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## THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EU STRATEGIC PRIORITIES IN POST-SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA

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### ABSTRACT

**T**he Central Asian region has never been a priority area of EU external policy, although the European Union Global Strategy underlines its support for multilateralism in global strategy. The European Union has been more actively engaged in the region since the launch of the New Great Game in Central Asia between China, Russia and the U.S. Following the “neigh-

bors of neighbors” concept, the EU shapes its relations with post-Soviet Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) on the basis of multilateral strategies and bilateral partnership agreements. The first comprehensive EU strategic document focused on post-Soviet Central Asia, *The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership*, was con-

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cluded in 2007. Despite some allegations that the strategy should take into account the individual needs and specificities of each country, it should be emphasized that the strategy intensified mutual relations between Central Asia and the EU, as well as the EU's institutional presence in the region, mainly in terms of political and diplomatic dialog. Due to a dynamic approach, the analysis undertaken in the research study

allowed for the presentation of positive and negative tendencies, changes and reversals in the implementation of the particular components of the previous EU strategy towards Central Asian countries over time.

It should be noted that most objectives outlined in its normative strategy towards Central Asia were achieved to a limited extent, especially in terms of democratization and civil society.

**KEYWORDS:** *European Union, Central Asia, post-Soviet countries, EU strategy towards Central Asia.*

## *Introduction*

Over the years, the EU has utilized technical and financial instruments to activate its presence in Central Asia and institutionalized mutual cooperation in both multilateral and bilateral formats. Following the vision of “neighbors of neighbors,” the EU establishes its relations with post-Soviet Central Asia on the basis of multilateral strategies and bilateral partnership and cooperation agreements.<sup>1</sup> The first comprehensive EU strategic document focused on post-Soviet Central Asia, The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership, was concluded in 2007.<sup>2</sup> Despite some allegations that the strategy should take into account the individual needs and specificities of each country, it should be emphasized that the strategy intensified mutual relations between Central Asia and the EU, as well as the EU institutional presence in the region, mainly in terms of political and diplomatic dialogue.

In 2019, in its Joint Communication on the new strategy The EU and Central Asia: New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership,<sup>3</sup> the European Commission stated that the EU and Central Asia have reached an “unprecedented level of cooperation” and “opened up new opportunities” for a new partnership.<sup>4</sup> Kazakhstan’s authorities perceive the new EU strategy as visionary and flexible,<sup>5</sup> whereas Peter Burian, the EU Special Representative for Central Asia, stresses that the EU needs to

<sup>1</sup> See: A. Konopelko, “The European Union Policy Towards the Post-Soviet Countries of Central Asia,” in: *Can Business Challenges in the Changing Economic Landscape?*, ed. by B.M. Huseyin, H. Danis, E. Demir, U. Khan, Springer Publishing, Cham, 2016, pp. 423-435.

<sup>2</sup> See: “Regional Strategy Paper for Assistance to Central Asia for the Period 2007-2013,” available at [[http://www.eeas.europa.eu/central\\_asia/rsp/07\\_13\\_en.pdf](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/central_asia/rsp/07_13_en.pdf)], 21 June, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> See: “Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council on ‘The EU and Central Asia: New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership’,” European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, available at [[https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/joint\\_communication\\_-\\_the\\_eu\\_and\\_central\\_asia\\_-\\_new\\_opportunities\\_for\\_a\\_stronger\\_partnership.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/joint_communication_-_the_eu_and_central_asia_-_new_opportunities_for_a_stronger_partnership.pdf)], 19 June, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> A. Aubakir, “New EU Strategy for Central Asia: History, Vision, Prospects,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus. English Edition*, Vol. 21, Issue 4, 2020, pp. 7-14.

<sup>5</sup> See: “EU and Central Asia: A New Strategy: Special Report,” EURACTIV, available at [<https://en.euractiv.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/special-report/EURACTIV-Special-Report-EU-and-Central-Asia-A-new-strategy.pdf>], 14 June, 2020.



“strengthen the capacity of Central Asian states and societies to overcome internal and external shocks, not as a rival player but as a reliable partner for the region.”<sup>6</sup>

The main research objective of this paper is to analyze and assess the implementation of the EU strategic priorities in post-Soviet Central Asia. The article evaluates the scope and degree of the implementation of the EU strategy in the Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan in 2008-2018. A dynamic analysis of the implementation of the key objectives outlined in the strategy allowed to fill the research gap by examining trends and changes in the level of the involvement of particular Central Asian republics in the process of institutional cooperation with the EU. Over the selected period of time between 2008 and 2018, certain tendencies and reversals may be observed from a medium- or long-term perspective. A novel research approach proposed in the article is complementary to the existing studies on mutual relations between the EU and Central Asia and on the strategic role of the EU in the region. The empirical measurement of the selected indicators enabled the presentation and analysis of both positive and negative tendencies in implementing the particular components of the EU strategy in Central Asian countries.

## Literature Overview

The Central Asian region is perceived as a strategic zone of interests, not only for its huge reserves of natural resources and security importance, but also for its strategic location between Asia and Europe and its status as an important transport corridor in transcontinental routes.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the Central Asian region has never been a priority area of EU external policy, although the European Union Global Strategy underlines its support for multilateralism.<sup>8</sup>

EU external policy towards the Central Asian region has been shaped by the political and economic influence of other external players in the region and the launch of a “New Great Game.” Over time, the roles of particular players have been dynamic and subject to change.<sup>9</sup> Undoubtedly, the visibility of Russia and China has increased significantly, whereas the Western partners, the U.S. and the EU, have reduced their active presence. Russia traditionally perceives the Central Asian region as a natural zone of influence and the near abroad.<sup>10</sup> However, in recent years, the Russian Federation’s vision of regional integration have been affected by China’s growing involvement in Central Asia, as well. China, as a major trade partner, key foreign investor and proponent of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Belt and Road interregional initiatives (BRI), has become a main geopolitical and economic player in the region, which has weakened Russian integration initiatives.<sup>11</sup> On

<sup>6</sup> See: J. Itzek, “‘Central Asia Has Always Been Important for Europe’: The Influence of Political Heavyweights China and Russia in Central Asia Grows. Peter Burian on Europe’s Role in the Region,” available at [<https://www.ips-journal.eu/topics/international-relations/article/show/central-asia-has-always-been-important-for-europe-3676>], 20 June, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> See: K. Czerewacz-Filipowicz, A. Konopelko, *Regional Integration Processes in the Commonwealth of Independent States. Economic and Political Factors*, Springer Publishing, Cham, 2017, p. 347.

<sup>8</sup> See: “Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy,” European Union External Action, available at [[http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top\\_stories/pdf/eugs\\_review\\_web.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf)], 22 June, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> See: N. Collins, K. Bekenova, “Fueling the New Great Game: Kazakhstan, Energy Policy and the EU,” *Asia Europe Journal*, Vol. 15, No.1, 2017, pp. 17-18; A. Konopelko, K. Czerewacz-Filipowicz, “The Strategy of the Eurasian Economic Union Extra-Regional Integration,” *WSEAS Transactions on Business and Economics*, Vol. 18, 2021, pp. 67-68.

<sup>10</sup> See: S. Krapohl, A. Vasileva-Dienes, “The Region That Isn’t: China, Russia and the Failure of Regional Integration in Central Asia,” *Asia Europe Journal*, Vol. 18, 2019, pp. 347-366.

<sup>11</sup> See: S. Yilmaz, L. Changmin, “China’s ‘Belt and Road’ Strategy in Eurasia and Euro-Atlanticism,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 70, No. 2, 2018, pp. 262-271; K. Czerewacz-Filipowicz, A. Konopelko, “Can the EAEU Deliver External Integration to Business?” *European Research Studies Journal*, Vol. XXIII, No. 2, 2020, pp. 515-528.

the other hand, such deep engagement of China in Central Asia definitely affects the current architecture of regional integration created by the Russian Federation. The United States perceives the region as a guarantee of security, but also a possible option for regional economic and energy integration.<sup>12</sup>

Most scientific research studies on EU policy in Central Asia emphasize the normative role of the EU and its “normative power”<sup>13</sup> due to its legal, values-based approach and its status as a bearer of democratic values.<sup>14</sup> Such regulatory regionalism<sup>15</sup> as an element of the EU’s soft power is subject to criticism due to its ineffectiveness, unilateral Eurocentric approach<sup>16</sup> and visible divergences between the interests of Central Asian states and the EU.<sup>17</sup>

The EU creates its multilateral policy towards Central Asia by means of strategic documents; however, they cannot be called typical strategies.<sup>18</sup> They formulate key strategic priorities and detailed goals, but in typical strategic documents the objectives are measurable, real, feasible and time-based; thus, their fulfilment within a pre-determined period of time is considered realistic. The EU 2007 strategy is of a general nature without detailed implementation instruments, SWOT analyses and precise deadlines; however, it can be defined as an instrument of EU external policy.

In his evaluation of the 2007 strategy, Neil Melvine noted a small amount of progress in the implementation of the EU strategic objectives, especially in terms of democratization and rule of law issues, while the EU’s increased institutional engagement in Central Asia was stressed.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, according to Jos Boonstra, the current EU presence in Central Asian region was insufficient, and cooperation in the energy sector has not developed significantly.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, in its report, the European Court of Auditors emphasized that “the regional programs did not achieve a genuine regional dimension; a significant share consisted merely of ‘multi-country’ facilities available to each partner country individually.”<sup>21</sup>

In its 2019 framework document, The EU’s New Central Asia Strategy, the EU Parliamentary Research Service underlined a limited amount of progress in the implementation of the EU 2007 strategic objectives.<sup>22</sup> Only three out of 13 areas evaluated in the scorecard by the Research Service noted a good level of progress. The largest improvements were observed in diplomatic relations and political dialog. Such conclusions prove the resistance among authoritarian political leaders resulting from a reluctance to change their constitutional regulations and democratize their political regimes, and from a will to preserve the *status quo*.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>12</sup> See: H. Khan, “Russia and Central Asia: The Eurasian Orientation of Development,” *Journal of European Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 2019, pp. 21-22.

<sup>13</sup> See: I. Manners, “Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?” *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 2, 2002, pp. 235-258.

<sup>14</sup> See: R. Dragneva, K. Wolczuk, “Russia, the Eurasian Customs Union and the EU: Cooperation, Stagnation or Rivalry?” *Russia and Eurasia Programme Briefing Paper*, Vol. 1, 2012, p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> See: P. Jones, “Regulatory Regionalism and Education: The European Union in Central Asia,” *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2010, pp. 59-85.

<sup>16</sup> See: A. Konopelko, “Eurasian Economic Union: A Challenge for EU Policy towards Kazakhstan,” *Asia Europe Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2018, pp. 1-17.

<sup>17</sup> See: A.M. Angheliescu, “European Union and Central Asia: Past Directions and Future Perspectives,” *CES Working Papers*, Vol. X, No. 3, 2018, pp. 283-284.

<sup>18</sup> See: N. Kassenova, “The EU Strategy for Central Asia: Imperatives and Opportunities for Change. A View from Kazakhstan,” available at [[http://www.fes-centralasia.org/files/assets/publikationen/Nargis%20Kassenova\\_new.pdf](http://www.fes-centralasia.org/files/assets/publikationen/Nargis%20Kassenova_new.pdf)], 26 March, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> See: N. Melvin, “The EU Needs a New Values-Based Realism for its Central Asia Strategy,” *EUCAM Policy Brief*, Vol. 28, 2012, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> See: J. Boonstra, “EU Central Asia Policy: Steady as She Goes,” *Central Asia Policy Brief*, Vol. 4, 2012, pp. 1-5.

<sup>21</sup> See: “EU Development Assistance to Central Asia,” European Court of Auditors, available at [[https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR13\\_13/QJAB13014ENN.pdf](https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR13_13/QJAB13014ENN.pdf)], 18 July, 2020.

<sup>22</sup> See: M. Russell, “The EU’s New Central Asia Strategy,” 2019, available at [[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/633162/EPRS\\_BRI\(2019\)633162\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/633162/EPRS_BRI(2019)633162_EN.pdf)], 5 July, 2020.

<sup>23</sup> See: K. Shyrokykh, “Policy-Specific Effects of Transgovernmental Cooperation: A Statistical Assessment across the EU’s Post-Soviet Neighbours,” *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2019, pp.149-168.

## The Analysis of the Implementation of the Previous EU Strategy Towards Central Asia. Research and Results

The research was carried out in five selected post-Soviet Central Asian countries covered by The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership adopted on 30 May, 2007.<sup>24</sup> The analysis focuses on the period between 2008 and 2018, beginning with the moment of the implementation of the EU strategy.

The study is developed through the empirical analysis, overview and interpretation of official data and documents of the European Union and other international institutions. The research is based on 24 indicators grouped by particular categories indicated in the EU strategy as key priorities. The data were collected from Freedom House, The Economist Intelligence Unit, Transparency International, the International Criminal Court, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the European Commission, World Bank Group, the Heritage Foundation, the United Nations Commission on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI), British Petroleum (BP), the World Economic Forum, the Institute for Economics and Peace and ACN International.

There are several limitations to this analysis. It is not easy to examine certain EU priorities by means of measurable indicators year-to-year, or even within two-year periods, because they are projected for several years and their results may be visible only from a medium- or long-term perspective. In addition, during the research process the author was faced with the lack of complete data in particular rankings available for certain years or for certain countries. The author is aware that the selected Central Asian countries, despite being situated in the same region and belonging to the post-Soviet legacy, differ from each other by many internal historical, political, cultural and economic conditions. Nevertheless, the selected longer time period allowed for the indication and comparison of certain regularities, tendencies and reversals in the implementation of EU strategy in specific countries.

The EU strategy of 2007 outlined seven key priorities.<sup>25</sup> The first priority, namely, "Human rights, the rule of law, good governance and democratization" has been perceived as the most important in terms of its normative approach to Central Asian countries. However, when we look at the scores demonstrated by the selected international institutions and compare them with the implementation of other priorities, the results are not particularly optimistic.

In 2008-2018, no substantial progress was noted in the democratic performance of Central Asian political regimes. According to the Freedom in the World reports<sup>26</sup> prepared by the Freedom House on the basis of political rights and civil liberties ratings, Kyrgyzstan has remained a partly free regime, whereas the rest of the republics are non-free regimes. In turn, using its Democracy Indexes based on 60 indicators in five categories: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, the functioning of government, political participation and political culture, the Economist Intelligence Unit noted an improvement in Kyrgyzstan, which evolved from an authoritarian regime in 2008 to a hybrid regime in 2018.<sup>27</sup> Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have demonstrated limited progress in their ranks, but in general four of the Central Asian countries have remained authoritarian regimes.

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<sup>24</sup> See: "Regional Strategy Paper for Assistance to Central Asia for the Period 2007-2013," available at [[http://www.eeas.europa.eu/central\\_asia/rsp/07\\_13\\_en.pdf](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/central_asia/rsp/07_13_en.pdf)], 21 June, 2020.

<sup>25</sup> See: *Ibidem*.

<sup>26</sup> See: "Freedom in the World," Freedom House, available at [<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world>], 2 April, 2020.

<sup>27</sup> See: Economist Intelligence Unit "Democracy Index," available at [<https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index>], 2 April, 2020.

The results of the evaluation of political rights and civil liberties presented by Freedom House<sup>28</sup> are highly pessimistic, which proves that human rights are not respected in the selected countries. In 2008-2018 the overall trend was negative. In Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, the scores have not changed, remaining at the lowest level, whereas the scores in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan have worsened, and Kyrgyzstan's score remained stable—but also at a low level.

In its Nations in Transit reports, Freedom House assesses the state of democracy in the countries of Eurasia by means of selected measures such as national and regional governance, judiciary, corruption in the media and civil society.<sup>29</sup> Almost all Central Asian republics represent consolidated authoritarian regimes, which means that their authoritarian presidents prevent political competition and pluralism, and they are responsible for violations of political and civil rights. Neither the legislative, nor executive, nor the judiciary branches or the media are independent. Civil society organizations are highly limited in terms of their participation in the public sphere. A declining trend in all these categories may be discernible. Between 2008 and 2018, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan consistently occupied the lowest ranks in all categories. A slight improvement was noted in 2018 in Uzbekistan within the independent media and civil society categories. The situation in national democratic governance and independent media in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan remains stable, but, once again, at a low level. The most visible regression is observed in independent judiciary and civil society areas in all the selected republics.

As demonstrated in the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index<sup>30</sup> in 2008-2018, almost all Central Asian republics (except for Tajikistan) have made progress in the rankings. However, the results may rather be due to a greater regression of other countries, all the more so because, as recorded in the Freedom House's Nations in Transit reports, these countries (except for Kyrgyzstan) have noted negative tendencies in their "corruption" scores.

One of the key objectives in the framework of the first priority of the EU 2007 strategy was "the adoption of the necessary legal adjustments required to accede to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC)."<sup>31</sup>

The Court investigates the most serious crimes such as war crimes, genocide, crimes of aggression and crimes against humanity. According to the International Criminal Court, only Tajikistan (in 2000) signed and ratified the document, whereas Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan signed—but have never ratified—the Rome Statute. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have not managed to sign the document.<sup>32</sup>

When we observe the implementation of the second priority of the EU strategy towards Central Asia, "Investing in the future: 'youth and education'," which covers the development of all stages of education and Internet-based communication networks, the assessment results are more positive than in the case of the first priority.

Over the period of 2008-2018, almost all post-Soviet Central Asian republics improved their scorecards in the Education index, which is one of the components measured by the UNDP in the framework of the Human Development Index.<sup>33</sup> The education component is measured by years of schooling for adults and expected years of schooling for children. Only Tajikistan noted a slight de-

<sup>28</sup> See: "Freedom in the World."

<sup>29</sup> See: "Nations in Transit," Freedom House, available at [<https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit>], 3 April, 2020.

<sup>30</sup> See: "Corruption Perception Index," Transparency International, available at [<https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi#>], 25 April, 2020.

<sup>31</sup> "Regional Strategy Paper for Assistance to Central Asia for the Period 2007-2013."

<sup>32</sup> See: United Nations Treaty Collection, available at [[https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=XVIII-10&chapter=18&clang=\\_en](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XVIII-10&chapter=18&clang=_en)], 28 April, 2020.

<sup>33</sup> See: "Human Development Index," United Nations Development Program, available at [<http://hdr.undp.org/en/data>], 1 May, 2020.

cline between 2009 and 2017. In 2015, the Central Asian countries were included in the EU Erasmus+ exchange program. As we may observe, the total number of students and staff moving to Europe has increased, especially in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan; whereas in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan these figures have been moderately stable, but in Uzbekistan they have declined over the last two years.<sup>34</sup>

When it comes to Internet communication, the UNDP also investigates the number of Internet users through its Human Development Index.<sup>35</sup> According to the reports, the total number of Internet users has increased in all republics that were the subjects of research. The highest growth was noted in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, where the percentage of Internet users in the total population has increased from 3% in 2010 to more than 21% in 2018 in Turkmenistan, and from almost 16% in 2010 to more than 52% in 2018 in Uzbekistan. Growth figures in the rest of the countries have doubled or tripled as well.

Under the third priority, “Promotion of economic development, trade and investment,” part of the EU strategy is to support the Central Asian countries in their accession to the World Trade Organization. This goal has been partially implemented. While Kyrgyzstan joined the WTO before 2007, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan joined in 2015 and 2013, respectively. Uzbekistan still has an observer status, while Turkmenistan has not begun the accession process.<sup>36</sup>

The 2007 strategy also put emphasis on the bilateral dimension of mutual cooperation, therefore aiming “to fully implement the trade and economic provisions of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs).”<sup>37</sup>

In actual fact, only Kazakhstan has successfully concluded such negotiations, signing a new enhanced PCA with the EU in 2015, whereas Tajikistan has not yet begun negotiations. Some provisions are being negotiated with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan under the proposed new enhanced PCAs, while Turkmenistan is negotiating new provisions with the European Union based on the Interim Trade Agreement.<sup>38</sup>

As for EU institutional involvement in Central Asia, the opening of EU delegations in Central Asian countries (especially the most recent in Turkmenistan in 2019) and the establishment of the EU Special Representative in Central Asia should be perceived positively.

The World Bank Group, in its Doing Business reports, investigates 12 various areas of activity that affect business in 190 countries.<sup>39</sup> The rankings demonstrate the regulations on: starting a business, dealing with construction permits, obtaining electricity, registering property, obtaining credit, protecting minority investors, paying taxes, trading across borders, enforcing contracts, resolving insolvency, employing workers, and entering contracts with the government.

The ease of doing business has been explored in four Central Asian countries due to a lack of available data from Turkmenistan. The rankings demonstrate the regular progress of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan between 2008 and 2018, which advanced by 42, 33 and 62 positions, respectively. Following the initial growth, Kyrgyzstan has noted a decline and remained stable. The World Bank Reports emphasize that all the evaluated republics made efforts to implement regulatory reforms to make it easier to start a business, gain access to credit, trade across borders, enforce contracts, pay taxes and export products faster.

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<sup>34</sup> See: “Erasmus+,” European Commission, available at [[https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about/factsheets\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about/factsheets_en)], 7 May, 2020.

<sup>35</sup> See: “Human Development Index,” United Nations Development Program.

<sup>36</sup> See: World Trade Organization, available at [[https://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/whatis\\_e/tif\\_e/org6\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/org6_e.htm)], 28 April, 2020.

<sup>37</sup> See: “Regional Strategy Paper for Assistance to Central Asia for the Period 2007-2013.”

<sup>38</sup> See: “Central Asia,” European Union External Action, available at [[https://eeas.europa.eu/regions/central-asia/2068/central-asia\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/regions/central-asia/2068/central-asia_en)], 22 May, 2020.

<sup>39</sup> See: “Doing Business,” World Bank Group, available at [<https://www.doingbusiness.org>], 28 April, 2020.

Similar research outcomes have been reflected in the Heritage Foundation's reports on the Index of Economic Freedom.<sup>40</sup> The rankings concentrate on four key categories: the rule of law, the size of government, regulatory efficiency and market openness, in which 12 components are measured. From the point of view of the research, business freedom, investment freedom and financial freedom turned out to be the most relevant components. The business freedom component assesses the impact of regulatory and infrastructure constraints on procedures, time and costs of starting, operating and closing a business. A maximum of 100 points is assigned to the freest business environment. Apart from Turkmenistan, which has remained at a low but stable position of 30 points, and Kyrgyzstan, which recorded a slight decline, the rest of the evaluated countries have noted regular improvements in their business freedom scores. The highest growth, by more than 22 points, was observed in Tajikistan. The investment freedom index measures regulatory restrictions imposed on investment. The results are not as optimistic as in the case of the business freedom index. The worst situation is observed in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, where the governments imposed many restrictions on foreign investment and specific sectors. In Tajikistan, the marks have worsened, whereas those of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have slightly improved and remained at an average level.

The regulatory environment of the investment sector was revealed in the dynamics of foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows. According to the World Investment Reports by the United Nations Commission on Trade and Development,<sup>41</sup> the general trend in all Central Asian countries is negative. Following the initial growth in 2009 and 2010, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have noted a decline in their FDI inflows, whereas Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have recorded a regular drop since 2008: in 2018 they reached their lowest levels of FDI inflows. In Tajikistan, the trend in FDI inflows has remained changeable. Following an initial decline, it noted slight improvements, but since 2015 has again recorded a regular fall in foreign investment.

The financial freedom index<sup>42</sup> evaluates government regulations and influence on financial services and markets and openness to foreign competition. The Heritage Foundation underlines that, in all the selected Central Asian countries, financial institutions and services are subject to significant restrictions, and in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan the financial systems are near-repressive. None of the countries seem to have made progress in 2008-2018. Furthermore, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan have recorded a regular decline in their scores.

The biennial Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index assesses the transformation towards democracy and a market economy, as well as the quality of political management, in more than 130 countries.<sup>43</sup> The Ranking Status Index measures different variables within three components: democracy, economy and governance. It can be observed that in 2008-2018, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan have recorded a regular decline in their rankings, whereas following an initial fall, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have noted improvements in their overall transformation indexes. The deteriorating scores of the Central Asian countries in the component Ranking Economy Status may be discerned. The economy index explores social and economic measures, such as the level of socio-economic development, organization of the market and competition including the banking system, monetary and fiscal stability, private property, the welfare regime, economic performance, and sustainability. All states that were subject to evaluation have noted a negative trend: Kazakhstan has recorded the highest decline, from 32nd to 64th position. Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan

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<sup>40</sup> See: "Index of Economic Freedom," Heritage Foundation, available at [<https://www.heritage.org/index/download#>], 11 April, 2020.

<sup>41</sup> See: "World Investment Report," UNCTAD, available at [[https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/wir2019\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/wir2019_en.pdf)], 3 April, 2020.

<sup>42</sup> See: "Index of Economic Freedom."

<sup>43</sup> See: "Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index," available at [<https://www.bti-project.org/en/meta/downloads.html>], 22 April, 2020.

have remained outside of the top 100. The authors of the BTI reports demonstrate negative tendencies in the economic status of the Central Asian countries, describing their economic performance as limited (Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) or very limited (Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan).

Another two priorities of EU strategy in Central Asia include the energy and environmental sectors. However, the assessment of the implementation of the selected objectives is hardly measurable from a year-on-year comparative perspective. In particular, most new energy projects have been scheduled from a long-term perspective (e.g. new energy transport corridors, diversified export routes or new investments in energy). The measurable objective “increasing oil and gas exploitation” was evaluated on the basis of the BP Statistical Reviews of World Energy.<sup>44</sup> The research examines three oil-based Central Asian economies. In the period of 2008-2018, only Kazakhstan noted a visible increase in oil production, from 70 to 91 million tonnes, and liquefied gas production from 15 to 21 million tonnes. Uzbekistan’s oil and natural gas production has regularly declined in the last ten years. Turkmenistan’s energy sector was highly vulnerable to external conditions. Following a visible drop in 2009, the next six years were marked by an increase in Turkmenistan’s oil and natural gas production up to 2016, which was the beginning of another declining trend.

In terms of the environmental sphere, the main EU goals in Central Asia were related to forestry and water management. The EU has implemented numerous effective long-term projects to improve environmental management. In its Human Development Index reports, the UNDP<sup>45</sup> demonstrates the percentage of forest area in the total land area. In 2010-2018, the overall forest area in Central Asian republics remained stable. In Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, it remained unchanged, whereas in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan it decreased by 0.2%, and in Tajikistan it increased by 0.1%.

The last two priorities relate to “Combating common threats and challenges” and “Building bridges: inter-cultural dialog.” It should be noted that the EU has successfully implemented the Border Management Program in Central Asia (BOMCA) to develop effective legal institutions, procedures and measures facilitating regional and international trade, as well as fight against organized crime, terrorism, corruption, illegal migration, the trade of weapons and drugs, and trafficking in human beings.<sup>46</sup>

The Global Competitiveness Report of the World Economic Forum assesses the influence of organized crime on business in 141 countries.<sup>47</sup> Due to a lack of complete data, only three countries could be analyzed. In Kazakhstan, the overall tendency is positive, with the country rising 38 places in the rankings in 2008-2018. The situation in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, however, has not been quite as stable. Following the periods of ups and downs, Kyrgyzstan eventually fell five positions in the rankings, whereas Tajikistan noted a slight rise by two positions.

The above scores demonstrate similar trends presented in the Global Terrorism Index of the Institute for Economics and Peace,<sup>48</sup> which reflects the number of terrorist incidents and the number of deaths from terrorism. In 2013-2018 Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan recorded progress in terms of their rankings, whereas Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan noted a regular decline. It should be underlined that the neighboring Afghanistan has been perceived by the EU as one of the greatest threats to security in Central Asia, especially in the context of illegal migration, trafficking in human

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<sup>44</sup> See: “BP Statistical Reviews of World Energy,” British Petroleum, available at [<https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/business-sites/en/global/corporate/pdfs/energy-economics/statistical-review/bp-stats-review-2019-full-report.pdf>], 12 June, 2020.

<sup>45</sup> See: “Human Development Index.”

<sup>46</sup> See: “Border Management Programme in Central Asia,” available at [<https://www.bomca-eu.org/en>], 16 May, 2020.

<sup>47</sup> See: “Global Competitiveness Reports,” World Economic Forum, available at [<https://www.weforum.org/reports>], 26 May, 2020.

<sup>48</sup> See: “Global Terrorism Index,” Institute for Economics and Peace, available at [<http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2019/11/GTI-2019web.pdf>], 18 June, 2020.

beings and the illegal weapons trade. Afghanistan invariably occupies the first place in the Global Terrorism Index as the country most impacted by terrorism.

The Institute for Economics and Peace, in its Global Peace Index,<sup>49</sup> also investigates the state of peace in 163 countries by measuring the number of domestic and international conflicts, the degree of militarization and the level of societal safety and security. As may be observed, the worst scores among the Central Asian republics and the highest decline in recent times were recorded in Turkmenistan. As a relatively closed regime, Turkmenistan is not a target of terrorist attacks as such, but it is highly unstable and unsafe in terms of the militarization level and societal security. The rest of the evaluated countries were marked by improvements in long-term results. The greatest growth is visible in the scores of Kazakhstan.

In the framework of the priority “Building bridges: inter-cultural dialog,” the European Union put emphasis on the civil society and respect for freedom of religion.

Since 2012, Freedom House has prepared a detailed review of respect for freedoms of expression, assembly, religion and association in its Freedom in the World reports.<sup>50</sup> In general, a negative trend may be visible in all evaluated countries. Within the subcategories of freedom of assembly and freedom for non-governmental organizations and trade unions, a country is awarded a maximum of 12 points. None of the Central Asian republics has received more than five points, and Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have remained at a level of zero or one point. A much worse situation is observed in the subcategory of freedom to practice and express religious faith or non-belief in public and private. Except for Kyrgyzstan, which recorded a slight improvement in 2008-2018, the rest of the countries were awarded either zero or one point out of a maximum of four points, and Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have noted a regular decline to zero points.

The results of the Freedom in the World rankings reflect the restrictive laws on religion and limited rights under these regulations in the evaluated republics, which have also been examined by the independent institution ACN International. In its Religious Freedom Reports<sup>51</sup> the organization stated that the situation in the religious freedom domain in Central Asian countries worsened or remained unchanged, but overall was at a low level between 2008 and 2018.

## *Conclusion*

Due to the general assumptions of the research, the conclusions drawn on the basis thereof almost exclusively concern the evaluation of the implementation of the previous EU 2007 strategy towards Central Asia. The new EU 2019 strategic document has begun to be implemented in 2020; therefore, a thorough analysis of the progress in the implementation of the directions of the new strategy will be possible in several years' time.

Due to a dynamic approach, we may observe certain mechanisms and tendencies in the decisions and steps taken by the selected Central Asian countries over time. The analysis undertaken in the research allowed for the presentation of positive or negative trends in the implementation of the particular components of the EU strategy.

Analyzing the scope of and the advancement in implementing particular strategic objectives, it should be stated that the most pessimistic results were achieved under the first and the seventh com-

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<sup>49</sup> See: “Global Peace Index,” Institute for Economics and Peace, available at [<http://visionofhumanity.org/reports/page/4>], 18 June, 2020.

<sup>50</sup> See: “Freedom in the World.”

<sup>51</sup> See: “Religious Freedom Reports,” ACN International, available at [<https://religious-freedom-report.org>], 10 July, 2020.



ponents. All the examined rankings, within almost all measured indicators, demonstrate no progress in terms of the democratization process and respect for human rights; therefore, the overall tendency is negative. A slight improvement is visible in Kyrgyzstan, which evolved from an authoritarian to a hybrid, partly free regime. Similarly, in 2008-2018, negative trends have been recorded in judiciary and corruption subcategories. The regular decline in measures pertaining to the civil society and respect for freedom of religion may be perceived as a consequence of restrictions imposed on non-governmental organizations. Much better outcomes have been recorded under the second priority. All the evaluated countries have managed to improve their ratings in the education and Internet subcategories, which may also be affected by direct support and cooperation with international institutions, including the EU. Such a measurable effect has not been fully achieved in the institutional dimension of the third component of the EU strategy. Most of the Central Asian republics have not concluded new partnership and cooperation agreements, but previous steps towards closer integration into the European and global economy should be perceived positively. In general, despite the unfavorable legal and political environment, the results relating to the economic development priority do not seem excessively pessimistic. The differentiated research effects of particular rankings result from various research methods and indicators measured by selected institutions; however, certain regularities and conclusions may be observed. The worst scorecards have been observed in the investment and the financial sectors. The restrictive state regulations have regularly negatively affected both sectors, which revealed negative tendencies in the ratings of particular countries and the declining inflow of foreign direct investments. In turn, when it comes to the assessment of the business environment component, it should be stated that almost all Central Asian countries, except for Turkmenistan which represents a restrictive closed economy, have demonstrated regular progress in their scores pertaining to regulations on starting and doing business. The energy sector is highly vulnerable to natural conditions and external determinants, and numerous irregularities and reversals were observed in 2008-2018. Kazakhstan is the country that benefited most from strengthening energy links, whereas Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan recorded declining tendencies. As for the research on security threats and challenges, the results of the reports are somewhat surprising. Traditionally, the Central Asian region is perceived as politically unstable, being a source of many domestic and international conflicts and a base for organized crime. Such arguments are not groundless, since their nearest neighbors are Afghanistan and Pakistan, the countries which are highly impacted by terrorism. However, following the previous period of domestic instability affected by numerous domestic revolutions, most post-Soviet Central Asian countries, except for Turkmenistan, which has increased its militarization, have recorded improvements in their internal safety and security. In terms of the influence of organized crime and terrorist incidents on business, negative trends have been visible in the ratings of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

## ASSESSMENT OF PERCEPTION OF CHINA IN THE KAZAKHSTANI SOCIETY: MYTHS AND REALITY

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### ABSTRACT

**T**he article examines the image of China in Kazakhstani society, analyzes the perception and attitude of Kazakhstan's population towards China. Based on the results of a survey of Kazakhstan's population ( $N = 2,594$ ) and an expert survey ( $N = 23$ ), the authors identify the principal stereotypes about China in the mass perception of Kazakhstanis. Also, the authors assess the level of awareness of the population about China and its projects and the perception by the Kazakhstani people of the economic, political and socio-cultural influ-

ence of Kazakhstan's eastern neighbor. In addition, the article examines the attitude of Kazakhstanis to bilateral cooperation between Kazakhstan and China and the manifestations of Sinophobia in Kazakhstani society and identifies the main factors of anti-Chinese sentiments in society.

The article also presents the authors' original model of the China Perception Index in Kazakhstan, which consists of four parameters that reveal the level of cultural, economic and political perception of the country's eastern neighbor.

*The results of the study establish that the general attitude of the Kazakhstani society towards China is neutral. The main factor that influences the perception of China is the degree of the Chinese investors' presence in the region. The study proves the correlation between the duration of the presence of Chinese investors and the scale of business, on the one hand, and the level of perception, on the other: the longer the history of presence*

*in the region, the less positive the attitude of the population towards China.*

*Along with this, the study demonstrates a positive relationship between educational achievements and the China Perception Index. Thus, Kazakhstani citizens with an academic degree (Index = 0.24) have a significantly more positive attitude towards China, compared to those with a secondary technical and vocational education (Index = 0.09).*

**KEYWORDS:** *Kazakhstan, China, perception of China, Sinophobia, China Perception Index.*

## *Introduction*

Foreign policy strategies that are set forth by the People's Republic of China and reflect the approach of China's political leadership to the international relations system and global governance are constantly at the epicenter of attention and arouse increasing interest. Belt and Road is a unique precedent in the modern international relations system. The implementation of Belt and Road can also be considered a new stage in the Chinese economic Go Global strategy and a new step towards China's integration into the global economy by increasing Chinese investments abroad.

Meanwhile, certain difficulties are emerging during the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, including increasing default risks in developing countries with unstable economies. The implementation of this strategy may also lead to an asymmetric dependence of the regional states on the PRC.<sup>1</sup>

In some countries, the Belt and Road projects face difficulties due to the negative attitude of the local population. This is especially true of neighboring countries, where the neighbor factor can be a negative one in the development of such initiatives. The governments' decision-making process should be naturally based on the interests of the state and the people. As a country bordering China, Kazakhstan needs to defend its own national interests and understand China's possible long-term strategies and scenarios. That is why it is vital to win the support of the population in the decisions on the implementation of such initiatives.

A review of China-related discourse in modern Kazakhstani society reveals the presence of a somewhat negative attitude towards the eastern neighbor associated with public debates on land sale, unfair business conduct in the country, significant state debt, etc. However, some of these statements are not substantiated or based on reliable facts. Even experts sometimes use unverified data in discussions, thereby creating certain myths about China. That is why this study aims to scientifically analyze the current perception of China in Kazakhstani society and answer the following research questions:

- (1) How is China perceived in Kazakhstani society?
- (2) What factors influence the perception of China in Kazakhstan?

<sup>1</sup> See: Julie Yu-Wen Chen, S. Jimenez-Tovar, "China in Central Asia: Local Perceptions from Future Elites," *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 2017, pp. 429-445.

## Research Methodology

To answer these research questions, the authors use the results of the survey and expert interviews, as well as secondary statistical data.

In order to analyze the degree of China’s influence on Kazakhstani society, the authors developed the China Perception Index in Kazakhstan, which is a rating scale from “-1” to “1,” where -1 stands for a very negative, and 1—for a very positive attitude. Four components are measured:

- (1) general attitude towards China (general perception);
- (2) China as a center of influence (geopolitics and security);
- (3) China as an investor (cooperation);
- (4) Chinese culture and education (soft power).

The index was slated to resolve the following tasks:

- (1) to evaluate the image of China in the mass perception of Kazakhstanis;
- (2) to assess the level of the population’s awareness about China and its projects in Kazakhstan;
- (3) to assess the perception of China’s economic, political and socio-cultural influence in Kazakhstan by the Kazakhstani population;
- (4) to assess the mass perception of bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and China;
- (5) to study the features of manifestation of Sinophobia in Kazakhstani society;
- (6) to identify the main factors of Sinophobia.

Separate questions and the formula for calculating the Index were developed to measure each of the components (see Table 1).

Table 1

**Questions for the Components of the China Perception Index in Kazakhstan and Calculation Algorithms**

Questions Related to the Component	Algorithm
<b>Component 1 <i>General attitude towards China</i> (general perception)</b>	
Please rate your general personal attitude towards China	Component 1 = (positive + 0,5*positive rather than negative) — (0,5*negative rather than positive + negative)/positive + rather positive + rather negative + negative + not sure)
<b>Component 2 <i>China as a center of influence</i> (geopolitics and security)</b>	
1. Do you think China’s influence in the world has been recently increasing or decreasing? 2. Do you think China is a friendly or unfriendly state towards Kazakhstan? 3. Do you think China has more weight in the world than Russia, or less? 4. Do you think China is an economically developed country?	Indicator for each question of Component 2 = (is probably increasing — is probably decreasing)/(is probably increasing + is probably decreasing + not sure)  Component 2 = arithmetic mean of 7 indicators

*Table 1 (continued)*

Questions Related to the Component	Algorithm
5. Do you think China is a rich country? 6. Do you think China is a socially responsible state? 7. Does or does not China pose a threat to Kazakhstan?	
<b>Component 3 <i>China as an investor</i> (cooperation)</b>	
1. In your opinion, should Kazakhstan develop or weaken cooperation with China in such areas as ... (production) in the future? 2. In your opinion, should Kazakhstan develop or weaken cooperation with China in such areas as ... (education) in the future? 3. In your opinion, should Kazakhstan develop or weaken cooperation with China in such areas as ... (security) in the future? 4. In your opinion, should Kazakhstan develop or weaken cooperation with China in such areas as ... (trade) in the future? 5. In your opinion, should Kazakhstan develop or weaken cooperation with China in such areas as ... (technology) in the future? 6. In your opinion, should Kazakhstan develop or weaken cooperation with China in such areas as ... (logistics) in the future? 7. In your opinion, should Kazakhstan develop or weaken cooperation with China in such areas as ... (agriculture) in the future? 8. In your opinion, should Kazakhstan develop or weaken cooperation with China in such areas as ... (finance) in the future?	Indicator for each question of Component 3 = (develop-weaken)/(develop + weaken + not sure)  Component 3 = arithmetic mean of 8 indicators
<b>Component 4 <i>Chinese culture and education</i> (soft power)</b>	
1. Do you like Chinese cuisine? 2. Do you trust Chinese medicine? 3. Do you trust the quality of goods made in China? 4. Would you like to know more about the history and culture of China? 5. Would you like to visit China as a tourist? 6. Would you like your child to learn Chinese? 7. Would you like to get an education yourself or send your child to study in China? 8. Would you like to move to China?	Indicator for each question of Component 4 = (yes-no)/(yes + no + not sure)  Component 4 = arithmetic mean of 8 indicators

A sociological survey of the population was conducted from May to July 2020 to calculate the Index. The mass poll of the population was carried out in Kazakh and Russian languages through the

TALAP.Polls mobile application. The questionnaire included 41 questions aimed at assessing the perception of China’s political, economic, social and cultural presence and its influence on the Republic of Kazakhstan. 2,594 citizens of Kazakhstan over 18 years of age from all of the country’s regions participated in the survey. The socio-demographic data of the respondent sample fully reflects the general population of the country. Thus, 58.9% of the respondents are urban population, 41.1%—rural population; 53.4% of respondents are women, 46.6% are men; 19% of respondents are aged 18-24 years, 24.9%—25-34 years old, 19.5%—35-44 years old, 15.4%—45-54 years old, 11.7%—55-64 years old, 9.5%—65 years and older. The sample was biased only in relation to the level of education. 2.9% have completed 9 grades of school, 9.1% received a secondary education (10-11 grades), 35.7%—specialized secondary (vocational school, college), 42.2%—higher or incomplete higher education, 8.8% have an academic degree, 1.3% refused to provide data on education.

Along with this survey, 12-question expert interviews were carried out in July-August 2020. The interviews were conducted with 23 experts across 16 private, public and international sectors. All interviewed experts were aware of the PRC’s activities in implementing domestic and foreign policies, international projects and initiatives. The main purpose of the expert interview was to obtain the most objective expert assessment of the perception of China in Kazakhstan (see Table 2).

*Table 2*

**Expert Interview Questions**

No.	Question	Goal of the Question
1	On a scale from 0 to 7, what is the level of public interest in China in Kazakhstan today?	Obtain expert opinion on the level of public interest in China
2	You assessed the level of public interest in China among Kazakhstanis as above average, high or very high. What do you believe is the reason for this?	Identify the reasons for public interest in China among Kazakhstanis
3	In your opinion, what sources of information do Kazakhstanis most often use to obtain information and news about China?	Obtain expert opinion on the most relevant channels for informing the population about China
4	Indicate the areas in which cooperation between Kazakhstan and China, from your point of view, is beneficial for Kazakhstan?	Obtain expert opinion on the most profitable areas for relations with China
5	Indicate the sectors of the economy in which cooperation between Kazakhstan and China is effective for Kazakhstan from your point of view?	Obtain expert opinion on the most effective sectors of the economy for cooperation with China
6	How would you characterize the Kazakh-Chinese cooperation at the present stage?	Obtain expert opinion on the nature of relations between Kazakhstan and China
7	What benefits do you see for Kazakhstan from cooperation with China?	Obtain expert opinion on the benefits of cooperation between Kazakhstan and China
8	What risks do you see for Kazakhstan from cooperation with China?	Obtain expert opinion on the risks of cooperation between Kazakhstan and China
9	Is China a friendly state towards Kazakhstan?	Identify possible factors that affect the degree of China’s influence in Kazakhstan

*Table 2 (continued)*

No.	Question	Goal of the Question
10	In your opinion, what factor has the greatest influence on the formation of public perception of China in Kazakhstan?	Obtain expert opinion on the factors that affect the formation of a public image of China in Kazakhstan
11	In your opinion, what image of China dominates public perception today?	Obtain expert opinion on the image of China formed by the bulk of the population of Kazakhstan
12	How would you say the attitude of Kazakhstanis towards China has changed over the past three years: has it improved or worsened?	Obtain expert opinion on possible changes in the attitude of Kazakhstanis towards China over the past 3 years
13	On a scale from 0 to 7, what is the current level of Sinophobia in Kazakhstani society?	Assess the level of Sinophobia in Kazakhstan based on expert opinions
14	What do you see as the main reasons for the development of Sinophobia in Kazakhstan?	Find out the causes of Sinophobia in Kazakhstan
15	Please indicate the statement that you support the most. 1. The factor of Sinophobia is a real instrument for destabilizing the situation in Kazakhstan; 2. The destructive influence of Sinophobia is exaggerated, it is sporadic and has a localized.	Find out the causes of Sinophobia in Kazakhstan
16	Please indicate the statement that you support the most. 1. Sinophobia reduces the investment potential of Kazakhstan 2. Sinophobia does not affect China's investment interests in Kazakhstan	Find out the causes of Sinophobia in Kazakhstan
17	Please indicate the statement that you support the most. 1. Sinophobia in Kazakhstani society is formed spontaneously as a result of an incorrect information policy towards China 2. The formation of Sinophobia in Kazakhstani society is the result of certain purposeful actions	Find out the causes of Sinophobia in Kazakhstan

## Results of Research and Discussion

The growing role of China is one of the most noticeable trends in the modern development of post-Soviet Central Asia. Economic and political interests play an important role in the positive assessment of the Chinese factor in the Central Asian states. The latter believe that they cannot expect qualitative development or improvement of their socio-economic situation without attracting foreign investment, using foreign experience and technologies. At the same time, while Central Asian elites

regard the PRC primarily as an important economic and political partner, the Chinese factor is often considered a threat by the public.<sup>2</sup>

The study demonstrates that the average value of the China Perception Index in Kazakhstan is 0.13 (possible range: -1 to +1). According to the scale, this result shows neutral level of perception on average.

In terms of indicators, the following results are observed:

- General attitude towards China—0.27;
- China as a center of influence—0.22;
- China as an investor—0.26;
- Chinese culture and education— -0.22.

The value of the China Perception Index differs depending on the region or city of republican significance and ranges from -0.36 to 0.39 (see Fig. 1).

As the analysis demonstrates, the regions with the highest Index score differ from the regions with a low Index score by the higher level of public confidence in China as an investor and a center of influence. Thus, business and government representatives in the Kostanay region noted the comfort of working with Chinese investors during the online expert meeting. Positive feedback was provided on the importance of technology transfer by the Chinese, which contributes significantly to the development of the regional and Kazakhstan's technical "intelligentsia." Also, Kostanay experts noted the benefits of developing production in the region by Chinese investors due to the convenient location and proximity of the border sales market of four Russian regions.

"Chinese investors do not merely invest in our projects. Investors provide technological schemes, technological maps... The very idea of assembling a product (i.e., a tractor.—*Author's Note*) from vehicle kits and further localization aims primarily to educate technical intelligentsia in Kazakhstan, so that people improve their qualifications and gain experience. The first priority is for people (Chinese investors.—*Author's Note*) to share their technology. In terms of technology, the Chinese partners are quite open and always ready to help," said a representative of the Chinese tractor assembly plant in Kostanay.

In terms of communications with Chinese citizens, experts from Kostanay region noted the loyalty of both China-based partners and Chinese employees working in Kazakhstan.

Business representatives from Shymkent and Turkestan region also expressed different opinions and wishes regarding interaction with Chinese investors and partners. For instance, they proposed certain measures that create parity conditions in Kazakh-Chinese relations. It is also necessary to elaborate the issues related to supply of finished Kazakhstani agricultural goods to the Chinese market and consider the principle of level balance in bilateral trade.

The China Perception Index averaged 0.15 in the urban areas of the Republic of Kazakhstan. In rural areas it equaled 0.1, which is lower than the national average (0.13). All Index values are higher among the urban population. The biggest difference is observed in Indicator 2 and Indicator 3 values (see Fig. 2).

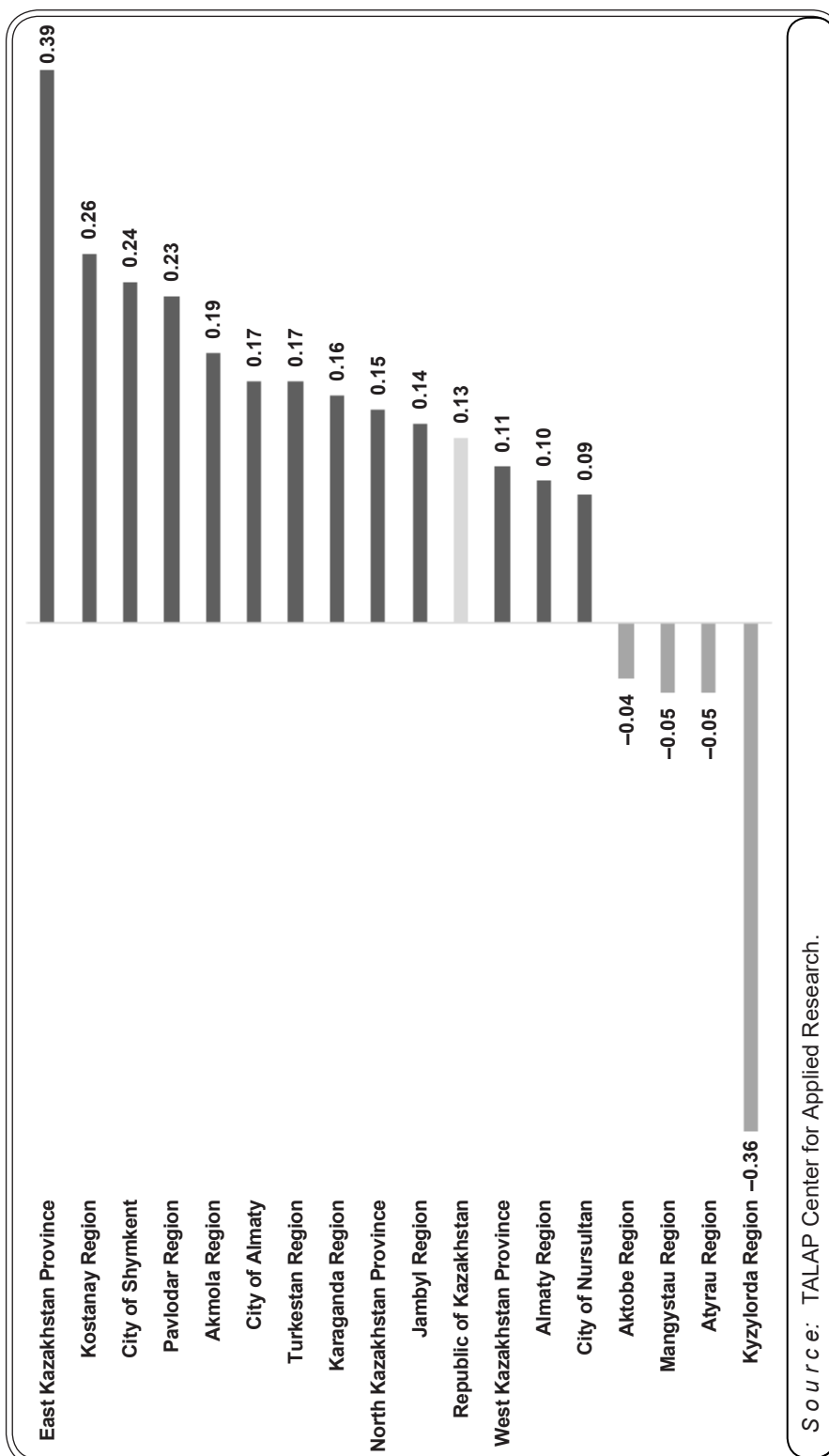
The study demonstrated that Kazakhstani women (Index = 0.16) have a more positive attitude towards China than men (Index = 0.10). Thus, women have a more positive general attitude towards China (Indicator 1). The index value among the surveyed women is 0.06 points higher than among the surveyed men. The difference in Indicator 4 values (Chinese culture and education) is also significant. Both men (-0.27) and women (-0.17) are suspicious of Chinese culture and education. There is a difference of 0.10 points in this indicator value (see Fig. 3).

<sup>2</sup> See: D. Malysheva, "Postsovetskies gosudarstva Tsentralnoi Azii v politike Kitaia," *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia*, No. 5, 2019.



Figure 1

Values of China Perception Index in Kazakhstan by City and Region



Source: TALAP Center for Applied Research.

Figure 2

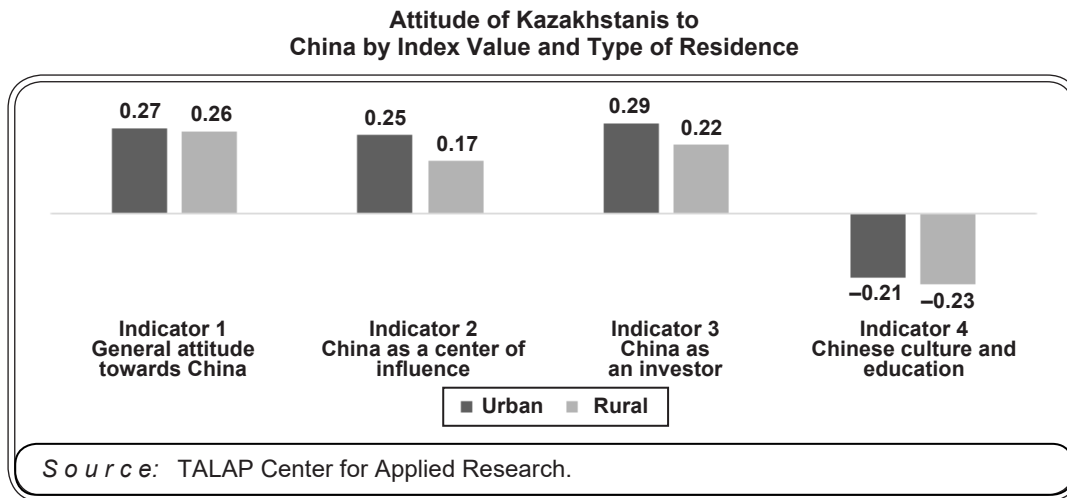
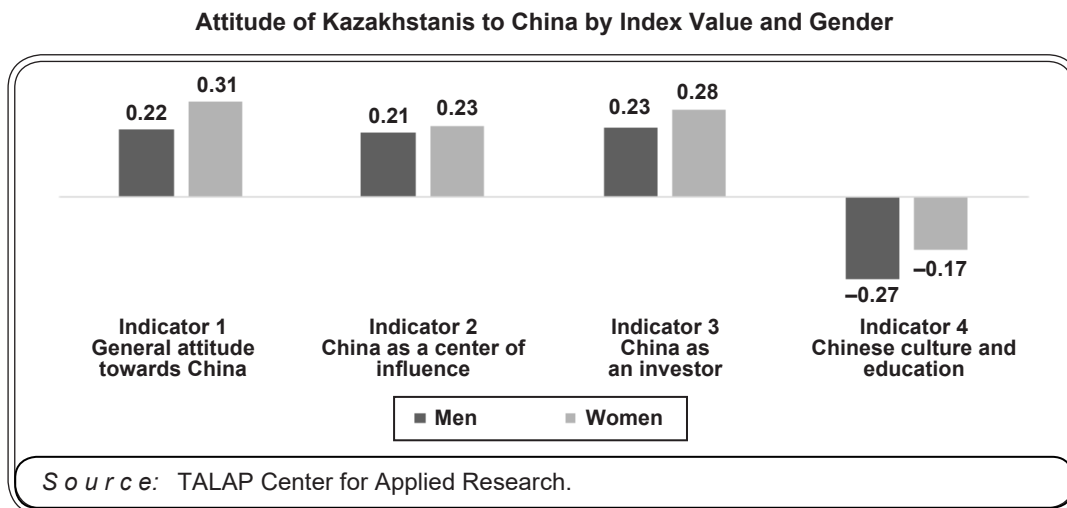


Figure 3



An analysis of the respondents by age groups revealed a low Index value among older respondents (see Table 3). Among respondents 55-64 and 65 years and older, the Index value was 0.08.

The most positive attitude towards China was detected among respondents between 18 and 24 years of age (0.18). Among respondents of this age category, the value of all indicators is higher than among older people.

When comparing the Index value among the 18-24 and 65 years and older age groups, there is a significant difference in Index values for all indicators. For example, to the question related to Indicator 1 “How do you personally feel about China as a state?” the answer “Positively” was given by 26.4% of the respondents 18-24, while 19.1% of positive answers came from those aged 65 years and older. To the question “Do you think China has more weight in the world than Russia, or less?”, which is one of 7 questions for Indicator 2, respondents 18-24 gave a positive answer in 45.3% of cases. 28% of respondents aged 65 and older agree that China has greater influence in the world than Russia.

The age groups 25-34 (Index = 0.12), 35-44 (Index = 0.14) and 45-54 (Index = 0.16) are almost unanimous in their opinion of China.

*Table 3*

**Values of China Perception Index in Kazakhstan by Age Group**

Age Group	Value of China Perception Index	Value for Indicator 1— General Attitude towards China	Value for Indicator 2— China as a Center of Influence	Value for Indicator 3— China as an Investor	Value for Indicator 4— Chinese Culture and Education
18-24	0.18	0.35	0.22	0.30	-0.16
25-34	0.12	0.23	0.22	0.25	-0.22
35-44	0.14	0.25	0.24	0.23	-0.18
45-54	0.16	0.29	0.24	0.28	-0.18
55-64	0.08	0.24	0.19	0.24	-0.32
65 and older	0.08	0.25	0.16	0.23	-0.34

The study reveals that respondents with advanced degrees have a more positive attitude about China (see Table 4). We believe that this is the result of their greater awareness of the current situation in relations between China and Kazakhstan and the fact that cooperation in the field of education is an integral part of China’s long-term soft power strategy in Kazakhstan.<sup>3</sup>

*Table 4*

**Values of China Perception Index in Kazakhstan by Education Level**

Education Level	Value of China Perception Index	Value for Indicator 1— General Attitude towards China	Value for Indicator 2— China as a Center of Influence	Value for Indicator 3— China as an Investor	Value for Indicator 4— Chinese Culture and Education
Incomplete secondary (9 grades)	0.11	0.35	0.11	0.25	-0.28
Secondary (10-11 grades)	0.10	0.26	0.11	0.25	-0.24
Secondary vocational (vocational college)	0.09	0.22	0.20	0.22	-0.29
Higher, incomplete higher	0.15	0.28	0.23	0.28	-0.18
Academic degree	0.24	0.40	0.30	0.32	-0.04
Refuse to answer	-0.05	0.00	0.16	0.07	-0.44

<sup>3</sup> See: K. Muratshina, “China-Kazakhstan Cooperation in the Field of Education,” in: *12th International Technology, Education and Development Conference (INTED)*, Valencia, Spain, 2018.

The dependence of the degree of awareness on the level of education is confirmed by the respondents' responses related to attitudes towards certain Chinese projects. Thus, to the question "How do you feel about the following Chinese projects and initiatives being implemented in the territory of Kazakhstan? (Western Europe-Western China transport corridor)" only 3.1% of respondents with an academic degree answered "I am unaware of this project." Meanwhile, 22.7% of respondents with incomplete secondary education, 25.7% of respondents with secondary education, 15.3% of people with secondary vocational education, and 12.9% with higher education were unaware of the above-mentioned Chinese project.

The study found that the respondent's occupation has an impact on the perception of China. Among the unemployed, the Index value equaled 0.03, while the survey of school/college students returned the Index value of 0.44 and university students—0.24 (see Table 5).

Table 5

Values of China Perception Index in Kazakhstan by Occupation

Occupation	Value of China Perception Index	Value for Indicator 1— General Attitude towards China	Value for Indicator 2— China as a Center of Influence	Value for Indicator 3— China as an Investor	Value for Indicator 4— Chinese Culture and Education
Owner of small/medium/ large business	0.12	0.24	0.12	0.34	-0.22
Individual entrepreneur	0.12	0.27	0.19	0.20	-0.18
Self-employed (cab driver, tutor, hairstylist, etc.)	0.09	0.22	0.19	0.23	-0.26
Employed in the private sector	0.20	0.31	0.26	0.36	-0.13
Employed in the public sector	0.08	0.20	0.21	0.17	-0.24
Secondary school/ vocational college student	0.44	0.64	0.51	0.59	0.02
University student	0.24	0.40	0.27	0.36	-0.08
Retired	0.09	0.29	0.18	0.24	-0.36
Housewife	0.15	0.29	0.24	0.27	-0.21
Unemployed	0.03	0.20	0.18	0.11	-0.36
Disabled	0.33	0.50	0.43	0.38	0.00

High school and college students view China positively throughout all four components of the Index. In this group of respondents, none of the indicators has a negative value.

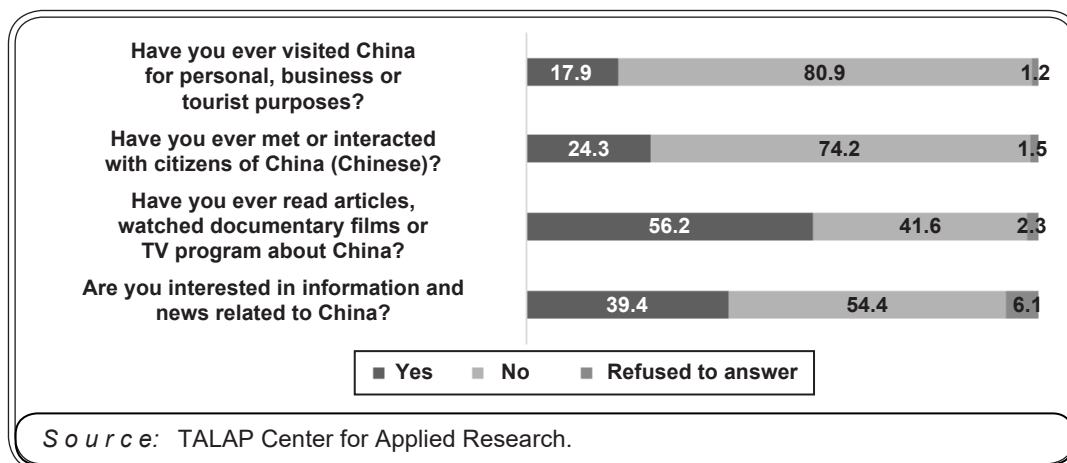
The low value of the Index among the unemployed can be explained by the general negative attitudes of this group and the lack of stable earnings.

Also, the relatively low value of the Index among public sector employees (0.08) is associated with low income and a relatively high workload. In the private sector, wage earners with more convenient work schedules and higher wages, have a much more positive view of China (Index = 0.20). More positive attitudes across all indicators are seen among private sector workers.

Along with the questions included in the China Perception Index indicators, the survey also contained questions to understand the reasons for specific levels of perception of China in Kazakhstan. The study showed that over a third of the respondents are interested in information related to China. Thus, 56.2% have read articles or watched documentaries about China. Almost a quarter of the respondents have experience in communicating with the citizens of the PRC and almost 18% have visited China. 39.4% of respondents are interested in information and news related to China. 11.1% of respondents come across information about the PRC very often, 38.2%—often, 44.2%—rarely and very rarely, 6.6%—do not come across such information at all (see Fig. 4).

Figure 4

Sources of Information about China, %



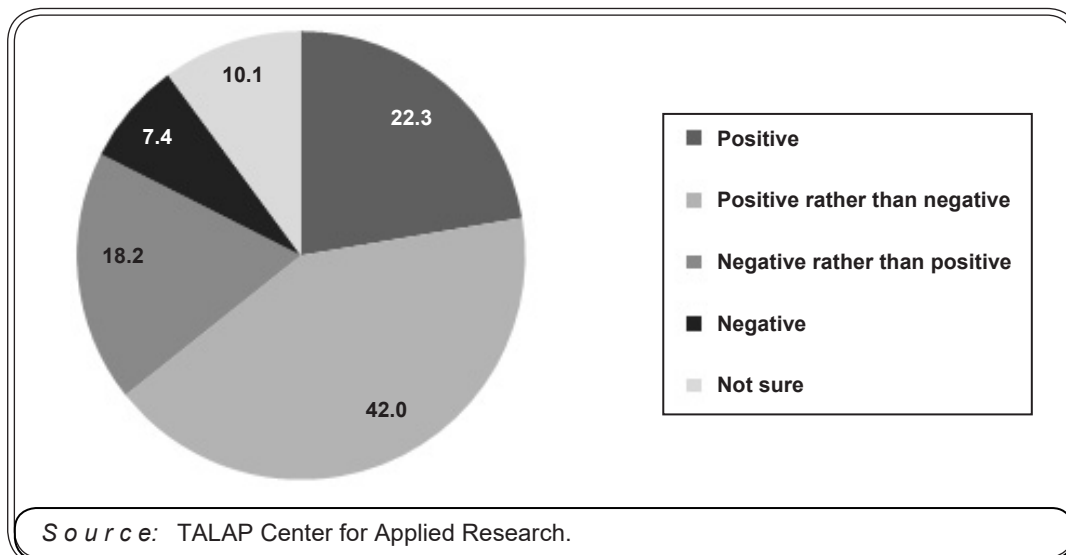
## Indicator 1. General Attitude towards China

Indicator 1 has the highest value (0.27) among the four indicators of the China Perception Index. To assess this Indicator, respondents were asked to answer one question: “Please indicate how you personally feel about China as a whole?” Of all those surveyed, 22.3% said they had a positive attitude towards China. 42% answered that they have a positive rather than a negative attitude towards China, and 35.7% responded that their attitude was negative rather than positive (18.2%), negative (7.4%) and not sure (10.1%) (see Fig. 5).

The Indicator value ranges from 0.03 to 0.51 in different regions. The most negative general attitude towards China is observed in Atyrau (0.03), Aktobe (0.05), Kyzylorda (0.09), Mangystay (0.11) and West Kazakhstan (0.15) regions. The highest value of the Indicator is observed in Kostanay (0.46), East Kazakhstan (0.48) regions and in the city of Shymkent (0.51) (see Fig. 6).

Figure 5

General Attitude of Kazakhstanis to China, %



In a number of regions, the attitude towards China is better than the average for the Republic of Kazakhstan due to less interaction with the citizens of the PRC and a lower probability of competition in the labor market. However, in 2010-2017, about 32% of all issued foreign labor quotas were issued for Chinese citizens.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, since 2015, this indicator has been gradually decreasing, and according to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, as of 1 July, 2020, the number of Chinese citizens working in Kazakhstan was 4,521.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, to the multiple-choice question, which was not included in the Index components, namely, “Which of the following contributes to your negative attitude towards China?” (respondent can choose up to 3 answer options), only 23% of the respondents responded “Attitude towards Kazakhstani workers at Chinese enterprises.” Also, to a similar multiple-choice question, “What do you think causes the greatest concern among Kazakhstanis with regard to China today?” only 25.1% responded “Labor migration flows.”

The difference in the Indicator value between urban and rural areas is insignificant: 0.27 and 0.26, respectively. The answers of respondents from rural areas are less categorical and tend to be less specific (see Fig. 7).

In addition, the study of the “General attitude towards China” Indicator demonstrated that the women are more optimistic about the PRC. Thus, the value of the indicator for women was 0.31, while for men this indicator returned a value of 0.22.

In terms of education level, as with the general attitude Index, people with an academic degree are the most loyal to China (0.40).

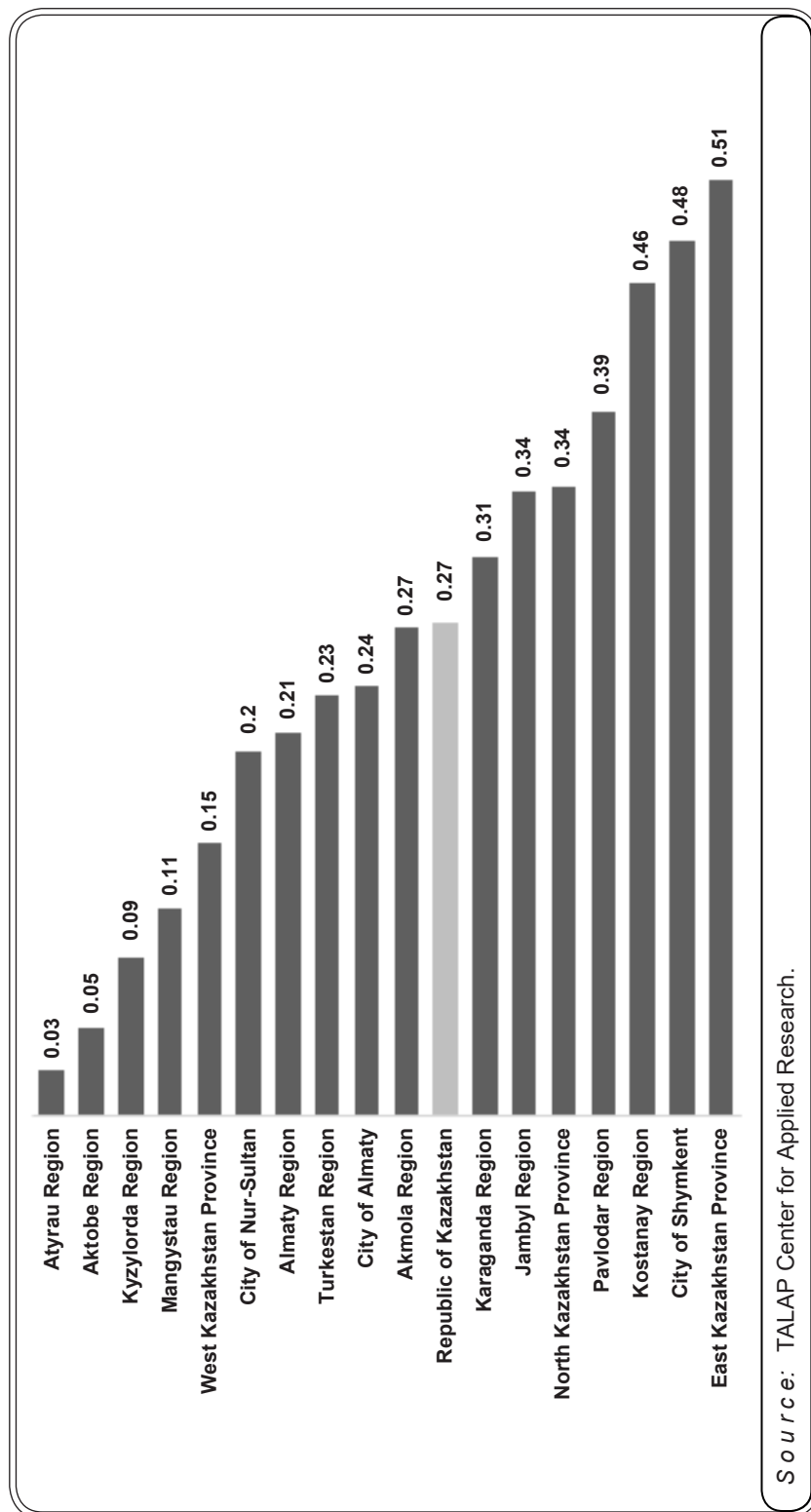
It should be noted that the general attitude towards China in the country is above neutral, regardless of the occupation, social status, level of education, age, and place of residence of the surveyed citizens.

<sup>4</sup> See: “Inostrannyye spetsialisty v Kazakhstane: kto oni i otкуда?” AO “Tsentr razvitiia trudovykh resursov”, 2010-2017, available at [<https://iac.enbek.kz/ru/node/552>], 2021.

<sup>5</sup> See: *Ibidem*.

Figure 6

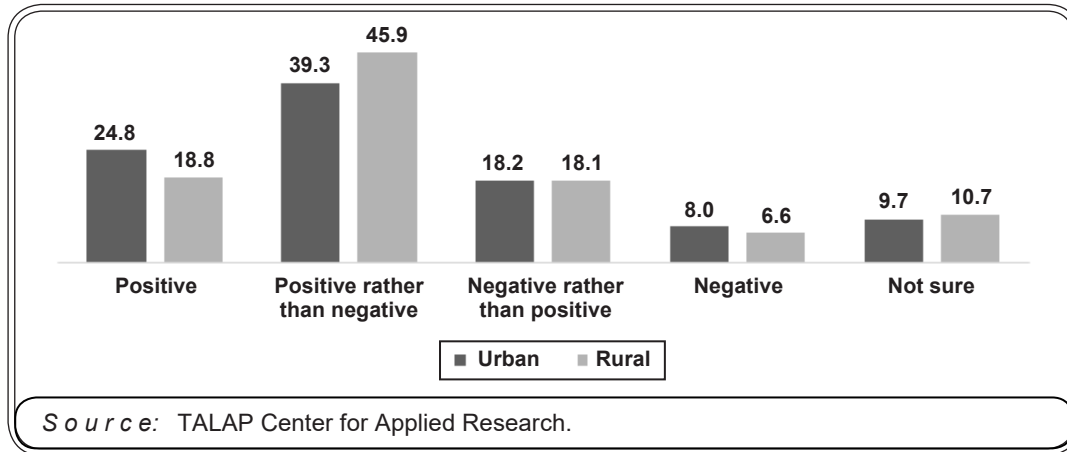
General Attitude of Kazakhstanis to China by City and Region



Source: TALAP Center for Applied Research.

Figure 7

Attitude of Kazakhstanis to China by Type of Residence (Urban/Rural), %



## Indicator 2. China as a Center of Influence

According to experts, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a serious impact on China’s macroeconomic performance in 2020. At the same time, China was able to effectively control the epidemic and maintain minimum economic growth, laying a favorable foundation for maintaining the economic growth pace in the medium and long term.<sup>6</sup> Further development of the Chinese economy could become one of the growth factors for the economy of Kazakhstan. This would allow China to be seen by Kazakhstanis as one of the centers of influence.

The value of the “China as a center of influence” indicator was calculated at 0.22 (see Fig. 8). The negative value of the indicator for the question about the potential threat of China for Kazakhstan (–0.08) indicates the respondents’ disagreement with this assumption. So, to the question “Does or does not China pose a threat to Kazakhstan?” 35% of the respondents answered that it does, 43%—that it does not, and 21.7% were unsure.

Also, a negative value (–0.22) was calculated in the responses to the question “Do you think China has more weight in the world than Russia, or less?” 39.3% of respondents answered that China has more weight in the world than Russia, 41.5%—less weight, and 19.2% found it difficult to answer.

In eight regions and two cities of republican significance, Indicator 2 is at or above the national average. In most regions where the indicator is below the national average, the Indicator value is above neutral. Only in the Kyzylorda region, the respondents do not consider China to be a center of influence (see Fig. 9).

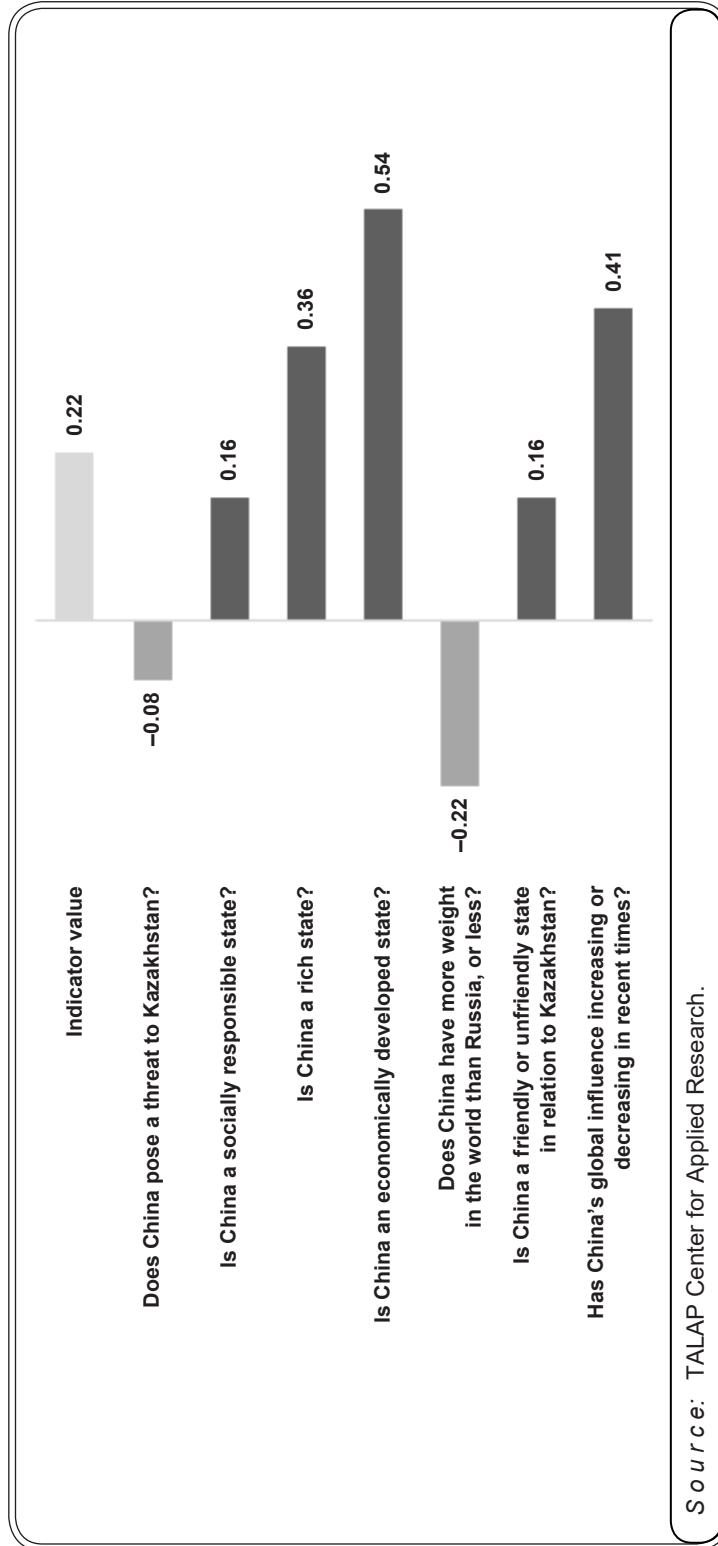
In comparison with the rural population, a greater share of the urban population of Kazakhstan considers China to be a center of influence. Thus, according to the results of the survey, in the cities the value of Indicator 2 equals 0.25, in the rural areas—0.17.

<sup>6</sup> See: Xiaoguang Liu, Yuanchun Liu, Yan Yan, “China Macroeconomic Report 2020: China’s Macroeconomy is on the Rebound under the Impact of COVID-19,” *Economic and Political Studies-EPS*, Vol. 8, Issue 4, available at [<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/20954816.2020.1844609?needAccess=true>], 2020.



Figure 8

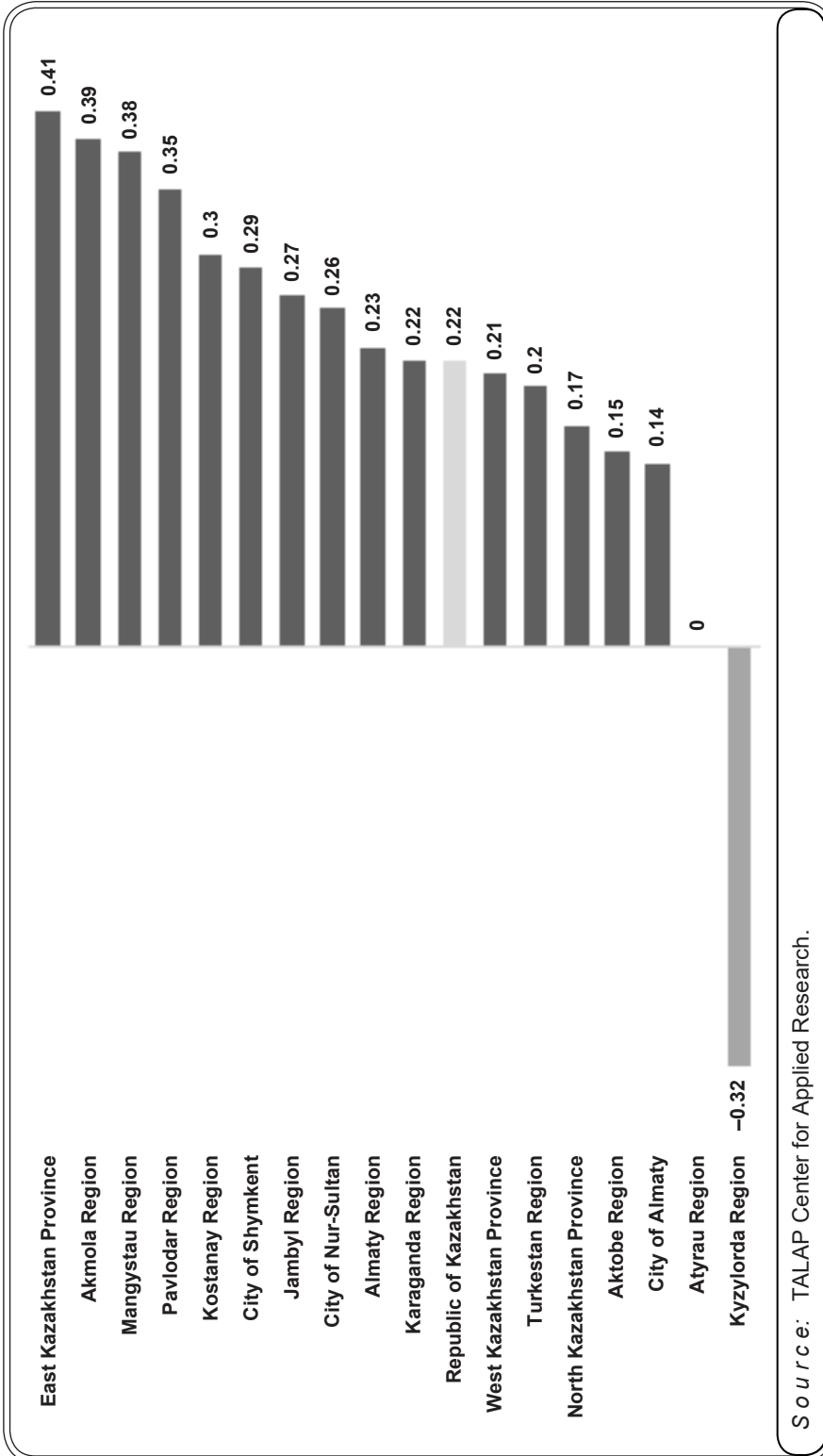
Attitude of Kazakhstanis to China as a Center of Influence



Source: TALAP Center for Applied Research.

Figure 9

Personal Attitude of Kazakhstanis to China as a Center of Influence by City and Region

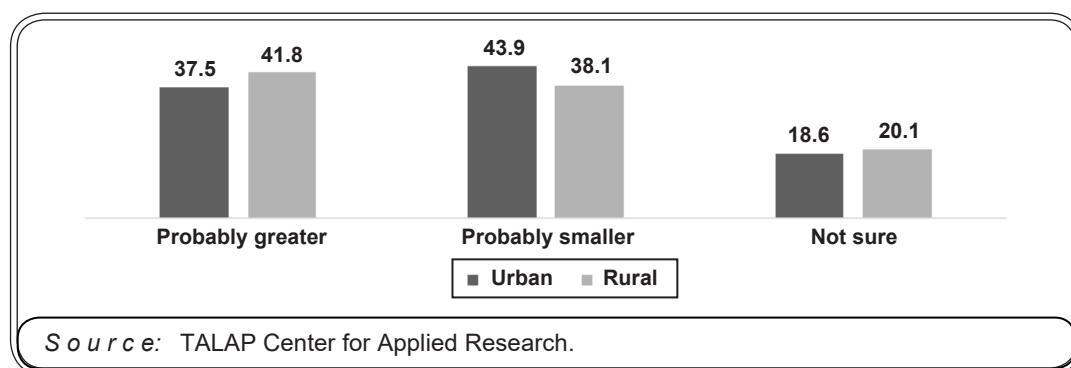


Source: TALAP Center for Applied Research.

The answers to almost all questions are identical among both urban and rural populations. The exception is the response to the question “Do you think China has more weight in the world than Russia, or less?” Here, the rural population was more inclined to consider Chinese influence stronger than Russian. The urban population’s responses to the remaining questions are more positive. At the same time, in rural areas there are more respondents who were not sure about their response (20.1%), which indicates the lower awareness of the rural population (see Fig. 10).

Figure 10

**Attitude of Kazakhstanis to Chinese and Russian Global Influence by Type of Residence (Urban/Rural), %**



Also, the value of Indicator 2 “China as a center of influence” of the China Perception Index is below average among older respondents.

The value of Indicator 2, which is below the national average (Indicator 2 = 0.22) among respondents over 55 years old (0.19), is associated with a lower value of responses to the questions “Do you think China has more weight in the world than Russia, or less?” and “Does or does not China pose a threat to Kazakhstan?” (see Fig. 11).

There is no pronounced pattern in the value of Indicator 2 depending on the type of respondents’ occupation. The highest value of the indicator is observed among school/college students (0.51), persons with disabilities (0.43), persons who refused to provide data on occupation (0.36), students (0.27), employees of private sector (0.26) and housewives (0.24).

At the same time, certain experts believe that interactions between Russia, China, and the United States remain highly volatile, especially in the context of the re-establishment of U.S.-Russian relations. Accordingly, Central Asia is becoming an important strategic “platform” for competition for influence between these countries.<sup>7</sup>

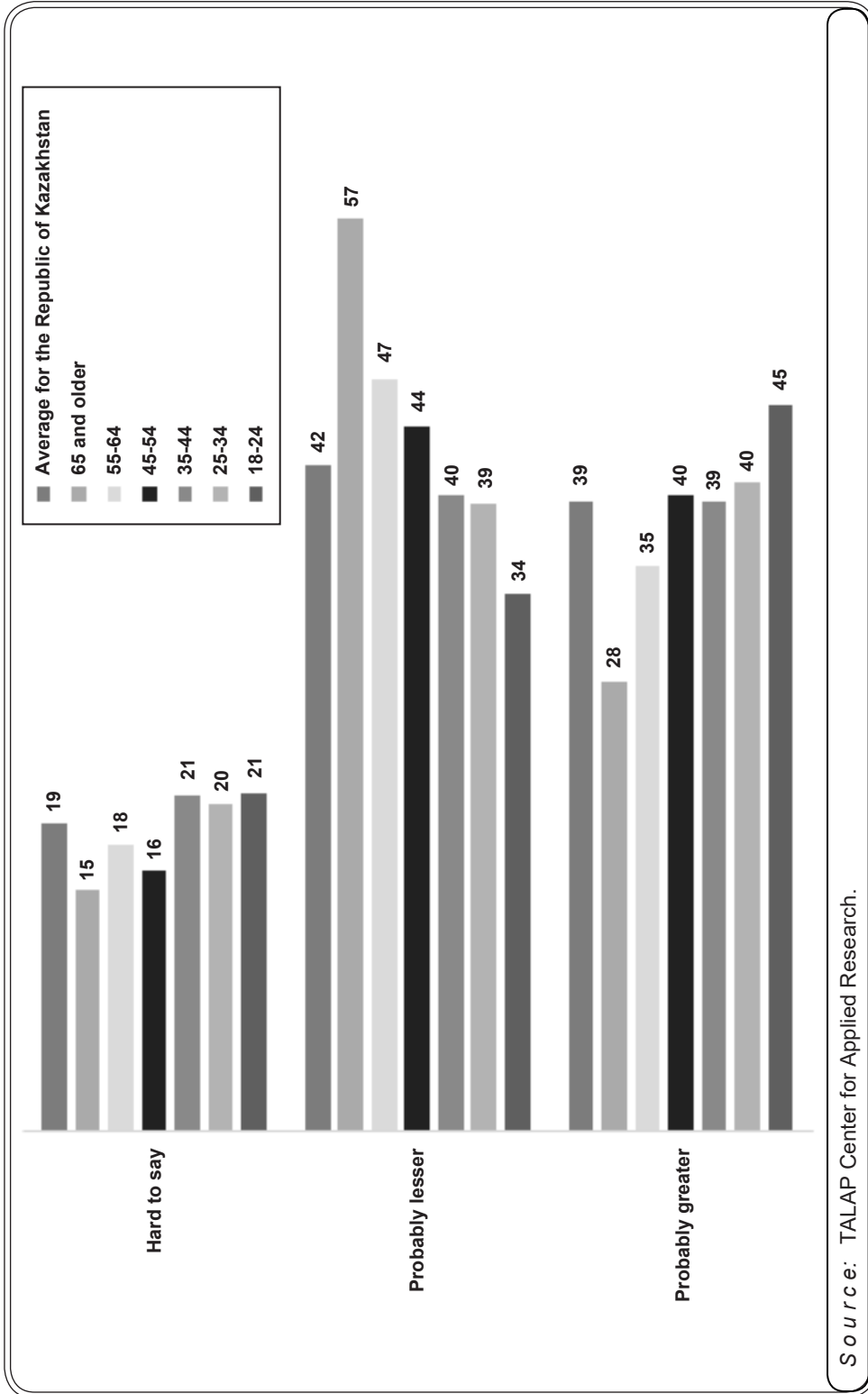
### **Indicator 3. China as an Investor (Cooperation)**

According to the report of the Eurasian Development Bank, *Monitoring of Direct Investments in Eurasian Countries—2014*, China’s investments in Eurasian Economic Union countries increased

<sup>7</sup> See: D. Kerr, “Central Asian and Russian Perspectives on China’s Strategic Emergence,” *International Affairs*, Vol. 86, Issue 1, January 2010, pp. 127-152, available at [https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2010.00872.x].

Figure 11

Responses to the Question “Do You Think China Has More Weight in the World Than Russia, Or Less?” by Age, %



Source: TALAP Center for Applied Research.

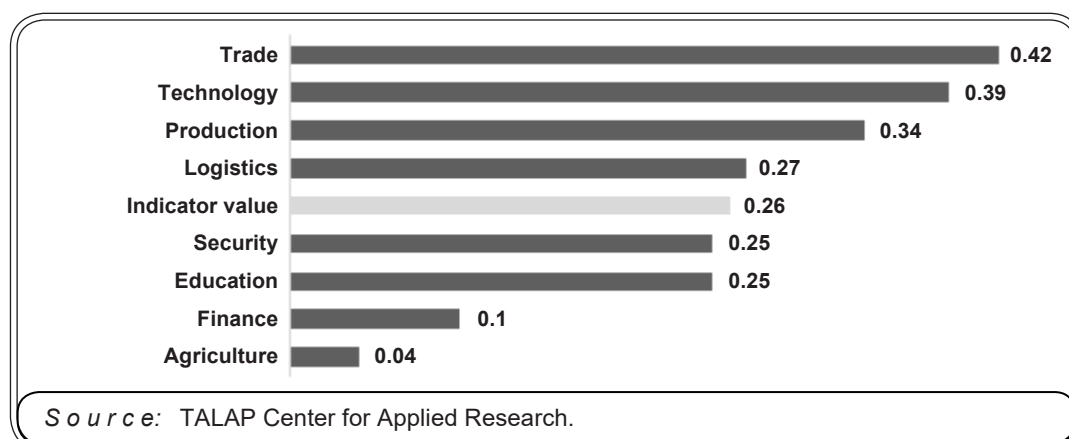
from \$11.02 to \$24.67 billion in 2009-2013. At the same time, Kazakhstan accounted for 95% of investments, or \$22.57 billion.<sup>8</sup>

China is an attractive investor for emerging economies. Accordingly, the value of Indicator 3 in the China Perception Index is important.

The value of Indicator 2 equals 0.26. It should be noted that the values obtained for each of the 8 questions are positive. The respondents are most neutral about the development of cooperation with China in the spheres of security, education, finance, and agriculture. Lower values are associated with people’s fears regarding the Chinese expansion in the above-mentioned spheres. For instance, the issue of land lease by Chinese investors has been topical in the field of agriculture in recent years, while fears of the appropriation of the financial market exist in the financial sphere. The population also believes that the education and security spheres are strategic and require more protection from the state (see Fig. 12).

Figure 12

**Attitude of Kazakhstanis to the Prospects of Cooperation with China by Industry**



Regionally, the value of Indicator 3 ranges from –0.44 to 0.66. In 7 regions of the country, the value of the Indicator “China as an investor (cooperation)” is above the national average, in 2 regions (Karaganda, Akmola) it is at the average level, in 8 regions—below the average for the Republic of Kazakhstan (see Fig. 13).

In four regions the value of Indicator 3 is neutral or negative. These are Atyrau (0), Aktobe (0), Mangystau (–0.17) and Kyzylorda (–0.44) regions. In these regions, half or more of the Indicator values are negative.

In Kyzylorda oblast, just as in the context of previous indicators, all eight values of Indicator 3 are negative.

There is a slight difference in indicators by type of the respondents’ residence: in urban areas it equals 0.29, which is 0.03 points higher than the national average (0.26), in rural areas—0.22.

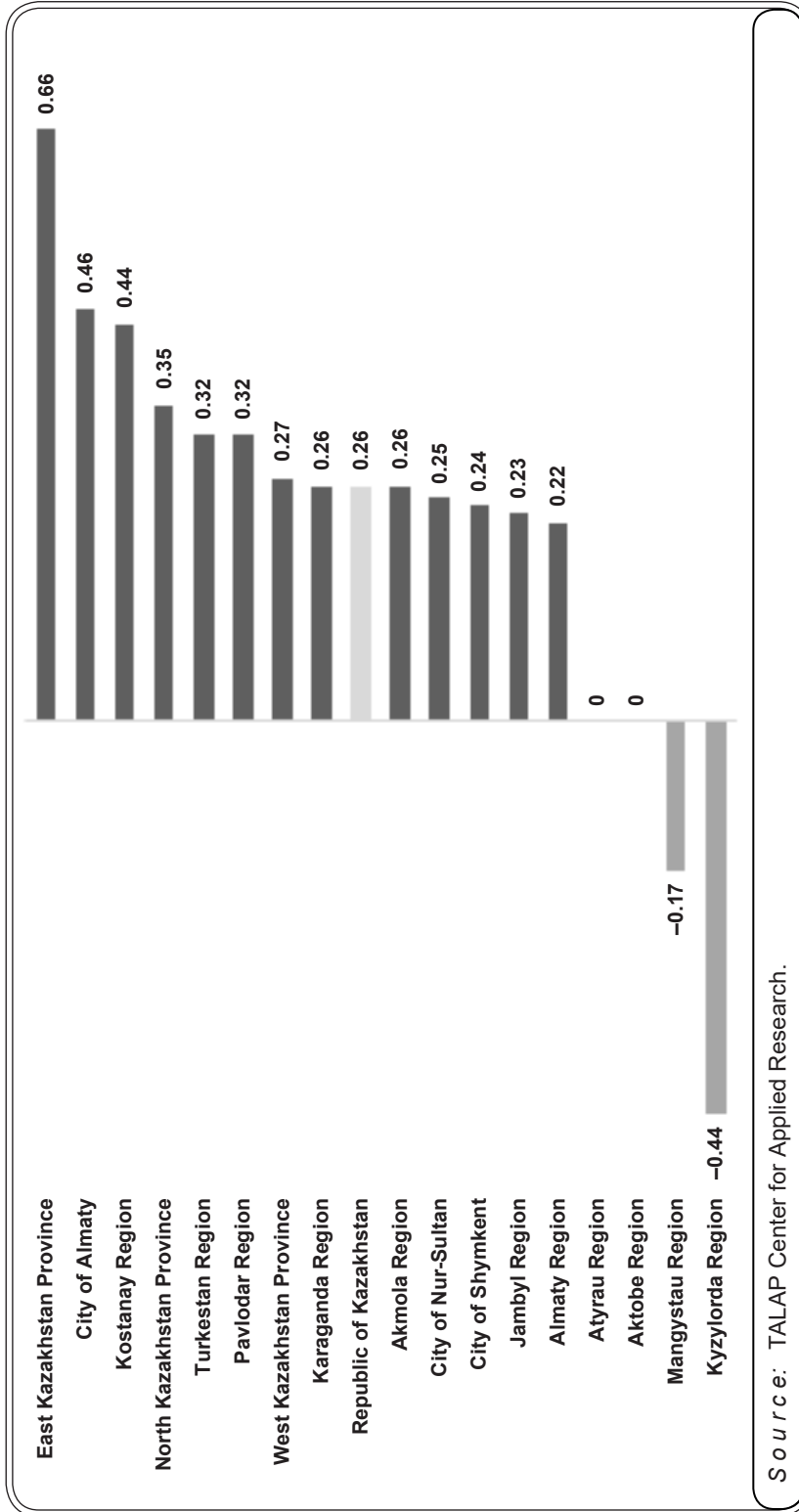
Indicator values also differ slightly by gender. For men, the value of the “China as an investor” Indicator equals 0.23, for women it is 0.28.

If we consider the age factor, the value of the “China as a center of influence” Indicator was below the national average among people over 55 years old, but the distribution of the respondents’

<sup>8</sup> See: “Pochemu investory Kitaia predpochitaiut Kazakhstan?” Tsentr delovoy informatsii Kapital.kz., 2015.

Figure 13

Attitude of Kazakhstanis to China as an Investor by City and Region



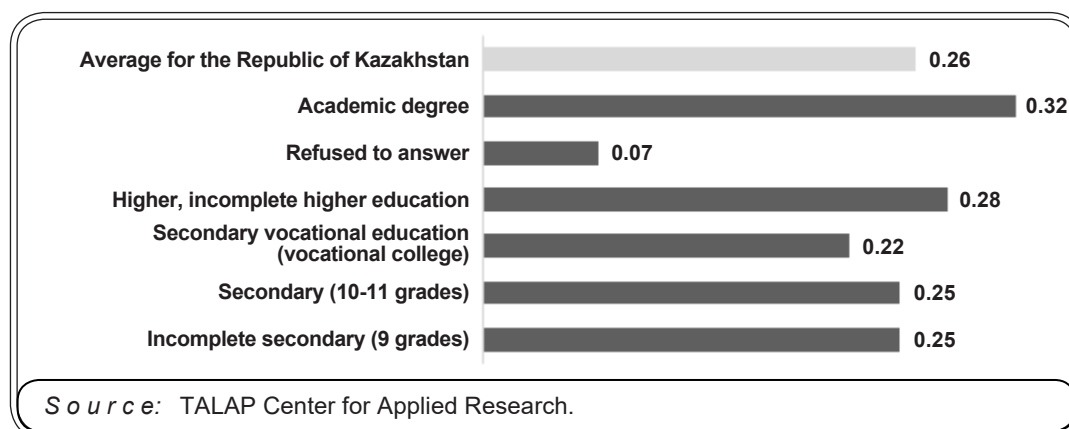
Source: TALAP Center for Applied Research.

preferences is slightly different for Indicator 3. The age groups 25-34 and 35-44 also demonstrated a value below the national average. At the same time, it should be noted that only older people show below neutral values of the Indicator (cooperation in the field of agriculture).

The hypothesis about the dependence of the indicator values on the level of education was confirmed when compared with calculations of Indicator 3. Thus, the respondents who completed high school or vocational college returned Indicator values below the national average, while those with a higher education or an academic degree returned higher than average values for Kazakhstan (see Fig. 14).

Figure 14

**Attitude of Kazakhstanis to China as an Investor by Education Level**



An examination of Indicator 3 values by the type of occupation demonstrates a more pessimistic attitude towards China as an investor on the part of the unemployed (0.11), public sector employees (0.17), individual entrepreneurs (0.2), self-employed (0.23) and pensioners (0.24). In turn, students, college students, persons with disabilities, owners of small and medium-sized businesses and housewives are more optimistic about cooperation with China.

In general, the attitude of the citizens of Kazakhstan towards cooperation with China in various spheres of the economy is positive. People are more cautious in regard to areas of greater strategic importance to national security.

## **Indicator 4. Chinese Culture and Education (Soft Power)**

The formation of the global education system is one of the most important of the numerous integration processes in the modern world, China included. Education is one of the highest values in the traditional Chinese culture. For instance, the establishment of world-class universities has recently become an important policy and practice in higher education in China.<sup>9</sup> The threshold of the

<sup>9</sup> See: Jia Song, Zhaofeng Chu, Yuwei Xu, "Policy Decoupling in Strategic Response to the Double World-Class Project: Evidence from Elite Universities in China," Higher Education, February 2021, available at [<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-020-00642-y>].

21st century has become the most important for the PRC on its path to integration in the world community. The success of this transition in any state is largely determined by its education policy, which creates conditions for a socio-economic and cultural start.

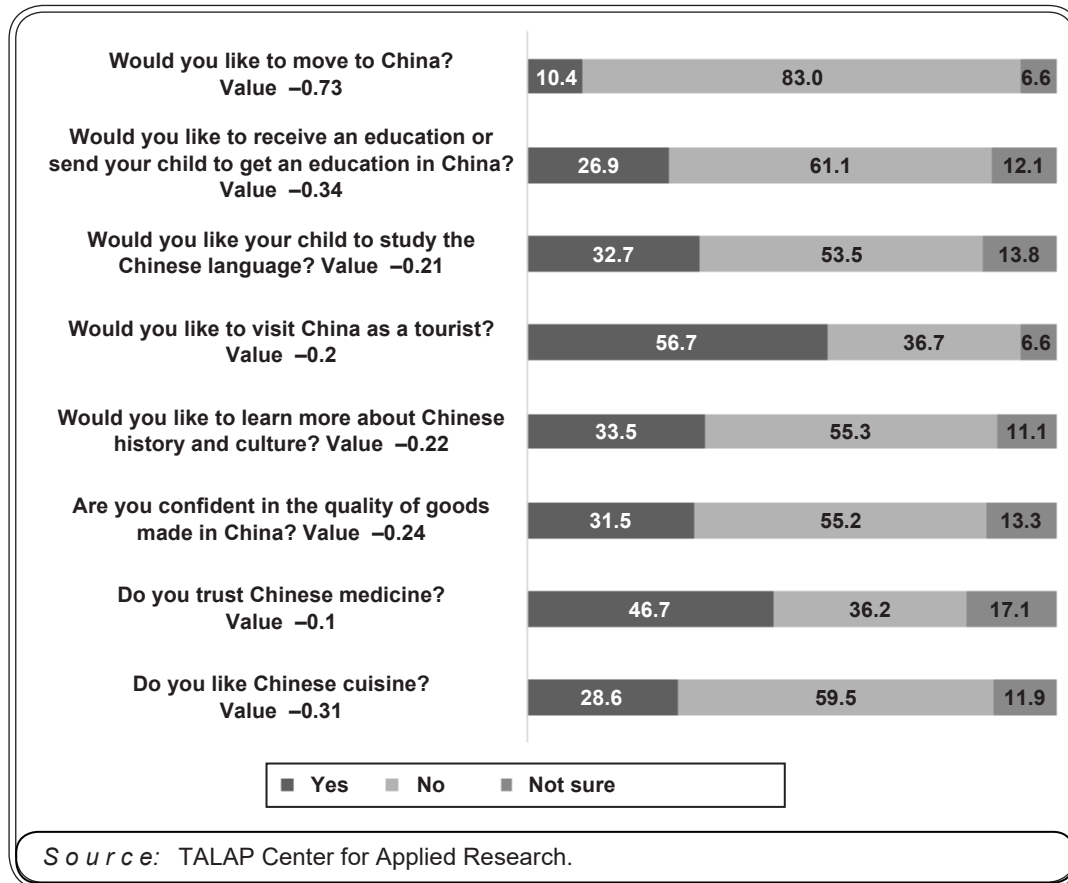
Indicator 4 “Chinese culture and education (soft power)” aimed to determine the extent to which Kazakhstani society perceives Chinese soft power in the form of education and culture.

The poll yielded a value of  $-0.22$  for Indicator 4, with virtually every value within Indicator 4 being negative.

It should be noted that not many Kazakhstanis like Chinese cuisine. Also negative are the values of indicators associated with a possible move to China, getting an education there, learning the Chinese language, knowledge of Chinese history and culture, as well as the use of Chinese goods. At the same time, the indicator of attitude and trust in Chinese medicine and tourism in China returned a positive value (see Fig. 15).

Figure 15

**Responses  
to the Questions of Indicator 4  
“Chinese Culture and Education (Soft Power)”, %**

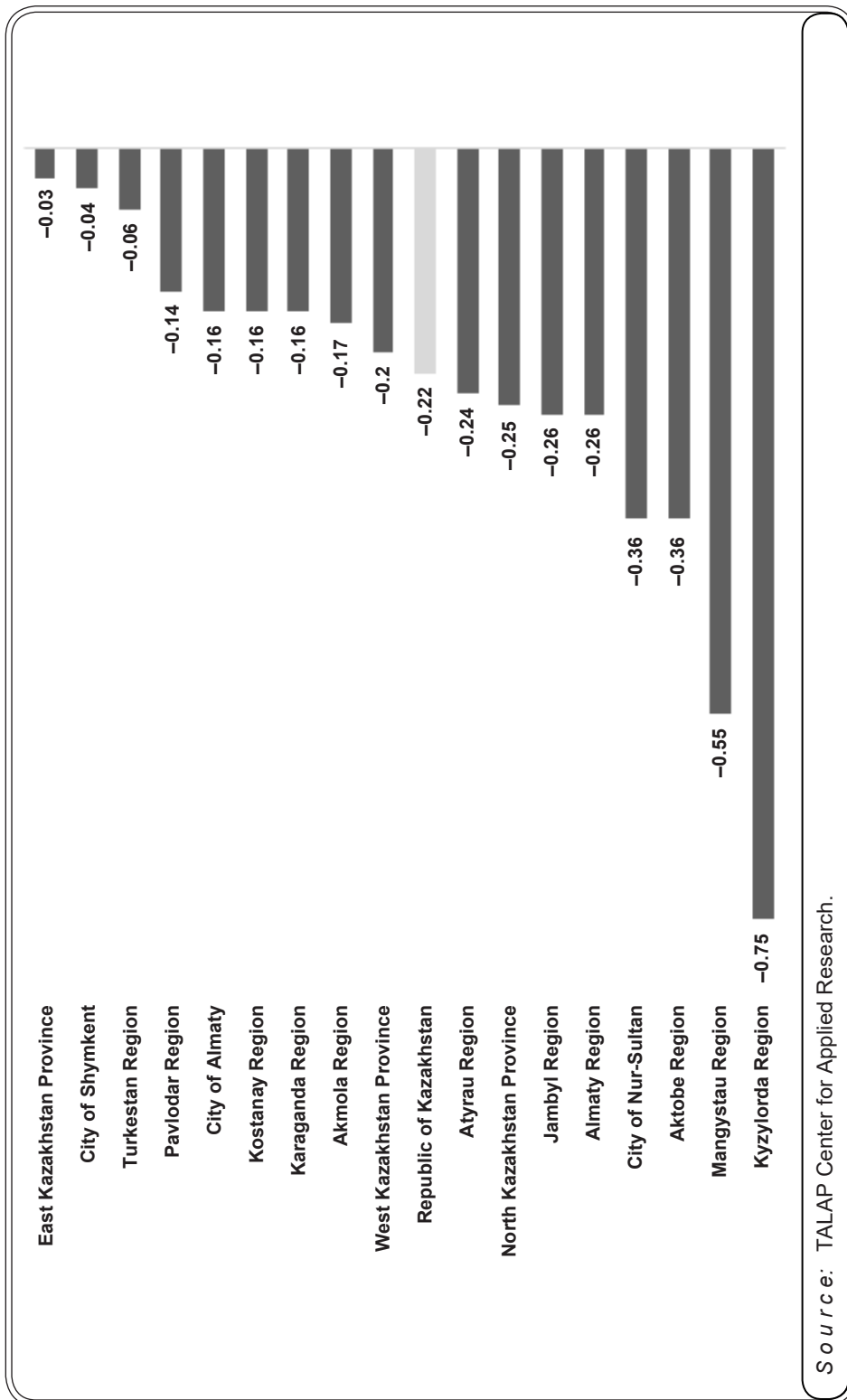


In the regional context, all regions and cities of republican significance showed negative values for Indicator 4 (see Fig. 16).



Figure 16

Values of Indicator 4 “Chinese Culture and Education (Soft Power)” by City and Region



Source: TALAP Center for Applied Research.

Scientists believe that stereotypes about China were also formed by Kazakh repatriates who returned to their homeland under the Nurly Kosh program.<sup>10</sup> As carriers of both Kazakh and Chinese culture, repatriates brought much from China back to Kazakhstan, including language, new dishes, culture and traditions.<sup>11</sup> The regions with the highest numbers of returnees are less positive about China. Residents of rural and urban areas are aligned in their perception of Chinese culture and education. With the national average of  $-0.22$ , urban dwellers scored  $-0.21$ , while rural dwellers were at  $-0.23$ .

The respondents' answers varied by gender. The value of Indicator 4 among surveyed women is  $-0.17$ , among men is equals  $-0.27$ . The difference in the indicator values between men and women emerged due to different opinions on the study of Chinese by children, visiting China for tourist purposes, confidence in Chinese goods, medicine and cuisine.

Indicator 4 is also negative in respondents from different age groups, occupations and educational levels. Only in individuals with an academic degree ( $-0.04$ ), the value of Indicator 4 is close to neutral.

## Conclusion

At present, China's relations with Kazakhstan and the Central Asian countries are at a fairly high level. Experts note that the main obstacle to further development and deepening of relations between China and Central Asia is the image, or rather the knowledge and ideas about China, which have developed in the states and among their populations.<sup>12</sup>

When analyzing relations with China, many experts consider Central Asia as one region, and do not account for the likely differences in attitudes towards China by country. Certain differences in perception can be facilitated by factors like the political system, economic and political situation, geographic location and neighbors, information background and the level of relations with world leaders.

The results of the analysis demonstrate that the image of China and the general attitude towards it in Kazakhstan is also formed by a complex multi-factor combination. In general, there is a high value of the "China as a center of influence (geopolitics and security)" Indicator, which indicates the great importance of the eastern neighbor for Kazakhstan. In the regional context, almost all regions and cities of republican significance, with the exception of Kyzylorda region, demonstrated a higher than neutral value of this Indicator.

Kazakhstanis have a generally positive attitude towards the influence of the PRC, both in the Central Asian region and in the world as a whole. On a 100% scale, with a maximum of +1 and a minimum of  $-1$ , a 0.22 value should be equated to a 61% confirmation of the hypothesis about China as a center of influence.

Insufficient information awareness of the Kazakh society creates the foundation for the negative perception and distortion of the current status of attracting foreign labor, including from China.

In the regional context, the value of the China Perception Index ranges from  $-0.36$  to  $+0.39$ . The study showed that such a significant variation in Index values by region is probably related to the duration, scale and history of the presence of Chinese investors in the region. In regions with a Chinese business presence, the Index value is below the national average. Urban population demonstrates

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<sup>10</sup> See: B. Bokayev, S. Zharkynbekova, K. Nurseitova, A. Bokayeva, A. Akzhigitova, S. Nurgalieva, "Ethnolinguistic Identification and Adaptation of Repatriates in Polycultural Kazakhstan," *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, No. 11(5), 2012, pp. 333-343, available at [<https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2012.723579>].

<sup>11</sup> See: B. Bokayev, A. Kazhenova, S. Zharkynbekova, G. Beisembayeva, S. Nurgalieva, "Adjustment and Ethno-Lingual Identification of Kazakh Repatriates: Results of Sociolinguistic Research," *Journal of Sociology*, No. 50 (4), 2014, pp. 545-559, available at [<https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783312467095>].

<sup>12</sup> See: Zhao Huasheng, "Sozdanie obraza: kak Kitaiu zakrepitsia v Tsentralnoi Azii," *Yezhegodnik IMI*, Issue 4 (14), 2015.

a more loyal attitude towards China. A higher value of the Index is observed among women, who, in comparison with men (up by 0.10), showed a more loyal attitude towards China.

China has common borders with four Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan). The border spans 2,900 km, of which the Kazakh section is 1,782 km (62%). This topographical contact line cannot but contribute to the involvement of Kazakhstan and China in the development of mutually beneficial relations.

Today, the Republic of Kazakhstan is actively involved in the transformation of the geo-economics of Eurasia. In the future, Kazakhstan will have to make better use of all the new opportunities and prospects. In the coming years, Kazakhstan has yet to critically rethink the complex of broad geo-economic opportunities that are now being formed around the landlocked country.

In general, the results of the study reveal the need for further comprehensive research, improving the information campaign and creating discussion platforms with the participation of non-governmental and international organizations, the expert community, and government agencies.

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## **INDIA'S ROLE IN KAZAKHSTAN'S MULTI-VECTOR FOREIGN POLICY**

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## ABSTRACT

**A**fter the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan's economy was weak since most of the industrial enterprises were located in Russia. To attain economic growth, Kazakhstan crafted a unique foreign policy known as the multi-vector foreign policy, which facilitated an easy inflow of direct foreign investments into the state economy. After economic liberalization in 1991, India took a serious interest in Cen-

tral Asia, and since then the two nations have come a long way marked by complex interdependence in the international arena. They have demonstrated a successful and sustained upward trend in their bilateral relationship through soft power, trade and long-standing historical connections. Thus, the prospects of mutual cooperation between Central Asia, particularly Kazakhstan, and India are quite promising in the near future.

**KEYWORDS:** *multi-vector foreign policy, Kazakhstan, India, soft power, Central Asia.*

## *Introduction*

The economy of the newly independent Kazakhstan was in a miserable condition as it was closely tied to Russian economy. The country was forced to align itself with Russia due to the mere fact that it used to be a part of the Soviet Union. Moreover, after the disintegration, important industries, including pharmaceutical companies came under Russian control and Russian military helped to secure the extensive border with China. The presence of a large population of ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan and the country's dependence on the Russian alliance to use its oil pipeline infrastructure allowed Russia to assume a position of the "big brother," a source of assistance and a partner to collaborate with. Nevertheless, Kazakhstan soon realized the need to accommodate the interests of influential powers, i.e., the United States and China, and, subsequently others. The interests of the other powers were properly endorsed and aligned in the country's multi-vector foreign policy. Kazakhstan realized that Russia could not provide the much-required technical and financial assistance to develop its industrial resources. Thus, in the course of elaborating and implementing a foreign policy, the first president Nursultan Nazarbayev shaped the national identity of Kazakhstan to pave the way for economic development and to consolidate his power.<sup>1</sup> India, which is one of the fastest growing economies of the world and an influential player in the developing world, a country with deep-rooted historical connections with Kazakhstan, growing bilateral trade and no major conflicts, is a favorable partner in the multipolar world, and this partnership can prove mutually beneficial in the long run.

## Connecting Past and Present

Historically, Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent interacted closely. Kanishka, a Kushan king, paid immense attention to Buddhism and even the Ferghana valley was a part of his kingdom

<sup>1</sup> See: P. Ipek, "The Role of Oil and Gas in Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy: Looking East or West?" *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 59, No. 7, 2007, pp. 1179-1199.

during the golden period of his rule. Thus, it can be said that Buddhism spread to Central Asia through the Kushan kingdom during the early Middle Ages.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, the relations between Central Asia and India thrived in the first two centuries of the Mughal rule. It was through an extensive exchange of culture and ideas that people from two geographically separated areas found a sense of interconnectedness. Over the years, the Mughal and Central Asian cultures have enriched each other through individuals who traveled between the two regions for various purposes: as treasure hunters, merchants, researchers, tourists, migrants moving out of the region due to regional instability or ostracism at home. Mughals are considered the direct descendants of Timur and thus trace their origin from the Central Asian region. Mughal patronage and close contacts with the Naqshbandi Sufi order are well-documented. Pilgrimage to the tombs of Muslim saints became another important reason for travel; Abdullah Kabuli was one of those who travelled to Ahmedabad, Lahore, Multan, Delhi, Agra and Kashmir. The Mujavaba<sup>3</sup> literary tradition became common during this era. Apart from cross-border movements of people, the caravans carried the messages of poets, rulers and other important people to-and-fro between the land of Uzbeks (Central Asia) and Mughals (India).

Pictorial arts in the form of miniature paintings illustrate the synthesis in architecture, handicrafts, jewelry, tools and weapons and, most importantly, give a general picture of the lifestyle. Mir Sayyid Ali, who founded the Mughal School of Painting, also travelled from Central Asia to the Mughal court to work for Akbar. Greek astronomy and Unani medicine penetrated the Indian subcontinent as a result of this cultural exchange.

Khawaja Khawind Mahmud was from Samarqand, and he studied Unani medicine in Iran before working at the court of Babur. His brother Khawaja Yusuf's descendants, commonly known as the Sharifi family in India, practiced Unani medicine in the 17th and 18th centuries<sup>4</sup>. Music as well as sports, i.e., wrestling matches, also connected the two territories for years. Humayun's tomb is a vivid example of interconnectedness in the architectural sphere,<sup>5</sup> which confirms that 16th-17th century developments in India were not purely a Mughal phenomenon, but, rather, a result of complex interpenetration of Central Asian and Mughal cultures.<sup>6</sup>

With the advent of the British, this contact largely broke off, only to be revived in 1991-1992 after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The persevering efforts of the British colonialists to break the bond between Central Asia and India failed. As Khilnani rightly pointed out, "socialism reached India not from Britain, but from Russia."<sup>7</sup>

Thus, even during the British rule the cultural and conceptual exchange persisted. Therefore, the author believes that the rich history of interaction between the Central Asian region and the Indian sub-continent should form the basis of the contemporary relationship between India and Kazakhstan. Political scientist Peter Evans notes that "the desire to predict is part of social science."<sup>8</sup> Hence, looking at their successful history, one can predict a successful and mutually beneficial relationship in the near future.

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<sup>2</sup> See: K. Sadikov, "On the Expansion of Buddhism in Central Asia," *Academia*, n.d.

<sup>3</sup> See: R. Foltz, "Cultural Contacts Between Central Asia and Mughal India," *Central Asiatic Journal*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 1998, pp. 44-65.

<sup>4</sup> See: H.A. Hameed, *Exchanges Between India and Central Asia in the Field of Medicine*, Department of History of Medicine and Science, Institute of History of Medicine and Medical Research, New Delhi, 1986, pp. 39-41.

<sup>5</sup> See: J.D. Hoag, "The Tomb of Ulugh Beg and Abdu Razzak at Ghazni, A Model for the Taj Mahal," *Journal of the Society for Architectural Historians*, Vol. 27, No. 4, 1968, p. 241.

<sup>6</sup> See: R. Foltz, op. cit.

<sup>7</sup> See: N.M. Khilnani, *Realities of Indian Foreign Policy*. ABC Publishing House, New Delhi, 1984, p. 169.

<sup>8</sup> See: P. Evans, "The Role of Theory in Comparative Politics: A Symposium," *World Politics*, Vol. 48, No. 1, October 1995, p. 3.

## Reasons for the Success of Indo-Kazakh Relations / Accommodation without Conflict

India can no longer be considered a “reclusive porcupine.”<sup>9</sup> It plays an important role in the functioning of all international organizations, while witnessing an unprecedented economic growth, which was only slowed down by the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the years, India has considerably developed its “hard power” by increasing defense expenditures, conducting nuclear tests<sup>10</sup> and refusing to become a signatory of NPT while adopting a foreign policy of non-alignment. Although a nuclear power, India follows a “no first use policy” which guarantees a “no-war” approach, which allows it to be seen as a reliable economic partner. At the same time, the role played by non-state actors and Track II Diplomacy cannot be ignored. Business groups, middle-class population, students and professionals have all played a major role in integrating India into the global order.<sup>11</sup> Considering terrorism a common threat, the two countries can jointly develop anti-terrorism strategies and engage in military exercises. Furthermore, as a member of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, Kazakhstan has decided to support disarmament. In that case, India should use the instruments of soft power diplomacy to nurture strong bilateral relations.

The domestic policies are focused on generating and maintaining the two national identities through the integration of people from various regional and linguistic, class and racial groups into one whole.<sup>12</sup> Further, the new state is moving slowly towards democratization and although India “does not believe in exporting democracy,”<sup>13</sup> it should nevertheless help Kazakhstan in fostering it.<sup>14</sup> In the 21st century war is a threat to economic development, since the true nature of power is defined not by military strength, but by a country’s economic growth, which is a crucial factor for developing nations. Thus, economic competition opens up opportunities for cooperation.

Currently the region is witnessing a New Great Game among Russia, China, U.S., Turkey, EU, Japan, Pakistan and India.<sup>15</sup> All these actors want to carve out a sphere of influence to meet their own energy requirements. In the context of the New Great Game, Kazakhstan has pursued a balanced foreign policy and worked to develop its economy, especially its hydrocarbon industry. While the country’s economic outlook is improving, Nursultan Nazarbayev maintains strict control over the country’s politics<sup>16</sup>. He does so through various state apparatus<sup>17</sup> by which he calls for foreign direct investments allowing to freely invest within the country but restricts them to misuse its resources.. However, the state is still facing challenges at various levels. It is facing problems of Islamic funda-

<sup>9</sup> R.M. Chilamkuri, *Crossing the Rubicon: The Shaping of India’s New Foreign Policy*, Penguin, Delhi, 2003.

<sup>10</sup> See: T.C. Schaffer, et al. “Partnering with India: Regional Power, Global Hopes,” in: *Challenges and Choices*, Strategic Asia Series, 2008-2009.

<sup>11</sup> See: A. Sinha, “Partial Accommodation without Conflict: India as a Rising Link Power,” in: *Accommodating Rising Powers: Past, Present, and Future*, ed. by T.V. Paul, Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 222-245.

<sup>12</sup> See: Y.I. Rudenko, “Current Status, Problems and Prospects of India-Kazakhstan Cooperation in Political Sphere,” *FPRC Journal*-10, No. 2, 2012.

<sup>13</sup> M. Rakhimov, “Regional Cooperation in Central Asia and Perspective of Central Asia-India Relations,” in: N.R. Khan, *India, Central Asia and the World Powers*, Primus Books, 2013, p. 27.

<sup>14</sup> See: S. Rosato, “Explaining the Democratic Peace,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 99, No. 3, August 2005, pp. 467-472.

<sup>15</sup> See: N. Kaushiki, “The New Great Game and India’s Connect Central Asia Policy: Strategic Perspectives and Challenges,” *Journal of International and Area Studies*, December 2013, pp. 83-100.

<sup>16</sup> See: A. Tripathi, “The Great Game that Never Ends: China Emerges as Leading Player in Kazakhstan,” *Artha-Journal of Social Sciences*, 2017, Vol. 16, No. 4 [61-77ISSN0975-329X][[https://doi: 10.12724/ajss.43.4](https://doi.org/10.12724/ajss.43.4)].

<sup>17</sup> See: A. Gupta, *India and Central Asia: Need for a Pro-active Approach*, IDSA, New Delhi, 2013.

mentalism and drug trade and human trafficking from its relative proximity to Afghanistan and the weak border controls in the Central Asian states.<sup>18</sup>

Also, one of the disadvantages lies in the fact that it is a landlocked country. For this very reason, it always has tried to accommodate other powers for its economic development. Thus, it is planning for a revival of the ancient Silk Route and building better bilateral relations with countries like Russia and India. Institutions like the G-Global is one such example. The Astana Economic Forum is eager to work out a strategy to bring more countries into a broader structure extending G-20 into G-Global. Former president Nursultan Nazarbayev believed that the number of member countries should be increased so that it would be able to make major trade-related decisions and search for global anti-crisis solutions.<sup>19</sup> To that regard, the current Prime Minister of the country Askar Mamin has already set up a coordinating council to attract Indian investments. The creation of institutions is necessary because they allow to support acceptable behavior on the part of the states and thus avoid major conflicts.<sup>20</sup>

## **Bilateral Connections: Politics, Culture, and Economy**

Cultures and ideas flowed throughout the Silk Route through trade and commerce.<sup>21</sup> India had bilateral contacts with Central Asia owing to its connection with the ancient Silk Route, although the relationship was more cultural than economic. Bilateral connections were fully revived under Pamulaparthi Venkata Narasimha Rao's government. Embassies were opened in Almaty and New Delhi in 1992 and 1993, respectively.<sup>22</sup> When it comes to cultural exchange, the Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre (SVCC) in Nur-Sultan deserves a mention. It provides dance, yoga, instrumental and Hindi language classes, organizes Bollywood movie screenings, performances by visiting troupes and celebrates Indian festivals, among other things. Films, art and culture have constant facilitated mutual ties between the two countries. Indian society and family values at large have always encouraged and impressed the people of Kazakhstan. Beyond culture, a number of scholarships are also available for Kazakhs for higher studies in the Indian universities under the auspices of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)<sup>23</sup>, the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) and the Indian Council of Social Science Research. Cultural ties are getting even stronger with the visits by diplomats from India to Kazakhstan and vice versa. Visits by high-level diplomats and politicians show a deep-rooted interest and interdependence. Further, exchanges at an academic level lay a foundation for a deeper relationship and future growth. An increasing number of scholarships on both ends and cultural exchange will definitely lead to increased mutual trust, understanding and innovation.

The two countries are also cooperating in the scientific, industrial and technological fields. Joint working groups have been created for the eight sectors, namely: Counter Terrorism, Trade and Eco-

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<sup>18</sup> See: D. Lewis, "High Times on the Silk Road: The Central Asian Paradox," *World Policy Journal*, Spring 2010, pp. 39-49.

<sup>19</sup> See: G-Global (2015, December). *G Global*. Retrieved from G-Global: The Concept of G-Global Initiative, available at [[https://kazatu.edu.kz/assets/i/docs/global\\_2\\_en.pdf](https://kazatu.edu.kz/assets/i/docs/global_2_en.pdf)].

<sup>20</sup> See: J.J. Mearsheimer, "Anarchy and the Struggle for Power," in: J.J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 2001, p. 31.

<sup>21</sup> See: S. Behera, "India's Encounter with the Silk Road," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, No. 51, 2002, p. 5077.

<sup>22</sup> See: Ministry of External Affairs, December 2018 [[https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/december\\_2018.pdf](https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/december_2018.pdf)].

<sup>23</sup> See: Embassy of India, Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan, n.d. [<http://www.indembastana.gov.in/page/icc/>].

conomic Cooperation, Defense and Military Technical Cooperation, Information Technology, Hydrocarbons, Textiles, Tea Debt and Space Cooperation. India and Kazakhstan share a trade relationship, which is currently negligible, although important to both sides and should be fostered. As per the 2017 data, trade between the two countries totaled \$981.8 million, including approximately \$757 million in exports from Kazakhstan, and \$225 million in exports from India. When it comes to science and technology, India has sent a draft cooperation plan for 2016-2018, which is under consideration by the Kazakhstan government. In space cooperation, the ISRO and the National Space Agency of Kazakhstan have signed an MOU in 2009. In 2017, a 1.7 kg Technology Demonstrator Nano Satellite that was built by Al-Farabi Kazakh National University was launched by ISRO. In 2009, a civil cooperation agreement was signed, according to which 2,100 tons of uranium were supplied to India by the end of 2014. An agreement on Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy was also signed during PM Manmohan Singh's visit to Kazakhstan in 2011.<sup>24</sup> These facts suggest a possibility of promising economic cooperation.

Security and defense issues become crucial in reinforcing the relationship between any two countries. So much so, it becomes an instrument of state policy and in that regard, defense cooperation between India and Kazakhstan can lead to mutual progress. Therefore, it is vital to build strategic partnerships in the field of security and defense. The pharmaceutical industry is another booming sector in both countries owing to the positive business environment. Export commodities from India to Central Asia include tea, ready-made garments, cotton yarn, jute goods, while India imports iron and steel, fruit, and other goods. from Central Asia.<sup>25</sup> This reveals a sustainable economic growth that promises enhanced economic opportunities in the future. A number of English language teachers from India are also employed in Central Asia, assisting the regional youth to become global leaders of the future.

## Energy and Beyond

One of the agendas of adopting a multidimensional foreign policy, namely the multi-vector foreign policy, is to reap the economic benefits that the energy sector has to offer. Therefore, the interaction in the energy sphere that is at the nexus of India and Kazakhstan's relationship can be further strengthened to mutual advantage. For instance, Indian oil giant Oil and Natural Gas Corporation has shown interest in buying a large share of an oil-producing firm in Kazakhstan.<sup>26</sup>

When a country's economic progress is tied to its non-renewable resources, like it is in Kazakhstan, the economy will have to deal with inflation in the long run owing to the depletion of such resources. In other words, moving away from the use of fossil fuels and other non-renewable energy sources and adopting sustainable ways of development are the only ways forward. One of such ways is to become a part of the International Solar Alliance, a joint endeavor of France and India. Moreover, the value of the currency being tied to its natural resources and global warming and climate change in the contemporary scenario justifies the need to devise sustainable development plans. In Kazakhstan, low oil prices in the 1990s directly affected the tenge, thereby leading to currency devaluation in 1999.<sup>27</sup> Thus, Kazakhstan should be developing other sectors, such as the agricultural, chemical and cotton industries.

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<sup>24</sup> See: Ministry of External Affairs, December 2018.

<sup>25</sup> See: I.A. Mir, "India's Trade Potential with Central Asia: An Application of Gravity Model," *International Journal on World Peace*, Vol. 31, No. 3, September 2014, pp. 53-69.

<sup>26</sup> See: D.R. Chaudhury, "New Milestone in Indo-Kazakh Trade to Further Boost Kazakhstan Social Sector Spendings," *The Economic Times*, New Delhi, 2019.

<sup>27</sup> See: R. Pomfret, "Kazakhstan's Economy since Independence: Does the Oil Boom Offer a Second Chance for Sustainable Development?" *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 6, September 2005, pp. 859-876.



## Conclusion

To balance out the interests of Russia, China and the U.S., India needs to find a significant place in the multi-vector foreign policy of Kazakhstan. Further, India has to make the maximum efforts to forge better ties with Kazakhstan, propagating the hope that the two countries will help each other in bad times. A country like India should focus primarily on its soft power, i.e., Bollywood when it comes to engagement with the Kazakh population. It is important here to note that actors like Jitendra, Raj Kapoor, Mithun Chakraborty are enormously popular in Kazakhstan, and India should harness this cultural capital to wield power in the international arena. There is always complex interdependence and mutual tensions between states, which result in mutual deterrence, as seen in the Cold War era. Therefore, both countries can pave the way for economic, cultural and social development using diplomacy as a tool and trade as a means.

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## NEW FOREIGN POLICY COURSE IN THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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## ABSTRACT

**W**e relied on the “geopolitical codes” concept formulated by Colin Flint as “the manner in which a country orientates itself towards the world” to analyze the changes that the new President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev has brought to the country’s foreign policy. Geopolitical codes include assessments of strategic importance of the neighboring states defined by the leaders of state and potential threats emanating from them. We have studied the new foreign policy priorities formulat-

ed by President Mirziyoyev and possible variants of the foreign policy course pursued by the Republic of Uzbekistan in Central Asia, the EAEU and WTO, as well as specifics of

its relationships with the leading centers of power. We have selected comparative analysis, SWOT analysis and the prognostication method as our main instruments.

**KEYWORDS:** Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Islam Karimov, foreign policy.

## *Introduction*

The leaders of the Republic of Uzbekistan have invariably pointed out that they were and are pursuing an open, mutually advantageous and constructive foreign policy in full conformity with the country's national interests. Its contemporary foreign policy course takes into account the dynamically changing situation in the world and in our region, as well as the large-scale changes realized in the country.<sup>1</sup>

This article is better described as an attempt at a complex analysis of the republic's foreign policy after power transit: new foreign policy priorities, possible variants of the relationships with the Central Asian countries, potential integration with the EAEU and the WTO and the principles on which Uzbekistan relies when dealing with the leading centers of power.

We relied on comparative and SWOT analysis and the method of prognostication. Colin Flint's *Introduction to Geopolitics*<sup>2</sup> served as the theoretical foundation of our studies.

## **Reforms**

President Islam Karimov, a highly influential and a deeply respected political actor, remained at the helm for 26 years. His political regime was based on authoritarianism and a super-presidential form of governance and stood apart as the most rigid in the post-Soviet space. Some believe that under Karimov Uzbekistan pursued a "swinging pendulum policy," oscillating between Russia and the United States. In a certain sense, Uzbekistan had isolated itself at the regional and international levels in the last years of Karimov's rule.<sup>3</sup> He ruled the country in the so-called transition period, which explains the above-mentioned specifics: the country was coping with the task of restoring its independent statehood, following the course of reforms and joining the world community and the system of international relations. This explains why the isolationism of his last years contradicts, to an extent, his active involvement in regional and international interaction. An analysis of post-Karimov Uzbekistan and its foreign policy requires a detailed and careful examination of the accumulated assets, successes achieved in the region and the world, and the republic's failures.

In December 2016, power was transferred to Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who won the presidential elections. He has remained president for nearly five years. The new president began a new develop-

<sup>1</sup> See: "Vneshniaia politika Respubliki Uzbekistan," MID RUz, available at [<https://mfa.uz/ru/pages/vneshnaya-politika>], 20 April, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> See: C. Flint, *Introduction to Geopolitics*, Routledge, New York, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> See: D. Borisov, "Vneshniaia politika Uzbekistana pri Sh. Mirziyoyeve: strategiya i praktika," *Izvestia Uralskogo federalnogo universiteta*, Vol. 14, No. 2/188, 2029, p. 131.

ment stage, a new stage of political, economic and social reforms. Five years is a fairly short period of time, yet much has already been done. As president-elect, he outlined the priorities of foreign and domestic policies. His new Strategy of Action on Five Priority Development Trends of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2017-2021, adopted in February 2017, defined Central Asia as the foreign policy priority. The process of border delimitation with the neighboring states was accelerated. Today, the republic has practically no border problems, which is a serious achievement. For a long time, border disagreements and irrigation problems weighed heavily on the republic's relationships with its neighbors and were a stumbling block on the road towards faster regional integration.

These priorities have preserved their importance. According to the summit statistics, exchanges of delegations, business and cultural forums, exchange of phone calls between presidents, interstate agreements and regional projects, Central Asia's weight in Uzbekistan's international relations is greater than that of other regions and countries.<sup>4</sup> We have already pointed to good-neighborly relations and mutually advantageous cooperation with the Central Asian countries as one of Tashkent's foreign policy priorities. The same fully applies to cooperation with other countries of the near and far abroad. President Mirziyoyev informed the country that he was contemplating reforms of the legal, legislative and administrative systems within the Strategy 2017-2021, along with economic liberalization and development of the social sphere. This Strategy is realized in five stages, with the program of each stage confirmed by the president every year. The year 2017 came down in history as The Year of a Dialog with People in the Interests of Man; the year 2018 as The Year of Support of Active Entrepreneurship, Innovation Ideas and Technologies. The year 2019 was realized as The Year of Active Investments and Social Development; 2020 was The Year of the Development of Science, Education and Digital Economics; 2021 is The Year of Support of the Youth and Strengthening the Health of the Republic's Population.

The following foreign policy tasks are formulated in the Strategy:

- Achievement of firmer independence and sovereignty of the state; further consolidation of the country's place and role as an equal entity of international relations, joining the group of developed democratic states and creation of a belt of security, stability and good-neighborly relations around Uzbekistan;
- Further consolidation of the republic's international image and provision of objective information about the reforms realized in the country to the world community;
- Improvement of the normative legal framework of the Republic's domestic and foreign economic policy, as well as the contractual legal framework for international cooperation;
- Settling the problems of delimitation and demarcation of the State Border of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

In December 2020, in his address to the parliament President Mirziyoyev informed the nation that a new Foreign Policy Concept for Uzbekistan was being drafted and will likely be adopted in 2021. This information and the intention to formulate a new concept were suggested by the new foreign policy aims and tasks, while the international and regional situation had changed significantly since the adoption of the present Concept. From the conceptual point of view, the success of the Republic's new foreign policy course will depend, among other things, on the extent to which other Central Asian states will accept regional priorities and record them in relevant documents.

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<sup>4</sup> See: F. Tolipov, "Eklektichnost mnogovektornosti kak factor sboia piatistoronnosti v Tsentralnoy Azii," available at [<https://caa-network.org/archives/20446>], 25 November, 2020.

## The Geopolitical Codes of the Republic of Uzbekistan

In recent decades, geopolitics acquired a concept of “geopolitical codes” of countries the fullest description of which can be found in works of Colin Flint who has written in his *Introduction to Geopolitics*: “The geopolitical codes of states rest upon the maintenance of their security” and “Geopolitical codes define ways in which the sovereignty of the state must be protected or the state’s status and well-being enhanced.”<sup>5</sup> This determines the position of any state in the world and its foreign policy which can be described as a sum-total of the key ideas of the state’s citizens and the political elites about their place in the world, the foreign policy strategy and national priorities. As such, geopolitical codes can be described as national myths of sorts.<sup>6</sup> There is, therefore, a close interconnection between politics of national security and realization of national interests, on the one hand, and national identity which will invariably affect what people think about foreign policy trends of their countries, on the other.

A geopolitical code is more than a course declared by a state, it is guaranteed by the nation’s support. Therefore, it is this code that predetermines certain steps of the state in the international arena. However, if the geopolitical code is designated as a determinant of the state’s policy, its identification requires great strategic wisdom. As part of Uzbekistan’s geopolitical code, the republic’s Central Asian policy deserves a special mention. President Mirziyoyev is pursuing an active and pragmatic policy based on the country’s national interests. The President of Uzbekistan improved, to a great extent, the relationships with the country’s regional neighbors. The border problems with Kyrgyzstan, which remained unresolved for a long time, were finally settled; the two countries signed a strategic partnership treaty. In 2019, the Uzbek-Kyrgyz relations were raised to a new qualitatively higher level, hence the ecological movement Ala-Too ayymdary named the President of Uzbekistan Man of the Year 2019.

Closer cooperation with the Republic of Kazakhstan helps Uzbekistan address its food security problems. In March 2017, during President Mirziyoyev’s official visit to the capital of Kazakhstan, the presidents signed a Joint Declaration on Further Deepening of Strategic Partnership and Stronger Good-neighborly Relations between the Two Countries and several other important documents. In April 2019, Tashkent hosted an official meeting between two presidents, who discussed further consolidation and development of friendly relations and good-neighborly policy, cooperation in tourism, transport, trade, etc. They signed about ten bilateral documents on the development of mutually advantageous cooperation. The Year 2019 was declared the Year of Kazakhstan in Uzbekistan, while 2018 had been the Year of Uzbekistan in Kazakhstan, which is an obvious sign of stronger strategic partnership between the two states.

Under Islam Karimov, the relations between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan were rather unfriendly due to the construction of a big Rogun Hydropower Plant on the Vakhsh River. The president of Uzbekistan was convinced that the new hydropower plant would cut down the runoff and, therefore, affect the volume of water supplied to the republic, and this, in turn, would negatively affect the Uzbek economy. Under the new president, disagreements were either smoothed out or even settled. In March 2018, President of Uzbekistan arrived in Tajikistan with an official visit. This historic event helped President Mirziyoyev settle a number of problems inherited from the previous president: the visa regime was rescinded, aviation and land transport communication restored, an agreement on the area of the Farkhad Hydropower Station-2 achieved. Uzbekistan resumed gas supplies to Tajikistan

<sup>5</sup> C. Flint, op. cit., p. 125.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 125-127.

while Tajikistan restarted electric power supplies to Uzbekistan. A decision was made to coordinate the anti-extremist and anti-terrorist struggle, a point of special importance due to the republics' proximity to Afghanistan.

The relations between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan demonstrate a positive trend. In March 2017 the newly elected President of Uzbekistan Mirziyoyev paid his first official visit to Turkmenistan. This brought the relations between the two countries to a new level of strategic partnership. In 2018, President of Turkmenistan paid an official visit to Uzbekistan. In August of the same year, President Mirziyoyev, as head of one of the founder states, took part in the sitting of the Council of Heads of States-Founders of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea, held in Turkmenistan. In November 2019, President of Turkmenistan visited Uzbekistan on an invitation of its president. They discussed the most topical issues of bilateral relations and their prospects.<sup>7</sup>

Russia is one of the biggest investors of Uzbekistan and one of its most important trade, economic, military, political, cultural and humanitarian partners. According to the Ministry of Investments and Foreign Trade of Uzbekistan, in 2019 foreign trade turnover of Uzbekistan was \$42.2 billion, and Russia's share was \$6.6 billion (15.7%).<sup>8</sup> Russia has a stake in furthering bilateral cooperation with Uzbekistan and wants to see it an active contributor to Eurasian integration. Throughout 2020, supporters and opponents of Eurasian integration in Uzbekistan were discussing the pros and cons of this involvement and agreed on an observer status for their country.

The two countries also cooperate in the security sphere. During the official visit of the president of Uzbekistan to Moscow in April 2017 the sides signed a package of intergovernmental agreements and investment projects and drew a joint plan of interaction for the sake of greater regional stability.

The 2016 presidential elections raised the relations between Uzbekistan and the United States to a new level. In September 2017, President Mirziyoyev came to the U.S. with an official visit to take part in the 72nd session of the U.N. General Assembly. He met the President of the United States and heads of the biggest American companies; the two countries signed contracts in the total amount of \$2.6 billion.<sup>9</sup>

In May 2018, the President of Uzbekistan was invited to the United States. The two leaders signed the documents on cooperation designed to promote foreign trade and discussed a roadmap for the development of digital commerce in Uzbekistan and a wider access of Uzbek businessmen to global trade platforms and electronic payment systems. In addition, the sides signed a Five-Year Plan of Military Cooperation, since the relations between states were based on anti-terrorist struggle and Afghan settlement. Uzbekistan is developing its cooperation with the United States in science, technology and economic modernization.

In February 2020, CIA Director Mike Pompeo visited Uzbekistan; he took part in a sitting of C5+1 format attended by heads of five Central Asian countries. He met the president of Uzbekistan to discuss issues of mutual interest; it was declared that the relations between the two countries had reached their highest point. The visit of the president of Uzbekistan to the U.S. and the visit of the CIA Director to Uzbekistan led to a publication of a number of articles and official statements in the Russian media and analytical circles about Tashkent's alleged turn to the West. Much was said about its drifting away from Russia, about Washington's strengthening influence in the region, etc. This could be observed during the entire period of independence, which, in fact, speaks volumes of the real

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<sup>7</sup> See: "UZBEKISTAN-TURKMENISTAN: novy uroven mnogovekovykh druzhestvennykh i kulturnykh svyazey," available at [<https://mfa.uz/ru/press/news/2019/11/22133/>], 20 April, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> See: V. Novikov, "Minvneshtorg Uzbekistana obnarodoval itogi vneshney torgovli za 2019 god," available at [<https://nuz.uz/ekonomika-i-finansy/46076-minvneshtorg-uzbekistana-obnarodoval-itogi-vneshneytorgovli-za-2019-god.html>], 20 April, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> See: "Itogi vizita Shavkata Mirziyoyeva v SShA," available at [<https://www.publika.uz/uzbekistan/politics/53741>], 25 April, 2020.

(or ascribed) geopolitical dimension of foreign policy moves of Uzbekistan and its Central Asian neighbors.

Today, the European Union extends considerable assistance to Uzbekistan as part of the New Cooperation Strategy adopted in 2007, which outlined the EU's new approach to the Central Asian region.<sup>10</sup> Brussels has positively assessed the economic, social and political reforms carried out in Uzbekistan. Under President Karimov, the relations with the EU were developing turbulently and inconsistently. Today, the leader of Uzbekistan focuses on cooperation with the EU in the spheres of primary importance: regional security, border security; struggle against drug trafficking, stability in Afghanistan and reduction of the repercussions of the Aral Sea drying-up. The EU treats the following as its priorities in the Republic of Uzbekistan: encouragement and promotion of political, juridical and economic reforms; promotion of the rule of law, human rights and the right to labor; wider trade, tourist, investment and energy contacts between the EU and Uzbekistan; promotion of regional peace and security by opposing terrorism and WMD proliferation.<sup>11</sup> In the fall of 2020, the European Union extended over €2 million in aid to Uzbekistan for the fight against COVID-19 as part of the Team Europe Program of the total amount of €36 million.

Brussels intends to support and accelerate the reforms in Uzbekistan's agrarian sector and its economic modernization to consolidate their relationships. A new initiative—the Association of Economic Cooperation Europe-Uzbekistan, a non-commercial and non-governmental organization—was launched on 12 November, 2019 in Brussels to strengthen economic ties between Uzbekistan and the EU business community. Set up with the principal purpose of supporting European business activity in Uzbekistan, it is registered in Brussels and has an office in Tashkent. It is expected to comprehensively support private businesses that are already operating or trying to find their place on the Uzbekistan market.<sup>12</sup>

The Association intends to support the republic's government by helping introduce the new government development strategy of the agricultural and foodstuff sector for the period in 2020–2030. The Uzbek government has recently published the latter to inquire into public opinion. It is a clear roadmap that will allow the government to offer improved and redesigned state services to the agricultural sector; support farmers and agriculture in general without infringing on their freedom, which is vital for businesses. Its realization will allow the Republic of Uzbekistan to position itself as one of the region's biggest producers and exporters of valuable agricultural products. The republic has already improved its cooperation with the EU in the education sphere. The EU is ready to help realize new trends of the reforms carried out in the republic, it supports its openness and is ready to transform all positive impulses into concrete achievements.

An analysis of geopolitical processes unfolding in Central Asia and around it and, in particular, of the geopolitical code of Uzbekistan is impossible without an analysis of China's Central Asian policy. In the 21st century, the PRC is growing increasingly global, which is especially obvious in the context of the Belt and Road initiative formulated by Xi Jinping. This is, in fact, a contemporary version of the ancient Great Silk Road. At first, as a global network of infrastructural projects (highways, hubs, pipelines, etc.), it has acquired certain soft power components related to culture, education tourism, etc. Its Central Asian segment is the spot where regional and world powers—China, Russia, the U.S., Europe, India, Turkey, Iran, etc.—resumed the Great Game, each with its own aims and interests.

In his time, Islam Karimov, the First President of Uzbekistan, supported the initiative; President Mirziyoyev, likewise, has supported it: China is Uzbekistan's biggest trade partner and investor; there are two Confucius Institutes in the country; there are thousands of students from Uzbekistan studying

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<sup>10</sup> See: A. Ospanova *et al.*, "Main Directions of Cooperation Development between the European Union and Kazakhstan in the 2010s," *Medwell Journals, The Social Sciences*, No. 11 (23), 2016, pp. 5653-5656.

<sup>11</sup> See: "EU-Uzbekistan Cooperation Council," European Council, 17 July, 2017, available at [<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-ministerial-meetings/2017/07/17/>], 28 April, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> See: F. Tolipov, "Tridsat let mezhdunarodnykh otosheniy Uzbekistana: QUO VADIS?" available at [[https://www.crossroads-ca.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/CCAPB4\\_Tolipov-RUS.pdf](https://www.crossroads-ca.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/CCAPB4_Tolipov-RUS.pdf)], 28 November, 2020.

at Chinese universities. Today, the two countries are discussing the construction of a railway between Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and China as an important hub of transcontinental communication between West China and Western Europe. A highway hub has already been built.

In the context of geopolitics, it should be noted that the United States, the EU and the Russian Federation have unique variants of the Silk Road. In this regard, the issue of compatibility of these options is being updated. This explains the recent term “connectivity” in the political vocabulary. Despite the fairly complicated set of problems related to the Belt and Road initiative, experts invariably point at its existential aspect: highways, transportation hubs, infrastructural projects and trade. This is not about the economy but about development as a whole: they will inevitably transform society and create new great power challenges.

American political scientist Stephen Blank has written in this respect: “In pursuit of these geo-economic and geopolitical goals that would bind Asia to China ever more closely through commercial means, Beijing has recently allocated US\$40 billion for the first Silk Road alone, on top of all of its previous large-scale investments in Central Asia, [its] information systems, telecommunications, transportation, energy pipelines, and infrastructure.”<sup>13</sup>

Without plunging into the depths of the set of problems posed by the Belt and Road and geopolitics of other countries, we would like to point out that Central Asia has found itself once again in the epicenter of another Great Game. Today, with the experience of 30 years of independence, the Central Asian countries have learned a great deal about the game and acquired enough skills to avoid a situation in which their foreign policy moves will be imposed on them by non-regional countries. In fact, their choice will determine the course of the game with Uzbekistan playing a very special role.

## **The WTO vs. the EAEU: Uzbekistan at the Crossroads**

From the very first days of independence, Uzbekistan has been treating economic integration as one of its foreign policy priorities. Back in 1994, Tashkent tried to integrate Central Asia within the Central Asian Economic Union of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In 2002, it was transformed into the Central Asian Cooperation Organization, of which Russia was a member. It was disbanded in 2005: its members decided to join the Organization of Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC). In 2008, Uzbekistan left it under the pressure of certain problems in its relationships and interregional disagreements with the Russian Federation. President Karimov was skeptical of, or even feared this and similar projects that might have weakened the country’s sovereignty. Today, sovereignty is as important as ever, even if integration models are discussed in Uzbekistan (and in all other Central Asian countries, for that matter), albeit in a different context.

According to certain media sources, the country’s leaders have been discussing membership in the EAEU for three years now. They even set up an expert commission to analyze the pros and cons of EAEU integration. The public and analysts were greatly surprised, not to say shocked, to learn that the discussion of possible membership had lasted for three years.<sup>14</sup> Discussion of possible formats and schedule of the country’s accession to the EAEU officially started when the Concept of Comprehensive Socio-Economic Development of Uzbekistan until 2030 was officially published in 2019. In January 2020, President Mirziyoyev discussed this possibility when speaking in front of the parlia-

<sup>13</sup> S. Blank, “China’s Silk Roads and Their Challenges,” *CACI Analyst*, 7 January, 2015, available at [<http://cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13119-chinas-silk-roads-and-their-challenges.html>].

<sup>14</sup> See: F. Tolipov, “Hamletovskiy vopros dlia Uzbekistana v Evraziyskom ekonomicheskom soiuze,” available at [<https://caa-network.org/archives/18507>], 28 May, 2020.

ment and entrusted it with the task of formulating a well-founded suggestion to be used for a corresponding decision based on the country's national interests. "You should be aware that, from the political point of view, we will not give our independence away," said the president.<sup>15</sup> After discussions it was decided that Uzbekistan should join as an observer.

There is an opinion in the expert community that unification with the EAEU may be highly profitable for Uzbek businesses: Uzbek producers will acquire equal access to the markets of the EAEU members. It will simplify the position of Uzbek labor migrants: there are over 2 million of them in Russia and about 200 thousand in Kazakhstan. EAEU membership will remove the barriers on the labor market, simplify legalization, make it easier to register their education diplomas and qualification documents, introduce a single tax regime, open access to social insurance and free medical services, their labor service in other EAEU countries will be taken into account when calculating pensions, etc.<sup>16</sup> EAEU membership will make it easier to export agricultural products; increase export of textile and automobile products into other EAEU members, open access to the EAEU technological, transit transportation and investment potential, etc.

The idea of Eurasian integration raised a wave of indignation in the expert community along with another wave of obvious approval. Some experts insisted that it would be a positive rather than a negative step. One of the experts has formulated the three main reasons for possible Eurasian integration. It will remove the barriers in interstate relations that interfere in their development, many social and economic programs related to migration will be resolved, very much needed investments and technologies will be attracted.<sup>17</sup> Others insisted that these problems could be resolved in the bilateral format; that the EAEU membership was not needed and that it was a purely (geo)political factor. They warned that this might scare major new investors away.

Experts suggested that Uzbekistan should first join the WTO to trade with the EAEU members according to the WTO rules. We are convinced that the WTO issue was resolved in 1994 when the country had applied for admission. In addition, the EU has allocated a grant of about €5 million to help the republic join the WTO. In June 2018, at a meeting between the EU and Uzbekistan that took place in Brussels, the sides achieved an agreement related to the development of certain branches of Uzbek agriculture. There is an opposite opinion: negative results will outweigh possible gains, while EAEU membership will close the doors to the WTO. American media were especially active in this respect. The republic had to choose between the two organizations, which resembled blackmail.

It should be said that membership in the international economic structures will help Uzbekistan consolidate its positions in foreign trade and promote mutually advantageous cooperation. According to American expert Mark Linscott, several countries have not yet joined the WTO, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan among them. Their WTO membership will offer guarantees to investors who enter Uzbekistan and to its trade partners. As a WTO member, Tashkent will have the right to place complaints against commercial decisions of other countries. All full-fledged WTO members have the right to participate in formulating the rules of international trade.

The above suggests that EAEU membership is not an economic but, rather, a geopolitical issue for Uzbekistan. How does it relate to Uzbekistan's geopolitical code? To which extent do the codes of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan as EAEU members correlate with that of Uzbekistan? How do the geopolitical codes of Tajikistan and Turkmenistan determine their decisions? It seems that Uzbekistan's decision will become the key one in our understanding of the region's geopolitical code.

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<sup>15</sup> K. Kari, "Nakanune vizita v Moskvu Mirziyoyev vspomnil o EAES. Stanet li Uzbekistan chlenom soiuza?" available at [<https://rus.azattyq.org/a/chaikhana-uzbekistan-eeueconomy/30397416.html>], 10 February, 2020.

<sup>16</sup> See: "Chem obernetsia prisoedinenie Uzbekistana k EAES?" October 2019, available at [<http://mirperemen.net/2019/10/chem-obernetsya-prisoedinenie-uzbekistana-k-eaes/>], 10 February, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> See: M. Lapenko, "'VTO nelzia EAES': pochemu SShA zastavliaiut rsstavliat zapiaty," available at [[https://ia-centr.ru/experts/marina-lapenko/vto-nelzia-eaes-pochemu-ssha-zastavlyatrasstavlyatzipatyatye/?fbclid=IwAR2Hb7PzC2AiO2e\\_3h3rYkKL6svwfx1n\\_RRkHx\\_\\_SFrjtyurKsL0BzbPtU/](https://ia-centr.ru/experts/marina-lapenko/vto-nelzia-eaes-pochemu-ssha-zastavlyatrasstavlyatzipatyatye/?fbclid=IwAR2Hb7PzC2AiO2e_3h3rYkKL6svwfx1n_RRkHx__SFrjtyurKsL0BzbPtU/)], 3 March, 2020.



## *Conclusion*

We would like to conclude our article with an observation: starting with the presidency of Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the Republic of Uzbekistan has been strategically acting as an active member of the world community with an independent, fully justified, consistent and firm foreign policy position: realization of national interests, consolidation of sovereignty, regional leadership and competitiveness on the international arena. The country raised its political status and improved its image on the world arena; it takes into account the rapidly changing political realities of the 21st century, while undertaking an active and pragmatic foreign policy course brimming with initiative and adequate responses to threats and challenges.<sup>18</sup>

Shavkat Mirziyoyev has radically changed the republic's foreign policy. This is fully confirmed by its openness, the reforms underway in the country, the new foreign policy course and good-neighborly relations with the Central Asian countries. According to the Strategy of Action on Five Priority Development Trends of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2017-2021, Central Asia is one of the republic's foreign policy priorities.

Uzbekistan remains Russia's strategic partner and ally, developing cooperation with it in trade, economic, military, political, cultural and humanitarian spheres. Interregional cooperation has received a new lease of life.

The relationship between Uzbekistan and the United States are at a high point, which is confirmed by official visits of heads of state, meetings of the U.S. president with heads of major Uzbek companies, and multi-billion agreements and official documents on the countries' cooperation.

The EU and Uzbekistan cooperate on a mutually advantageous basis, attuned with the national interests of Uzbekistan and the aims and goals of the new EU Strategy in Central Asia. Their cooperation will be developing in the bilateral and multilateral formats.

As Uzbekistan's main trade partner and investor, China will continue building up its presence in the region and will thus challenge the "traditional influence of Russia." Here is an interesting fact: Russian, European and American policies in Central Asia are relatively clear, or even predictable, which cannot be said about China. It remains to be seen whether the Chinese and non-Chinese projects will demonstrate connectivity.

As a country with no common borders with great powers, Uzbekistan is somewhat removed from their direct influence, which is not the case with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In the context of Central Asian regionalism, however, it is open to geopolitical impacts, therefore its choice as the key regional state should somehow reflect its weight as an important player.

The problem of EAEU vs. WTO remains open. Despite its 1994 request and the grant provided by the European Union, Tashkent opted for a wait-and-see policy. On the whole, involvement in Eurasian integration does not contradict WTO membership: Russia and Kyrgyzstan belong to both structures. Tashkent has certain doubts about the EAEU; this means that it will move in its direction step by step, and no rash moves are to be expected. This can be largely explained by the state of affairs in Central Asia.

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<sup>18</sup> See: N. Artykova, F. Muzaffarova, "Vneshniaia politika Uzbekistana i sotsialnoe razvitiie," in: *World Science: Problems and Innovations. Collection of article of the XXXI International Scientific-Practical Conference*, in four parts, Part 4, Nauka i prosveshchenie, Penza, 2019, p. 201.

## REGIONAL ECONOMY

# THE CENTRAL ASIAN ECONOMY DURING THE PANDEMIC: AN ANALYSIS OF SMALL AND MEDIUM BUSINESS SUPPORT STRATEGIES

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### ABSTRACT

**T**his paper examines public policy towards small and medium-sized enterprises in the Central Asian countries during the COVID-19 pandemic. A study of analytical surveys for 2020 and 2021 produced by international organizations (such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, KPMG, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), as well as of legal and regulatory documents and strategic programs adopted in

the countries of Central Asia during the coronavirus pandemic, has made it possible to identify the advantages and disadvantages of government decisions regarding business and to analyze public strategies for supporting small and medium-sized enterprises.

This analysis leads to the conclusion that the potential for economic recovery in the Central Asian countries is directly dependent on the measures taken by their

*governments to maintain and support the business sector. In particular, the study results show that the main business support tools during the coronavirus pandemic are*

*mechanisms such as tax holidays for businesses, soft loans, loan restructuring and refinancing, and administrative support measures.*

**KEYWORDS:** *public policy, business, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), COVID-19.*

## *Introduction*

The COVID-19 pandemic has dealt a severe blow to the world economy. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the contraction of the global economy for 2020 is estimated at 3.5%, and the contraction of world trade in goods and services at 9.6%.<sup>1</sup> According to a World Bank report, the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered the deepest global economic recession in eight decades, almost three times as deep as the 2009 global recession.<sup>2</sup> Experts have identified the most significant factors behind the crisis: border closures, restrictions on movement and economic activity, and a decline in commodity exports and remittances.<sup>3</sup> All of this has done significant damage to businesses. Economic recovery depends on the policy strategies of states, particularly on government measures to create an enabling environment for business. This is why the governments of the countries of Central Asia, as well as the whole world, face a totally new task: to maintain and support the business sector in the post-COVID-19 period.

In Central Asia, according to a report by the Asian Development Bank (ADB),<sup>4</sup> the highest GDP growth rate for 2021 is projected at 6.5% in Uzbekistan, and the lowest at 2.8% in Kazakhstan.

The worst GDP forecast was naturally for 2020: a 2.1% contraction for Central Asia as a whole. This was due to significant projected contractions in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan. At the same time, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, despite slower GDP growth in 2020, were on the whole set to grow by 3.2% and 0.5%, respectively<sup>5</sup> (see Fig. 1).

Many states have taken steps to ensure an economic recovery with special focus on small and medium-sized enterprises. In this context, the case of Central Asia demonstrates various government strategies and tools designed to ensure the recovery of the economy and business.

The research question in this paper was as follows: “How do the countries of Central Asia ensure small and medium business activity through public policy?”

<sup>1</sup> See: World Economic Outlook Update, January 2021, International Monetary Fund, available at [<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2021/01/26/2021-world-economic-outlook-update>], 25 February, 2021.

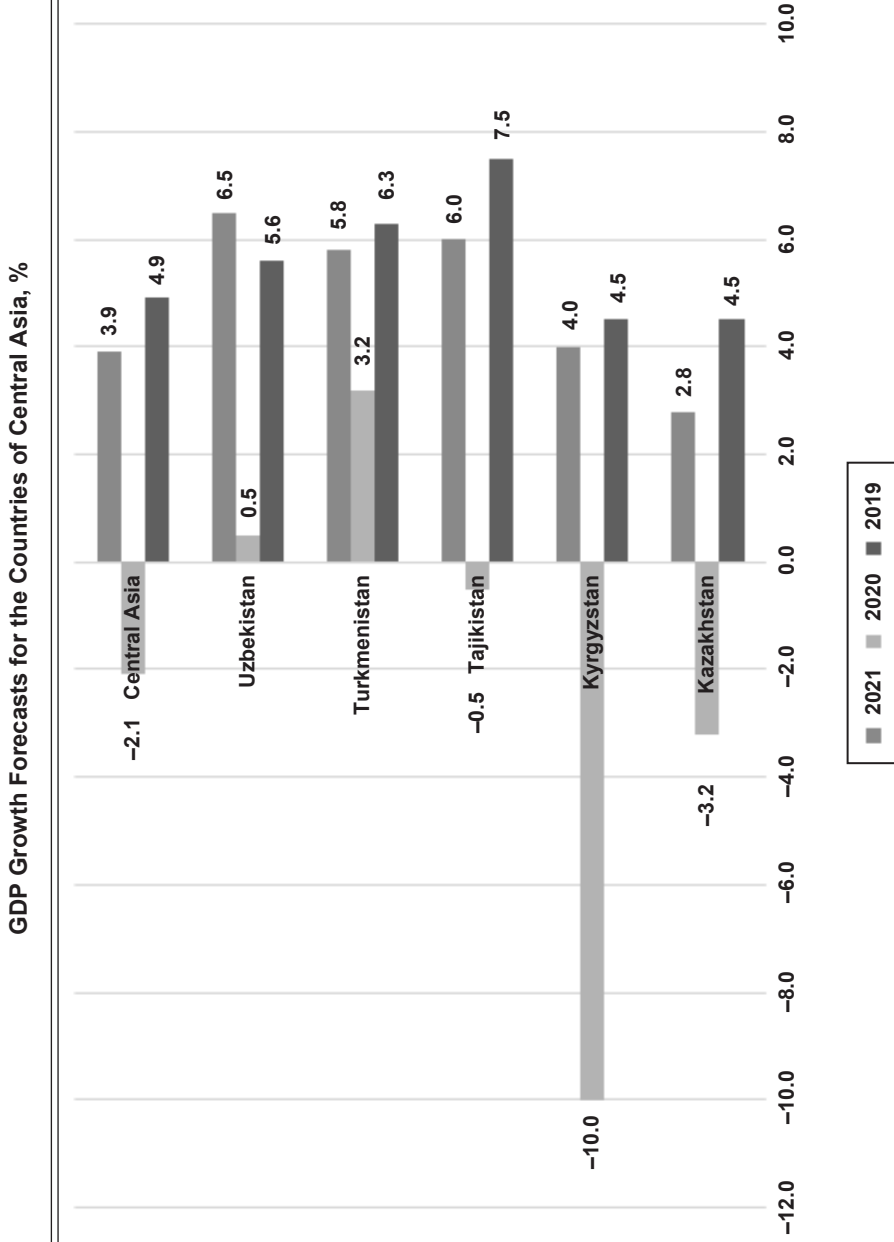
<sup>2</sup> See: COVID-19 and Human Capital. Europe and Central Asia Economic Update, Office of the Chief Economist, World Bank Group, Fall 2020, available at [<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/34518/9781464816437.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y>], 25 February, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> See: L. Kopzhassarova, “When and How Will Central Asian Economies Recover from COVID-19?”, Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting (CABAR.asia), 11 November, 2020, available at [<https://cabar.asia/en/when-and-how-will-central-asian-economies-recover-from-covid-19/>], 25 February, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> See: Asian Development Outlook 2020 Update. Wellness in Worrying Times. Highlights, Asian Development Bank, 2020, available at [<https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/635666/ado2020-update-highlights.pdf>], 25 February, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> See: Ibidem.

Figure 1



Source: Asian Development Bank data, available at [<https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/635666/ado2020-update-highlights.pdf>].

## Research Methods

In this study, public policy towards small and medium business in the Central Asian countries was analyzed using the method of secondary data analysis. The data were collected from open sources (World Bank, Asian Development Bank, OECD, etc.), mainly analytical reports and statistical publications. The use of this method has made it possible to carry out the research in a relatively short time and to conduct a comprehensive study of the attitude towards small and medium business among the Central Asian governments. A rapid assessment of secondary data has helped to make a comparative analysis of measures taken by the public authorities in the Central Asian countries during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To structure the data obtained, the author has developed a policy evaluation tool that includes the following key components:

- (1) economic measures;
- (2) administrative measures;
- (3) institutional measures.

The evaluation of economic measures includes financial and monetary policy (concessional financing, tax and non-tax deferral and relief). Administrative measures relate to legal and regulatory reforms (adoption of a package of measures). The evaluation of institutional measures includes the establishment of anti-crisis funds and the preparation of economic programs and analytical forecasts.

## Literature Review

Researchers speak of sufficiently rapid income growth in the Central Asian countries following a number of economic reforms with emphasis on worldwide exports of energy, minerals, and agricultural products and selected imports. In this context, the fastest-growing oil-dependent states of Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan show signs of “Dutch disease.” The classification of the Central Asian countries takes into account their somewhat similar post-Soviet experience and, at the same time, their different resources, development strategies, and implemented reforms. Based on their differing export staples, they may be divided into three categories: “petro-dependent” Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, “other-dependent” Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and “independent” Uzbekistan.<sup>6</sup>

The interaction of state and business in the world economy takes place in a wide variety of ways. In Central Asia, the significant direct involvement of the government in the economy through state ownership is seen by researchers as the most important mechanism of the state-business nexus.<sup>7</sup>

During the current economic recession, however, public policy strategies should be designed for the medium and long term. Researchers<sup>8</sup> note that economic development strategies focusing on sector-by-sector plans that encourage sustainable entrepreneurship are needed to ensure an economic recovery. In addition, governments and financial institutions should constantly re-assess and re-evaluate

<sup>6</sup> See: M. Spechler, “The Economies of Central Asia: A Survey,” *Comparative Economic Studies*, Vol. 50, Issue 1, 2008, pp. 30-52.

<sup>7</sup> See: M. Stark, J. Ahrens, F. Täube, “The Business of Government: The State as Obstacle and Facilitator for Private Investment in Central Asia,” EBS Business School Research Paper, No. 14-04, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> See: M. Nicola, Z. Alsafi, C. Sohrabi, A. Kerwan, A. Al-Jabir, C. Iosifidis, M. Agha, R. Agha, “The Socio-Economic Implications of the Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19): A Review,” *International Journal of Surgery*, Vol. 78, 2020, pp. 185-193.

“the state of play.” According to an analytical review by M. Nicola *et al.*, aid packages across the world include various measures that are to some extent unprecedented. The state development bank (KfW) has pledged to provide €500 billion in loans to companies affected by the pandemic. Similar measures were taken in France (€345bn), Spain (€200bn), and Italy (€25bn). The U.K. government has included numerous fiscal support measures in its aid package: emergency loan guarantees, tax deferrals, grant funding for small and medium-sized businesses (including trade and service sectors), a new lending facility to support company liquidity, and interest rate cuts. The United States has also adopted a “virus-aid package” to support an economic recovery: loan and grant funding, financial assistance for farmers, restarting of the asset-backed loan facility that was used in 2008-2009, loan guarantees, etc.

Thus, a review of global experience helps to form a certain concept whose structure includes government support measures of a financial, administrative, and institutional nature. In the present study, this concept is applied to public policy regarding business in the countries of Central Asia.

## Research Results and Discussion

According to the classification of the World Bank, the countries of Central Asia are categorized as low and middle income countries.<sup>9</sup> The latest data show the following picture (see Table 1).

*Table 1*

**Classification of the Central Asian Countries by Income Level**

	Country	Income Group
1	<b>Kazakhstan</b>	<b>Upper middle income: between \$4,046 and \$12,535</b>
2	<b>Turkmenistan</b>	<b>Upper middle income: between \$4,046 and \$12,535</b>
3	<b>Uzbekistan</b>	<b>Lower middle income: between \$1,036 and \$4,045</b>
4	<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	<b>Lower middle income: between \$1,036 and \$4,045</b>
5	<b>Tajikistan</b>	<b>Low income: less than \$1,035</b>

*Source:* World Bank (2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic, which reached Central Asia relatively late (in mid-March 2020),<sup>10</sup> undoubtedly carries the risk of significant changes in the forecasts for economic recovery. Along with the problem of undiversified economies and high resource dependence, a characteristic feature of the Central Asian countries is a correlation between revenues and migrant remittances, especially when it comes to migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In 2019, for example, migrant remittances to these countries amounted to about a third of their GDP.<sup>11</sup> A decline in remittances has a direct effect on budget revenues.

<sup>9</sup> See: World Bank Country and Lending Groups. Country Classification, The World Bank, 2021, available at [<https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups>], 25 February, 2021.

<sup>10</sup> See: COVID-19 Crisis Response in Central Asia, Updated 4 June, 2020, available at [<https://www.oecd.org/eurasia/competitiveness-programme/central-asia/COVID-19-crisis-response-in-Central-Asia-English-June.pdf>], 25 February, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> See: *Ibidem*.

This is why economists from ADB’s Central and West Asia Department say that governments in the region must deepen regional cooperation and integration to undertake “extraordinary reforms” to match this unprecedented crisis.<sup>12</sup> However, the Central Asian governments have made different decisions.

## Kazakhstan

The development of small and medium business has been among the top public policy priorities in Kazakhstan for many years. During the pandemic, this has posed a new challenge to public administration. Existing support measures had to be modernized without delay and adapted to the new conditions created by the pandemic. As might be expected, the hardest-hit sector was the service sector: air transport, fitness industry, restaurant business, and non-food retail trade.<sup>13</sup>

Broadly speaking, the additional government support measures announced in Kazakhstan include tax and customs relief coupled with administrative, financial, and government procurement measures. Small and medium-sized enterprises are financed under basic government programs (see Table 2).

*Table 2*

**Government Measures to Support Business in Kazakhstan During the Pandemic, %**

	Business Support Measures	Amount of Support (GDP Share)
1	<b>Government-backed soft loan program for businesses at an interest rate of 6%</b>	0.86%
2	<b>Additional funding under existing soft loan programs for businesses</b>	1.5%
3	<b>Exemption from income tax for sole traders until the end of 2020</b>	n/a
4	<b>Deferral of tax and non-tax payments for SMEs</b>	n/a
5	<b>Deferral and restructuring of loan payments for SMEs</b>	n/a
6	<b>Six-month extension of deadlines for payroll tax and other returns and payments for SMEs in the most-affected sectors of the economy</b>	n/a

*Source:* USAID’s Future Growth Initiative. *Looking Ahead: Economic Policy Options for COVID-19 and Beyond in Central Asia*, USAID, October 2020, available at [https://catradeforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/USAIDs-FGI-EIU\_COVID-19-Policy-Responses-in-CA-report\_eng\_v2.pdf], 25 February, 2021.

Thus, business support measures in Kazakhstan are sufficiently comprehensive. The removal of sectoral restrictions on participation in the state business support and development program (Business Roadmap 2025) is also of essential importance. This widens the range of businesses that are eligible for government support.

<sup>12</sup> G. Sugiyarto, W. Liepach, “Countries in Central and West Asia Must Avoid a COVID-19 Race to the Bottom,” *Asian Development Blog*, 5 October, 2020, available at [https://blogs.adb.org/blog/countries-central-and-west-asia-must-avoid-covid-19-race-bottom], 25 February, 2021.

<sup>13</sup> See: COVID-19 Pandemic: Are the Government Business Support Measures in Kazakhstan Effective? Market Opinion, KPMG, July 2020, available at [https://assets.kpmg/content/dam/kpmg/kz/pdf/2020/07/covid-pandemic-report.pdf], 25 February, 2021.

However, given the negative impact of COVID-19 on the service sector, it is necessary to provide a targeted support package designed to expand access to credit in order to improve liquidity.

## Kyrgyzstan

According to a joint report by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB),<sup>14</sup> the majority of businesses in the most-affected sectors of the Kyrgyz economy are micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) operating informally. For example, in agriculture, one of the key sectors, which accounts for 12% of GDP, the share of informal employment is 96%.

The service sector in Kyrgyzstan, as in many other countries, has been most affected by the pandemic. The negative impact here is due both to border closures and to the closure of city markets and the decline in the hotel and restaurant business. At the same time, the trade and consumer services sector accounts for a significant share of GDP (18%).

However, a significant role in the country's economy is played by labor migrants working in CIS countries, mainly in Russia (more than 1 million people in 2019). Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the amount and frequency of remittances to Kyrgyzstan have fallen dramatically.

Thus, the government of Kyrgyzstan has faced new challenges in supporting and maintaining the business sector, as well as in creating conditions for the country's workforce. At the same time, it is noted that "labor market policies in a narrow sense have never been used significantly in the Kyrgyz Republic,"<sup>15</sup> which makes it more difficult for the state to ensure strategic management in this area.

*Table 3*

**Government Measures to Support Business in Kyrgyzstan During the Pandemic**

	Business Support Measures	Amount of Support
1	<b>Soft loans from the Anti-Crisis Fund for priority sectors of the economy at an interest rate of 4% to 8%</b>	n/a
2	<b>Increase in the loan guarantee fund (primarily for export-oriented companies, regional projects, and female entrepreneurs, mainly in agriculture, trade, and industry)</b>	<b>\$27 billion</b>
3	<b>Soft loans for farmers</b>	<b>\$1.3 billion</b>
4	<b>Loan guarantee funding for unsecured microloans provided to sole traders</b>	<b>\$13 billion</b>
5	<b>Deferral of tax and non-tax payments without fine or penalty for late payment</b>	n/a

*Source: USAID's Future Growth Initiative. Looking Ahead: Economic Policy Options for COVID-19 and Beyond in Central Asia, USAID, October 2020.*

Support measures are implemented through the government's Financing Business Entities program (see Table 3), whose size is to triple in 2021.<sup>16</sup> The program provides for collateral-free loans,

<sup>14</sup> See: COVID-19 in the Kyrgyz Republic: Socioeconomic and Vulnerability Impact Assessment and Policy Response, United Nations Development Program, Asian Development Bank, 12 August, 2020, available at [[https://kyrgyzstan.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/UNDP-ADB%2520SEIA\\_11%2520August%25202020%2520Eng.pdf](https://kyrgyzstan.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/UNDP-ADB%2520SEIA_11%2520August%25202020%2520Eng.pdf)], 25 February, 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>16</sup> See: Ibidem.



which could be of real assistance to entrepreneurs affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, interest rates of 14% (microloans) is a sufficiently heavy burden. For comparison, microloans in Kazakhstan under state programs are issued to entrepreneurs at an interest rate of 6%.

### Tajikistan

Agriculture, forestry, metallurgy, mining, and the cotton industry account for a significant part of Tajikistan’s economy.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, cotton and electricity are the main export items.

Tajikistan is the lowest-income country in Central Asia (less than \$1,035). Consequently, it has fewer resources than other Central Asian countries for providing government support. This is why the country has had to obtain loans and grants from international organizations to fight the pandemic.<sup>18</sup>

*Table 4*

**Government Measures to Support Business in Tajikistan During the Pandemic**

	<b>Business Support Measures</b>	<b>Amount of Support</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Central bank guidelines for increasing lending to industrial enterprises and loan restructuring</b>	<b>n/a</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Tax relief (for the tourism, hospitality, and transportation sectors and for sole traders in retail trade and services)</b>	<b>n/a</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Soft loans (for companies producing food and medical supplies)</b>	<b>n/a</b>

*Source: USAID’s Future Growth Initiative. Looking Ahead: Economic Policy Options for COVID-19 and Beyond in Central Asia, USAID, October 2020.*

Of course, public policy towards business (see Table 4) depends on the country’s economic potential, which is limited in Tajikistan. However, analysis shows that the support measures proposed by the government are insufficient to resolve the problems caused by the pandemic.

It should also be noted that further analysis may be complicated by significant problems with budget transparency in Tajikistan. According to the Open Budget Survey of the International Budget Partnership for 2019,<sup>19</sup> Tajikistan is a country with “scant or none” budget transparency.

### Turkmenistan

As of February 2021, there were no reported cases of COVID-19 in Turkmenistan.<sup>20</sup> It remains a sufficiently closed country in terms of access to information about the state of its economy. In this

<sup>17</sup> See: A. Tabakh, A. Prokudin, A. Podrugina, “Makroekonomicheskaya situatsiya v stranakh Tsentralnoi Azii: kak Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kirgizia i Tadjikistan perezhivaiut posledstviia pandemii COVID-19,” *Mezhdunarodnye finansy*, 17 February, 2021, available at [https://www.raexpert.ru/researches/int\_fin/central\_asia\_2021/], 25 February, 2021.

<sup>18</sup> See: Ibidem.

<sup>19</sup> Open Budget Survey 2019, 7th Edition, International Budget Partnership, March 2020, available at [https://www.internationalbudget.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/2019\_Report\_EN.pdf], 25 February, 2021.

<sup>20</sup> See: Koronavirusnaia infektsiia COVID-19. Turkmenistan, GOOGLE, 25 February, 2021, available at [https://news.google.com/covid19/map?hl=ru&mid=%2Fm%2F01c4pv&gl=RU&ceid=RU%3Aru], 25 February, 2021.

context, many economists prefer to leave Turkmenistan out of consideration in economic surveys and analysis of Central Asian countries.<sup>21</sup> This is explained by its lack of openness and the questionable quality of its statistics.

The USAID’s Future Growth Initiative (FGI) report<sup>22</sup> notes that on 3 March, 2020, Turkmenistan’s President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov gave the Cabinet of Ministers a series of instructions related to the pandemic and, specifically, asked the government to complete a list of enterprises that should be granted tax deferrals and to expand a lending program for small and medium-sized businesses. However, no further details have been reported. Turkmenistan’s economic policy remains closed even during the pandemic.

## Uzbekistan

In recent years (since 2017), Uzbekistan’s economy has undergone a number of reforms, including those designed to increase its openness.<sup>23</sup> A significant share of GDP comes from sectors such as the mining and processing industries dominated by large and medium-sized enterprises less affected by the pandemic.

The key government measure to support the economy is the establishment of an Anti-Crisis Fund. Targeted support is provided to sectors hardest hit by the pandemic (see Table 5).

*Table 5*

**Government Measures to Support Business in Uzbekistan During the Pandemic**

	Business support measures	Amount of support (GDP Share)
1	<b>Anti-Crisis Fund: a government loan guarantee program that supports a credit scheme through commercial banks offering loans to companies for the supply, sale, and production of essential consumer goods</b>	<b>\$98.7 million</b>
2	<b>Support for vital sectors and businesses, including subsidies to state companies in the water, heat, and electricity generation sectors and the oil and gas sector, as well as restructuring loans held by Uzbekistan Airways</b>	<b>\$277 million</b>
3	<b>Deferral of tax and social insurance payments for small and medium business</b>	n/a
4	<b>Tax payment suspensions for the tourism and agricultural sectors</b>	n/a
5	<b>Reimbursement of transport costs for the export of certain products</b>	n/a
6	<b>Adoption of a set of measures for widespread digitalization (an improvement in broadband and mobile internet services availability)</b>	n/a

*S o u r c e: USAID’s Future Growth Initiative. Looking Ahead: Economic Policy Options for COVID-19 and Beyond in Central Asia, USAID, October 2020.*

<sup>21</sup> See: A. Tabakh, A. Prokudin, A. Podrugina, op. cit.

<sup>22</sup> See: USAID’s Future Growth Initiative. *Looking Ahead: Economic Policy Options for COVID-19 and Beyond in Central Asia*, USAID, October 2020, available at [https://catradeforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/USAIDs-FGI-EIU\_COVID-19-Policy-Responses-in-CA-report\_eng\_v2.pdf], 25 February, 2021.

<sup>23</sup> See: A. Tabakh, A. Prokudin, A. Podrugina, op. cit.

Thus, business support includes guarantees and interest deductions for loans issued for the production of socially significant goods. The business support package also includes loan and tax holidays, crisis lending facilities, and interest-free budget loans for strategic enterprises to help them pay their debts.

## *Conclusion*

There is no doubt that COVID-19 has affected and continues to affect the Central Asian economy. The Asian Development Bank's GDP growth forecast for 2021 is 3.9%, compared to actual GDP growth of 4.9% in 2019.<sup>24</sup> The regional economy has faced global challenges posed by the fall in oil prices, on which the economy of Kazakhstan directly depends. Border closures have reduced demand for labor from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, thus leading to a drop in migrant remittances to these countries. Against this background, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have economic potential for a rapid recovery. This is due to a sufficiently open economy, comprehensive government support measures, and significant investment capacity. As for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, they are heavily dependent on the recovery of migration flows.

At the same time, decision-making in most Central Asian countries is concentrated at the national level, while autonomy at the regional and subregional levels is often limited.<sup>25</sup> The lack of flexibility in decision-making by the subnational authorities could have a negative impact on the economic recovery.

In summary, one should note that the Central Asian governments have largely focused on administrative and financial support measures. Government policy is characterized by relief measures in the form of tax and non-tax payment deferrals. In most Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan), extensive use is made of financial business support measures such as soft loans and government guarantees.

It should be emphasized that the removal of sectoral restrictions on access to soft loans in Kazakhstan is a good practice for increasing the range of enterprises covered by government support.

In Kyrgyzstan, unsecured loans for businesses are an obvious advantage of the policy pursued, because during the pandemic this is real assistance for firms that are running out of cash.

Government policy in Uzbekistan combines financial and institutional tools: the activities of the Anti-Crisis Fund cover both the worst-affected sectors of the economy and vital ones (water, heat, and electricity).

As regards Tajikistan, let us emphasize that its government is mainly focused on administrative support measures, because the country's limited resources do not allow for a wide range of financial tools.

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<sup>24</sup> See: Asian Development Outlook 2020 Update. Wellness in Worrying Times. Highlights.

<sup>25</sup> See: COVID-19 Crisis Response in Central Asia.

# INFRASTRUCTURE POLICY OF THE CASPIAN STATES: DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY AND GEOPOLITICAL AIMS

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## ABSTRACT

**I**n recent years, the Caspian states have been paying increasingly more attention to port infrastructure development. The construction of new facilities and the reconstruction of existing ports received a new impetus. The Caspian states increase their investments in this sphere every year. They have developed national programs that aim to increase the volume of cargo passing through the Caspian states' sea-ports.

The development of port infrastructure, augmented by new railways, was deliberated by the Caspian states in the context of solving geopolitical problems. The advancement of the negotiation process on the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea brought the solution of economic issues to the fore, along with the development of transport and related infrastructure. The signing of this document in August 2018 only raised the interest of the regional states in trade and economic cooperation. Accordingly, one of the key tasks that the Caspian states were facing was port infrastructure development. The construction of new ports

was believed to foster achievement of long-term goals. In addition to economic development, first and foremost, of coastal territories, regional countries sought to reinforce their positions in global trade flows. Besides, the facilities constructed by the Caspian countries in recent years have been integrated in large-scale infrastructure projects, which are being actively promoted by non-regional states. China, the EU and Turkey have a stake in their implementation, and the Caspian infrastructure served as a part of regional transportation projects.

The adoption of documents related to the development of transport in the Caspian region by the Caspian states reflected the importance of infrastructure. They formulated long-term tasks and outlined the spheres of cooperation with their regional neighbors.

The expansion of regional cooperation by the Caspian countries is accompanied by the intensified struggle for the flow of goods. The Caspian states are growing increasingly competitive in the transportation sphere. The struggle for container traffic volumes

and hydrocarbon resources is pushing the | and administrative mechanisms in order to  
Caspian states to apply various financial | attract cargo.

**KEYWORDS:** Caspian region, convention, infrastructure, ports,  
shipping.

## *Introduction*

In recent years, the regional countries' interest in the implementation of infrastructure projects located on the Caspian Sea coast has increased. First and foremost, this concerns the port infrastructure and facilities involved in hydrocarbon extraction.

In addition, the Caspian states support and actively participate in the implementation of international transport projects that allow to attract additional flows of goods. A key aspect of the Caspian states' policy in regard to the Caspian Sea are the increased investments in multimodal transport corridors that traverse the Caspian Sea and coastal territories. The regional countries began to develop ambitious plans to increase transit capabilities, which should lead to the creation of transport hubs in the long term.

The signing of the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea in August 2018 opened up a new phase in the development of the regional transport infrastructure. Clarity was achieved in the relations between the regional states, and new opportunities were created for their economic development. Political disagreements on key regional issues gave way to the Caspian states' long-term plans in the sphere of shipping, port infrastructure development, extraction of hydrocarbon resources and their subsequent delivery to the external market.

## **Documents Adopted by the Caspian States**

In recent years, the importance of the transport sector for the Caspian countries manifested in the adoption of a number of documents. They have defined long-term tasks in the sphere of transport infrastructure development and the expansion of shipping.

The growing importance of the transit and logistics factor and the desire to optimize transport processes in the Caspian have prompted Russia to develop the Strategy for the Development of Russian Seaports in the Caspian Basin, and Rail and Road Links to Them until 2030.<sup>1</sup> The document, ratified by the Russian government in November 2017, aims to ensure the sustainable development of the Caspian region and includes infrastructural, legal and economic aspects. The key goal is stated to be the "strengthening of the economic and geopolitical presence of the Russian Federation in the Caspian Sea, expanding and deepening economic and cultural ties with the Caspian regional states, and creating the conditions for fostering the region's socio-economic development by increasing international cargo flows passing through the Caspian seaports."<sup>2</sup> The Strategy underscores that "the

<sup>1</sup> See: *Strategy for the Development of Russian Seaports in the Caspian Basin, Rail and Road Links to Them until 2030*, Order of the Government of the Russian Federation of 08.11.2017 No. 2469-p, available in Russian at [<http://static.government.ru/media/files/zACqKSgh6AdU2bWZahEb92qpLifBzJlr.pdf>], 25 August, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem.

cargo turnover through Russian ports largely depends on external factors, primarily on the processes in the Iranian economy, as well as the development of new fields and the construction of oil pipelines by oil companies of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.”<sup>3</sup>

Issues of port infrastructure development and increasing port capacity were repeatedly raised in subsequent years. Meetings of the working group of the Presidium of the State Council of the Russian Federation for the development of transport infrastructure in the Caspian region were held in Moscow and Astrakhan in February and April 2018.

At the end of 2018, the Russian president set the task of creating a Port Special Economic Zone. Then, in April 2019, a meeting was held, where the development of Russian transport infrastructure in the Caspian Sea was discussed.<sup>4</sup> This topic was elaborated at a meeting in the Astrakhan region in May 2019, which was chaired by the Russian president. Vladimir Putin once again stressed the importance of “developing transport infrastructure.”<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the Minister of Economic Development Mikhail Oreshkin proposed to develop the port infrastructure of the Astrakhan region through the port economic zones.<sup>6</sup>

In November 2020, Russia adopted a *Resolution of the Government of the Russian Federation On the Creation of a Port Special Economic Zone and the Caspian Cluster in the territory of the Astrakhan Region*.<sup>7</sup> The document aimed to create a port economic zone in the Limansky District municipal formation of the Astrakhan region. In addition, the document declares the need to “unite a port special economic zone and a special industrial production economic zone in the Narimanov District municipal formation of the Astrakhan region into one Caspian cluster.” In 2021-2022, over 2.5 billion rubles (about \$35 million) will be allocated for these purposes.<sup>8</sup>

Great attention was paid to the development of port infrastructure in Kazakhstan. In December 2019, the country developed Nurly Zhol, a state infrastructure development program for 2020-2025.<sup>9</sup> It replaced the program that operated in 2016-2019. As part of the program, terminals were built in the Aktau port and a ferry complex—in the port of Kuryk.<sup>10</sup> The new program formulates the task of further expanding the country’s transport capabilities, which must correspond to the increasing flows of goods and hydrocarbon production. In 2020, 1,283 ship calls occurred. Kazakhstan expects the number of ship calls to the Kazakhstani sector of the Caspian Sea to double by 2025.<sup>11</sup>

Other Caspian states have limited themselves to the establishment of separate programs aimed at the development of port infrastructure and shipping. For instance, Azerbaijan has approved a shipping development program, aiming “to facilitate shipping and growth of cargo transportation through

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<sup>3</sup> Strategy for the Development of Russian Seaports in the Caspian Basin, Rail and Road Links to Them until 2030.

<sup>4</sup> See: “Astrakhan Hosted a Meeting on the Preparation of the Presidium of the State Council of the Russian Federation on the Development of Transport and Energy Infrastructure of the Caspian Region,” 19 April, 2019, available in Russian at [<https://www.astrob1.ru/news/111844>], 18 January, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> “Soveshchanie po voprosam sotsialno-ekonomicheskogo razvitiia Astrakhanskoy oblasti,” 14 May, 2019, available at [<http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60518>], 18 May, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> See: Ibidem.

<sup>7</sup> See: *Resolution of the Government of the Russian Federation On the Creation of a Special Economic Zone and the Caspian Cluster in the Territory of the Astrakhan Region* of 7 November, 2020, No. 1792, available in Russian at [<http://docs.cntd.ru/document/566240024>], 13 January, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>9</sup> See: *Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan On Approval of the State Program for Infrastructure Development “Nurly Zhol” for 2020-2025* of 31 December, 2019 года No. 1055, available in Russian at [<http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/P1900001055>], 13 January, 2021.

<sup>10</sup> See: N. Sadykhova, “V Kazakhstane realizovan riad proektov po razvitiuu portov,” 18 February, 2020, available at [<https://www.trend.az/business/economy/3193362.html>], 24 January, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> See: “Kazakhstan ozhidaet dvukratnoe uvelichenie sudozahodov na Kaspiy k 2025 godu,” 3 February, 2021, available at [[https://www.inform.kz/ru/kazakhstan-ozhidaet-dvukratnoe-uvelichenie-sudozahodov-na-kaspiy-k-2025-godu\\_a3748698](https://www.inform.kz/ru/kazakhstan-ozhidaet-dvukratnoe-uvelichenie-sudozahodov-na-kaspiy-k-2025-godu_a3748698)], 5 February, 2021.

the country.”<sup>12</sup> In 2020, Turkmenistan began to develop a National Maritime Strategy. This issue was discussed at a meeting of the Turkmenistan government.<sup>13</sup>

## Resulting Outcomes

In the previous decades, the Caspian states did not pay due attention to infrastructure development. Government policies have often been ineffective, leading to a reduction in shipments between the Caspian countries. For instance, the total cargo turnover of the Russian ports of Astrakhan, Olya and Makhachkala in 2010-2016 decreased from 10.9 million tons to 6 million tons. About 55% of cargo went through the Makhachkala seaport, of which 87% was crude oil, and 13%—grain supply.<sup>14</sup> The reason for the reduction in volume was the reorientation of oil logistics in the Caspian region to oil pipelines. The transshipment of ferrous metals through the port of Makhachkala decreased from 270,000 to 34,500 tons in 2011-2016. The significant growth in the volume of grain transshipment through Russian ports from 51,000 to 332,000 tons in the same time period was another positive factor. In 2010, 5 million tons of metals (79% of all dry cargo) were shipped through Russian ports, but in 2016 this figure only constituted 18.4% of the cargo turnover.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, the Caspian ports of Astrakhan and Olya mainly handled dry cargo, most of which was sent to Iran. Astrakhan was of key importance in the export of certain agricultural products, since over 60% of Russian grain transported to Iran was supplied through it.

In the first half of the 2010s, there was a drop in cargo turnover through Russian ports. This was due to the underdevelopment of the infrastructure, and the current tariff policy, which reduced the interest in deliveries through Russian ports. This situation has pushed other Caspian countries to develop their own port infrastructure, thereby creating conditions for increasing the flow of goods. Russia has made the necessary conclusions as well. As a result, the Caspian countries embarked on large-scale projects to create new port facilities and modernize the previously built ones. This has allowed to increase the throughput of seaports and speed up cargo handling, which had been productive. Almost all the Caspian seaports have improved their performance indicators. Thus, according to the Association of Russian Trade Seaports, the cargo turnover of the Caspian Sea basin ports in 2020 amounted to 8.1 million tons, increasing by 9.1% compared to 2019.<sup>16</sup>

At the end of 2020, Russia decided to build a new port in the city of Lagan, Kalmykia. The construction of a new port with a capacity of 12.5 million tons of cargo is included in the territorial planning program of the Russian Federation approved by the Russian government.<sup>17</sup> The new port will increase the export of grain, container and refrigerated cargo and other products from Kalmykia. The decision to build a new port in Kalmykia will expand the capabilities of all Russian constituent entities on the Caspian Sea, and will open up new prospects for their socio-economic development.

In recent years, Kazakhstan has implemented infrastructure projects in the transportation sphere. In 2016, the new port of Kuryk was commissioned on the Caspian Sea coast, south of the port of

<sup>12</sup> “Ilkham Aliyev utverdil programmu razvitiya sudokhodstva Azerbaidzhana na 2016-2020 gody,” 8 November, 2016, available at [[https://www.korabel.ru/news/comments/ilham\\_aliev\\_utverdil\\_programmu\\_razvitiya\\_sudokhodstva\\_azerbaidzhana\\_na\\_2016-2020\\_gody.html](https://www.korabel.ru/news/comments/ilham_aliev_utverdil_programmu_razvitiya_sudokhodstva_azerbaidzhana_na_2016-2020_gody.html)], 24 January, 2021.

<sup>13</sup> [<https://turkmenportal.com/blog/30540/v-turkmenistane-razrabatyvaetsya-nacionalnaya-morskaya-strategiya>].

<sup>14</sup> See: *Strategy for the Development of Russian Seaports in the Caspian Basin, Rail and Road Links to Them until 2030*.

<sup>15</sup> See: *Ibidem*.

<sup>16</sup> See: “Gruzooborot morskikh portov Rossii za 12 mesiatsev 2020 goda,” 15 January, 2021, available at [<https://www.morport.com/rus/news/gruzooborot-morskikh-portov-rossii-za-12-mesyacev-2020-goda>], 4 February, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> See: R. Melnikov, “Zernyshko v biudzheta,” *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 28 December, 2020. C. 2.

Aktau. Since 2017, cargo deliveries have been organized from the port of Kuryk to the Azerbaijani port of Alat, which is the ferry terminal of the Baku port.

In the future, the non-freezing Kuryk should replace Aktau. The modern complex includes a ferry crossing and a railway line along the Borzhakty-Ersai route in the Mangistau region of Kazakhstan. The complex's capacity allows it to handle 5.1 million tons annually. As a result, the port of Kuryk has turned into a multimodal transport hub. Its capacity increased from 2 million tons in 2016 to 6 million tons in 2019. "The port of Kuryk transported 2.2 million tons of oil, 2.5 million tons of dry cargo and 1.4 million tons of ferry cargo."<sup>18</sup> The total annual throughput of Kazakhstani ports has been increased from 19.5 million tons to 27 million tons.<sup>19</sup>

At the end of 2016, Tengizchevroil, which develops the Tengiz and Korolev fields in the Atyrau region of Kazakhstan, began to build a new port, Prorva, near the village of the same name.<sup>20</sup> The new port is to be used for servicing oil fields. In 2019, the Tengiz field produced 29.7 million tons of oil.<sup>21</sup> Kazakhstan expects the volume of production to increase by 12 million tons in the coming years and reach 39 million tons of oil per year.<sup>22</sup>

The Kazakh fleet has been recently augmented with four dry cargo vessels, which are responsible for transporting approximately 10% of dry cargo from the port of Aktau. Kazakh tankers transport oil from Aktau and the Russian port of Makhachkala to the Azerbaijani port of Baku. In 2020, 2.2 million tons of oil were delivered through the port of Aktau.<sup>23</sup> Compared to 2019, the growth constituted 4%. Kazakh oil was exported to the Russian port of Makhachkala and the Azerbaijani port of Baku. In 2021, Kazakhstan plans to open a rail-ferry service to the Russian port of Makhachkala.

A new port complex was opened in Azerbaijan in May 2018 in the village of Alat in Baku's Garadagh region. Its initial annual capacity was up to 15 million tons of cargo.<sup>24</sup> The Azerbaijani side expected to increase the port's capacity to 25 million tons in the future. The future construction of the port may affect the cargo flows in the Caspian region. The port of Alat is regarded as an important link in the Caspian region's transportation system.

In 2019-2020, Iran heeded increased attention to the Caspian Sea coast infrastructure. It actively increased its port capacity and built a merchant fleet. In November 2020, 11 projects were launched in the Caspian port of Anzali, Iran. "It involved the opening of a berth for general cargo and grain, two structured berths for oil cargo, and a grain warehouse with a capacity of 50,000 tons."<sup>25</sup> This port is viewed as a strategic facility that should ensure the growth of supplies to other Caspian states.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> "Chetyre konteynernykh terminala planiruiut postroit na stantsii Dostyk k 2025 godu," 21 December, 2020, available at [<https://kaztag.kz/ru/news/chetyre-konteynernykh-terminala-planiruyut-postroit-na-stantsii-dostyk-k-2025-godu/>], 24 January, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> See: *On Approval of the State Program for Infrastructure Development "Nurly Zhol" for 2020-2025*.

<sup>20</sup> See: R. Koilybayev, "Kompaniia TSHO stroit port na Kaspii," 2 November, 2016, available at [<https://atpress.kz/1879-kompaniya-tsho-stroit-port-na-kaspii/>], 9 January, 2021.

<sup>21</sup> See: "Godovoy otchet AO «NK «KazMunayGaz» za 2019 god," available at [[https://ar2019.kmg.kz/pdf/ar/ru/strategic-report\\_operating\\_projects.pdf](https://ar2019.kmg.kz/pdf/ar/ru/strategic-report_operating_projects.pdf)], 22 January, 2021.

<sup>22</sup> See: "Boleye 29 mln tonn nefi dobyli na Tengizskom mestorozhdenii v 2019," 18 February, 2020, available at [[https://forbes.kz/news/2020/02/18/newsid\\_219245/](https://forbes.kz/news/2020/02/18/newsid_219245/)], 18 January, 2021.

<sup>23</sup> See: I. Shaban, "Port Aktau v Kazakhstane narastil ob'emy perevalki nefi v 2020 godu," 10 February, 2021, available at [<http://caspienbarrel.org/ru/2021/02/port-aktau-v-kazakhstane-narastil-obemy-perevalki-nefti-v-2020-godu/>], 12 February, 2021.

<sup>24</sup> See: "Ilkham Aliyev priniat uchastie v otkrytii kompleksa Bakinskogo mezhdunarodnogo morskogo torgovogo porta," 14 May, 2018, available at [<https://ru.president.az/articles/28547/>], 24 January, 2021.

<sup>25</sup> "11 Projects Inaugurated in Anzali Port, N Iran," 17 November, 2020, available at [<https://en.mehrnews.com/news/165961/11-projects-inaugurated-in-Anzali-Port-N-Iran/>], 17 January, 2021.

<sup>26</sup> See: *Ibidem*.



Iran's efforts to expand port infrastructure have yielded results. The export of goods through Iranian ports on the Caspian Sea increased by 40% in 6 months of 2020.<sup>27</sup> The role of the Iranian port of Astara on the Caspian Sea has increased. It has become a new regional container shipping hub after the launch of new transport services from this port.<sup>28</sup>

The increase in cargo flows through Iranian ports on the Caspian Sea was the result of the changes in Iran's policy. In recent years, the country has stepped up trade and economic cooperation with the countries of the Eurasian Economic Union.<sup>29</sup>

In September 2020, the Ports and Shipping Organization (PMO) of Iran and one of the foreign shipping companies functioning in the Caspian basin signed a memorandum of understanding. One of its main points is "the creation of regular communication between the ports of Iran, Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan."<sup>30</sup> The document also emphasized the task of "expanding freight traffic."<sup>31</sup>

To strengthen its position in the Caspian, at the beginning of 2021, Iran increased the number of ships in its merchant fleet. As the managing director of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines Mohammad Reza Modarres noted, "the main goal is to expand trade with neighboring countries, in particular with Russia."<sup>32</sup>

A large-scale infrastructure project was implemented by Turkmenistan. In May 2018, the new Turkmenbashi international seaport was opened on the Caspian Sea coast. Port construction was carried out in accordance with the Development Strategy of the International Seaport of Turkmenbashi and the Turkmen Sea Merchant Fleet until 2020.<sup>33</sup> The new port is seen as the main sea gate for the national economy. Simultaneously with the completion of port construction, the new shipyard and ship repair plant, Balkan, was put into operation (until 15 April, 2019 it was part of the Turkmenbashi International Seaport). It is designed for the construction and repair of ships and floating structures. Every year, Turkmenistan plans to launch 4-6 large vessels down the slipways and repair between 20 and 30 ships.

Turkmenistan is considering the possibility of increasing supplies through the Turkmenbashi seaport. This issue was constantly in the focus of attention of the Turkmen leadership in 2020-2021. In September 2020, issues of international cooperation in the Caspian region were considered at a meeting of the Turkmenistan government.<sup>34</sup> Subsequently, in October 2020 and January 2021, meetings of the Interdepartmental Commission of Turkmenistan on the Caspian Sea,<sup>35</sup> created by the Decree of the President of the country in October 2020, were held. They pertained to the development of transport communications. In December 2020, during a government meeting, the President of Turkmenistan announced negotiations to expand communications with Kazakhstan, namely, with the

<sup>27</sup> See: "Ob'em eksporta iz severnykh portov Irana uvelichilsia na 40%," 15 December, 2020, available at [<https://www.trend.az/iran/business/3350555.html>], 23 January, 2021.

<sup>28</sup> See: "Iranskiy port Astara stal novym tsentrom konteynernykh perevozok v regione," 10 December, 2020, available at [<https://www.trend.az/iran/business/3348136.html>], 27 January, 2021.

<sup>29</sup> See: *Ibidem*.

<sup>30</sup> "Iran podpisal Memorandum s tsel'iu razvitiya sudokhodstva na Kaspii," 29 September, 2020, available at [<https://business.com.tm/ru/post/6074/iran-podpisal-memorandum-s-celyu-razvitiya-sudokhodstva-na-kaspii>], 24 January, 2021.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>32</sup> E. Bashyshov, "Iran narashchivaet chislenost sudov na Kaspii," 7 January, 2021, available at [<https://www.trend.az/business/3360967.html>], 19 January, 2021.

<sup>33</sup> See: "Master Plan for the Development of the Turkmenbashi International Seaport and the Marine Merchant Fleet of Turkmenistan until 2020," available in Russian at [[http://www.traceca-org.org/uploads/media/10.Presentation\\_TKM\\_Ru\\_01.pdf](http://www.traceca-org.org/uploads/media/10.Presentation_TKM_Ru_01.pdf)], 17 January, 2021.

<sup>34</sup> [<https://turkmenportal.com/blog/30540/v-turkmenistane-razrabatyvaetsya-nacionalnaya-morskaya-strategiya>].

<sup>35</sup> See: "Sostoyalos ocherednoe zasedanie Mezhvedomstvennoy komissii Turkmenistana po voprosam Kaspiiskogo moria," 30 January, 2021, available at [<https://www.mfa.gov.tm/ru/news/2462>], 2 February, 2021.

Aktau sea trade port and the Kuryk seaport.<sup>36</sup> In addition, the issue of launching a ferry service with the Russian ports of Olya and Makhachkala was brought up. All of these actions demonstrated that the expansion of communication across the Caspian Sea is one of the key tasks of the Turkmen foreign policy.

## Maritime Cooperation of Caspian States

Along with an increase in port capacity, the Caspian countries have been recently expanding their cooperation on a bilateral basis. This was confirmed by numerous meetings of bilateral commissions formed by the Caspian states. Several intergovernmental commissions of the Caspian states dedicated to cooperation in the transport sector, were held just in the second half of 2020-early 2021.

In November 2020, a meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission on Cooperation between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Kazakhstan was conducted.<sup>37</sup> Among the many questions on the agenda were the problems of cooperation in the transportation sphere.<sup>38</sup> In January 2021, a meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission of Iran and Azerbaijan was held. The parties discussed their interaction within the framework of the North-South international transport corridor. In addition, the first meeting of the Russian-Turkmen working group on the development of shipbuilding projects took place. This meeting was held within the framework of the Memorandum of Cooperation signed in December 2020 between the United Shipbuilding Corporation and the Balkan Shipyard and Ship Repair Plant, which is related to the development of cooperation in the shipbuilding sphere.

Along with an increased interest in expanding cooperation in the transport sector, the Caspian countries have been growing increasingly competitive. In recent years, the struggle for cargo flows in the Caspian region has intensified. This is due to the development of their own fleet by the Caspian countries and the modernization of the port infrastructure. However, cargo volume and the production of hydrocarbon resources are increasing at a slower pace. Countries use various state support mechanisms to defend their interests. Among them are preferential lending rates, subsidies and government co-financing. These measures are actively used by Russia, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan. Iran and Turkmenistan use preferential port service.

## Participation of Caspian States in International Projects

The development of coastal infrastructure is closely related to the implementation of international projects in which the Caspian countries are involved. They are of considerable interest to the regional states, since they enhance their involvement in international trade and allow to strengthen their positions as transit states.

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<sup>36</sup> See: "Sotrudnichestvo Turkmenistana s Kazahstanom i RF po transportnomu soobshcheniu vstupit v rabochiy etap," 12 December, 2020, available at [<https://turkmenportal.com/blog/32863/sotrudnichestvo-turkmenistana-s-kazahstanom-i-rf-po-transportnomu-soobshcheniyu-vstupit-v-rabochii-etap>], 23 January, 2021.

<sup>37</sup> See: "Aleksey Overchuk provel zasedanie Mezhravitelstvennoi komissii po sotrudnichestvu mezhdu Rossiiskoi Federatsiei i Respublikoi Kazahstan," 24 November, 2020, available at [<http://government.ru/news/40944/>], 28 January, 2021.

<sup>38</sup> See: *Ibidem*.

To discuss all issues related to the implementation of international infrastructure projects, Caspian states resort to bilateral and trilateral meetings. As a rule, they are conducted by the heads of the respective states.

One of the projects that involves Russia, Azerbaijan, and Iran is the North-South International Transport Corridor (ITC) project. The participation of the Caspian states gives it a “Caspian edge.” In November 2017, the second meeting of the presidents of the three states was held in Tehran. A Joint Statement was signed after the talks, in which the heads of the Caspian states “noted the importance of trilateral interaction and cooperation between the governments and parliaments of the three countries in the regional and international arena.”<sup>39</sup> The document also emphasizes “the importance of cooperation in the field of road, rail and air transport in order to modernize transport infrastructure and develop the ITC.”<sup>40</sup> The parties stressed the need for the earliest possible construction of the Rasht-Astara railway line. Later, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said that the country’s authorities “plan to complete the construction of a railway from the city of Anzali on the Caspian Sea coast to the city of Rasht by June 2021. Upon completion, this route should become part of the North-South transport corridor.”<sup>41</sup>

Another project involving the Caspian countries is the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR). It must ensure the transportation of goods from China through the territory of Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Georgia to Turkey, and then to Europe. In October 2016, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Georgia signed an agreement on the establishment of the TITR international association. Its activities are aimed at “attracting transit and foreign trade cargo, as well as the development of integrated logistics products along the TITR.”<sup>42</sup>

In 2017 traffic volumes through the TITR amounted to 1.2 million tons, while only 750 thousand tons were anticipated.<sup>43</sup> Container transportation has played an important role in increasing the TITR turnover. Their share in the total volume is increasing. The April 2018 launch of containerized cargo transport corridor between the ports of Baku and Aktau, which previously served only dry cargo ships, played a role. In addition, container traffic through the port of Kuryk grew, thus rapidly increasing the volume of container traffic through TITR. In 2018, it amounted to 537,000 DFE (twenty-foot equivalent) containers.<sup>44</sup> In 2019, “container traffic on the TITR route increased by 71%” compared to 2018.<sup>45</sup> According to Pavel Sokolov, Deputy Chairman of the Management Board of JSC NC KTZh, Kazakhstan plans to increase the volume of container traffic by 2024 to 1.6 million transit containers.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Joint Statement of the President of the Russian Federation, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 1 November, 2017, available at [<http://www.kremlin.ru/supplement/5247>], 8 January, 2021.

<sup>40</sup> *Kaspii: mezhdunarodno-pravovye dokumenty*, Compiled by S. Zhiltsov, I. Zonn, A. Kostianoi, A. Semenov, Mezhdunarodnye otnoshenia, Moscow, 2018, 568 pp.

<sup>41</sup> “Iran do iyunia 2021 goda soedit zheleznoi dorogoi gorod Resht i Kaspiiskoe more,” 14 December, 2020, available at [<https://tass.ru/ekonomika/10252167>], 16 January, 2021.

<sup>42</sup> “Kazakhstan, Azerbaidzhan i Gruzia uchredili assotsiatsiiu Transkaspiskogo marshruta,” 10 October, 2016, available at [<https://www.rosbalt.ru/world/2016/10/10/1557319.html>], 23 January, 2021.

<sup>43</sup> See: L. Parkhomchik, “Transkaspiskiy mezhdunarodny transportny marshrut narashchivaet oboroty,” 27 November, 2018, available at [<http://casp-geo.ru/transkaspiskij-mezhdunarodnyj-transportnyj-marshrut-narashchivaet-oboroty/>], 19 January, 2021.

<sup>44</sup> See: N. Butyrina, “Konteinerny tranzit cherez Kazakhstan poshel v rost,” available at [<http://casp-geo.ru/kontejnernyj-tranzit-cherez-kazahstan-poshel-v-rost/>], 23 January, 2021.

<sup>45</sup> “Po marshrutu TMTM v 2019 godu dostignut istoricheskiy rekord v kontejnerykh perevozkakh,” 21 January, 2020, available at [<https://www.adyexpress.az/ru/archives/9379>], 29 January, 2021.

<sup>46</sup> See: I. Zhukov, “Kakovy trazitnye vozmozhnosti Kazakhstana?” 6 November, 2019, available at [[https://forbes.kz/finances/integration/kakovy\\_i\\_trazitnye\\_vozmozhnosti\\_kazakhstan/](https://forbes.kz/finances/integration/kakovy_i_trazitnye_vozmozhnosti_kazakhstan/)], 25 January, 2021.

The development of TITR would have been impossible without the development of infrastructure on the western Caspian coast, in Azerbaijan. Much attention is paid to expanding the “capacity of the Baku International Trade Port Complex—up to 17 million tons and 150,000 containers. Completion of the third phase should lead to the creation of a port with a cargo handling capacity of 25 million tons and 500,000 containers.”<sup>47</sup>

The Lapis Lazuli Corridor route is slated to pass to the south of the TITR. The agreement on its establishment was signed in November 2017, and it was opened in December 2018. It will allow to deliver goods from Afghanistan through Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey to Europe.<sup>48</sup> The corridor will pass through the Afghan border railway stations of Aqina in the Faryab province and Torgundi in the Herat province, Turkmenbashi in Turkmenistan, Baku in Azerbaijan, Tbilisi and Batumi in Georgia and Istanbul in Turkey. China, the Central Asian republics, India, Pakistan, and Iran may join this transport corridor in the future. To a large extent, the route shadows the TRACECA project.

Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, which are in transport isolation, are the two main beneficiaries of the project. This route will allow these two countries to increase the supply of their products to the European market. For example, Afghanistan’s exports to European countries are \$6 million, while imports from the EU and Turkey through Iran are \$900 million.<sup>49</sup>

The countries are currently working out the issues that will allow to launch this project. On 2 July, 2020, a meeting was held between the presidents of Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Afghanistan, at which issues of the project’s practical implementation were discussed. In January 2021, a meeting of the heads of the three countries’ interagency group took place. The meeting resulted in the adoption of a road map, which should expand the possibilities for interaction in the transportation sphere.<sup>50</sup>

## Hydrocarbon Delivery Infrastructure

In addition to the initiatives to create the infrastructure required for the export of goods, the Caspian countries sought options that would allow them to increase the volume of hydrocarbon export to the external market, including the use of the Caspian coastal infrastructure. This mainly concerned several ports of the Caspian states, which created a window of opportunity for the export or receipt of hydrocarbon resources, primarily oil.

Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have demonstrated great interest in the formation and subsequent use of the infrastructure required to export oil to the foreign markets. In recent years, crude oil from Kazakhstan and the northern Russian shelf fields has been shipped through Makhachkala to Azerbaijan. Russia has a stake in preserving this scheme. However, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan still hope to gain direct access to pipelines that will transport their oil westward. At the turn of the 21st century, the Trans-Caspian oil and gas pipeline projects were postponed due to the expansion of oil and gas production in Azerbaijan. They were not, however, completely abandoned, and their construction is still supported by the U.S. and the EU.

<sup>47</sup> N. Butyrina, “Kaspiiskie porty — perezagruzka. K itogam konferentsii ‘Kaspiiskie porty i sudokhodstvo-2019’,” 23 May, 2019, available at [<http://casp-geo.ru/kaspiiskie-porty-perezagruzka-k-itogam-konferentsii-kaspiiskie-porty-i-sudokhodstvo-2019/>], 14 January, 2021.

<sup>48</sup> See: V. Panfilova, “Lazuritovy koridor sviazal Ashkhabad i Baku,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 22 November, 2018.

<sup>49</sup> See: A. Shustov, “Kuda vedet ‘Lazuritovy koridor’,” 11 August, 2019, available at [<https://www.ritmearasia.org/news--2019-08-11--kuda-vedet-lazuritovyj-koridor-44278>], 14 January, 2021.

<sup>50</sup> See: V. Kondratiev, “Soglasovana trekhstoronniaia ‘dorozhnaia karta’ sotrudnichestva po Lazuritovomu koridoru,” 21 January, 2021, available at [<http://casp-geo.ru/soglasovana-tryohstoronnyaya-dorozhnaya-karta-sotrudnichestva-po-lazuritovomu-koridoru/>], 5 February, 2021.

In the absence of a Trans-Caspian oil pipeline, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan use tankers to export their oil, delivering it to Baku. In recent years, the volume of supplies to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline was insignificant and did not exceed several million tons of oil annually.

If oil production increases in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, two ports of equal capacity on the eastern Caspian coast may enter into competition. These are the Kazakh port of Kuryk and the Turkmen port of Turkmenbashi. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan would like to obtain the priority right to direct their oil to the Azerbaijani pipeline.

The creation of the infrastructure necessary for the export of hydrocarbon resources was more successful in Azerbaijan. In May 2018, the Southern Gas Transportation Corridor (SGC) was launched. It opened up new opportunities for transporting natural gas from the Caspian Shah Deniz field to Europe. The project involves Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Albania and Italy. The corridor is a system of gas pipelines, some of which were built earlier, others—in recent years. In particular, the SGC includes the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline, the Trans-Anatolian gas pipeline (TANAP) and the Trans-Adriatic gas pipeline (TAP). Azerbaijani gas will be supplied to Turkey and further, to the countries of Southern Europe—Greece and Italy.

### *Conclusion*

In recent years, the Caspian states have made significant progress in the construction of coastal infrastructure facilities. This allowed them to increase export volumes and the transshipment of transit cargo. In addition, new facilities have become an integral part of international projects in which the Caspian countries play a key role.

The plans announced by all regional states to increase the production of hydrocarbons and further develop the coastal infrastructure and their participation in international transport projects may intensify the competition in the Caspian region. Moreover, infrastructure projects are considered by the Caspian countries as a mechanism for defending their geopolitical interests and solving economic problems.

The explosive interest in the implementation of transport projects in the Caspian establishes a new stage in the development of the Caspian region. The geopolitical rivalry that has been ongoing since the 1990s is being replaced by a period of economic development and regional cooperation, and active involvement in international infrastructure projects.

# THE ISLAMIC DEVELOPMENT BANK AND ITS ROLE IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC REFORMS IN THE CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES

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## ABSTRACT

**T**he purpose of this article is to analyze the activities of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, as well as the dynamics of cooperation with each country and the region as a whole. The Bank provides a number of financing operations to promote socio-economic development in its member countries, enhance regional integration, and foster cooperation among all IDB states. The main

focus of its operations is project financing. Since its inception, the Bank has approved many significant projects (already completed or still in progress) in the most important social and economic areas.

In this study, use was made of the historical comparative method, the historical chronological method, and a systems approach to analyzing socio-economic activity in the region, namely, the method of analysis and synthesis. The historical compara-

tive method was used to analyze data from annual IDB reports, particularly in identifying priority sectors of project implementation in the Central Asian countries for the entire period of cooperation, and the dynamics of project financing in the region over a period of five years. The historical chronological method was used to compile a timeline of the IDB's relations with countries in the region. The method of analysis and synthesis was used to study the Bank's socio-economic activities in each individual country and in the region as a whole. According to an analysis of project funding approvals, the main sectors in the Central Asia Region are transport, energy, and agriculture. Overall, despite the positive dynamics of IDB operations in the region, the amount of funding varies significantly from country to country. Kazakhstan, as a country with the most stable economic and political situation, is of particular interest to the Bank, just as Uz-

bekistan, which became an IDB member much later than other CA countries, but has already risen to top positions. In Turkmenistan, most of the funding goes to the transport and energy sectors, which are of interest to the country itself, whereas in other sectors the Bank's presence is minimal, because the country is a closed one. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan get much less funding than the top recipients listed above. This is primarily due to their weak economy and unstable political situation, because under the IDB Articles of Agreement the main criterion for approving any financing operations is the social importance of the project for the development of the recipient country, but it is also necessary to take into account the country's financial position and stability in order to avoid credit risks. On the whole, the IDB makes a significant contribution to the development of the region and promotes the adoption of Islamic finance in the CA countries.

**KEYWORDS:** *Islamic Development Bank, Central Asia, project financing, Special Program for Central Asia, Member Country Partnership Strategy, socio-economic development.*

## *Introduction*

Islamic financial institutions are increasingly influential throughout the world. In countries with a large Muslim population who are unwilling to entrust their savings to conventional banks, as well as a significant number of Muslim entrepreneurs who do not use the services of conventional banks, the creation of Islamic financial institutions can improve the efficiency of the financial market and accelerate its development.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike conventional finance, Islamic finance has four main categories of objectives designed to ensure successful and productive work: economic, Islamic, ethical, and social. These objectives should always be taken into account and achieved for the survival of an Islamic bank in the financial market. Two researchers from Saudi Arabia, Fayaz Ahmad Lone and Siraj Ahmad, have analyzed Islamic economics and have shown its numerous strengths and advantages in response to scholars who have criticized this system without an in-depth study.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See: V. Malyaev, "Opportunities for Adapting Islamic Banking Products to the Russian Legislative Framework," *BRICS Law Journal*, No. 4 (3), 2017, pp. 62-80.

<sup>2</sup> See: F.A. Lone, S. Ahmad, "Islamic finance: More Expectations and Less Disappointment," *Investment Management and Financial Innovations*, No. 14 (1), 2017, pp. 134-141.

Malaysian researchers have analyzed the differences in the number of Islamic bonds (*sukuk*) issued in ten selected member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and have shown a direct relationship with the state's monetary policy. Their findings suggest that the financial system in each country has a significant impact on the development of the Islamic economy.<sup>3</sup>

One of the first multilateral development banks in Islamic finance was the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), established within the framework of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Its main purpose is to foster economic development and social progress in its member countries, promote bilateral and multilateral relations between them, advance regional cooperation, and facilitate access to global markets. As a development bank set up to meet the needs of most Muslim countries, the IDB offers several interest-free modes of financing.<sup>4</sup>

The authors see the Bank not only as a financial organization, but rather as a social institution. In funding projects or providing technical assistance, the Bank gives priority to socially significant projects in areas that are of importance to the recipient country, without focusing on profit. It has done a great deal for the development of countries in the young Central Asia Region (CAR), thus increasing the presence of Islamic banking capital in the region.

This article examines the IDB's activities in Central Asia, including the emergence and development of cooperation, the approval and implementation of projects in different sectors, and the overall dynamics of its relations with the CA countries. The purpose of the article is to analyze and compare the IDB's operations in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, taken separately and together.

## The Development of IDB Cooperation with Central Asia

The OIC, one of the world's largest organizations, has a number of specialized institutions, among which the IDB has a special place. The Bank was established to foster economic and social development in its member countries, enhance cooperation among them, and help them enter the global market through the development of Islamic economics, based on the principles of Shari'a. Cooperation with Central Asia began after the attainment of independence by countries in the region and their entry into the OIC, which is the basic condition for IDB membership. Kyrgyzstan was the first CA country to become a member of the IDB in November 1993, followed by Turkmenistan in November 1994; Kazakhstan joined the IDB as a full member in 1995, and Tajikistan in 1996. Uzbekistan, after having accepted and fulfilled all terms and conditions, officially joined only in September 2003.

From the very beginning, contacts between the CA republics and the IDB were established at different levels. The first few years were marked by meetings and visits of delegations that came to acquaint themselves with the political and economic situation in Central Asia and assess the overall level of the future partnership. At first, the Bank's huge potential remained largely untapped in the region, because it took some time to determine the main areas of future joint activity. It was necessary, in the first place, to develop oil and gas production and transportation, agriculture, food processing, construction, and the energy sector.

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<sup>3</sup> See: N. Ahmad, N. Hashim, F. Johari, "Measuring the Size of Output Gap in Sukuk Issuing OIC Member Countries," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, No. 6 (2S5), 2015, pp. 249-254.

<sup>4</sup> See: R. Ray, R. Kamal, "Can South-South Cooperation Compete? The Development Bank of Latin America and the Islamic Development Bank," *Development and Change*, No. 50 (1), 2019, pp. 191-220.



In June 1996, the IDB and the Republic of Kazakhstan signed a memorandum of understanding regarding Kazakhstan's fulfillment of the conditions for IDB membership and an agreement on the provision of IDB technical assistance (grant) in the amount of \$298,000.

Special attention was paid to discussing the possibility of the Bank's participation in financing the development of infrastructure in the new capital, Astana, including the construction of a new thermal power plant for the city and the reconstruction of an existing thermal power unit, modernization of the airport and the railway line, construction of administrative and residential buildings in the city, development of civil engineering infrastructure, and reconstruction and development of communication systems.<sup>5</sup>

At the IDB's initiative, a delegation of OIC member countries visited Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) in 1996 for acquaintance with the country's economic possibilities, and an investment conference was held the same year in Almaty (Kazakhstan) to study investment opportunities. The conference led to the establishment of the Central Asian Investment Company, which has implemented a number of projects in the region.

In 1997, the Bank opened a regional office (hub) in Almaty to coordinate its cooperation with the countries of Central Asia, Albania, and Azerbaijan. The agreement on its establishment was signed in 1996. The Almaty office helps to accelerate the solution of cooperation problems and facilitates the implementation of agreements related to economic and social development in these countries.

At the 23rd Annual Meeting of the IDB Board of Governors in Cotonou (Republic of Benin) in November 1998, it was decided to establish a new group consisting of CA countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan), Azerbaijan, and Albania. The group was to be represented by an executive director elected by these countries for a period of three years. In 2003, when Uzbekistan joined the IDB, it also became a member of this group. The fact that the CA countries have a separate group within the IDB shows the importance attached by the Bank to the republics of Central Asia.<sup>6</sup>

Another important event was that on 2 and 3 September, 2003, Almaty hosted the 28th Annual Meeting of the IDB Board of Governors, the first meeting to be held in Central Asia. At that meeting, Uzbekistan was admitted to the IDB as its 55th member, so that cooperation with the region assumed a new character, with broad prospects for the implementation of large-scale projects. Uzbekistan's entry has made it possible to prioritize the financing of projects that are of interest to all five countries in the region and thus to boost integration processes.

The creation of efficient production in the territory of CA countries will enhance their international competitiveness, IDB experts believe. It should be taken into account that the shortest routes connecting the countries of the Persian Gulf with China and the Southeast Asian countries, and Russia with India, Iran, and the Persian Gulf countries run through Central Asia. This is why, with a regional approach to enhancing the efficiency of CA transit corridors, active use of trade regimes in priority sectors of trade with member countries of the IDB, and concessional financing by this financial institution, projects in this area can be expected to yield maximum returns, thus promoting the development of all countries in the region.<sup>7</sup>

The IDB awards annual prizes (\$100,000, a trophy, and a certificate) for the successful development of science and technology in member countries. In 2004, one of the three annual prizes went to

<sup>5</sup> See: K. Tokayev, *Diplomatiya Respubliki Kazakhstan*, Elorda, Astana, 2001, p. 327.

<sup>6</sup> See: N.Z. Abidin, "Osnovnye etapy sotrudnichestva mezhdru Kazakhstanom i IBR," *Mezhdunarodnoe sotrudnichestvo Respubliki Kazakhstan: realii, zadachi i perspektivy*, International Workshop, Astana, 2007, p. 187.

<sup>7</sup> See: K. Kapparov, "Tsentralnaia Azia pod opekoi Islamskogo banka razvitiia," *Rossia i musulmanski mir: Byulleten referativno-analiticheskoi informatsii*, INION RAN, Moscow, Center of Scientific Information Study in Social Sciences, No. 12 (138), 2003, p. 153.

the Institute of Plant Physiology, Genetics, and Bioengineering in Kazakhstan for research in grain production, and in 2013 to the Tajik State Medical University.

In August 2005, the Bank organized a brainstorming session in Almaty as part of its regular events designed to achieve all the objectives of the so-called IDB Vision 2020 taking into account the opinion of the CA countries about future difficulties and problems. The holding of such an event in Central Asia shows the importance and significance of the region.

In May 2006, Kyrgyzstan and the IDB signed a memorandum of understanding and are currently developing a partnership strategy for the country to determine the main areas of cooperation. A memorandum of understanding was also signed between Turkmenistan and the IDB in 2016.

During the entire period of cooperation, the CA countries, along with Kazakhstan, have hosted a number of meetings of the IDB Board of Governors, including its 34th Meeting in Ashgabad (Turkmenistan) on 2 and 3 June, 2009, and its 38th Meeting in Dushanbe (Tajikistan) on 21 and 22 May, 2013.

Of unique importance to the region was the launch in September 2012 of one of Central Asia's first country-specific partnership strategies in Central Asia: The Member Country Partnership Strategy (MCPS) for the Republic of Kazakhstan (2012-2014), worth a total of more than \$1 billion. The Strategy is based on four "engagement pillars":

- (i) increasing the country's competitiveness through infrastructure modernization;
- (ii) supporting economic diversification through enhancement of non-extractive industrial capacity to ensure sustainable economic development and agricultural productivity by modernizing the irrigation system and increasing livestock production;
- (iii) deepening the financial sector through the advancement of Islamic finance; and
- (iv) supporting regional integration through cross-border cooperation between Kazakhstan and other IDB member countries.

The implementation of these four pillars will help to develop the private sector.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, a Partnership Framework Agreement (PFA) between the government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the IDB Group was signed in May 2014. Under Art 4, it was to provide the basis for cooperation between the Kazakhstan government and the IDB Group, along with the existing MCPS for Kazakhstan (2012-2014) and its second stage. The investment portfolio was projected at \$2 billion.<sup>9</sup>

On 18 September, 2018, a Member Country Partnership Strategy for 2018-2021 was signed in Tashkent between the government of Uzbekistan and the IDB, which committed more than \$1 billion to the development of sectors such as transport, energy, and infrastructure. To support and expand interaction, Uzbekistan also approved an Action Plan (Roadmap) for further development of cooperation with the IDB Group (5 March, 2019).

The above document contains a list of promising investment projects proposed for joint implementation with the IDB for 2019-2021 at a total cost of \$2,042.2 million, including \$1,785.4 million worth of loans. It also presents an action plan to develop cooperation with the IDB, particularly in implementing the Partnership Strategy, grant agreements, and memoranda, in attracting financing, and in organizing an annual meeting of the IDB Board of Governors in Uzbekistan.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See: Islamic Development Bank Group's Member Country Partnership Strategy for the Republic of Kazakhstan (2012-2014), September 2012, available at [<http://www.istisna.kz/rus/img/Final-MCPS-eng.pdf>], 25 June, 2019.

<sup>9</sup> See: *Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the Signing of a Partnership Framework Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Islamic Development Bank Group*, No. 535 of 22 May, 2014, available in Russian at [<http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/P1400000535>], 26 June, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> See: *Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Measures to Further Develop Cooperation with the Islamic Development Bank Group and the Funds of the Arab Coordination Group*, No. 428 of 23 May, 2019, available in Russian at [<http://lex.uz/pdfs/4351728>], 26 June, 2019.

One of the key events in the entire history of cooperation between the IDB and the CA countries was the development of a Special Program for Central Asia (SPCA).

The SPCA is a regional program of the IDB Group aimed at supporting cooperation among its member countries in Central Asia. The Program is anchored on the OIC Plan of Action for Cooperation with Central Asia (PACCA) and the IDB's 10-Year Strategy. It covers six member countries: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

For the implementation of the SPCA in the period from 2016 to 2020, total financing was projected at \$6 billion, including \$2.5 billion of ordinary financing, \$375 million of concessional financing, \$1.25 billion for trade financing, and \$500 million for private sector financing. Additionally, conventional and innovative resource mobilization efforts and co-financing with development partners were estimated to exceed \$1 billion.

In the event of its effective implementation, the SPCA was expected to contribute to increased production, competitiveness, and trade in the Central Asia Region and, through these, to enhance inclusive economic growth.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, we now have a general idea of the development of the IDB's relations with the region. Tables 1 and 2 contain data for 2018. More recent data are unavailable, but observations show that since then the trends and proportions have remained basically unchanged and that the data given in these tables are an adequate reflection of the overall picture. Table 1 shows the total number of IDB-financed projects in the key sectors of the CA countries for the entire period of cooperation.

As we see from Table 1, over the years of cooperation with the Islamic Development Bank the CA countries have received funding for projects in all sectors, but the number of projects and the amount of funding vary significantly from country to country.

In agriculture, most of the funding has gone to Kazakhstan (16 projects worth a total of \$824.9m), followed by Uzbekistan (5 projects worth \$332.6m), Tajikistan (12 projects worth \$116.4m), and Kyrgyzstan (11 projects worth \$43.8m); Tajikistan has received the least amount of funding in this sector (1 project worth \$0.3m). As we see, agriculture is actively developing in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan; IDB funding is at a medium level in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, while the Bank's contribution to the development of agriculture in Turkmenistan is only marginal.

In education, the biggest recipient of IDB funding among the CA countries is Uzbekistan, despite its later entry into the IDB (11 projects worth \$78.6m); it is followed by Tajikistan (10 projects worth \$48.2m), Turkmenistan (2 projects worth 5.6m), Kazakhstan (2 projects worth \$2.1m), and finally Kyrgyzstan (2 projects worth \$0.3m). One can say that in the latter three countries, compared to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, there is virtually no IDB funding of education.

Energy, as one of the key sectors, is financed in four of the five CA countries. Turkmenistan tops the list with one \$350m project, Uzbekistan is second with 5 projects worth \$203.1m, Tajikistan is third with 15 projects worth \$133m, and Kyrgyzstan in fourth with 8 projects worth \$111.4m. The energy sector is actively developing with the use of IDB funds, but one should note that Kazakhstan is not on the list.

In finance, projects are also being implemented in four countries (except Turkmenistan). Kazakhstan is in the lead with 24 projects worth \$394.5m, followed by Uzbekistan with 22 projects worth \$313.8m, Kyrgyzstan with 18 projects worth \$42.7m, and Tajikistan with 16 projects worth \$41.5m.

Healthcare projects are poorly financed in all countries of the region except Uzbekistan, which has 12 projects worth a total of \$418.5m, an amount that is dozens of times larger than that received by the other four countries. Tajikistan gets only a small fraction of this funding (9 projects worth

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<sup>11</sup> See: Special Program for Central Asia (2016-2020), Part I, The Program, March 2016, available at [<https://idbgbf.org/assets/2016/3/7/pdf/8165ddd7-b84c-473c-acdc-9325e0b82a21.pdf>], 26 June, 2019.

Table 1

**Sectoral Distribution of IDB Project Financing in the Central Asian Countries as of 2018**

Sector	Kazakhstan		Kyrgyzstan		Tajikistan		Turkmenistan		Uzbekistan		CA total	
	Projects	\$m	Projects	\$m	Projects	\$m	Projects	\$m	Projects	\$m	Projects	\$m
Agriculture	16	824.9	11	43.8	12	116.4	1	0.3	5	332.6	45	1 318
Education	6	2.1	2	0.3	10	48.2	2	5.6	11	78.6	31	134.8
Energy	—	—	8	111.4	15	133	1	350	5	203.1	29	797.5
Finance	24	394.5	18	42.7	16	41.5	—	—	22	313.8	80	792.5
Health	3	11.7	4	6.2	9	37.5	4	25.9	12	418.5	32	499.8
Industry and mining	2	8.3	2	22.4	—	—	—	—	10	70.1	14	100.8
Transport	10	760	10	111.8	8	91.6	5	414.5	2	10.8	35	1 388.7
Information and communications	2	10.8	—	—	—	—	1	0.3	28	10.8	31	21.9
Real estate	—	—	—	—	1	10	—	—	—	—	1	10
Water, sanitation, and urban development	1	9.5	—	—	2	11.3	1	17.4	2	92.9	6	131.1
Other social services <sup>1</sup>	1	0.1	5	2	4	0.8	2	10.8	—	—	12	13.7
Others <sup>2</sup>	1	3	1	0.2	3	0.6	—	—	4	1	9	4.8

Source: Islamic Development Bank in Brief 1975-2019, available at [https://www.isdb.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2019-02/ISDB%20in%20Brief%201.5.pdf], 28 May, 2019.

<sup>1</sup> "Other social services" include relief, conferences, community services, and community centers.

<sup>2</sup> "Others" include public administration and trade-related projects.

\$37.5m), Turkmenistan has 4 projects worth \$25.9m, Kazakhstan follows with 3 projects worth \$11.7m, and Kyrgyzstan comes last with 4 projects worth \$6.2m.

In industry and mining, Uzbekistan is also far ahead of other countries with 10 projects worth \$70.1m; it is followed by Kyrgyzstan with 2 projects worth \$22.4m; and Kazakhstan comes third with 2 projects worth \$8.3m. Tajikistan and Turkmenistan have not had any IDB projects in this sector.

If we look at the transport sector, we will see that it is financed in all five countries. The table shows, however, that most of the funding goes to Kazakhstan (10 projects worth \$760m) and Turkmenistan (5 projects worth \$414.5m). In Kyrgyzstan (10 projects worth \$111.8m) and Tajikistan (8 projects worth \$91.6m), IDB funding in this sector is at a medium level, while Uzbekistan brings up the rear with 2 projects worth \$10.8m. One should note that the transport sector is actively developing throughout the region, with the exception of Uzbekistan.

In information and communications, Kazakhstan (2 projects) and Uzbekistan (28 projects) have each received \$10.8m. In Turkmenistan, there is only one project worth \$0.3m, which is significantly less than in the above countries. In Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, projects in this sector have never been financed by the IDB.

In real estate, there is only one project in the entire region, which is being implemented in Tajikistan (worth \$10m). In the other countries, this sector has not been financed since they joined the IDB.

The main recipient of IDB funding in water, sanitation, and urban development is Uzbekistan (2 projects worth \$92.9m), followed by Turkmenistan (1 project worth \$17.4m), Tajikistan (2 projects worth \$11.3m), and Kazakhstan (1 project worth \$9.5m), while Kyrgyzstan has not had any projects in this sector.

Other projects (which include social services such as relief, conferences, community services, and community centers) are also financed in Central Asia, with the exception of Uzbekistan. The Bank has approved \$10.8m worth of funding for 2 projects in Turkmenistan, \$2m for 5 projects in Kyrgyzstan, \$0.8m for 4 projects in Tajikistan, and only \$0.1m for 1 project in Kazakhstan. Small amounts are also allocated for public administration and trade-related projects. As we see, the IDB has approved funding for 1 project worth \$3m in Kazakhstan, 4 projects worth \$1m in Uzbekistan, and 3 projects worth \$0.6m in Tajikistan. As for Turkmenistan, it has not had any IDB-financed projects of this kind.

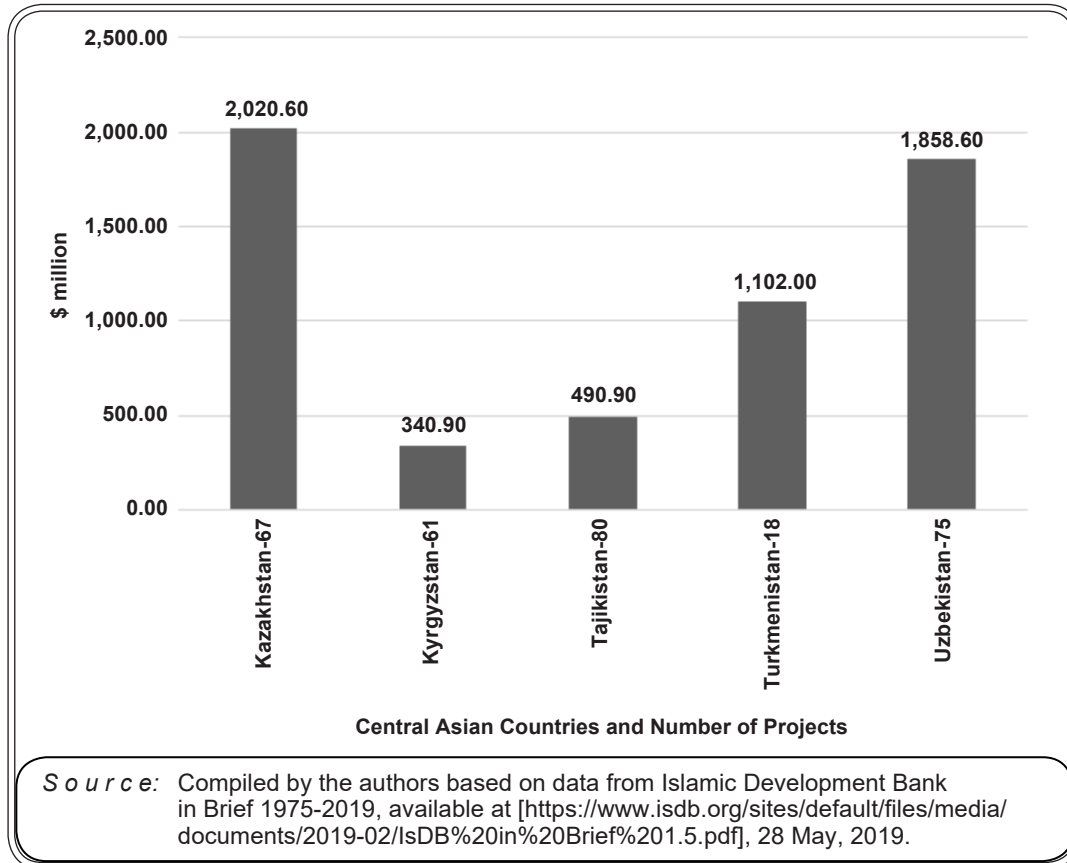
Thus, we can draw the conclusion that the top recipients of IDB Group funding in the Central Asia Region are the transport sector (35 projects worth \$1,388m) and agriculture (45 projects worth \$1,318m), followed by energy (29 projects worth \$797.5m), finance (80 projects worth \$792.5m), healthcare (32 projects worth \$499.8m), education (31 projects worth \$134.8m), water, sanitation, and urban development (6 projects worth \$131.1m), and industry and mining (14 projects worth \$100.8m). A relatively small amount is allocated to projects in information and communications (31 projects worth \$21.9m) and real estate (1 project worth \$10m in only one of the five countries). Along with these key sectors, some funding has also been provided for social services (12 projects worth \$13.7m) and for public administration and trade-related projects (9 projects worth \$4.8m, which is the smallest amount of all IDB project approvals in the region).

Figure 1 shows the total amount of IDB project financing in the CA republics for the entire period of cooperation.

As we see from Fig. 1, Kazakhstan is in the lead with 67 projects worth a total of \$2,020.6m, including 49 completed and 18 ongoing projects. Although Uzbekistan joined the IDB later than other CA countries, the Bank's total financing for that country is just short of that approved for Kazakhstan and amounts to \$1,858.6m. During the 15 years of cooperation with Uzbekistan, it has approved 75 projects, 38 of which have already been completed and 37 are still in progress. In Turkmenistan, there are only 18 IDB-financed projects (13 completed and 5 ongoing), but the total amount of funding for these projects is \$1,102m, which makes the country the third-largest recipient among the five countries. It is followed by Tajikistan, where the Bank has approved the largest number of

Figure 1

**IDB Project Financing in the Central Asian Countries as of 2018**



projects (80 projects, including 57 completed and 23 ongoing), but they are worth a total of only \$490.9m. As for Kyrgyzstan, it gets the least amount of funding among the CA countries. Over the entire period, the IDB has approved \$340.9m worth of funding for 61 projects in Kyrgyzstan, including 37 completed and 24 still in progress.

Table 2 shows IDB project financing by sector in the CA countries from 2014 to 2018. Sectors where there were no approved projects in that period were not included in the table.

We find that in 2014 the IDB did not approve any projects in Tajikistan or Turkmenistan; the smallest amount of funding was allocated to Kazakhstan (\$0.3m for finance, trade, and public administration); then comes Kyrgyzstan with \$0.05m for projects in finance, trade, and public administration, \$0.3m for agriculture, and \$21.3m for transport; and the largest amount in 2014 went to Uzbekistan for projects in three sectors, including \$17.4m for healthcare, \$44.5m for education, and \$189.6m for agriculture (the maximum for the year).

In 2015, Kazakhstan topped the list of CA countries with \$70m for public-private partnership (PPP) projects. Uzbekistan was in second place with \$57.5m for urban development and services, followed by Kyrgyzstan with a total of \$37.8m for energy / information and communications, transport, and water resources and environment. Tajikistan in 2015 received the smallest amount of funding: \$17.5m for energy / information and communications. Turkmenistan had no approved projects for the second year running.

Table 2

Sectoral Distribution of IDB Project Financing  
in the Central Asian Countries from 2014 to 2018 (\$m)

Country	Sector	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Kazakhstan	Public-private partnership (PPP)		70			
	Transport			273	328.5	
	Agriculture			249.9		
	Education			0.2		
	Finance, trade, and public administration	0.3				
Kyrgyzstan	Energy / Information and communications		12.5		12.5	12.5
	Transport	21.3	12			
	Agriculture	0.3		20		
	Water, sanitation, and urban development	0.2	13.3			
	Finance, trade, and public administration	0.05				
Tajikistan	Energy / Information and communications		17.5		17.5	17.5
	Transport			20		
	Healthcare					23
Turkmenistan	Energy / Information and communications			700	623	
Uzbekistan	Urban development and services		57.5			
	Agriculture	189.6				
	Rural development				113	
	Education	44.5				
	Healthcare	17.4				93
<b>Central Asia total</b>		<b>273.45</b>	<b>182.8</b>	<b>1,263.1</b>	<b>1,094.5</b>	<b>146</b>
<p><i>Sources:</i> Islamic Development Bank Annual Report 2014, available at [<a href="https://www.isdb.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2018-12/IsDB-Annual%20Report-1435H%282014%29.pdf">https://www.isdb.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2018-12/IsDB-Annual%20Report-1435H%282014%29.pdf</a>], 17 February, 2019; Islamic Development Bank Annual Report 2015, available at [<a href="https://www.isdb.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2018-12/IsDB-Annual%20Report-1436H%282015%29.pdf">https://www.isdb.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2018-12/IsDB-Annual%20Report-1436H%282015%29.pdf</a>], 17 February, 2019; Islamic Development Bank Annual Report 2016, available at [<a href="https://www.isdb.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2018-12/IsDB-Annual%20Report-1437H%282016%29.pdf">https://www.isdb.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2018-12/IsDB-Annual%20Report-1437H%282016%29.pdf</a>], 17 February, 2019; Islamic Development Bank Annual Report 2017, available at [<a href="https://www.isdb.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2018-12/IsDB-Annual%20Report-1438H%282017%29.pdf">https://www.isdb.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2018-12/IsDB-Annual%20Report-1438H%282017%29.pdf</a>], 17 February, 2019; "Islamic Development Bank Annual Report 2018," available at [<a href="https://www.isdb.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2019-04/usb%20Annual%20report%20English%202018_softproof.pdf">https://www.isdb.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2019-04/usb%20Annual%20report%20English%202018_softproof.pdf</a>], 28 May, 2019.</p>						

The amounts of IDB project funding approved in 2016 for Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan were sufficiently large, namely, \$700m for energy / information and communications in Turkmenistan and

\$523.1m for transport, agriculture, and education in Kazakhstan. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan received \$20m each for projects in agriculture and transport, respectively. In Uzbekistan, there was no financing that year.

The year 2017 was an active one for all countries in the region, because projects in different areas were approved in all of them. However, the amounts of funding differed significantly. For example, Turkmenistan received \$623m for the development of energy / information and communications, while Tajikistan received \$17.5m, and Kyrgyzstan only \$12.5m, which is dozens of times less. Kazakhstan obtained \$328.5m for transport projects, and Uzbekistan \$113m for rural development.

In 2018, there was no IDB financing in Kazakhstan or Turkmenistan, although the Bank approved a number of projects in the other three countries. As in the previous year, it allocated \$12.5m to Kyrgyzstan and \$17.5m to Tajikistan for the development of energy / information and communications. Tajikistan received \$23m, and Uzbekistan \$93m for healthcare.

The 14th Islamic Summit Conference, held in Saudi Arabia on 31 May, 2019, by the OIC member states, commended the important role of the IDB Group in promoting the development of the OIC countries, strengthening their cooperation, enhancing Islamic finance, developing infrastructure, and promoting the private sector, and also noted the IDB's new development model. Amid the fragile conditions experienced by some member countries, the Bank should have more financial resources to meet their social development needs. In this regard, the Conference called upon the member countries to significantly increase the IDB's capital in order to resolve these problems.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, in the near future one can expect a significant increase in IDB financing in member countries, including Central Asia.

## *Conclusion*

Over the years of cooperation, the activities of the IDB Group in Central Asia have expanded significantly, which shows that the CA countries and the Bank itself are interested in them. The IDB has filled an important niche in the region and has been working to promote successful socio-economic development in the CA republics to strengthen integration processes and develop their relations among themselves and with other member countries.

In the course of research, we have come to the following conclusions:

1. The Central Asia Region is an important area in the IDB strategy. For example, annual meetings of the IDB Board of Governors are held in countries of the region; memoranda of understanding have been signed; member country partnership strategies have been prepared for Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan; a separate group of CA countries has been established within the IDB; a Special Program for Central Asia has been developed; and a regional office has been opened in the region. All of this helps to optimize, improve, and accelerate the partnership.
2. The main type of operations is project financing, primarily in sectors such as transport, energy, and agriculture. The construction of roads has allowed the virtually landlocked CA countries to reach out to other regions and member countries. Oil and gas transportation corridors help to develop regional cooperation and to transfer excess energy to energy-deficient countries. Agricultural projects have a positive impact on socio-economic develop-

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<sup>12</sup> See: *Draft Final Communiqué of the 14th Islamic Summit Conference (Session of Hand in Hand Toward the Future)*, Makkah Al-Mukarramah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 31 May, 2019, available at [<https://www.isdb.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2019-06/Draft%20Final%20Communique%20English.pdf>], 5 September, 2019.



ment in the CA countries, helping to boost agricultural production, improve living standards, and create new jobs.

3. Project funding approvals differ significantly from one CA country to another. The largest amount in the region goes to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, although the latter joined the IDB later than the rest. These two countries are more developed economically and thus more attractive to the IDB. For example, owing to its large population, Uzbekistan needs more investment in the social sector, which has led to the rapid development of its cooperation with the IDB and brought it to the top of the list. Turkmenistan ranks third with projects in energy and transport, while in other sectors there are virtually no projects being implemented. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have received the least amount of funding because of the unstable political situation in these countries and their weak economy. When approving projects, the IDB considers not only their social and economic importance, but also the member country's ability to pay back the money allocated to their implementation. Under the Bank's Articles of Agreement, profit from investment is not its primary purpose and most of its funding is virtually interest-free, which is why it is necessary to avoid risk in approving any financial operation.
4. In the period from 2014 to 2018, the IDB approved projects in the CA countries, but in 2014 and 2015 there were no major projects, which is probably connected with the economic crisis of those years and the suspension of the Bank's operations to avoid risks. The amount of funding increased sharply in 2016 and 2017, when the economic situation stabilized and major projects were proposed and approved in the energy sector, transport, and agriculture. Thus, we see that the decline and increase in IDB funding is directly related to economic and political stability in the member countries, because these factors are the main guarantee of timely implementation of projects, punctual payments, and use of results for their intended purpose.

The IDB seeks to help the CA countries implement their national strategies, and its overall activity has been of great benefit to them. At present, work is underway to implement existing agreements with the IDB, strategies and programs, while projects that have been completed or are at various stages of completion will certainly make a significant contribution to socio-economic progress in the CA countries and provide them with new opportunities.

# PRODUCT INNOVATION AS THE CAUSE OF EXPORT PROPENSITY IN THE CAUCASUS: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FOR ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN AND GEORGIA

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## ABSTRACT

**D**espite the extensiveness and abundance of empirical research in the existing literature, there is no clear view or position with respect to the role of innovation in exporting, especially regarding the heterogeneous impacts of different types of innovations (product, process, organizational and marketing innovations) on exporting. The objective of this article is the empirical verification of innovation as the cause of export propensity in firms from the South Caucasian countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia). The empirical investigation is based on the data collected by the Enterprise Survey (World Bank Microdata), conducted among companies located in the

Southern Caucasus. Seven hundred and seventy-six firms were selected through an appropriate procedure, including 279 from Armenia, 236 from Azerbaijan, and 261 from Georgia. Logit regression models were applied to determine the chances of exporting, depending on the type of innovations implemented by each company. The results of binomial logistic regression analysis demonstrate that product innovations play an important role in explaining SMEs' export propensity in the South Caucasian countries. Moreover, the likelihood of export is seen to be positively related to the share of foreign capital in company structure. The general level of economy innovativeness in the Cau-

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casus is low, but the share of foreign ownership in companies under consideration was relatively high, so the foreign investors probably played a key role in the innovations implemented by local ventures. It is most likely due to Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia going through an early stage in economic transition, in which soft innovations (organizational and marketing innova-

tions) lag behind hard innovations. There is an evident lack of empirical studies of the role of innovation in the development of export in emerging countries, including the South Caucasian countries, and it still remains largely underexplored; therefore, the novelty of this research lies in the exploration of the Caucasian countries as emerging markets.

**KEYWORDS:** *innovation, export propensity, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan.*

## *Introduction*

Despite the vast amount of international economics and international business literature and an abundance of empirical research, there is no clear view or position regarding the role of innovation in exporting or the more general process of the company's internationalization.<sup>1</sup> The numerous empirical attempts to verify this relationship have been unable to fill this research gap. The earliest empirical studies were conducted in developed economies (North America, Western Europe), and later the attention of researchers focused on emerging markets, mainly China,<sup>2</sup> and more recently—on Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>3</sup> Most of emerging markets still remain unexplored, and the extension of empirical research and a test of the hypotheses from the well-developed economies to the Southern Caucasus is needed and anticipated. Larisa Korganashvili noticed that this particular region lacks sufficient innovation for a comprehensive integration of its countries' foreign trade with the global economic system.<sup>4</sup> Kiss, Danis and Cavusgil note that the problem lies in the extent of applicability of research results from developed economies to the realities of emerging markets,<sup>5</sup> so there is an evident lack of empirical studies on emerging countries, including the South Caucasian countries (SCCs).

In a recent study, Edeh, Obodoechi, and Ramos-Hidalgo<sup>6</sup> emphasize that the heterogeneous impacts of different innovation types on export performance, especially in the case of small busi-

<sup>1</sup> See: J.P. Damijan, C. Kostevc, S. Polanec, "From Innovation to Exporting or Vice Versa?" *The World Economy*, Vol. 33, No. 3, 2010, pp. 374-398, available at [<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9701.2010.01260>].

<sup>2</sup> See: A. Cieřlik, Y. Qu, T. Qu, "Innovations and Export Performance: Firm Level Evidence from China," *Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review*, Vol. 6, No. 4, 2018, pp. 27-47, available at [<https://doi.org/10.15678/EBER.2018.060402>].

<sup>3</sup> See: S. Bertarelli, C. Lodi, "Innovation and Exporting: A Study on Eastern European Union Firms," *Sustainability*, Vol. 10, No. 10, 2018, p. 3607, available at [<https://doi.org/10.3390/su10103607>].

<sup>4</sup> See: L. Korganashvili, "Georgia in the World Merchandise Trade: Main Trends and Problems of Development," *European Journal of Economics and Business Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 2017, pp. 52-60, available at [<https://doi.org/10.2478/ejes-2018-0058>].

<sup>5</sup> See: A.N. Kiss, W.M. Danis, S. Cavusgil, "International Entrepreneurship Research in Emerging Economies: A Critical Review and Research Agenda," *Journal of Business Venturing*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2012, pp. 266-290, available at [<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2011.09.004>].

<sup>6</sup> See: J.N. Edeh, D.N. Obodoechi, E. Ramos-Hidalgo, "Effects of Innovation Strategies on Export Performance: New Empirical Evidence from Developing Market Firms," *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, Vol. 158, 2020, pp. 120-167, available at [<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2020.120167>].

nesses, and in particular in developing countries or emerging markets, remain largely underexplored. The novelty of this research lies in the exploration of the South Caucasian countries as emerging markets, which are seldom explored in the literature on the subject of international economics. The role of innovation differs in the times of economic revivals or booms and economic slowdowns or crises.<sup>7</sup> The results of prior empirical research have prompted us to pose the following two research questions:

- RQ1:** What is the role of different types of innovations for exporting by firms from the three South Caucasian countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia)?
- RQ2:** What is the role of foreign capital in teaching companies from these three South Caucasian countries to innovate by developing their export activities?

The objective of this article is the empirical verification of innovation as the cause of export propensity in firms from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia as three countries of the Caucasus, which is explored as a distinct region with specific characteristics. We will investigate these issues on a more appropriate research sample from these countries, one that is more uniformly distributed and includes all companies (of all sizes: micro, small, medium-sized and large, as well as at early and slow stages of internationalization). We will also focus on various types of innovation, trying to explore this research gap in detail.

## Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Innovation has been one of the key issues in the abundant international business literature. Innovation-related models (i-models), which are one of the oldest approaches to explaining internationalization, introduced by Bilkey and Tesar, treat it as an innovation.<sup>8</sup> For the last two decades there have been various empirical studies exploring the role of innovation in exporting. Numerous theoretical concepts and empirical investigations treat this relationship as a bipolar one.<sup>9</sup> It means that,

- first of all, innovation can be the result of export activities, which means that firms learn to innovate by exporting. Thus, exporting or internationalization stimulate companies' innovative behavior due to different reasons.
- Second, innovation can make a contribution to exporting, which means that innovation is the cause of exporting or internationalization, and makes the latter processes faster, better or more intense, especially in the case of technology-based or high-tech "born global" companies.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See: J. Kaszowska-Mojša, "Innovation Strategies of Manufacturing Companies during Expansions and Slowdowns," *Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review*, Vol. 8, No. 4, 2020, pp. 47-66, available at [<https://doi.org/10.15678/EBER.2020.080403>].

<sup>8</sup> See: W.J. Bilkey, G. Tesar, "The Export Behavior of Smaller-Sized Wisconsin Manufacturing Firms," *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 8, 1977, pp. 93-98.

<sup>9</sup> See: S. Tavassoli, "The Role of Product Innovation on Export Behavior of Firms: Is It Innovation Input Or Innovation Output That Matters?" *European Journal of Innovation Management*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 2018, pp. 294-314, available at [<https://doi.org/10.1108/EJIM-12-2016-0124>].

<sup>10</sup> See: K. Wach, "Innovative Behavior of High-Tech Internationalized Firms: Survey Results from Poland," *Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 2016, pp. 153-165, available at [<https://doi.org/10.15678/EBER.2016.040311>].

In the existing literature there is no unequivocal standpoint on the relations between innovation and exporting. Despite the abundant literature and numerous empirical investigations, Zuchella and Siano observed that “the links between innovation and internationalization tend to be less clear.”<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, we will apply the latter approach, claiming that innovation impacts exporting.

Innovations and technological progress are important for company development and the growth of economies, especially in the era of economic globalization. Based on his extensive empirical studies for Italian exporters, Basile proved that innovation is a key factor that explains the intensification of exporting<sup>12</sup>. He also observed that innovators are better at trading goods abroad than non-innovators, and the latter are forced to rely solely on the fluctuations in exchange rates to obtain profits.

There are various classifications and typologies of innovations. Schumpeter identified five forms of innovations, namely

- (i) product innovation,
- (ii) process innovation,
- (iii) marketing innovation,
- (iv) organizational innovation and
- (v) supply innovation.<sup>13</sup>

Whereas the *Oslo Manual*, the most popular classification applied in various empirical studies, mentions only the first four of them.

Dohse and Niebuhr stress that there are “only few studies that investigate the different impact of distinct kinds of innovation on exports, and the evidence provided so far appears rather inconclusive.”<sup>14</sup> This encouraged us to research the impact of various types of innovations on exporting in the countries of the Southern Caucasus.

Product innovations and process innovations are sometimes collectively referred to as technological innovations. Cassiman, Golovko and Martínez-Ros,<sup>15</sup> who used a panel of Spanish manufacturing firms, as well as Becker and Egger,<sup>16</sup> who used secondary data from Germany in their empirical investigations, confirmed that product innovations propel export propensity, whereas process innovations have no important effect on exporting. Recently, Dohse and Niebuhr,<sup>17</sup> who also used German data, found that incremental innovations have a significant positive impact on export propensity, whereas radical innovations only affect exporting with a time lag. On the contrary, Damijan, Kostevc and Polanec<sup>18</sup> using panel microeconomic data for Slovenian firms found no evidence that product or process innovations increase export propensity. Studies of literature, and especially the review of various empirical studies, resulted in the following hypotheses to be tested:

<sup>11</sup> A. Zuchella, A. Siano, “Internationalization and Innovation as Resources for SME Growth in Foreign Markets: A Focus on Textile and Clothing Firms in the Campania Region,” *International Studies of Management and Organization*, Vol. 44, No. 1, 2014, pp. 21-41, available at [<https://doi.org/10.2753/IMO0020-8825440102>].

<sup>12</sup> See: R. Basile, “Export Behavior of Italian Manufacturing Firms Over the Nineties: The Role of Innovation,” *Research Policy*, Vol. 30, No. 8, 2001, pp. 1185-1201.

<sup>13</sup> See: J.A. Schumpeter, *The Theory of Economic Development: An Inquiry into Profits, Capital, Credit, Interest and the Business Cycle*, Transl. into English by R. Opie, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, London, 1934/2008.

<sup>14</sup> D. Dohse, A. Niebuhr, “How Different Kinds of Innovation Affect Exporting,” *Economics Letters*, Vol. 163, 2018, p. 183, available at [<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econlet.2017.12.017>].

<sup>15</sup> See: B. Cassiman, E. Golovko, E. Martínez-Ros, “Innovation, Exports and Productivity,” *International Journal of Industrial Organization*, Vol. 28, No. 4, 2010, pp. 372-376, available at [<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijindorg.2010.03.005>].

<sup>16</sup> See: S. Becker, P. Egger, “Endogenous Product Versus Process Innovation and Firm’s Propensity to Export,” *Empirical Economics*, Vol. 44, 2013, pp. 1-26, available at [<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00181-009-0322-6>].

<sup>17</sup> See: D. Dohse, A. Niebuhr, op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> See: J.P. Damijan, C. Kostevc, S. Polanec, op. cit.

**H1:** Product innovations have a significant positive impact on propensity to export in firms from the Southern Caucasus.

**H2:** Process innovations have a significant positive impact on propensity to export in firms from the Southern Caucasus.

Unlike technological innovations, referred to as hard innovations, there is relatively little empirical evidence in literature on the relationship between soft innovations and exporting. Non-technological (soft) innovations comprise organizational innovations and marketing innovations. D'Attoma and Ieva<sup>19</sup> urged that treating all kinds of marketing innovations as innovations of the same type, as well as being similar to technological innovations that lead to similar consequences, could be misleading. Based on German data, they empirically found that innovations in product packaging and design are positively related, while promotion innovations are negatively related to the company's performance.

On the sample of 573 Swedish firms Azar and Ciabuschi<sup>20</sup> empirically discovered that organizational innovations enhance export performance both directly and indirectly, but only by propelling technological innovations. Using a sample of 299 firms from three countries from the emerging South American economies (Colombia, Peru, Chile) Pino *et al.*<sup>21</sup> found that organizational innovations have a greater impact on market performance than marketing innovations.

It is also important to note that non-technological innovations (especially marketing innovations) are seldom compared with export dynamics in empirical studies, which is why we attempted to fill this research gap by dealing with this issue. Thus, we will test the following research hypotheses:

**H3:** Organizational innovations have a significant positive impact on propensity to export in firms from the South Caucasus.

**H4:** Marketing innovations have a significant positive impact on propensity to export in firms from the South Caucasus.

The countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus are still undergoing economic transformation and are considered economies in transition, nonetheless, these countries have been actively increasing their international trade since the early 1990s, mainly by increasing mineral export. As Amirbek, Makhanov, Tazhibayev and Anlamassova observed,<sup>22</sup> trade between the Central Asian countries has been and remains negligible, whereas a much larger share in foreign trade of Central Asian countries is taken up by the EU, China and Russia. The main factors hindering economic cooperation in Central Asia are

- (i) weak institutions that are not conducive to the development of the private sector and entrepreneurship, and
- (ii) poorly developed infrastructure and innovation.

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<sup>19</sup> See: I. D'Attoma, M. Ieva, "Determinants of Technological Innovation Success and Failure: Does Marketing Innovation Matter?" *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 91, 2020, pp. 64-81, available at [<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2020.08.015>].

<sup>20</sup> See: G. Azar, F. Ciabuschi, "Organizational Innovation, Technological Innovation, and Export Performance: The Effects of Innovation Radicalness and Extensiveness," *International Business Review*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 2017, pp. 324-336, available at [<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2016.09.002>].

<sup>21</sup> See: C. Pino, C. Felzensztein, A.M. Zwerg-Villegas, L. Arias-Bolzmann, "Non-Technological Innovations: Market Performance of Exporting Firms in South America," *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 69, No. 10, October 2016, pp. 4385-4393, available at [<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.03.061>].

<sup>22</sup> See: A. Amirbek, K. Makhanov, R. Tazhibayev, M. Anlamassova, "The Central Asian Countries in the Global Economy: The Challenges of Economic Integration," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 21, Issue 1, 2020, pp. 90-101, available at [<https://doi.org/10.37178/ca-c.20.1.09>].

These conditions add further significance to the empirical study on the interdependence of innovation and foreign trade, and thus allow this article to fill the research gap.

Very recently Bigos and Michalik<sup>23</sup> have published their empirical results for 906 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) from 19 post-Communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus, including businesses from Armenia (9), Azerbaijan (25) and Georgia (65). Their research sample from the Southern Caucasus was relatively small (99 firms) and included only SMEs, thus, it is impossible to generalize their results over all of the companies from this region. They proved that process and organizational innovations stimulate the exports of “born globals” (firms whose share of exports in the total sales exceeded 25% during the first three years), while there was no such empirical confirmation for marketing innovations. What is more, there was no statistical significance for product innovations.

## Research Methodology

The empirical study is based on data obtained from the Enterprise Survey, which covered the period of 2008-2019 and was conducted jointly by the World Bank Group, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the European Investment Bank (EIB), and the European Commission (EC). The survey sample includes SMEs operating in the South Caucasian region, namely, in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. The survey process was supported by representatives of several business organizations and government agencies, and respondents were typically senior managers.

Initially, 3,514 business entities from the SME sector were selected for the study from the public database available. Subsequently, we eliminated the entities that did not have complete information on domestic and foreign sales or specific types of innovations, which consequently resulted in the remaining 776 entities that were selected for the empirical analysis, with 36.0% of firms being from Armenia (279 firms), 30.4%—from Azerbaijan (236 firms), and 33.6%—from Georgia (261 firms).

The binomial logistic regression model—also known as the logit model—was used to verify the previously stated hypotheses. Its advantage is that the dependent variable (Y) may take dichotomous measures, depending on exogenous (independent) variables, which, in turn, may be quantitative or qualitative<sup>24</sup>:

$$Y = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{phenomenon occurs} \\ 0, & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases} \quad (1)$$

Moreover, logistic regression is usually recommended when the assumption of a normal distribution of variables cannot be met<sup>25</sup>. The estimation of logit model parameters is based on the maximum likelihood method<sup>26</sup>. Finally, the logistic regression model can take the following form<sup>27</sup>:

<sup>23</sup> See: K. Bigos, A. Michalik, “The Influence of Innovation on International New Ventures’ Exporting in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia Countries,” *Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 2020, pp. 47-63, available at [<https://doi.org/10.15678/EBER.2020.080303>].

<sup>24</sup> See: J. Hair, R.E. Anderson, R.L. Tatham, W.C. Black, *Multivariate Data Analysis with Readings*, Macmillan Publishing Company, New York, 1998.

<sup>25</sup> See: *Ibidem*.

<sup>26</sup> See: D.W. Hosmer, S. Lemeshow, R.X. Sturdivant, *Applied Logistic Regression*, John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken, 2013.

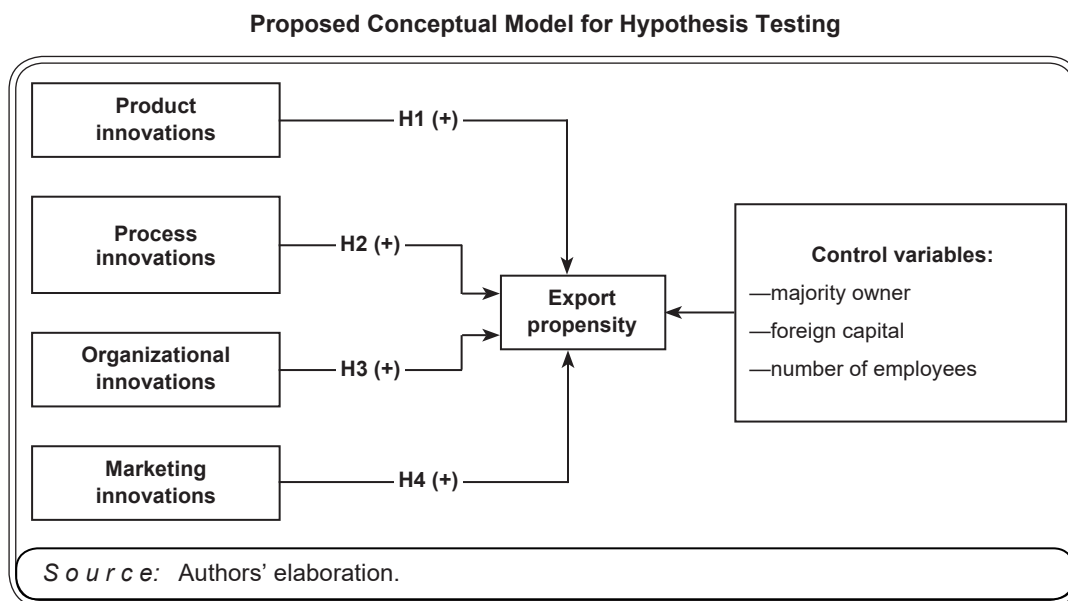
<sup>27</sup> See: P. McCullagh, J.A. Nelder, *Generalized Linear Models*, Springer US, Boston, 1989; S. Sperandei, “Understanding Logistic Regression Analysis,” *Biochemia Medica*, Vol. 24, 2014, pp. 12-18, available at [<https://doi.org/10.11613/bm.2014.003>].

$$\pi = \frac{\exp(\beta_0 + \sum_{i=1}^k \beta_i x_i)}{1 + \exp(\beta_0 + \sum_{i=1}^k \beta_i x_i)} \quad (2)$$

$$\ln\left(\frac{\pi}{1-\pi}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \dots + \beta_k x_k \quad (3)$$

The proposed research model (see Fig. 1) suggests a positive relationship between the four main types of innovation<sup>28</sup> and export propensity. It means that firms implementing product innovations (H1), process innovations (H2), organizational innovations (H3), and marketing innovations (H4) are more likely to export.

Figure 1



We used a total of ten variables in the research model (see Table 1), where the dependent variable represented firms' export propensity. Independent variables include four types of innovations.<sup>29</sup> We also included three control variables: share of the majority owner, foreign capital, and the number of employees. The research model consists of nominal (dummy) variables and continuous variables. The basic characteristics of the research sample are as follows:

- As for export propensity (d1), the sample contained 6.96% of exporters.
- The share of the so-called majority owner (c1) ranged from 9% to 100%, while the average share was 84.96% (std. dev. 24.84%).
- 2.45% of investigated firms had at least 50% of foreign capital (c2).
- The average number of employees (c3) in investigated firms equaled 17.31 (std. dev. 27.93 employees), whereas the smallest company employed 1 and the largest—220 staff members.

<sup>28</sup> See: *Oslo Manual: Guidelines for Collecting and Interpreting Innovation Data*, 3rd Edition, OECD, Paris, 2005, available at [[https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/science-and-technology/oslo-manual\\_9789264013100-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/science-and-technology/oslo-manual_9789264013100-en)].

<sup>29</sup> See: *Ibidem*.



- Product innovations (i1) were implemented by 9.28% of investigated firms.
- Process innovations (i2) were implemented by 6.35% of investigated firms.
- Organizational innovations (i3) were implemented by 4.53% of investigated firms.
- Marketing innovations (i4) were implemented by 6.87% of investigated firms.

*Table 1*

**List of Variables Used in the Calculations**

<b>Id</b>	<b>Variables</b>	<b>Measurement</b>	<b>Category</b>
<b>Dependent Variable</b>			
<b>d1</b>	<b>Export propensity</b>	<b>1 = export, 0 = no export</b>	<b>Dummy variable</b>
<b>Control Variables</b>			
<b>c1</b>	<b>Share held by Majority Owner</b>	<b>in percentage</b>	<b>Continuous variable</b>
<b>c2</b>	<b>Foreign capital</b>	<b>1 = at least 50% share of foreign capital, 0 = otherwise</b>	<b>Dummy variable</b>
<b>c3</b>	<b>Number of employees</b>	<b>in number</b>	<b>Continuous variable</b>
<b>Independent Variables</b>			
<b>i1</b>	<b>Product innovations</b>	<b>1 = firm introduced new products/services over the last 3 years, 0 = otherwise</b>	<b>Dummy variable</b>
<b>i2</b>	<b>Process innovations</b>	<b>1 = firm introduced new production/supply methods over the last 3 years, 0 = otherwise</b>	<b>Dummy variable</b>
<b>i3</b>	<b>Organizational innovations</b>	<b>1 = firm introduced new organizational/management practices or structures over the last 3 years, 0 = otherwise</b>	<b>Dummy variable</b>
<b>i4</b>	<b>Marketing innovations</b>	<b>1 = firm introduced new marketing methods over the last 3 years, 0 = otherwise</b>	<b>Dummy variable</b>
<i>Source:</i> Authors' elaboration based on OECD materials (2005).			

Table 2 demonstrates that there is no strong correlation between the independent and control variables used in the analysis. The highest correlation exists between variables representing organizational innovations and marketing innovations ( $r = -0.557$ ). In contrast, the lowest correlation exists between variables representing the number of employees and process innovations ( $r = 0.000$ ).

In the proposed conceptual model (see Fig. 1), export propensity is the dependent variable, which is measured dichotomously, where number 1 was assigned to exporting companies, and number 0—to non-exporters. The study included three control variables and four independent variables. In reference to control variables, we presumed that the majority owner share (c1) can impact the implementation of innovation in each firm. We also control the presence of foreign capital (c2) (1 = at least 50% share of foreign capital, 0 = other) and the number of employees in each venture (c3).

Table 2

Correlation Matrix for Control and Independent Variables

Id	c1	c2	c3	i1	i2	i3	i4
c1	1						
c2	-0.063	1					
c3	-0.051	-0.008	1				
i1	-0.236	0.093	-0.011	1			
i2	-0.145	-0.007	0.000	0.483	1		
i3	-0.093	0.006	0.076	0.380	0.480	1	
i4	-0.144	-0.010	0.027	0.354	0.455	0.557	1

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Enterprise Survey (N = 776).

In reference to independent variables, we took into consideration four types of innovations distinguished by OECD<sup>30</sup>:

- **product innovations** (i1) refer to the introduction of a product or service that is new or substantially improved in terms of its characteristics or use;
- **process innovations** (i2) refer to the implementation of a new or substantially improved production or supply method;
- **organizational innovations** (i3) refer mainly to the implementation of a new organizational method in operational procedures adopted by the company in the workplace setup or relations with the environment;
- **marketing innovations** (i4) primarily refer to the implementation of a new marketing method, which involves significant changes in product design, packaging, distribution, promotion, or pricing strategy.

## Findings

We used PQStat v.1.6.8. software to construct the binomial logistic regression model. A properly adjusted logistic regression model should mainly meet two criteria: (1) the likelihood ratio test, estimated with the maximum probability, should be statistically significant, and (2) the Hosmer-Lemeshow test should be statistically insignificant<sup>31</sup>.

In our model, the likelihood test was statistically significant (chi-square = 30.391,  $df = 7$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), which is the desired result. In addition, Hosmer-Lemeshow test is statistically insignificant (chi-square = 6.344,  $df = 8$ ,  $p = 0.609$ ). Thus, the diagnostic tests allowed us to interpret the logit model.

Based on the binomial logistic regression model (see Table 3), we can observe that all the control variables are significant. Although the variables describing the share of the majority owner in the

<sup>30</sup> See: Oslo Manual: Guidelines for Collecting and Interpreting Innovation Data.

<sup>31</sup> See: J. Hair, R.E. Anderson, R.L. Tatham, W.C. Black, op. cit.

venture and the number of employees are both statistically significant, they play no crucial role in explaining export propensity in the South Caucasian countries as their odd ratios are close to 1. A different situation occurs about foreign capital where we can observe that firms with at least 50% of foreign capital share are almost 4.2-times more likely to export.

*Table 3*

**Binomial Logistic Regression Model  
(Dependent Variables = Export Propensity)**

Variables	Coeff.	Std. Err.	Wald	Sig	Odd ratio
<b>c1: Share held by majority owner</b>	-0.013	0.005	6.158	0.013	0.987
<b>c2: Foreign capital</b>	1.432	0.568	6.362	0.011	4.187
<b>c3: Number of employees</b>	0.008	0.004	4.918	0.027	1.008
<b>i1: Product innovations</b>	0.949	0.447	4.513	0.034	2.582
<b>i2: Process innovations</b>	0.195	0.600	0.105	0.746	1.215
<b>i3: Organizational innovations</b>	0.247	0.676	0.134	0.715	1.280
<b>i4: Marketing innovations</b>	-0.105	0.617	0.029	0.866	0.901
<b>Constant</b>	-1.960	0.465	17.725	0.000	0.141

*Source:* Authors' elaboration based on (N = 776).

In terms of independent variables, it turned out that only one out of four types of innovations impacts export propensity. The results of our research confirm that the likelihood of export is 2.582 times higher in firms where product innovations are implemented than in those where there are no product innovations (coeff. = 0.949,  $p = 0.034$ ). Thanks to that, we can only confirm the H1 hypothesis. The logistic regression model has not confirmed the statistical significance for process innovations (coeff. = 0.195,  $p = 0.746$ ), organizational innovations (coeff. = 0.247,  $p = 0.715$ ), and marketing innovations (coeff. = -0.105,  $p = 0.866$ ) as predictors of export propensity, hence hypotheses H2, H3, and H4 should be rejected.

## Discussion

Our empirical calculations proved that product innovations have a significant positive impact on propensity to export in firms from the Southern Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia). Our results are in line with previous empirical evidence for Spanish manufacturing firm by Cassiman, Golovko and Martínez-Ros<sup>32</sup> and for German firms by Becker and Egger.<sup>33</sup> This is an expected result from the viewpoint of existing literature. The general level of innovativeness of Caucasian economies is low, but the share of foreign ownership in investigated firms was relatively high, thus, we assume that the foreign investors probably played a key role in innovations implemented by local ventures.

<sup>32</sup> See: B. Cassiman, E. Golovko, E. Martínez-Ros, op. cit.

<sup>33</sup> See: S. Becker, P. Egger, op. cit.

Our results do not support the impact of process, organization and marketing innovations on export propensity of the South Caucasian firms. We need to underscore that there are also opposite cases in literature, which means that some researchers have found proof of these relations. Based on a sample of 19 post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and Southern Caucasus, Bigos and Michalik proved that process and organizational innovations stimulate exporting activities of international new ventures. Nonetheless, our empirical results seem to be in line with most of the empirical evidence from around the globe. In any case, the existing literature is non-conclusive, which means there is little empirical evidence, and there is a need to continue further empirical investigations.

## *Conclusions*

Innovation, innovativeness, innovative resources and knowledge transfer and absorption are considered a major driver of internationalization of firms, both large corporations and small and medium-sized enterprises, which operate both in traditional labor-intensive industries and in high-tech industries, or at least in knowledge-intensive industries. Literature review reveals that both knowledge<sup>34</sup> and innovation<sup>35</sup> play a key role not only in supporting the propensity to export, but also impact export performance.

The conducted research confirms one out of four hypotheses. Hypothesis H1 posited that the implementation of product innovations by venture increases their likelihood to export, which has been confirmed. The binomial logistic regression model did not confirm hypotheses H2, H3 and H4. It turned out that process, organizational and marketing innovations do not play a crucial role in export propensity in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia (variables were not statistically significant). Most probably, these countries are in their early stage in economic transition, in which soft innovations lag behind hard innovations.

Just like every empirical study, this one is not free of limitations. The research sample included SMEs heavily different in terms of sectors of the economy and particular industries, as well as location and country of origin. There is a limited number of studies measuring the influence of SMEs' innovativeness in the South Caucasian countries on their export propensity. Further research should account for, among other things, the sectoral and industry diversification of venture activity as one of the variables influencing the export-oriented—or even global—attitude of managers towards export.

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<sup>34</sup> See: A. Głodowska, M. Maciejewski, K. Wach, "How Entrepreneurial Orientation Stimulates Different Types of Knowledge in the Internationalisation Process of Firms from Poland?" *Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2019, available at [<https://doi.org/10.15678/EBER.2019.070104>].

<sup>35</sup> See: K. Bigos, A. Michalik, op. cit.

## CHINA AND KAZAKHSTAN: BELT AND ROAD COOPERATION

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### ABSTRACT

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

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

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

## *Introduction*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Stages of Transformation of the Belt and Road Initiative

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

Table 1

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

Cooperation Trends	Results
Deeper political cooperation	(1) Bilateral visits (2) Interstate connectivity of strategic development projects
Reducing trade barriers, trade and economic structure optimization	(1) Bilateral turnover 2013-2018— \$28,6 billion (2) Trade turnover 2018—\$18 billion (3) Increase in comparable indices in 2018—37,4%. (4) China’s grain import—500 thousand tons
Greater infrastructure connectivity, creation of logistic networks	(1) Establishment of direct communication between six Chinese and Kazakhstani cities (2) 5 permanent check points (3) 5 transborder pipelines (4) 2 transborder railway branches and 1 international center of border cooperation (5) Chinese and Kazakhstani stretches of the Western Europe-Western China highway and 72 routes of international freight and passenger traffic, including numerous Chinese-European routes (6) By 2020 the share of China-Europe-China transit cargos increased by 61.6%.* In the first 10 months of 2020, transit across Kazakhstan along the above-mentioned route exceeded 407.6 thousand TEU, an increase of 65% against 2019”
Improvement of financial operations and joint counteraction against financial risks	(1) An intergovernmental agreement on mutual exchange of national currencies in the total amount of 14 billion yuans was signed (2) Active development of payment transactions in national currencies, joint counteraction against the global financial crisis (3) Joint bilateral financial protection of operations in joint construction of facilities within the BRI based on financial platforms—Asian Bank of Infrastructure Investments, China-Eurasia Economic Cooperation Fund and tied credits to promote industrial cooperation

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

<sup>14</sup> See: ““Odin poias-odin put’—put vzaimovыgodnogo razvitiia i sovместnogo protsvetaniia Kitaia i Kazakhstana,” available at [https://www.inform.kz/ru/odin-poyas-odin-put-put-vzaimovыgodnogo-razvitiya-i-sovместnogo-prosvetaniya-kitaya-i-kazakhstana\_a3381924], 29 January, 2021.

Table 1 (continued)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

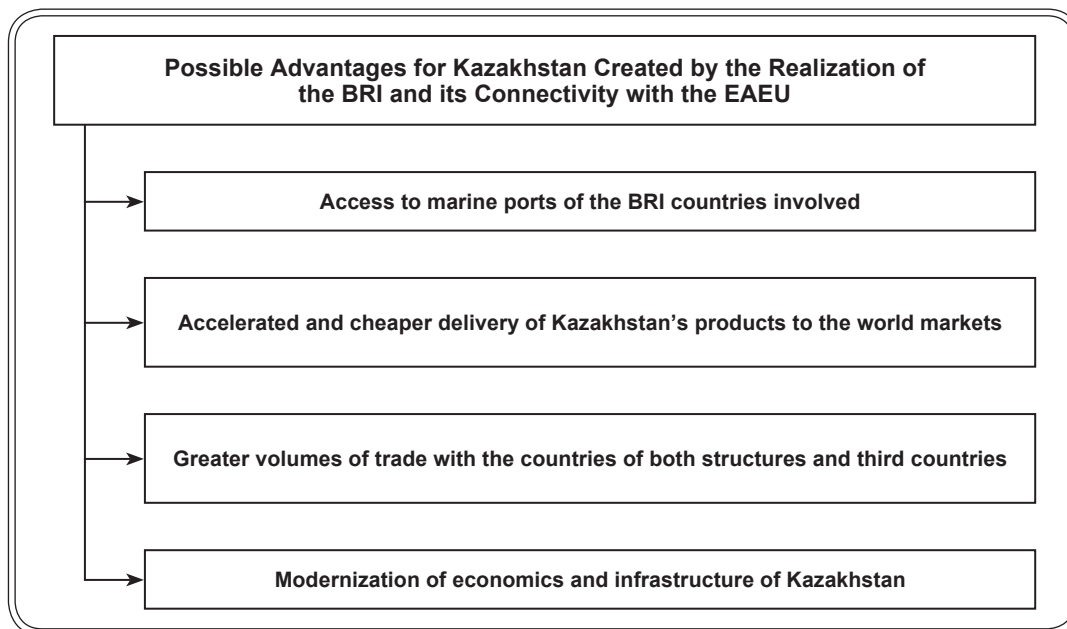
Despite the fairly fast development of economic contacts between the two countries, the volume of bilateral trade shrank twofold in the last years.<sup>21</sup> This is explained primarily by the socio-economic problems of Kazakhstan and China, Kazakhstan's decreased purchasing power and lower volumes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

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

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

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

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



### *Conclusion*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## KAZAKHSTAN'S POSITION IN THE ECONOMIC COOPERATION WITH OTHER COUNTRIES OF CENTRAL ASIA

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## A B S T R A C T

**I**mproving the forms and mechanisms of regional economic integration, deepening the mutual understanding on the formation of an economically and politically secure integrated space, expanding trade and economic relations, elaborating joint actions to maintain regional peace and stability, creating a single information space are among the key areas that have become the basis of cooperation among the Central Asian region (CAR) states.

The authors reveal the positive aspects of cooperation among the CAR countries—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan. First and foremost, these include common historical roots, linguistic and cultural similarity, convenient geographical location and established economic ties, which allow the states of Central Asia (CA) to establish a deeper and more active understanding of each other, to solve economic and political problems related to finding and realizing domestic investment potential and expanding regional trade and economic ties.

The joint establishment of international transport corridors and infrastructure will help reduce the transport costs for Central Asian countries that supply export products to external markets, which is an important area of cooperation in Central Asia.

In addition, the economic problems that exist among the regional countries largely determine the nature of relations between them. Future solution of problems determines the subsequent viability of the Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation

(CAREC) and the regional development prospects.

Based on the use of economic research tools, the authors examine the problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and their impact on the state of trade and economic relations between the regional states.

Post-crisis plans for economic recovery in the Central Asian countries will be developed and implemented in the context of the need to solve the present-day problems associated with the gradual lifting of quarantine measures. In this regard, the quickest possible transition of economies to an upward growth trajectory should launch the expansion of trade and economic cooperation and ties among the Central Asian countries.

The authors emphasize the fact that another important problem within CAREC is the fact that CAR economies are dominated by raw materials, which does not solve the problems of reducing social inequality and improving the welfare of the regional population.

For this reason, Kazakhstan, like other Central Asian countries, is currently in search of a new economic model. The transformation is crucial because the country needs to overcome its excessive long-term dependence on the export of oil and raw materials. The new economic model should be focused on further industrialization and diversification of the economy, on the search for new innovative approaches and development strategies.

**KEYWORDS:** economic cooperation, Central Asia, Central Asian countries, international integration, Kazakhstan, development strategy, Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC)

## *Introduction*

The implementation of a coordinated economic policy by the Central Asian region (CAR) countries led to the emergence of a strategy for interstate interaction and the establishment of Common Economic Space (CES), whose main priority tasks are:

- formation of a common energy market,
- interaction of transport complexes and the development of transit potential,<sup>1</sup>
- efficient use of water resources,
- increasing the productivity of irrigated agriculture and the introduction of modern technologies in agriculture.<sup>2</sup>

Further efforts to consolidate the Central Asian republics and intensify CAREC should be aimed at the need to improve the integrated transport and communication system, develop trade and economic cooperation and joint support for domestic producers, and address environmental issues.

According to international observers, Kazakhstan, with its vast natural resources and a relatively favorable investment climate, continues to be the most developed country in Central Asia. Experts estimate its potential for attracting foreign direct investment at \$100 billion, including up to \$40 billion in non-resource sectors of the economy.<sup>3</sup>

One of the priority strategic tasks of Kazakhstan's foreign policy is the creation of integrative structures in Central Asia, along with the expansion of bilateral cooperation with the regional states. Thus, the relationship of Kazakhstan with other Central Asian republics initially developed at two levels: within the CIS and within the region.<sup>4</sup>

The Foreign Policy Concept of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2030 (Chapter 4, "Priorities in the Field of Regional and Multilateral Diplomacy") discusses further development of strategic relations with the Central Asian states (Para. 4.2.), among other things.<sup>5</sup>

The following arguments serve as a justification for this provision. Kazakhstan, which has the largest economy in Central Asia in terms of GDP and territory, is an important and active participant of the CAREC program. In addition, the natural wealth of the Republic of Kazakhstan makes it highly attractive to foreign investors. Finally, the strategic position of the republic allows it to facilitate unhindered cross-border trade, which, thanks to the presence of transport corridors, is a serious advantage within CAREC. This situation obliges Kazakhstan to use its advantages to the maximum to create regional and global value-added chains.

In order to maintain a leading position among the Central Asian states, the Republic of Kazakhstan needs to further develop a strategy to diversify its economy and remove other restrictions for effective economic cooperation within the framework of the integrative union.

<sup>1</sup> See: K.S. Mukhtarova, S.K. Akhmetkaliyeva, E.S. Mukhtar, E.E. Baymukanbetova, Z.T. Dildebayeva, "Government Regulation of Innovations in the Logistics System in the Republic of Kazakhstan," *Espacios*, No. 39 (51), 2018, available at [<https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=55795620400>], 10 September, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> See: K. Erimbetova, "Sotrudnichestvo stran Tsentralnoi Azii v sovremennykh usloviyakh," e-history.kz, 14 April, 2018, available at [<https://e-history.kz/ru/news/show/5563.3214>], 10 August, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> See: M. Sarsenova, "Smozhet li Kazakhstan uderzhat lideriushchie pozitsii v Tsentralnoi Azii?" *Kapital*, 11 October, 2019, available at [<https://kapital.kz/economic/81878/smozhet-li-kazakhstan-uderzhat-lidiruyushchiye-pozitsii-v-tsentralnoy-azii.html>], 20 October, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> See: G. Koishybayev, "Tsentralnaia Azia: novy etap v ukreplenii regionalnogo partnerstva i doveriia," *Vestnik diplomatii*, No. 2, 13 June, 2018, available at [<http://kazanalytics.kz>], 10 September, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> See: *Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 6 March, 2020 No. 280 On the Concept of Foreign Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2030*, Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 9 March, 2020, available at [[https://www.akorda.kz/ru/legal\\_acts/decrees/o-koncepcii-vneshnei-politiki-respubliki-kazakhstan-na-2020-2030-gody](https://www.akorda.kz/ru/legal_acts/decrees/o-koncepcii-vneshnei-politiki-respubliki-kazakhstan-na-2020-2030-gody)], 12 August, 2020.



## Methods and Materials

Important issues of trade and economic cooperation between Kazakhstan and the Central Asian countries are reflected in analytical economic and statistical reviews posted in government documents, i.e., the Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 6 March, 2020 No. 280 On the Concept of Foreign Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2030, official Statistics of Foreign and Mutual Trade for 2018-2019,<sup>6</sup> etc.

Numerous studies and expert assessments have been devoted to the problems and prospects of integration within the Central Asian region. In fact, there is a group of authors researching various aspects of interstate cooperation in Central Asia: from multidimensional assessments to highly specialized analysis.

A multilateral study was conducted by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which released a report entitled *Kazakhstan, 2017-2021—Promoting Economic Diversification, Inclusive Development, and Sustainable Growth*, with participation of experts/consultants specializing in various aspects of CAREC development: W. Zhang, S. O’Sullivan, G. Capannelli, K. Rosbach, M. Counahan, A. Delos Santos, N. Djenchuraev, C. Espina, J. Farinha, A. Kalieva, I. Martinez, T. Minnich, L. Mtchedlishvili, R. Naik Singru, D. Peschel, N. Rive, M.A. Rosero, O. Samukhin, J. Sarvi, S. Shrestha, C. Tiango, H. Waldring, J. Asanova, V.A. Mercer Blackman, *et al.*<sup>7</sup>

The document of national importance, as well as the study of the priority role of the Republic of Kazakhstan and its significance from the viewpoint of the efficiency of public administration in the development of international economic cooperation, both at the enterprise and country levels, deserve attention.<sup>8</sup>

Research conducted by authors and organizations is devoted to the current state of CAREC development.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, most of these authors agree that integration cooperation within Central Asia carries a number of problems and risks, which are examined in some of the works.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See: *Statistics of Foreign and Mutual Trade for 2018-2019*, Official website of the Ministry of Science and Economics of PK, 2018, 2019, available at [<https://stat.gov.kz/official/industry/31/statistic/6>], 10 September, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> See: *Kazakhstan, 2017-2021—Promoting Economic Diversification, Inclusive Development, and Sustainable Growth*, ADB, Country Partnership Strategy, August 2017, available at [<https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/357421/cps-kaz-2017-2021.pdf>], 10 September, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> See: *Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 6 March, 2020 No. 280 On the Concept of Foreign Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2030*; K. Mukhtarova, G. Yesbolganova, “Perception of Innovations by Public Enterprises in Kazakhstan,” *Academy of Strategic Management Journal*, 2018, available at [<https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=55795620400>], 16 July, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> See: Zh. Mamyshev, “Kazakhstan narashchivaet sotrudnichestvo so stranami Tsentralnoi Azii,” *Kursiv*, 21 August, 2019, available at [<https://kursiv.kz/news/geopolitika/2019-08/kazakhstan-narashchivaet-sotrudnichestvo-so-stranami-centralnoy-azii>], 19 September, 2020; Yu. Mager, “Tsentralnaia Aziia: dobrososedstvo i sotrudnichestvo v XXI veke,” *Kazhskaya pravda*, 3 December, 2019, available at [<https://www.kazpravda.kz/articles/view/tsentralnaya-aziya-dobrososedstvo-i-sotrudnichestvo-v-xxi-veke>], 10 September, 2020; M. Bizhikeyeva, “Otkorrektiroval li COVID-19 eksportnye napravleniya Kazakhstana?” *Kapital*, 25 abrycra 2020, available at [<https://kapital.kz/economic/89256/otkorrektiroval-li-covid-19-eksportnyye-napravleniya-kazakhstana.html>], 10 September, 2020; Yu. Kutbitdinov, “Torgovo-ekonomicheskoe sotrudnichestvo stran Tsentralnoi Azii v period pandemii,” *TSEIR*, 19 June, 2020, available at [[review.uz/ru/hwh](http://review.uz/ru/hwh)], 10 September, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> See: T. Panchenko, “Pochemu strany Tsentralnoi Azii nikakaya integratsiia ne берет,” *forbes.kz*, 12 June, 2020, available at [[https://forbes.kz/process/expertise/pochemu\\_strany\\_tsentralnoy\\_azii\\_nikakaya\\_integratsiya\\_ne\\_beret](https://forbes.kz/process/expertise/pochemu_strany_tsentralnoy_azii_nikakaya_integratsiya_ne_beret)], 12 September, 2020; “Eksperty obsudili voprosy razvitiia torgovo-ekonomicheskikh otnosheniy v stranakh Tsentralnoi Azii,” Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting (CABAR), 16 October, 2019, available at [<https://cabar.asia/ru/iwpr-eksperty-obsudili-voprosy-razvitiya-torgovo-ekonomicheskikh-otnoshenij-v-stranah-tsentralnoj-azii#>], 15 August, 2020; N. Kuzmin, “Razroznennoe obshchenie: Tsentralnaia Aziia v poiske identichnosti,” *Mir peremen*, 25 June, 2020, available at [<http://mirperemen.net/2020/06/razroznennoe-obshchenie-centralnaya-aziya-v-poiske-identichnosti/>], 12 August, 2020; A. Bohr, “Relations with Other Central Asian States (short translation),” CAAN, 3 December, 2019, pp. 70-85, available at [<https://www.caa-network.org/archives/18673>], 12 August, 2020.

Other analytical works provide arguments in favor of establishing an international integration union.<sup>11</sup>

The ADB report is a fundamental study that broadly reflects the issues of public administration in the framework of Kazakhstan's international integration, which is a leader in cooperation with the Central Asian countries.<sup>12</sup>

The authors used official resources and documents published by state governing bodies, such as the official website of the President of Kazakhstan (2020), Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated March 6, 2020 No. 280 On the Concept of Foreign Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2030,<sup>13</sup> the official website of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Statistics of Foreign and Mutual Trade for 2018-2019.<sup>14</sup>

The methodological apparatus of the analysis of CAREC indicators in this article was based on economic and mathematical calculations with the obtainment and use of statistical data. Statistical analysis of the turnover indicators for the foreign trade between the Republic of Kazakhstan and other CA countries allows to determine the trends, structure and dynamics of foreign trade commodity flows in close connection with international macroeconomic indicators and the market situation.

Statistical research method was used to assess and analyze the turnover. Patterns in its development are revealed through turnover analysis. For this purpose, the authors calculated turnover dynamics in current and comparable prices; revealed the formula for the trade turnover growth dynamics in current prices and the used it to calculate the trade turnover growth dynamics for 2018 and 2019.

Thus, the trade turnover growth dynamics indicator (TGD) in current prices was determined by calculating and applying the indicators of the actual turnover for the previous year ( $B_{n-1}$ ) and the actual turnover for the reporting year ( $B_n$ ) according to the formula:  $TGD = B_n * 100 / B_{n-1}$ .

The authors used the economic and statistical research method to calculate a country's foreign trade turnover ( $B$ ) as the sum of exports ( $E$ ) and imports ( $I$ ) according to the formula:  $B = E + I$ .

This method was used to analyze and illustrate the economic position of Kazakhstan in the CAREC framework.

To predict the foreign trade of the Republic of Kazakhstan with the CA countries, the authors used the linear trend prediction method, usually applied to predict time series, where the data increases or decreases at a constant rate.

Prediction of foreign trade is based on the analysis of reported statistical data on the previous state of the object in question. The purpose of the prediction is to determine the future trends of changes in such impact factors as the general economic and trade situation in the country and structural changes in mutual trade.

The article used such research methods as historical, economic, statistical, comparative and systems analysis (causal relationship), and the method of analogy and prediction.

## Discussion and Results

The CAREC Program, established in 2001, is a partnership of 10 countries and 6 multilateral institutions that promote development through cooperation. CAREC helps Central Asian countries

<sup>11</sup> See: Yu. Yusupov, "Perspektivy regionalnogo ekonomicheskogo sotrudnichestva," CAAN, 10 September, 2018, available at [<https://caa-network.org/archives/14095>], 12 August, 2020; N. Murataliyeva, "Prognozy i riski v Tsentralnoi Azii v 2019 godu," CAAN, 20 January, 2019, available at [<https://caa-network.org/archives/15102>], 12 July, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> See: *Kazakhstan, 2017-2021—Promoting Economic Diversification, Inclusive Development, and Sustainable Growth*.

<sup>13</sup> See: *Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 6 March, 2020 No. 280 On the Concept of Foreign Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2030*.

<sup>14</sup> See: *Statistics of Foreign and Mutual Trade for 2018-2019*.

and their neighbors realize the enormous potential of an integrated Eurasia by developing regional cooperation in transport, trade facilitation, trade policy, and energy spheres.<sup>15</sup>

Central Asia itself is in many ways a mature and self-sufficient socio-economic, cultural and historical complex with long-standing traditions of cooperation and interaction. The relations of Kazakhstan with other Central Asian countries are multifaceted, since they have been formed over a long period of time and affect the most important spheres of life of the regional peoples.

The current structures that foster development within CAREC are the Customs Union, which has grown into the Eurasian Economic Community comprising Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Central Asian Economic Community (CAEC), which includes four Central Asian states, with the exception of Turkmenistan. In addition, the system of personal contacts between the countries' leaders and the bilateral cooperation format traditionally play an important role.

The great strategic integrative potential of the Central Asian countries (CACs), along with such unifying factors as their colossal natural wealth and rich human resources, makes this huge underdeveloped market very promising in terms of economic and political interaction of the CACs.

Integration within the CAR implies close-knit friendly cooperation, as well as consideration of mutually beneficial economic interests. The volume of trade between the Central Asian states in 2018 was still modest, however, it grew by 35% compared to the previous year and amounted to \$12.2 billion, serving as clear proof of mutually beneficial cooperation in the region.

Along with the fact that integration implies consideration of mutually beneficial economic interests, the CA countries are aware of the risks, certain contradictions of regional integration, as well as the danger of global competition. There are a number of problematic aspects in the activities of the CA countries, including infrastructure insufficiencies and other major barriers that currently impede cross-border trade, i.e., unofficial payments, which are a ubiquitous feature of the region's border regimes. It will therefore be beneficial for Central Asian leaders to take measures to improve border efficiency, in particular, by solving the problem of informal payments and other non-tariff barriers.<sup>16</sup>

In continuation of the above, the following is a quote from the 21 August, 2019 speech made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan Beibut Atamkulov at a high-level C5 + 1 meeting: "We are inspired by the progressive development of political, economic and humanitarian cooperation with our neighbors. Indeed, Central Asia is experiencing a renaissance."<sup>17</sup>

In its integration activities, Kazakhstan has always focused on strengthening economic cooperation and ensuring security. According to an international expert,<sup>18</sup> Kazakhstan is not merely positioning itself as an intermediary between Russia and other Central Asian states, it has begun to more clearly identify itself as an integral part of Central Asia.

The First President of Kazakhstan proposed to consider the possibility of concluding a five-sided Treaty on good-neighborliness and cooperation for the development of Central Asia in the 21st century; he also called on the governments of the CA member countries to pay attention to the problems associated with the high dynamics of demographic development. In particular, the share of young people is increasing in the CA countries, and special emphasis is required on issues of youth unemployment and labor migration both within countries and within the region.<sup>19</sup>

The new foreign policy concept of the Republic of Kazakhstan, approved on 6 March, 2020, states that Kazakhstan needs to consolidate its status as a leading Central Asian state. This means that the comparative advantages available in the republic should be used to solve common problems.

<sup>15</sup> See: "Eksperty obsudili voprosy razvitiia torgovo-ekonomicheskikh otnosheniy v stranakh Tsentralnoi Azii."

<sup>16</sup> See: A. Bohr, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted from: Zh. Mamyshev, op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> See: A. Bohr, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> See: Yu. Mager, op. cit.

In December 2018, Boston Consulting Group, an international management consulting company, presented the report *Investing in Central Asia: One Region, Many Opportunities*, where it estimated the investment potential of the Central Asian region at up to \$170 billion over the next 10 years. The document highlights an important fact—the region east of the Caspian Sea, which includes Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, has significant potential to become an attractive investment destination. However, some Central Asian countries are already on the investors' map. In particular, Kazakhstan attracted foreign direct investment (FDI) totaling \$82 billion between 2008 and 2017. “With FDI mainly concentrated in extractive sectors, the country’s [Kazakhstan’s] diversifying economy offers attractive new opportunities,” states the observers of the Boston Consulting Group.<sup>20</sup> The important role will belong to the projects related to the development of the oil and gas sector under TRACECA programs. The region will be quickly incorporated into the global transnational market system.<sup>21</sup>

The authors obtained a scientific conclusion based on economic calculations using the methodological apparatus of the study through an analysis of indicators characterizing CAREC carried out in the article. Thus, it is possible to determine turnover growth dynamics (TGD) in current prices using the following formula:

$$TGD = B_n * 100 / B_{n-1}, \quad (1)$$

where:  $B_{n-1}$  is the actual turnover for the preceding year;

$B_n$  is the actual turnover for the reporting year.

According to the above formula, the trade growth dynamics between Kazakhstan and the Central Asian countries in 2019 compared to 2018 equaled to 13.5%.

This approach confirms the leading position of Kazakhstan in trade and economic cooperation with the CAC, which is clearly demonstrated by the following diagram (see Fig. 1):

According to the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan (MNE RK), the total foreign trade turnover volume in 2018 amounted to \$94.769 billion, of which the total trade volume with the CA countries was \$4.635 billion; in 2019, the total trade turnover with the CA countries amounted to \$5.263 billion.

Of all the Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan was most actively involved in mutual trade with Uzbekistan; in 2018, Uzbekistan’s share in its total trade volume was 2.9%. The analysis demonstrates that Kyrgyzstan was second with 1.0%, Tajikistan was in the third place with 0.9%, and Turkmenistan—in the fourth place with 0.1%.

In 2019, the Republic of Kazakhstan’s share in its trade turnover with other Central Asian countries compared with 2018 increased from 4.9% to 5.4%, respectively.

The sum of a country’s exports and imports represents its foreign trade turnover, which correlates with the values of export and import indicators (see formula 2):

$$F = E + I, \quad (2)$$

where  $F$  is the foreign trade turnover of a country,

$E$ —exports, and

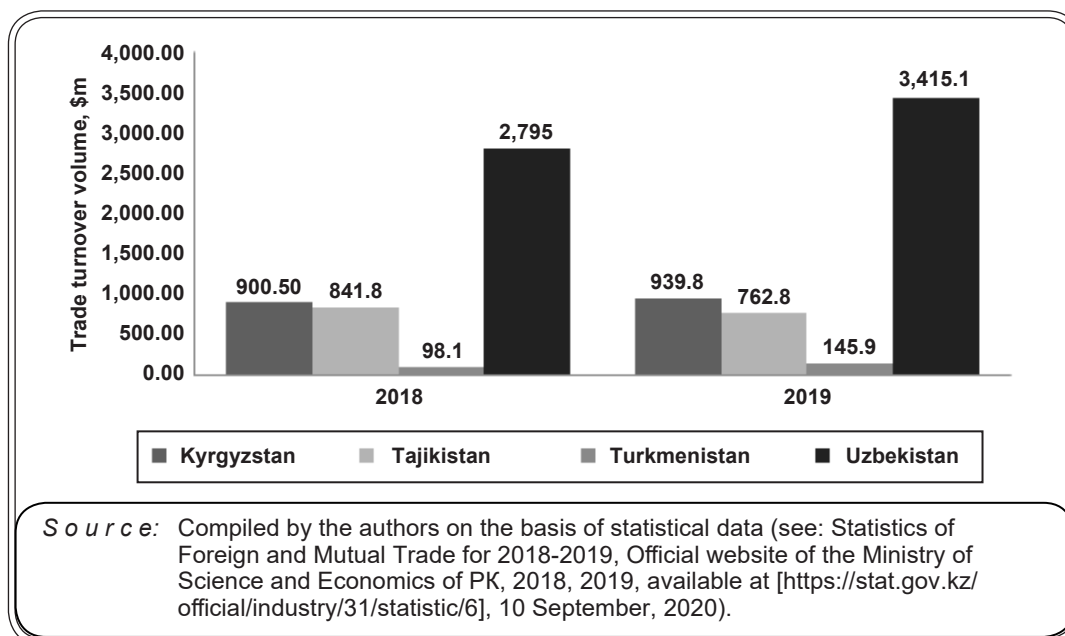
$I$ —imports.

<sup>20</sup> *Investing in Central Asia: One Region, Many Opportunities* BGG, 23 December, 2018, available at [https://www.bcg.com/investing-in-central-asia-one-region-many-opportunities], p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> See: “Sotrudnichestvo Kazakhstana so stranami Tsentralnoi Azii,” Kazportal. kz, 23 August, 2015, available at [https://www.kazportal.kz/sotrudnichestvo-kazakhstana-so-stranami-tsentralnoy-azii-2io], 16 August, 2020.

Figure 1

**The Total Trade Volume between Kazakhstan and  
Other Central Asian Countries in 2018-2019**



This methodology illustrates Kazakhstan's economic position in CAREC on the issues of export and import (see Fig. 2).

Thus, in 2019, the share of Uzbekistan in trade with the Central Asian countries was 3.5%, Kyrgyzstan—1.0%, Tajikistan—0.8%, Turkmenistan—0.1%.

Fig. 2 shows a noticeable increase in 2019 in indicators of trade with Uzbekistan, where trade turnover increased from 2.9% to 3.5%, exports—from 2.7% to 3.4% (from \$1.6 to \$1.9 billion), and imports—from 3.4% to 3.6% (from \$1.1 billion to \$1.4 billion).

With Kyrgyzstan, the indicators of trade turnover in the same period remained unchanged at 1.0%, the country's share in total exports did not change either and amounted to 1.1% (from \$656.8 to \$624.1 million), while imports increased from 0.7 % to 0.8% (from \$243.6 to \$315.7 million).

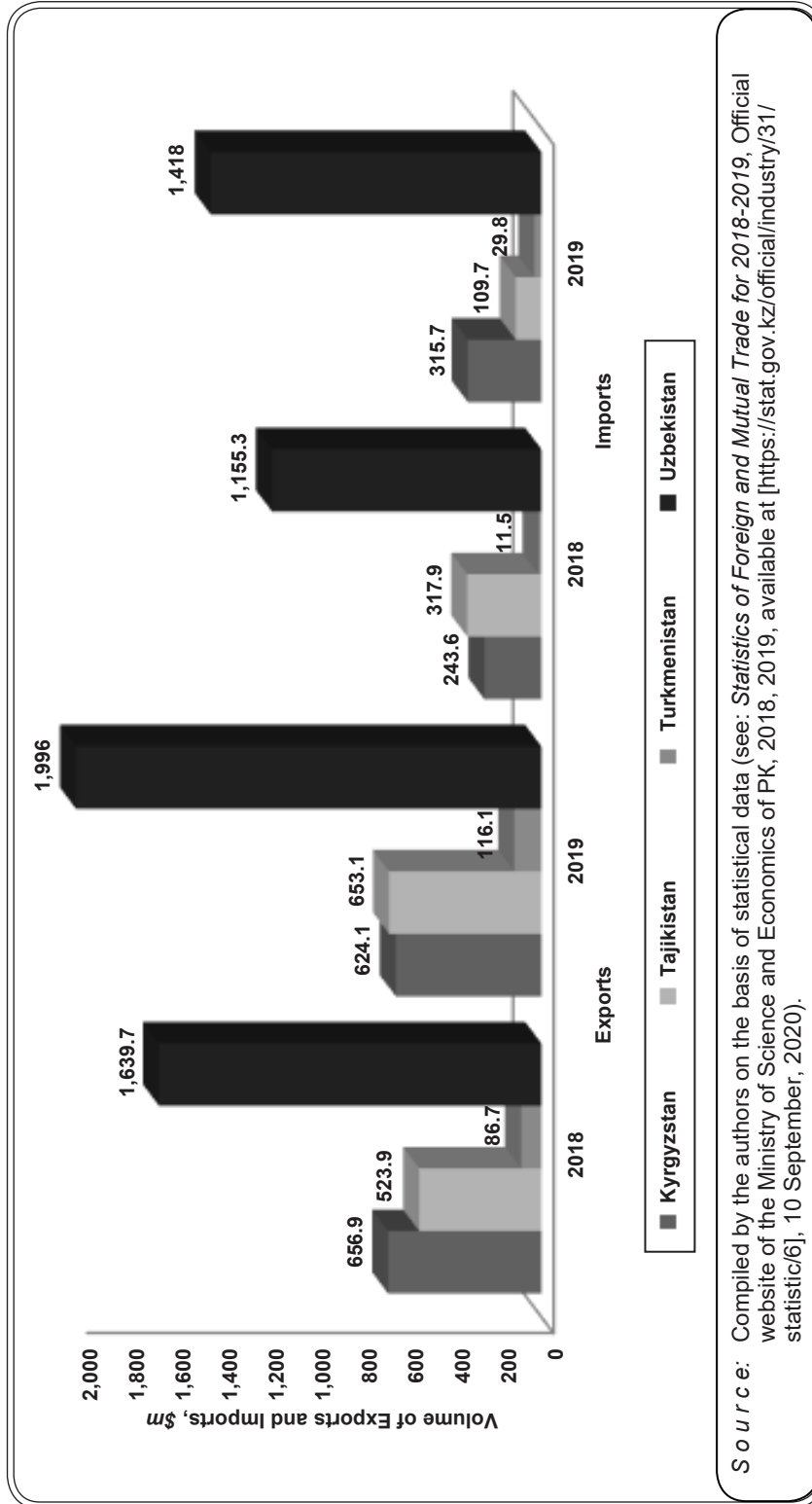
Trade with Turkmenistan in the same period also remained unchanged at 0.1%; the country's share in total exports and imports increased by 0.1% (from \$86.7 to \$116.1 million and \$11.5 to \$29.8 million, respectively).

At the same time, the indicators of foreign trade with Tajikistan slightly decreased both in trade turnover—by 0.1% (0.9% in 2018 – 0.8% in 2019), and in import volume—by 0.6% (from \$317.9 to \$109.7 million), while the share of Tajikistan in the total volume of exports, on the contrary, increased by 0.2% (from \$523.9 to \$653.1 million).

The trade and economic relations of Kazakhstan with the Central Asian countries were strongly influenced by the global COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, in 2020, the trade and economic relations of Kazakhstan with the Central Asian countries were seriously affected; quarantine measures taken in the region have led to a deterioration in the indicators of mutual trade between the countries; in the first five months of 2020, compared to the same period in 2019, trade between Kazakhstan and CA countries decreased by 16.9% and amounted to \$1.5 billion. According to the Ministry of Trade and Integration, exports decreased by 5.5% (from \$1.4 to \$1.2 billion), imports—by 9.3% (from \$475.4

Figure 2

Total Volume of Exports and Imports of the Republic of Kazakhstan with CA Countries, 2018-2019



Source: Compiled by the authors on the basis of statistical data (see: *Statistics of Foreign and Mutual Trade for 2018-2019*, Official website of the Ministry of Science and Economics of PK, 2018, 2019, available at [<https://stat.gov.kz/official/industry/31/statistic/6>], 10 September, 2020).

to \$336.0 million). But, on the other hand, in the context of the economic crisis, integration ties need to be intensified at the enterprise level.<sup>22</sup>

The chief contribution of the Central Asian countries to regional trade is as follows. The largest share in the volume of regional trade is the exports of goods from Kazakhstan and the import of goods to Kazakhstan. Thus, it can be stated with confidence that Kazakhstan is the regional trade leader. Uzbekistan is in the second place, despite its superiority over Kazakhstan in terms of the volume of imports from the regional states. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are more dependent on regional trade than others. Turkmenistan demonstrates the least dependence on trade within Central Asia.

Our calculations using the forecasting method with a linear trend allowed us to derive data on the external trade turnover of the Republic of Kazakhstan with the CA countries for the period from 2020 to 2025 (see Table 1):

*Table 1*

**Foreign Trade Turnover Forecast for the Republic of Kazakhstan  
with CA Countries for 2020-2025 (thous. dollars)**

Year	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan	Total Volume with CA Countries
2018	900,499.7	841,885.7	98,097.8	2,794,989.3	4,635,472.5
2019	939,776.1	762,857.6	145,913.8	3,415,131.5	5,263,679.0
2020	979,052.5	683,829.5	193,729.8	4,035,274	5,891,886
2021	1,018,328.9	604,801.4	241,545.8	4,655,416	6,520,092
2022	1,057,605.3	525,773.3	289,361.8	5,275,558	7,148,299
2023	1,096,881.7	446,745.2	337,177.8	5,895,700	7,776,505
2024	1,136,158.1	367,717.1	384,993.8	6,515,843	8,404,712
2025	1,175,434.5	288,689	432,809.8	7,135,985	9,032,918

*Source:* Compiled by the authors based on statistical data (see: *Statistics of Foreign and Mutual Trade for 2018-2019*, Official website of the Ministry of Science and Economics of PK, 2018, 2019, available at [<https://stat.gov.kz/official/industry/31/statistic/6>], 10 September, 2020).

According to the baseline forecast, the total volume of foreign trade turnover with CA countries is expected to grow. This trend will continue for 5 years, and will reach \$9.032 billion by 2025. Kazakhstan will most actively trade with Uzbekistan, with Kyrgyzstan in the second place, Turkmenistan in the third and Tajikistan in the fourth spot.

However, it is necessary to account for the factors that are independent from the economic activity of countries, such as the global COVID-19 pandemic, which inhibits the growth of trade between the CA countries; global economic crisis; sanctions; political wars between countries and other global issues.

The CA countries' integration is not limited to mutual trade alone. Important trends in solving urgent anti-crisis problems include the development of regional digitalization projects. Thus, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in its report *COVID-19 Crisis Response in Central Asia* recommends paying attention to the digitalization of public services (while

<sup>22</sup> See: K. Erimbetova, op. cit.; K. Mukhtarova, G. Yesbolganova, op. cit.

noting that the Kazakhstan portal egov.kz is one of the best in the world), development of e-commerce, creation of digital platforms for business.<sup>23</sup>

As part of the program to reduce oil dependence, Kazakhstan seeks to become a transport, telecommunications and investment hub for Eurasian integration. For this purpose, the republic focuses on the development of transport and logistics arteries through the implementation of the Nurlı Zhól (Light Path) program, which largely finances major construction projects and is synchronized with China's Belt and Road initiative.<sup>24</sup>

Kazakhstan remains committed to accelerating the integrative and cooperative processes in Central Asia. The CAREC 2030 strategy is likely to help open up new opportunities for trade and business in Central Asia, transform Kazakhstan's transport corridors into economic corridors, and gradually introduce projects under the New Silk Road megaproject. Since 2015, the government of Kazakhstan has started to implement measures for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which is reflected in the Kazakhstan-2050 strategy and national development programs.

Thus, Kazakhstan will, as before, act as a beneficiary of CAREC activities and investments within the framework of Strategy-2030, regional cooperation and international integration. Tasks like the rational use of water and energy resources, transport links, unification of tariffs, the creation of a free trade zone, demarcation of borders, etc., remain important for the development and improvement of the Central Asian common market.<sup>25</sup>

## Conclusion

As the result of the study, the authors arrived at the following conclusions:

Current cooperation between the Central Asian countries in the economic, political, socio-cultural and other areas is not only a matter of choosing an economic and foreign policy course and partners, but an objective necessity and inevitable fact. Common regional challenges and problems require common approaches to their solution. Constructive integration is capable of providing synergy, which will have a multiplier effect on the sustainable development of each country individually and the Central Asian region as a whole.<sup>26</sup>

Historical roots, a common foundation and close proximity, which have led to the emergence of common traditions in development, allow the Central Asian states to achieve a deeper understanding of each other and, accordingly, to solve economic and political issues in the search for and realization of internal investment potential, as well as expansion of regional trade and economic ties.<sup>27</sup>

The Central Asian states—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan—have a common history, linguistic and cultural affinity, a convenient geographical location, and established economic ties. Cooperation among CA countries also gives them advantages in saving on transport costs. International transport logistics requires close attention with the intention of successful economic development and interaction between countries. The CAREC transport corridors are an example of successful cooperation. Thus, it is the joint creation of international transport corridors and infrastructure that will contribute to a reduction of transport costs of supplying export products to foreign markets of the Central Asian region, which is a vital part of CAREC.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See: N. Kuzmin, op. cit.

<sup>24</sup> See: A. Bohr, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> See: "Sotrudnichestvo Kazakhstana so stranami Tsentralnoi Azii."

<sup>26</sup> See: Yu. Mager, op. cit.

<sup>27</sup> See: "Eksperty obsudili voprosy razvitiia torgovo-ekonomicheskikh otnosheniy v stranakh Tsentralnoi Azii."

<sup>28</sup> See: Yu. Kutbitdinov, op. cit.; K.S. Mukhtarova, S.S. Ospanov, M.D. Sharapiyeva, A. Antoni, "The Evaluation of the Efficiency of Transport and Logistics Infrastructure of Railway Transport," *Pomorstvo*, 2018, available at [<https://www.scopus.com/authorid/detail.uri?authorId=55795620400>], 12 October, 2020.



There is hope that quarantine measures will gradually be lifted in the Central Asian countries, and post-crisis plans for economic recovery will be developed and implemented more actively. In this regard, the expansion of trade and economic cooperation and ties between the countries of the Central Asian region will contribute to the earliest possible move of economies to an upward growth trajectory.

The dominance of the raw material component of the economies of the region's countries remains another long-standing problem within CAREC. This does not solve the problems of reducing social inequality and ensuring the well-being of the population.

Due to the fact that the Central Asian countries are constantly expanding mutual access to their domestic markets, this will largely contribute to increasing the exports of finished products, which should primarily include innovative joint development areas. This can lay claim to inclusive growth in the well-being of the regional peoples within CAREC. Therefore, the development of the service market is very important.

According to an international expert, when the countries of the Central Asian region did not demonstrate a particular readiness for cooperation, Kazakhstan has been establishing its identity as a Eurasian state for a long time, using this platform to develop regional ideas, while maintaining a convenient position as a conduit between Russia and the rest of Central Asia. Kazakhstan is currently in search of a new economic model; the economic course of the Republic of Kazakhstan is increasingly focused on strengthening cooperation with its neighbors in Central Asia.<sup>29</sup>

Kazakhstan's regional economic role is expected to grow significantly as the country plays an increasingly important role as a hub with its transit and logistics infrastructure, which can generate positive external effects and public benefits for the region.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See: A. Bohr, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-85.

<sup>30</sup> See: *Kazakhstan, 2017-2021—Promoting Economic Diversification, Inclusive Development, and Sustainable Growth*.

# ETHNIC RELATIONS AND MIGRATION

## REPRODUCTIVE AND MIGRATION ATTITUDES OF CONTEMPORARY YOUTH OF THE EAEU STATES (RUSSIA, KAZAKHSTAN, KYRGYZSTAN: A CASE STUDY)

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## A B S T R A C T

**T**he article is devoted to the current aspects of demographic development in the EAEU member states in the context of studying the specifics of the reproductive and migratory behavior of young people in Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The modern generation of young people in post-Soviet countries over the past three decades has been influenced by various factors that have radically transformed their views on family, childbirth and migration. Their attitudes towards reproductive and migratory behavior will dominate the future demographic trends not only in each of the studied countries, but also in the Eurasian space as a whole. Therefore, a detailed study of the attitudes of the young and educated generation is the most important task of demographic and sociological sciences. Based on the results of a sociological survey conducted using a unified methodology, the article examines the features of reproductive and migratory behavior in countries at different stages of the “demographic transition.” It reveals the peculiarities of the respondents’ attitude from the three states to official marriage, age preferences for starting a family and giving birth to their first child. Reproductive judgments regarding anticipated and ideal number of children are identified. The use of the ranking method allowed to detect the normative childbearing models in the three countries and the differ-

ences between them. The conclusion states that in all the states in question, the prevailing socio-economic conditions are an obstacle to the implementation of the existing ideal reproductive attitudes. The gender peculiarities of the views of young people in the three countries on extramarital unions, reproductive patterns and “planned childlessness” were noted. The article demonstrates that, with regard to the results of the study, in the next 25 to 30 years families in Russia will likely have a small number of children, in Kazakhstan—an average number, and reproductive behavior in Kyrgyzstan will likely retain its tendency towards having many children.

The article also contains conclusions about specific migration attitudes based on the replies to questions about the preferred place to apply professional skills, create a family and have children. The dependence of migration attitudes on gender and country of residence has been revealed. Based on empirical data, the groups of respondents characterized by pragmatic, patriotic and antipatriotic migratory behavior have been identified. It was determined that young people who live in Kyrgyzstan are more focused on moving to a new place of residence, while all respondents are quite cosmopolitan in regard to the place of application of their professional skills, and students are most patriotic about the place to start a family.

**KEYWORDS:** *reproductive behavior, sociological survey, birth rate, number of children, gender, migratory behavior, youth, Central Asia, Russia, respondents.*

### *Introduction*

Back in the Soviet period, when the country was unified, there was a significant differentiation in the demographic trends by republic due to variations in reproductive behavior. Demographers at that time noted significant differences in birth rate intensity and varying rates of the downward trend

for the population of various Soviet republics. For instance, half a century ago, in 1970, the birth rate in the R.S.F.S.R. was 14.6%, in the Kazakh S.S.R.—23.4%, and in the Kirghiz S.S.R.—30.5%. Even then, these three republics were characterized by three types of birth rate: low, medium and high.

In the 1980s, due to the formation of significant labor surplus contingents in Central Asia and the increasing imbalance in the conditions of a single Soviet labor market, dozens of dissertations and scientific monographs were written on the government measures that would increase the population's migration mobility from labor surplus republics to labor-deficient regions. The change of geopolitical scenery in the Soviet space altered both the vector of migration movements and labor surplus severity. Thus, in order to determine the long-term prospects for the EAEU common market, it becomes important to study and compare the specifics of the population's reproductive and migratory behavior in these states, which, in fact, underlie the formation of disproportion in labor potentials.

Under the influence of historical events (the collapse of the U.S.S.R.), as well as many international processes, including globalization, the cultural expansion of Western values, consumerist ideology, population's demographic behavior, including reproductive and migratory behavior, began to transform rapidly.

In modern society, it is important to examine the gender role transformation and instability under the rapidly changing conditions in the context of studying the actors of reproductive behavior. For instance, men today can go on maternity leave and raise children, women can independently decide to terminate a pregnancy starting at the age of 15, marriage no longer has to be a once-in-a-lifetime event, the concept of "head of the family" is devalued, premarital/extramarital sexual relationships and a child-free rhetoric are becoming increasingly more common, etc.

The transformation of reproductive behavior, conditioned, in the opinion of many demographers, by the "second demographic transition," is gradually affecting both traditional societies and countries. However, whether men or women are subject to a more intense transformation in reproductive behavior still remains to be seen. Therefore, it was important for the purposes of this project to identify the specific perceptions among men and women in relation to various aspects of reproductive behavior in countries with low fertility (Russia), average fertility (Kazakhstan) and high fertility (Kyrgyzstan).

Migratory behavior is shaped by numerous factors, first and foremost, economic ones. In the overwhelming majority of cases, it is the insufficient income level, the inability to get a job in the place of residence, and poor working conditions that induce people to move to a new place of residence, including looking for ways to apply their abilities abroad. Secondly, there are social factors. Traditions of the recipient and donor countries, mental characteristics of the population, religion and level of religiosity in the country affect the scale, direction of migration, and the gender structure of the migration flow. Thirdly, there are political reasons, including military actions, harassment on the basis of gender, nationality, or race, that often force people to change their place of residence.<sup>1</sup>

Apparently, people's migratory behavior differs depending on the socio-demographic characteristics of the population, i.e., gender, age and country of residence. Therefore, it is important to study the general transformation of the migration attitudes of the population, as well as with regard to these specific parameters.

## Methods and Materials

This article is based on the results of a large-scale sociological survey conducted in Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan based on the author's integrated methodology developed in the Depart-

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<sup>1</sup> See: L.L. Rybakovsky, *Migratsiia naseleniia (voprosy teorii)*, Moscow, 2003, available at [<http://rybakovsky.ru/migracia2.html>], 2 September, 2020.

ment of Population Reproduction and Reproductive Behavior of the IDR FCTAS RAS.<sup>2</sup> The questionnaire contained 24 questions, grouped into several blocks that seek to collect empirical information: the address block; questions related to the preferred age of marriage, birth of the first child; a block of questions on the assessment of demographic policy measures; a block of questions related to the assessment of extramarital unions and large families; a block of questions related to the reproductive experience in the parental family; a block of questions related to migration intentions, etc. In general, over 2,000 respondents were interviewed in 20 Russian regions in 2012-2020. In addition, representatives of the younger generation of other EAEU member countries (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan) were interviewed using an adapted version of this method.

For the purposes of the research specified in the article subject, we selected the empirical material that allowed to analyze not only the specific features of the reproductive and migratory behavior of the countries of Central Asia and Russia, but also their group and gender specificity, in addition to the general characteristics of the reproductive and migratory behavior of young people.

Russian youths were interviewed in five cities in different regions of the country (Karachaevsk, Ufa, Maikop, Kursk, Kaliningrad). In Kazakhstan, the survey was conducted in the cities of Almaty and Nur-Sultan (Astana), in Kyrgyzstan—in the cities of Bishkek and Osh. The research was carried out in the form of a questionnaire. During the analysis of empirical materials, 939 questionnaires were selected. Of these, 544 were filled out in Russia, 214, in Kazakhstan, and 181, in Kyrgyzstan. Among the respondents, 53% were women, 47% were men.

The empirical material allowed to obtain extensive information on various aspects of reproductive and migratory behavior concerning the views of young people related to a wide range of issues related to the formation of behavior, including matrimonial and family. The article will only touch upon some aspects of the study, which characterizes the differences and similarities between the attitudes of young people in these countries to reproduction and migration.

## Discussion and Approaches

Due to the orientation of Russian society towards the preservation of traditional family relations, enshrined in the new Constitution of the Russian Federation in 2020,<sup>3</sup> researchers are interested in the transformation of young people's reproductive behavior in the current social reality. Due to the current pandemic-related problems, the interest in the trends of international population exchange in the EAEU member countries has reemerged. That, in turn, determines the scientific interest in migratory behavior. Notably, the study of reproductive and migratory behavior has a decades-long history. Research attention to demographic, including reproductive and migratory, behavior was due to the appearance of a new approach to understanding human behavior, namely, behaviorism. Its founder John B. Watson touched upon some aspects of the transfer of reproductive experience from mother to children. In his work *Psychological Care of the Infant and Child* there is a separate chapter devoted to the sex education of children.<sup>4</sup> Well-known behaviorist Burrhus Skinner assumed a high probability of control over human behavior in his *Science and Human Behavior*. In an attempt to create a comprehensive theory of human behavior, he believed that people could be controlled and directed by changing the environmental conditions.<sup>5</sup> After the recognition of this approach by Soviet

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<sup>2</sup> The former Institute of Socio-Political Research, Russian Academy of Sciences.

<sup>3</sup> See: New text of the Constitution of the Russian Federation with additions and amendments adopted in 2020, available in Russian at [<http://duma.gov.ru/news/48953/>].

<sup>4</sup> See: J.B. Watson, *Psychological Care of Infant and Child*, First Edition, W.W. Norton & Comp., New York, 1928.

<sup>5</sup> See: B.F. Skinner, *Science and Human Behavior*, Free Press, New York, 1965.

psychology in the 1970s, the study of human behavior, including reproductive and migratory, received a new impetus, both in theoretical and applied research.

The theory of behavior is based on the fact that it is a consequence of the interaction of the psychological structure of the individual (needs, interests, moral convictions, motives, goals, attitudes, decisions) with the social environment. Therefore, a change in the social environment caused by the modification of the fundamental factors of the society's existence will undoubtedly entail a modification of both reproductive and migratory behavior.

The first definition of "reproductive behavior" in Russian science was provided by Vladimir Borisov: "a system of actions, relationships and mental states of the individual associated with the birth or refusal to give birth to children of any order, in marriage or out of wedlock."<sup>6</sup> Anatoli Antonov,<sup>7</sup> Vladimir Arkhangelsky,<sup>8</sup> Dmitri Valentey,<sup>9</sup> Anatoli Vishnevsky,<sup>10</sup> Valeri Elizarov,<sup>11</sup> Alexander Kvasha and others all addressed this subject.

The works of Tatiana Zaslavskaya,<sup>12</sup> Zhanna Zayonchkovskaya,<sup>13</sup> Vladimir Iontsev,<sup>14</sup> Viktor Perevedentsev,<sup>15</sup> Leonid Rybakovsky,<sup>16</sup> Sergey Ryazantsev and others were devoted to examining migratory behavior. Each author introduces their own research into the elaboration of theoretical and applied aspects of migratory behavior, which makes it possible to detail a wide range of emerging patterns in the sphere of formation and manifestation of migratory behavior.

Recent historical events have provided a new impetus to scientific research in the field of reproductive and migratory behavior. They include a new wave of depopulation, which has engendered the need for a new demographic policy vector, and a global social reality crisis associated with the global pandemic. Therefore, numerous works began to appear in the scientific information field, detailing the world, country, regional and generational aspects of reproductive and migratory behavior. An example of such research projects is the specialized issue of the *Nauchnoe obozrenie* (Scientific Review) journal, dedicated to COVID-19 and mobility,<sup>17</sup> as well as the National Demographic Report *Demographic Well-Being of Russian Regions*<sup>18</sup> and others.<sup>19</sup>

It is becoming obvious that the development of modern demographic trends, both at the global and national levels, increasingly determines the interest of the scientific community in the analysis of reproductive and migratory behavior.

<sup>6</sup> See: V.A. Borisov, *Demografiia i sotsialnaia psikhologiya*, Moscow, 1970.

<sup>7</sup> See: A.I. Antonov, *Sotsiologiya rozhdanosti*, Moscow, 1980.

<sup>8</sup> See: V.N. Arkhangelsky, "Reproduktivnoe i brachnoe povedenie," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, No. 2, February 2013, pp. 129-136.

<sup>9</sup> See: D.I. Valentey, A.Ya. Kvasha, "Osnovy demografii: [Textbook], Mysl Publishers, Moscow, 1989, 284 pp.

<sup>10</sup> See: A.G. Vishnevsky, *Izbrannye demograficheskie Trudy*, Nauka Publishers, Moscow, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> See: V.V. Elizarov, *Perspektivy issledovaniy sem'i*, Moscow, 1987.

<sup>12</sup> See: *Migratsiia selskogo naseleniia*, ed. by T.I. Zaslavskaya, Corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Mysl Publishers, Moscow, 1970, 312 pp.

<sup>13</sup> See: Zh.A. Zayonchkovskaya, "Migratsiia," in: *Naselenie Rossii 1994*, Moscow, 1994.

<sup>14</sup> See: V.A. Iontsev, *Mezhdunarodnaia migratsiia: naseleniia: teoriia i istoriia izucheniia*, Issue 3, Dialog-MGU, Moscow, 1999, 370 pp.

<sup>15</sup> See: V.I. Perevedentsev, *Metody izucheniia migratsii naseleniia*, Nauka Publishers, Moscow, 1975.

<sup>16</sup> See: L.L. Rybakovsky, op. cit.

<sup>17</sup> See: *Nauchnoe obozrenie*, Series 1: *Economics and Law*, No. 3, 2020.

<sup>18</sup> See: T.K. Rostovskaia, A.A. Shabunova, V.N. Arkhangelsky et al., *Demograficheskoe samochuvstvie regionov Rossii. Natsionalny demografichesky doklad—2020*, ed. by T.K. Rostovskaia, A.A. Shabunova, Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology, Russian Academy of Sciences (IDR FCTAS RAS), ITD "Perspektiva", Moscow, 2021, 214 pp.

<sup>19</sup> See: A.G. Grishanova, N.I. Kozhevnikova, E.S. Krasinets, "Migratsionnye problemy soiuznogo gosudarstva v period pandemii," in: *Instituty razvitiia chelovecheskogo potentsiala v usloviakh sovremennykh vyzovov: sbornik statey XI Uralskogo demograficheskogo foruma*, in two vols., Vol. I, Institute of Economics of UrO, Russian Academy of Sciences, Ekaterinburg, 2020, pp. 136-141.

## Results

### ***Country and Gender-Specific Features of the Reproductive Behavior of Youth in Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan***

The results of a sociological study of the reproductive behavior have demonstrated the great importance of an officially registered marriage union in countries with medium and high birth rates (see Fig. 1). Marriage as an integral part of the family is typical of the overwhelming majority of young people in Kyrgyzstan (63%), for half of young people in Kazakhstan (50%) and only 31% of young people in Russia.

Figure 1



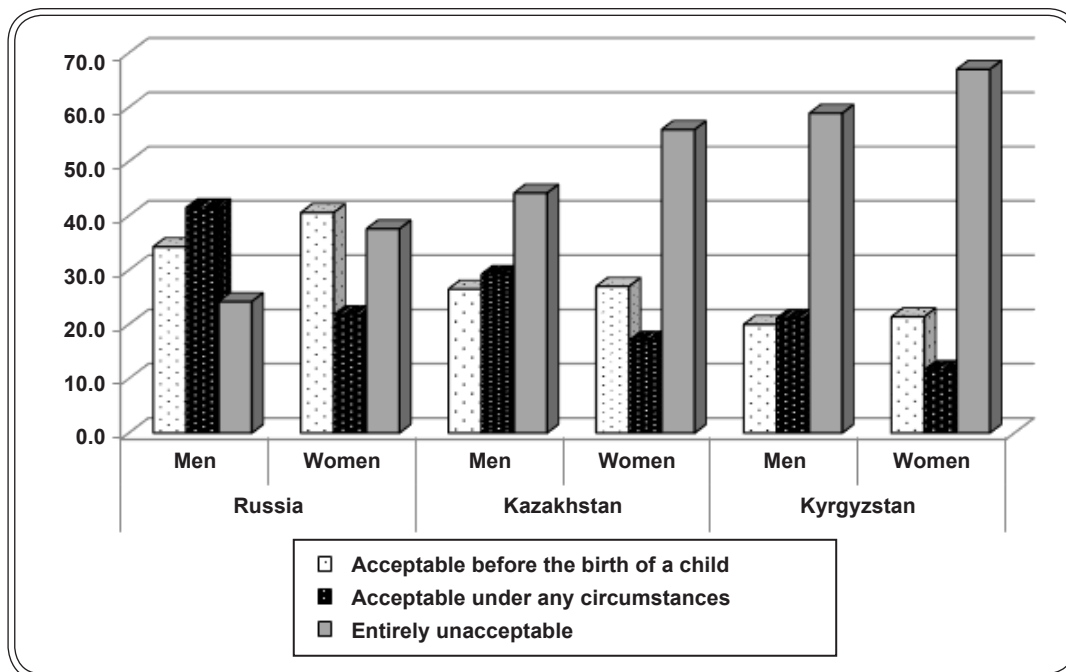
Young people from Russia (31%) are the most tolerant of extramarital affairs. In Kazakhstan, 23% of respondents hold similar views, and in Kyrgyzstan, the number is almost two times smaller than in Russia—16%. Let us begin by examining the perceptions of young people from Kazakhstan. In most of the questions related to reproductive behavior, they consistently occupied the middle position between their counterparts from Russia and Kyrgyzstan.

In regard to gender differences in the views on premarital unions, it should be noted that, among the respondents in each country, female respondents (37.6% to 67.0%) were more uncompromising than men, and considered it unacceptable to live together outside of a registered marriage (see Fig. 2).

Young men in Russia turned out to be the most tolerant towards premarital cohabitation. 41.5% of them consider such relationships acceptable in any case. Among young men from Kazakhstan, almost 30% hold the same opinion, and just over 21% of young men from Kyrgyzstan adhere to the same views. Young women in Russia are more inclined to believe that premarital relations are acceptable before the birth of a child (40.6%), but also a significant part of them (37.6%) do not approve of pre-marital relations at all. In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the opinion about the priority of officially registered marriage still prevails. Moreover, this view is typically dominant among young men and, to a greater extent, among young women.

Figure 2

Distribution of Responses to the Question: “What Is Your Opinion of Cohabitation Prior To Marriage?” by Gender and Country, %



One of the typical features of the “demographic transition” theory, along with a rise in the marriage age, is the decision of young parents to postpone the birth of their first child until a later age. If we estimate the average age at which a child is born (regardless of the priority) in the countries under examination, it turns out that it is approximately the same: 28.7 years in Russia, 28.7 in Kazakhstan and 28.0 years in Kyrgyzstan. It should be borne in mind that the dynamics of this indicator is under a differentiated influence of the reproductive model dominant in a particular country.<sup>20</sup> The most important evidence of the nature and stage of the “demographic transition” is the indicator of the age at which a woman gives birth to her first child.

Fig. 3 demonstrates the respondents’ choice of the most favorable age for the birth of their first child. The opinions of the respondents from Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were monolithically concentrated within the so-called “golden decade” (21 to 30 years). During this period, an entire range of interests and life tasks appears in front of the young generation. These tasks require time to be realized. They include getting an education and a profession, starting a career, creating a family, and giving birth to their first child. It should be noted that the current average age of a woman giving birth to her first child in Russia has actually shifted to the second half of the golden decade (26 years), although over half of Russians (56%) pinpointed the preferred first birth age range as 21-25 years.

The data obtained in our study demonstrated that regardless of the survey country and the respondent’s gender, the most frequently preferred age for the birth of the first child in the “golden decade” is its first half: 21-25 years (see Table 1). 26-30 years was the second most suitable age pe-

<sup>20</sup> See: E. Shcherbakova, “The Average Age of a Mother at Childbirth Remained Quite Stable: Its Median Value for All Countries of the World was 28.8 Years in the 1970s, and 28.7 in the 2000s,” available at [<http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2011/0489/barom03.php>].



riod for childbirth as indicated by the respondents. This choice was common among both men and women. Thus, 21-30 years is the unanimous preferred age range for the birth of the first child, both for the male and female populations of these countries.

Figure 3

**Distribution of Responses to the Question:  
“Which Age Do You Consider Best for Giving Birth to the First Child?”, %**

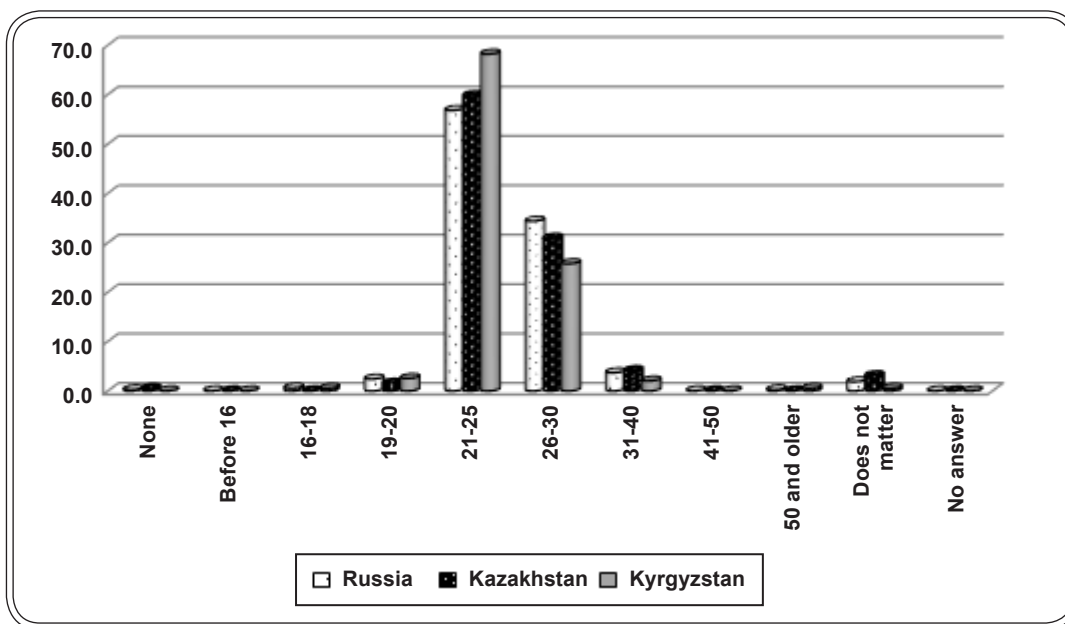


Table 1

**Responses to the Question:  
“Which Age Do You Consider Best for Giving Birth to the First Child?”, %**

	Russia		Kazakhstan		Kyrgyzstan	
	men	women	men	women	men	women
None	0.4		1.2			
Before 16						
16-18	1.2					0.9
19-20	2.8	2.0	3.6		5.5	
21-25	46.2	65.7	63.9	56.8	53.8	80.4
26-30	39.7	30.0	22.9	36.9	35.2	17.8
31-40	6.1	1.7	4.8	3.6	4.4	
41-50						
50 and older	0.4				1.1	
Does not matter	3.2	0.7	3.6	2.7		0.9

Among the female respondents, the preference for having a child at the age of 21-30 is more clear-cut than among the males. This age is preferred by 98.1% of young women in Kyrgyzstan, by 93.7%, in Kazakhstan and by 95.6%, in Russia. Among men, this age range was a priority, but less significant: 89.0%, in Kyrgyzstan, 86.7%, in Kazakhstan and 85.8%, in Russia. The most diverse attitudes to the preferred age of giving birth to the first child were demonstrated by Russian men, and the most homogenous—by Kyrgyz women. Among the latter, over 80% of the respondents consider 21-25 to be the most favorable age for the birth of their first child. This is evidence that young women in Kyrgyzstan have the most traditional idea of the age at which their first child should be born, their behavior has been least transformed at this point and they are far less inclined to delay the fulfillment of their reproductive function.

The survey also found that, when responding to the question about the most favorable age for the birth of their first child, some of the Russian and Kazakh youths chose the “None” alternative. We can assume that these are supporters of the widely discussed, but still relatively uncommon child-free stance. Moreover, as the survey data show, only men from Russia and Kazakhstan chose this response. None of the respondents from Kyrgyzstan agreed with this statement, which further emphasizes the traditional reproductive model dominant in this country.

Speaking directly and specifically about reproductive plans, the study focused on identifying their different aspects. In the studies of demographers and sociologists, reproductive intentions are traditionally divided into real (expected) and ideal, which are assessed using various questions. Thus, the answer to the question: “How many children do you intend to have?” is usually identified with the respondents’ real plans. On the other hand, the answer to the question: “How many children would you like to have?” is identified with the desired number of children.<sup>21</sup> In our work, we use differently formulated questions about the reproductive intentions of young people in the countries under consideration, which accentuates the results of the survey in a new way. Thus, survey results related to the expected number of children among the respondents from the three countries are ranked in the same way as half a century ago (see Fig. 4). The respondents from Russia are inclined towards having few children. The reproductive plans of young people from Kazakhstan are shifting towards an average number of children. Young people from Kyrgyzstan would like to have the largest number of children.

As for the approximate number of respondents who do not intend to have children, thus falling into the “planned childlessness” category, 3.4% of young people from Russia and 1.8% of those from Kazakhstan chose this option. According to our data, this phenomenon is statistically negligible in Kyrgyzstan.

If we rank the planned reproductive choice of the number of children, we will notice clearer trends in the reproductive plans of young people in the three countries. In total, the first three ranks of reproductive choice cover the vast majority of respondents. Also, there is a certain polarization of the reproductive choice in Kyrgyzstan between the average and large number of children. For Russians, the highest ranks of answers are as follows: 2 children (40%), 3 children (26%), 1 child (12%). For Kazakhstanis, the ranking is as follows: 3 children (32%), 2 children (30%), 4 children (14%). Young people from Kyrgyzstan clearly have the expected large number of children: 4 children (31%), 3 children (30%), 6 and more children (13%). Together, these three dominant ranks covered the overwhelming majority of the survey participants: 80% of Russians, 78% of Kazakhstanis and 74% of Kyrgyzstanis.

Fig. 5 shows the ideal number of children for young people from Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The reference to “ideal” reproductive behavior was reinforced by the modification of the

<sup>21</sup> See: S.G. Ivchenkov, M.S. Ivchenkova, “Osobennosti reproductivnykh ustanovok sovremennoi molodezhi: mneniia ekspertov i realnost,” *Alma Mater* (Bulletin of the Higher School), No. 11, 2020, pp. 36-44.

Figure 4

Distribution of Responses to the Question: "How Many Children Do You Intend to Have?", %

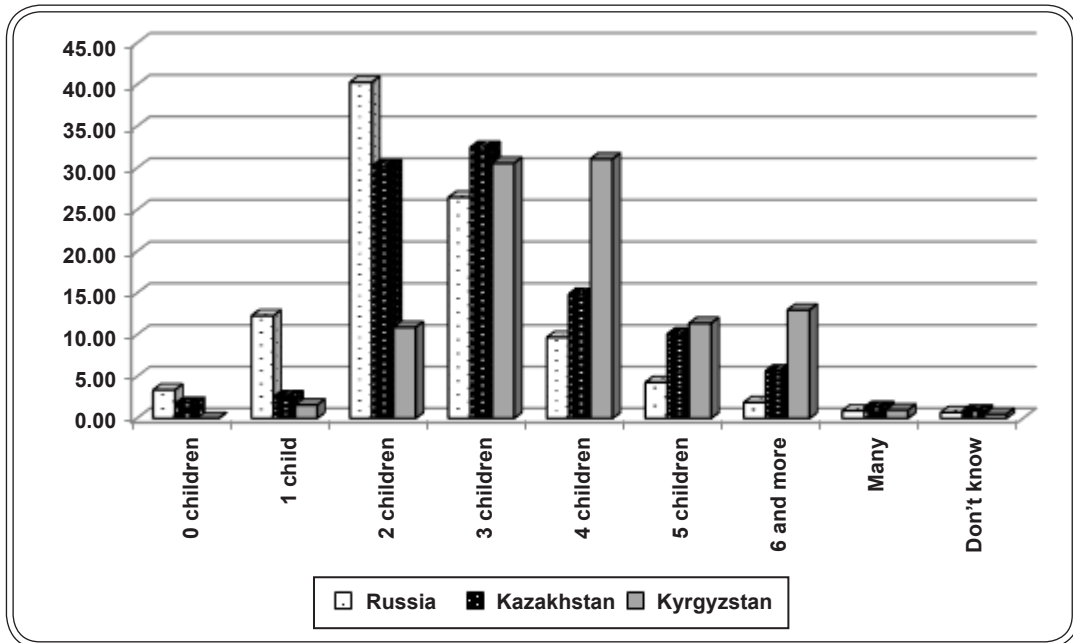
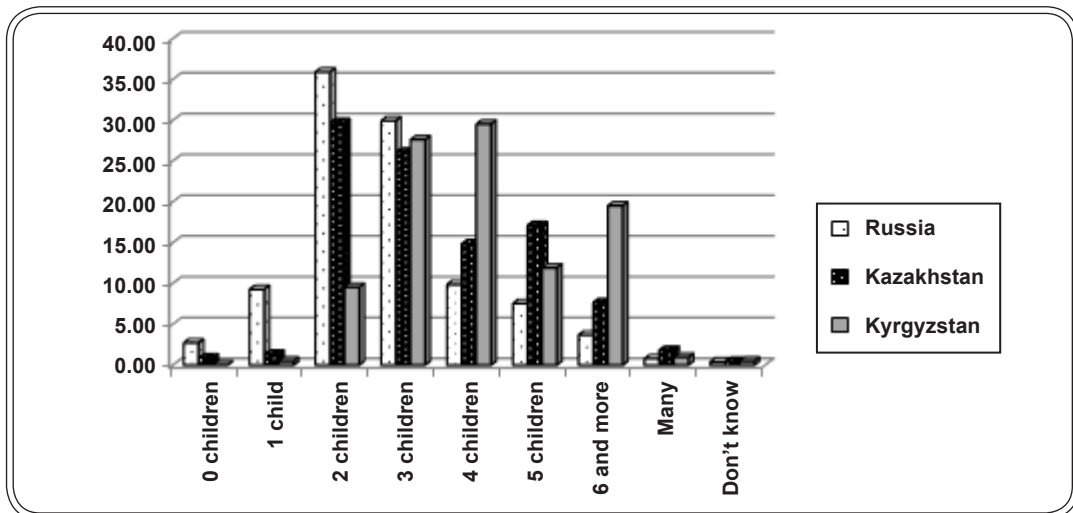


Figure 5

Distribution of Responses to the Question: "How Many Children Would You Like to Have If All the Required Conditions were in Place?", %



formulation of the question in our survey. We did not just ask: "How many children would you like to have?", as is usually done in other similar studies, but reinforced this "ideal nature" in the question with "ideal" circumstances: "...if all the required conditions were in place." This allowed to identify

the **maximum** reproductive intentions of these countries' youth today. An analysis of the responses to this question revealed a certain shift in the reproductive choice of respondents in all countries towards an increase in the number of children. However, these shifts are not equally sized.

Among the Russian youth, the reproductive choice to have 4 children was in the third place, the choice to have 2 children slightly decreased, and the choice to have 3 children slightly increased. The choice to have 1 child has moved down one rank. The views of young people from Kazakhstan have also shifted. The first place was taken by the 2-children choice, followed by 3 children, but the third place was taken by 5 children, which indicates the emergence of a shift in the views on the ideal number of children among Kazakhstani respondents. In Kyrgyzstan, the ranks of the preferred number of children, under ideal conditions, has not changed. The groups intent on having 4 and 3 children slightly decreased in size, but the group oriented towards 6 and more children has grown significantly (by up to 20%). Note also that in Russia and Kazakhstan, fewer respondents chose the planned childlessness option (2.7% and 1%, respectively), but still exist.

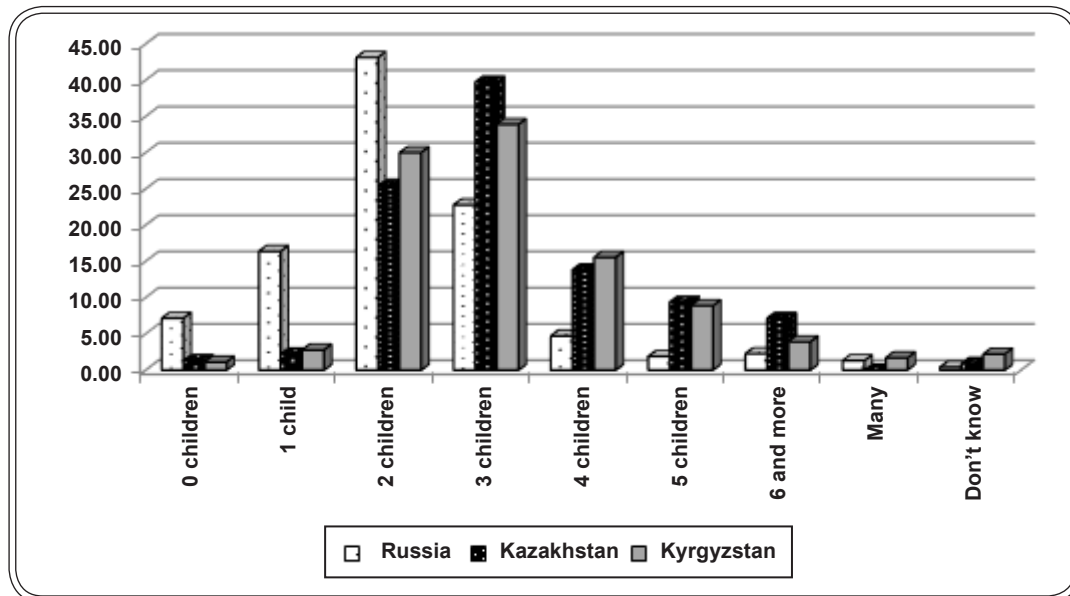
On the contrary, the share of respondents who declared their desire to have many children in the presence of all the necessary conditions increased along the north/south geographical vector: in Russia—53.4% (women) and 47.9% (men); in Kazakhstan—72.0% and 59.9% (respectively); in Kyrgyzstan—86.8% and 91.1% (respectively).

For a more detailed study of the reproductive attitudes of young people in Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, we also used the question that characterizes the reproductive choice under the current socio-economic conditions in these countries (see Fig. 6). In the context of this issue, it proved possible to compare current living conditions and ideal reproductive attitudes. Thus, its results can be compared with the responses to the previous question about the desired number of children, given all the necessary conditions.

In the figure, we see that reproductive views are more concentrated and begin to lean towards fewer children when the question is formulated this way. Compared to the choice of the ideal number

Figure 6

**Distribution of Responses to the Question:  
“How Many Children Is It Best to Have in Our Times in Your Country?”, %**



of children, in Russia, the one-child and two-children options are growing more popular, and the support for the three-children option is declining. In Kazakhstan, the number of respondents who selected the two-child option is decreasing, of those who made the three-child choice is increasing and of those who opted for the five-child choice is sharply falling, while the four-child choice has the same number of supporters. In Kyrgyzstan, the transformation of reproductive choice is even more significant. Here it is shifting towards a decrease in the number of children, even when compared with the planned reproductive attitudes. The three-children choice ranks first. Moreover, against the background of a significant increase in the child-free choice in Russia and its slight increase in Kazakhstan, respondents who believe that it is not necessary to have children in the current conditions are even appearing in Kyrgyzstan.

At the same time, despite the decreasing effect of modern conditions on the realization of ideal reproductive behavior, the potential of the traditional reproductive views of the Central Asian republics is still high, both for the entire population of these countries, and for the male and female populations (see Table 2).

Table 2

**Responses to the Question:  
“How Many Children Is It Best to Have in Our Times?”, %**

Number of Children	Russia		Kazakhstan		Kyrgyzstan	
	men	women	men	women	men	women
0 children	8.8	5.8	0.9	1,8	2.5	
1 child	16.3	16.5	3.6	0,9	1.3	4.0
2 children	38.8	46.7	27.0	23,9	23.8	35.0
3 children	23.8	22.0	45.9	33,6	33.8	34.0
4 children	6.3	3.4	9.9	17,7	21.3	11.0
5 children	2.1	1.7	9.0	9,7	6.3	11.0
6 children and more	2.1	2.4	2.7	11,5	6.3	2.0
Don't know	0.4	0.3	0.9	0,9	2.5	2.0
Many	1.7	1.0			2.5	1.0

This comparison showed that, due to the modern life conditions, the desire to have many children is sharply reduced in Russia and Kyrgyzstan (in both women and men), but remained practically unchanged among the respondents from Kazakhstan, even increasing slightly. Thus, only 29.5% of Russian female respondents believe that it is best to have 3 or more children at present. Among Russian men, this figure reaches 34.3%. In Kyrgyzstan, women who wish to have many children currently account for 58.0%, and men—67.7%. These data show that women in Russia and Kyrgyzstan do not currently intend to have many children compared to men in the respective country. However, this ratio is the opposite in Kazakhstan: women lean more towards having many children than men—72.5% versus 67.5%, respectively.

In addition, with a question formulated in this manner, an increased leaning towards childlessness was revealed even among respondents from Kyrgyzstan. Men from Russia, as well as women from Russia: 8.8% and 5.8% (respectively) have expressed their preference for the child-free ideology. There are respondents who hold this opinion among men (0.9%) and women (1.8%) in Kazakh-

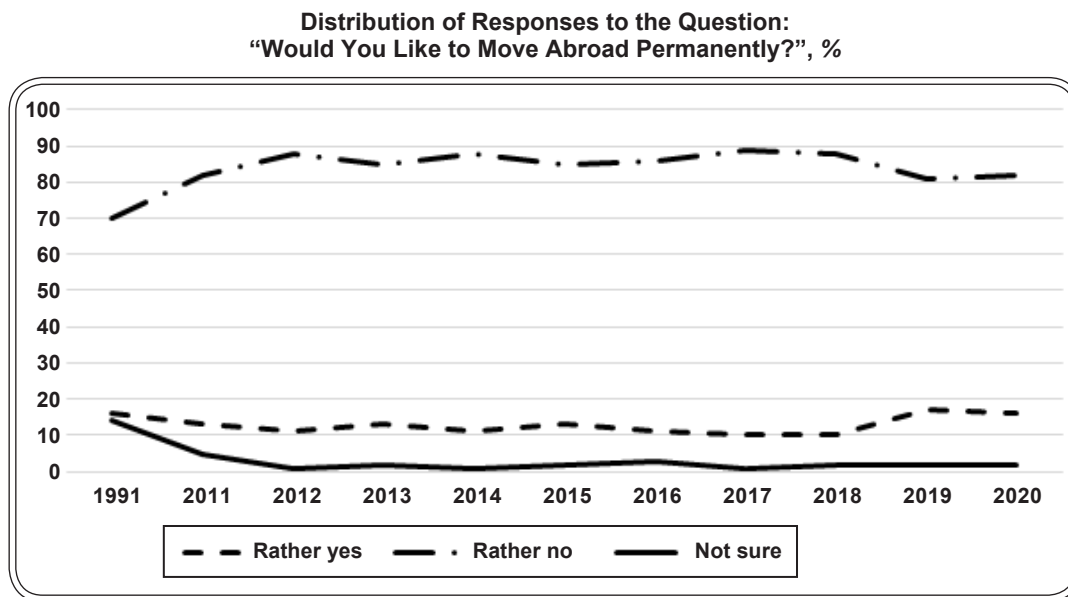
stan. Modern conditions had an impact on young men from Kyrgyzstan, 2.5% of whom believe that it is better not to have children at the present time. However, there were no adherents of childlessness among women from Kyrgyzstan.

### ***Migratory Behavior of Youth in Central Asia and Russia: Inter-Country, Inter-Group, and Gender Specifics***

The specifics of the population’s migratory behavior often become the subject of research by sociologists. This is hardly surprising, since migration is an important component of the demographic environment in any country, which affects the quantitative and qualitative parameters of the population structure.

Thus, the All-Russia Center for the Study of Public Opinion conducts an annual sociological survey in order to identify the migration attitudes of Russians. According to a study conducted in 2020, about 16% of Russians people would like to move abroad (see Fig. 7). At the same time, over the past 30 years since 1991, this parameter has changed insignificantly (from 10% in 2017 and 2018 to 17% in 2019) and strongly depends on the age of the respondents. While almost 40% of young people under the age of 24 have thought about moving to another country, people over the age of 60 are 10 times less likely to consider it (see Fig. 8).<sup>22</sup>

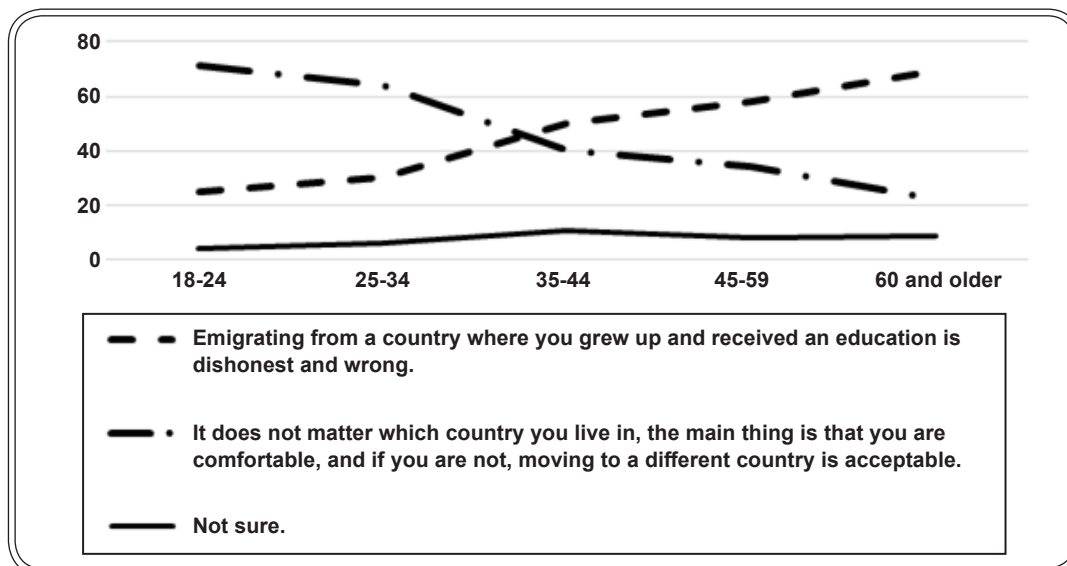
Figure 7



According to VTsIOM, the majority of the respondents have formed their judgments regarding emigration from the country. Young people demonstrate more “pragmatic” views (for 71% of respondents aged 18-24 it does not matter which country you live in). The older generation is more “patriotic” (for 69% of those over 60, it is unpatriotic to emigrate from the country).

<sup>22</sup> See: “Emigratsionnye nastroyeniia—2020: gde rodilsia, tam i prigodilsia,” VTsIOM, No. 4325, 7 September, 2020, available at [<https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=10431>].

Figure 8

Distributions of Responses to the Question:  
“Which of the Statements Do You Most Agree With?”, %

The present sociological study of the migration intentions of young people from the three countries, Russia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, was based on three questions that indirectly characterize the views on participation in migration movement and possible vectors of resettlement:

- Where would you apply your acquired professional skills?
- Where would you like to start a family?
- Where would you like your children to live?

The following alternatives were proposed:

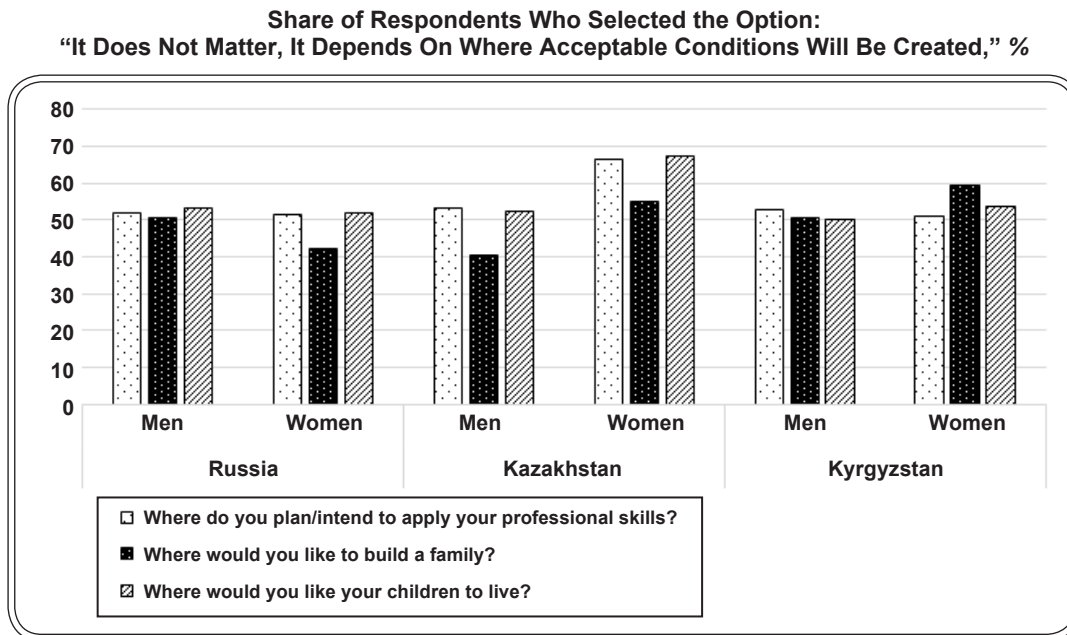
1. Only in Russia
2. In Russia and CIS countries
3. Only outside Russia and CIS countries
4. It does not matter, it depends on where acceptable conditions will be created.

This progression allows to split the respondents into three groups, conventionally called “patriots,” “anti-patriots” and “pragmatists.”

Analysis of the research results revealed that modern youth in all three countries most often adheres to pragmatic approaches in migration-related behavior choices.<sup>23</sup> More than 50% of the respondents selected the option “It does not matter, it depends on where acceptable conditions will be created” (see Fig. 9). This confirms that the modern youth in the three countries is chiefly guided by pragmatic reasons and rationally refers to the socio-economic conditions available at home in regard to the use of their professional skills, the creation of a family and the place of residence of their children.

<sup>23</sup> See: S.Yu. Sivoplyasova, E.P. Sigareva, “Nekotorye aspekty migratsionnoi motivatsii rossiiskoi molodezhi,” *Narodonaselenie*, No. 2, 2014, pp. 65-71.

Figure 9



At the same time, the choice of this answer option differs significantly depending on the gender, country of residence and the question posed. Thus, the greatest pragmatism in choosing the place to apply professional skills and the place of children’s residence was demonstrated by Kazakhstani women (66.7% and 52.3% of the total number of women who answered each question in Kazakhstan, respectively), and in relation to the place to start a family—by women from Kyrgyzstan (59.4% of respondents). The least pragmatic were Kazakhstani men and Russian women with regard to the choice of the place to start a family (40.6% and 42.2% of respondents, respectively).

There are gender subgroups among the respondents that are characterized by significant differences in the implementation of pragmatic approaches in relation to certain migration-related plans. Thus, Russian women, as well as young men and women in Kazakhstan, have approximately the same attitude towards choosing a place to apply their professional skills and a place of residence for their children. At the same time, respondents from these groups define the desired place for creating a family in a more specific manner. Further research has shown that most often the choice is made in favor of the country in which the respondents lived at the time of the survey.

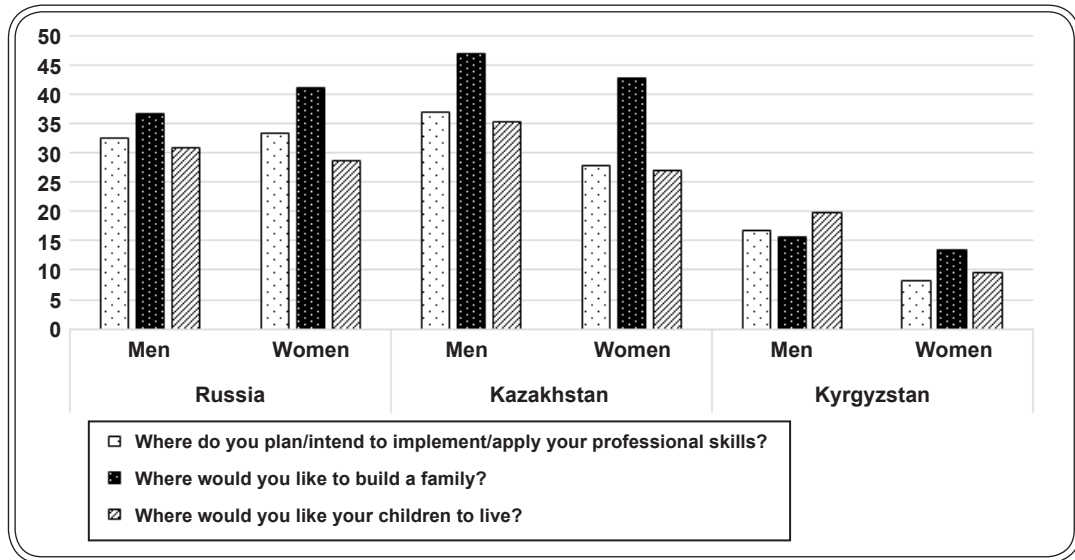
The second rather large group of respondents can be conditionally called “patriots.” These are the people who associate their future and the future of their descendants with the country where they lived at the time of the survey (for the purposes of this study, these countries will be called “homeland”). The results of the study show that the respondents are most “patriotic” about the place to start a family (see Fig. 10). Moreover, students in Kazakhstan generally demonstrate a more restrained attitude towards marriage migration, and wish to create families in their country. At the same time, they are ready to apply professional knowledge and raise children in other countries.

It is interesting to note that men from Kyrgyzstan showed patriotic feelings towards the country of their children’s residence more often than towards the place of application of professional knowledge and the place of creating a family. This may indirectly indicate a positive assessment of the country’s socio-economic development, as well as a desire to instill in children and preserve national cultural and mental traditions.



Figure 10

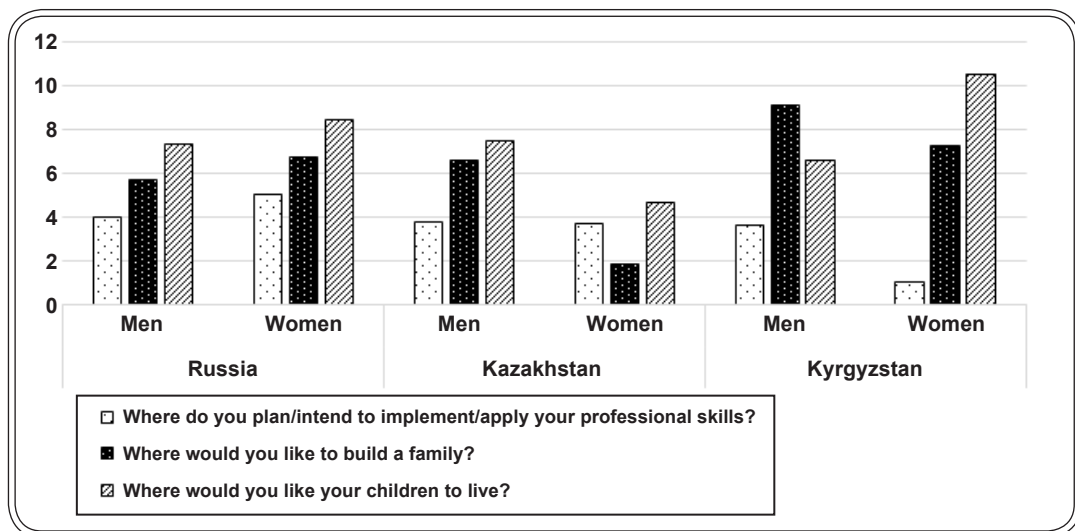
Share of the Respondents Who Selected the Option  
“Only My Own Country,” %



An important direction of the study was to identify the attitudes of young people towards migration to non-CIS countries. Such respondents were united in a group provisionally named “anti-patriots.” Notably, this group name does not carry any evaluative political meaning and is exclusively applicable for research purposes. An analysis of the survey results revealed that few people demonstrate a desire to leave their country and the CIS countries (see Fig. 11).

Figure 11

Share of Respondents Who Selected the Option:  
“Only Outside of My Country and the CIS Countries,” %



There are also several key points in the formation of the youth migratory behavior in the context of the desire to move to non-CIS countries.

- First of all, many groups of respondents (men and women in Russia, men in Kazakhstan, and women in Kyrgyzstan) are characterized by an increase in the so-called “anti-patriotic”<sup>24</sup> sentiments from the question of the place of application of professional knowledge to the question of the preferred place of residence of the respondents’ children.
- Secondly, the least patriotic students are in Kyrgyzstan. Thus, over 10% of women stated that they would like their children to live in non-CIS countries, and 9.1% of young men from Kyrgyzstan would like to create families away from home.
- Thirdly, less than 2% of women in Kazakhstan wish to marry outside their own country or another CIS country, which is the lowest value among the indicators obtained. That is, Kazakh women are either determined to start a family strictly at home, or have hardly thought about the place of marriage.
- Fourth, women in Russia and Kyrgyzstan are slightly more anti-patriotic than men in their countries. Meanwhile, the situation in Kazakhstan is the opposite.

The following results can be generally noted with regard to migration attitudes by country and gender. In all countries, young people demonstrate pronounced “pragmatic” or “patriotic” insistence on the choice of the location for the key life events. The share of “anti-patriots” ranges from 2.2% to 8.8%. The “pragmatists” are the largest in all countries. In Kazakhstan, the most “pragmatic” attitude towards the choice of the place of application of professional skills and the desired place of children’s residence is noted (60.1% and 59.8%, respectively). In Kyrgyzstan, the most “pragmatic” attitude is noted towards the choice of the place of marriage.

In Russia and Kazakhstan, young people are the most “patriotic” about the place to start a family. They are the least “patriotic” regarding their children’s place of residence. The most “antipatriotic” claims made by young people in Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan refer to their children’s place of residence.

The minimum number of respondents would like to move to a non-CIS country for employment. The least patriotic students live in Kyrgyzstan. About 4.2% of students in Kazakhstan wish to marry outside their own country or another CIS country, which is the lowest value among the indicators in question.

## *Conclusion*

Thus, the study sets the ground for the following conclusions.

1. The reproductive plans of young people in these three countries show that within the life span of the next generation the demographic potential ratio will remain the same as half a century ago. Russia will have a low birth rate, Kazakhstan will have an average one, and Kyrgyzstan will have a relatively high birth rate. Thus, in the next 25-30 years, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan can continue to be migration donors for the Russian Federation.
2. In Russia and Kazakhstan, reproductive plans are more monolithic, while in Kyrgyzstan there is a significant differentiation. This means that in the first two countries, the so-called normative reproductive models have already been formed, although they differ in type.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibidem.

3. The ideal reproductive choice in regard to the number of children in all surveyed countries naturally increases the prospects for improving the demographic situation. However, in the respondents' opinion, the current conditions for the implementation of the reproductive plans of the younger generation are particularly unfavorable. This is especially evident from the assessments of respondents from Kyrgyzstan.
  4. The study demonstrated the peculiarities of gender-specific ideas about the reproductive behavior of young people in the three post-Soviet states, which include a conservative traditional opinion on the unacceptability of extramarital unions, especially among the women from Central Asian states. For both men and women, the first pregnancy at the age of 21-25 years remains significant. There is also a stronger motivation of the male population for a large family. At the same time, it is vital to remember that current socio-economic conditions significantly reduce the likelihood of the implementation of ideal reproductive plans for large families, both for women and men.
  5. Based on the conducted research in the context of migratory behavior, it can be concluded that the conditions of professional realization and comfort in the place of residence are essential for modern intellectual youth. Therefore, the creation of the required infrastructure and guarantees of decent wages will reduce the scale of migration in the countries under consideration, especially in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, which are the labor donor countries. In addition, many respondents intend to create families in their "home" countries. From this we can conclude that married persons will migrate, and, therefore, either the scale of migration will increase (if whole families move to another country), or the flows of money sent by labor migrants to their homeland will grow. Finally, the desire to send children to non-CIS countries to live indicates a predominantly negative assessment of the level of the countries' socio-economic development, a lack of faith in the country's future positive development, and an unwillingness to associate their future with that country. It is important to take all these conclusions into account when developing and implementing socio-demographic and migration policy measures in Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.
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## THE IDENTITY OF KAZAKHSTANI YOUTH: IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION AND NEOTRADITIONALISM

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### ABSTRACT

**T**he article analyzes the value orientations of modern student youth in Kazakhstan that influence the formation of their identity. Based on the analysis of this social group's value alignments, the article attempts to determine the vital problem areas in the formation of the character of young people as those capable of taking responsibility for their own destiny and the destiny of their country. Special attention is heeded to ethnic, religious and civic identities. The ratio of civil and ethnic identities among Kazakhstani student youth is assessed. A growth tendency in the norms of individualism and indifference to traditional forms of identity is revealed. Particular attention is paid to the influence of traditional and modernization values on the self-awareness of Kazakhstani youth. This research perspective was selected deliberately. The current state of public relations—both global, and Kazakhstani in particular—is determined by active ambiguous, multi-directional transformation processes. Under these circumstances, the issue of identity becomes especially acute for young people, and a search for sources of worldviews en-

ues to help young people formulate and self-actualize their own essence and to construct their own view of the world. In the course of this search, it is crucial to avoid becoming an object of various kinds of ideological, spiritual, ideological manipulation and recruiting. The modern contemporary social reality engenders a wide variety of spiritual practices, ideological revelations and political modules. It is essential for a young person to make the right choice based on objective knowledge and understanding. Under the circumstances, a special responsibility is imposed on the education system. Unfortunately, the modern higher education system in Kazakhstan pays special attention to the rigid specialization of graduates as part of the current vigorous reforms. Purely professional training is becoming a priority, while the issues of socio-humanitarian, ideological training of our future specialists remain on the margins of the educational system, which, in turn, impedes their successful socialization. It is in these epistemological coordinates that this article was prepared. The article is based on the data obtained through a sociological

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study conducted in 2019 as part of the project “Formation of the Concept of Religious Tolerance and Ethnic Consolidation in Educational Formats of Modern Kazakhstan.”

**KEYWORDS:** *Kazakhstani youth, identity, values, ethnicity, religiosity, patriotism, education.*

## *Introduction*

For over two decades, both state and scientific researchers have been exploring the problem of the formation of Kazakhstani identity and, in particular, the identity of Kazakhstani youth. The official state position on this issue is clearly presented in a number of landmark works, documents that reflect the main priorities of state policy in this area. This problem was assessed in a number of works by Kazakhstani researchers, who offer their point of view on the peculiarities of Kazakhstani identity among young people.

A comprehensive study of the problems of Kazakhstani youth is carried out by Molodezh (Youth), a Kazakhstani research center. In recent years, the center’s researchers have been studying the principal value orientations of modern Kazakhstani student youth in the context of formation of a tolerant attitude towards ethnic and confessional diversity. The key conclusion in this research area testifies to the presence of tolerance skills in modern Kazakhstani youth as the foundation of the attitude towards the Other.<sup>1</sup>

In 2016, as part of the research project “Kazakhstani Youth as a Strategic Resource of the Society of Universal Labor,” the Youth center presented an analysis of the possibilities and prospects for youth in the implementation of the Kazakhstani program of public and state construction in accordance with modern trends. It also outlined the role of the state in the formation of labor culture in young people as an essential factor in successful socialization and self-identification. Research has shown that labor occupies an important place in the value hierarchy of young Kazakhstanis and is included in the same group of values as family and health. However, work is important for them—not as an ultimate, but as a terminal value, a condition for achieving their life goals (material well-being, success in life).<sup>2</sup>

Kazakh scientist Beket Nurzhanov analyzes significant aspects of ethnic identification in modern Kazakhstani society and provides a fascinating look at the nature of nationalism in the context of globalization.<sup>3</sup> Issues of interethnic and interconfessional communications among Kazakhstan youth are also examined in the monographic study by Baizhol Karipbayev *Transformations of National Consciousness in the Modernization Context of Modern Kazakhstan*.<sup>4</sup> These works offer various research and methodological perspectives.

However, the diversity and inconsistency of methodological principles and approaches in the study of identification processes seriously complicates the process of researching this issue. The so-

<sup>1</sup> See: “Studencheskaia molodezh: sotsialnyy portret,” Astana, 2014, available at [<https://eljastary.kz/articles/63/0>], 20 July, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> See: *Report on the Research Work “Kazakhstani Youth as a Strategic Resource of the Society of Universal Labor” (interim)*—The Youth Scientific-Research Center, Astana, 2016 (in Russian).

<sup>3</sup> See: B.G. Nurzhanov, “Globalizatsia: zakat natsionnosti ili rastsvet etnichnosti?” in: *Ustoychivost etnokulturnykh sistem v kontekste dinamiki globalizatsii. Materialy gorodskoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii*, Almaty, 2012, pp. 79-88.

<sup>4</sup> See: B.I. Karipbayev, *Transformations of National Consciousness in the Modernization Context of Modern Kazakhstan*, Print shop, Karaganda, 2019.

ciological approach to the examination of identity implies a study of its social aspects, understood as a person's attribution to various social categories: ethnicity, class, gender, race, etc. Traditionally, the concept of identity referred to a person's individuality, but now its meaning has expanded, and sociologists today speak of a collective, or group, identity. Along with personal identity, social identity is considered an important regulator of self-awareness and social behavior.

Social roles are accepted and assimilated through forming ideas about oneself on the basis of identification with various social categories: status, gender, age, norm, group, culture, socio-cultural patterns, norms and values. However, self-identification is altered in the process of interacting with other people, and identity is predominantly formed by the end of adolescence.<sup>5</sup> The formation of social identity is a continuous process that entails the acquisition of new social characteristics, each of which comes to the fore at a certain stage of life. This process, however, is not linear, and is associated with an identity crisis. An identity crisis arises as a person grows up and in adulthood due to social changes, engagement in new types of activity and new social roles. Such a crisis may also acquire a large-scale social character. Modern sociological theories mainly focus on constructed identity, which is not seen as stable because of the dynamic nature of modern society. Understanding identity is only possible in the context of the socio-historical environment, technology and economy of the era, cultural tradition and prevailing educational practices and values.

Modern Kazakhstani society is undergoing intense social transformations. Social transformation includes all changes in social structures, institutions, practices, the emergence of new or ensuring the functioning of former groups, forms of interaction and behavior. First and foremost, there is an ongoing transformation of the value system of Kazakhstani society. Youth is one of the essential groups in the transformation process. Kazakhstani youth determines the political, economic and social structure of society, acts as a catalyst in its development. Kazakhstan's future largely depends on the identification models of young people, their value attitudes, patterns of behavior, lifestyle, and the degree of their integration into socio-political processes.

The identity of modern Kazakhstani youth is formed in the context of globalization and technologization, global changes in the value system and the simultaneous revival of traditional values, which causes even greater uncertainty in the self-perception of young Kazakhstanis. In this article, we will define traditional values as the process of using norms and values from traditional culture and adapting them to modern conditions. This process is also called neo-traditionalism, because it entails the adaptation of traditional practices to modern conditions, rather than their mere replication. The approaches to the study of neo-traditionalism are ambiguous. Thus, researchers Yuri Popkov and Svetlana Madyukova see neo-traditionalism as a combination of constant and variable elements, that is, stability of tradition in the social space and its renewal in keeping with the changing reality. Innovation restores tradition, filling it with new meaningful characteristics, while tradition does not change its basic attributes. The authors conclude that neo-traditionalism is characterized by the logic of stability and variability, which determines the relationship between innovation and tradition.<sup>6</sup> A slightly different view of neo-traditionalism as an adaptation of traditional axiological content to new conditions allows to identify different variants of this adaptation.<sup>7</sup>

According to Anthony Giddens, the modern world is beyond control in general, it is a "runaway world." Giddens believes that the role of traditions and customs has ceased to be influential, which, in turn, leads to irreversible changes in the structure of self-identification. The weakening role of tradi-

<sup>5</sup> See: O.A. Simonova, "K formirovaniu sotsiologii identichnosti," *Sotsiologicheskii zhurnal*, No. 3, 2008, pp. 45—61.

<sup>6</sup> See: Yu.V. Popkov, S.A. Madyukova, "Fenomen sotsiokulturnogo neotraditsionalizma," *Aleteiia*, St. Petersburg, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> See: V.A. Lapshin, "Formy neotraditsionalizma: Severo-Zapadnyy federalnyy okrug," *Nauchno-issledovatel'skaia baza dannykh "Rossiyskiye modeli arkhaitzatsii i neotraditsionalizatsii,"* 2014, available at [[http://neoregion.ru/szfo.html?PH\\_PSESSID=1ce91e1b3a57218d3c4ab30aa05a582e](http://neoregion.ru/szfo.html?PH_PSESSID=1ce91e1b3a57218d3c4ab30aa05a582e)], 14 December, 2018.

tions and customs leads to the destabilization of the social foundations of identity, and to an impression of free choice in the search of an identification code.<sup>8</sup> The researcher directly links the factors of modern social changes that radically alter our life with the globalization processes, which impact not only the global situation, but also people's daily life, destroying the preceding foundations and traditions, which is bound to lead to various conflicts and contradictions in cultural and ideological aspects. As a result, the traditional society is being replaced by a new model, where new technologies, the Internet, virtual space, and mass media products have a significant impact on the formation of a person's worldview. Globalization creates anxiety and a sense of risk: high modernity is a "high risk society." Risk and anxiety are becoming fundamental in modern social life. All of the above leads to the emergence of the so-called runaway identity. "The absence of a single integral structure engenders many identities that are not consistent with each other, but alternate, interchangeable. In this situation, it is difficult for a person to orientate himself, to make the right choice. The younger generation is experiencing particular difficulties, since young people are a particularly vulnerable social group, which is subject to deprivation processes in the context of a socio-cultural crisis. The latter results from the absence of a single value matrix that contributes to self-determination and enables the search for identity."<sup>9</sup>

Sociology today is focused on anticipating the emergence of social problems. Prediction in the domain of principal identification patterns is imperative. At the same time, the issue of new identity formation in Kazakhstani society reveals itself as a problem with an indisputable practical dimension. It is associated with the need to optimize youth policy, come up with scientifically valid management decisions, determine the social well-being of Kazakhstani youth, and help them acquire their cultural identity. It is impossible to design and forecast the development of this society without a clear understanding of the possibilities and prospects of the national identity of the key socio-demographic group.

## Axiological Content of Kazakhstani Youth Identity

The central research problem of this article is the axiological content of young Kazakhstanis' identity, the question of the values that dominate young people's selfhood—traditional or global, global or civic? Today, young Kazakhstanis faced the acute issue of the formation of new identification models that can be associated with the history, culture and traditions of the dominant ethnic group. They can be focused on state and civic identity, but also on the global value system associated with the processes of universalization, technologization, uncertainty and fluidity. We were interested in how traditional, global and civic values are combined in the identity structure of Kazakhstani youth. Which ones are preferable? Which ones define the selfhood of a young person?

## Research Methodology

Numerous sociological schools have dealt with issues of identity formation, which include some of the most authoritative names.<sup>10</sup> However, the concept of identity owes its mass popularity to Erik

<sup>8</sup> See: A. Giddens, *Runaway World: How Globalization is Reshaping Our Lives*, Profile, London, 1999.

<sup>9</sup> See: Ye.G. Vialova, "Identichnost molodezhi v kontekste sovremennykh filosofskikh issledovaniy," *Bulletin of Kalmyk University*, No. 2 (30), 2016, p. 130.

<sup>10</sup> See: G. Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1934; P. Berger, T. Lukmann, *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise on Sociology of Knowledge*, Penguin Books, London, 1966; A. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society, Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1984; A. Touraine, *Le retour de l'acteur. Essai de sociologie*, Librairie Arthème Fayard, Paris, 1984, 350 pp.

Erikson. His concept entered both scientific discourse and everyday thinking in the United States and Western Europe.<sup>11</sup> Erikson is rightfully considered the author of one of the most famous and deeply developed theories of identity. In this article, we are interested in Erikson's notion of psychosocial identity, which is considered the core of a person's life and an indicator of his psychosocial balance. Equilibrium provides a feeling of stability and continuity of one's self in time and space, its inclusion in social communities, the identity of personal and socially accepted worldview types.<sup>12</sup>

In our study of the identification practices of modern Kazakhstani students, we proceeded from the concept of self-identification, formulated by Erikson, who defines it as a firmly assimilated and personally accepted image of oneself in all the diversity of one's relationship with the surrounding world and focuses on the problems of identification processes, referring to both the personal and the group level of this process.<sup>13</sup>

The attention of sociologists to the identification process is due to the fact that its result—individual and social identity—is one of the main factors in the formation of social groups, social ties and social differentiation. In a stable society, identification helps a person achieve a harmonious relationship between his perception of himself and others' perception of him, between the social and individual self. Along with the socio-psychological aspects of identity, Erikson accounted for the role of the historical context in the formation of identity.

As the personality develops, its identity is tested by the challenges of the changing external world, including its global contexts, especially in modern conditions. The social crisis is accompanied by a violation of the "ideological integrity" of society, an undermining of its previous value system. The self-identification process is impossible without comparing oneself with others. Only as a result of interaction with another group, direct and/or mediated, does an individual acquire his special characteristics. Identity can be considered a symbolic means of uniting with some and distancing oneself from others.

The notion of the naturalness of identity crises was especially important in our study, with Erikson being one of the first to notice the existence of a normative, psychosocial crisis. This crisis is expressed in a person's active exploration of his place in the world, his goals, aspirations and relationships with other people. At the same time, Erikson believes that a crisis of this sort is an obligatory step in the process of an individual's development, of constructing a more complex identity.<sup>14</sup> The scientist emphasized the close connection between an identity crisis and crises of social development. As a rule, an identity crisis occurs when the disintegration of previously dominant ideals and values, which begins due to an acute social crisis, forces people to look for new spiritual guidelines for realizing their place in a changing society, new relations with the state and the surrounding social environment, that is, a process that is typical today for the absolute majority of post-Soviet countries, including Kazakhstan.

## Research Methods

The study "Ethnos. Religion. Culture" was conducted in 2018-2019, within the framework of the project "Formation of the Concept of Religious Tolerance for Ethnic Consolidation in the Educational Formats in Modern Kazakhstan." Analyzing the age structure of the Kazakhstani population, youth in particular, we saw that according to the data of the Committee on Statistics of the Ministry

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<sup>11</sup> See: O.A. Simonova, op. cit.

<sup>12</sup> See: E. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 2nd Edition, Norton, New York, 1963.

<sup>13</sup> See: E. Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis*, Norton, New York, 1968.

<sup>14</sup> See: E. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*.



of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, there were 3,900,834 young people aged 14 to 29 as of the beginning of 2018. Today, one third of young people are the middle cohort, i.e., students and young people who are mostly completing vocational training, entering production activities and creating their own families. The smallest share is made up by adolescents and young people aged 14-18 years. Analyzing the “youth” demographic category, which, according to Kazakhstan’s official statistical criteria, includes young people aged 14 to 29, it is important to emphasize that the number of young people has been declining in the middle and older age groups since 2015. The situation is different for the younger age group (14-18): since 2016, their number has been gradually increasing. 542,500 young people are college students, and, compared to the last academic year, their number had increased by 9.3%. Thus, Kazakhstani students are one of the many subgroups of young people, which is why our chief research interest encompasses those who study in Kazakhstani colleges and universities. This research perspective is also determined by the fact that today’s generation of Kazakhstani youth was born and raised in the conditions of acquired state independence. Their value priorities are largely markers of the current transformation processes in Kazakhstan.

The sample population of the study comprised students of Kazakhstani universities and colleges. N = 1,500 people in seven cities of Kazakhstan (Nur-Sultan, Almaty, Shymkent, Karaganda, Kokshetau, Taldykorgan, Kostanay). The type of sampling method we have chosen is stratified sampling. The research method used is a questionnaire survey. Questionnaire blocks were devoted to the issues of social identity of student youth, interethnic relations, patriotic feelings, forecasts for the future, fears and threats that Kazakhstani youth is concerned with.

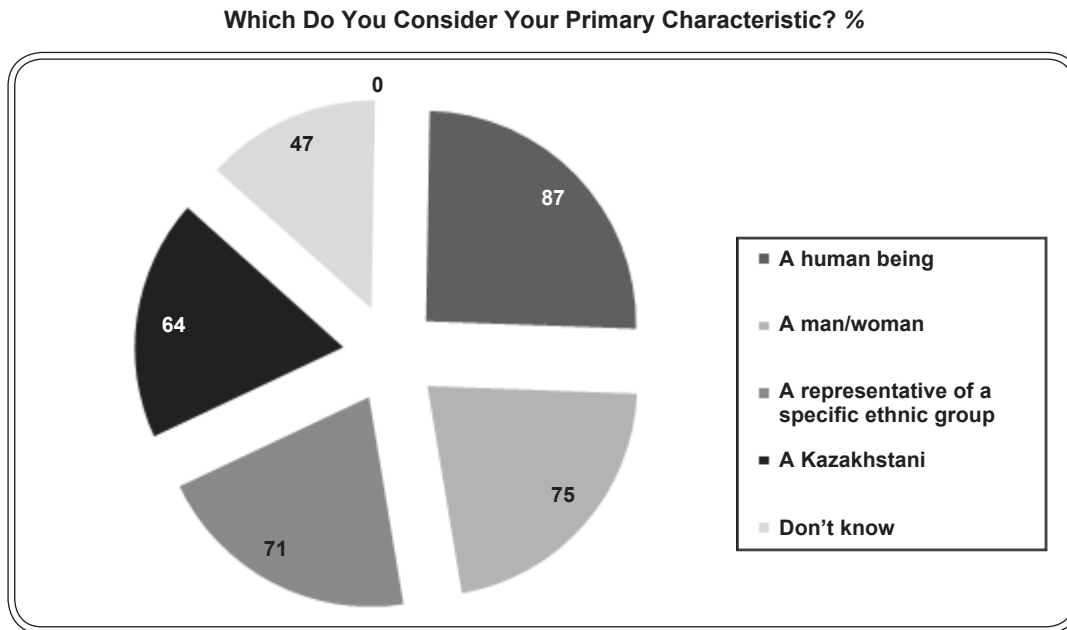
## **Identity, Ethnicity and Language**

Distribution of answers to the question “Which do you consider your primary characteristic?” produced the following results: “A human being”—87%; “A man/woman”—75%; “A representative of a specific ethnic group”—71%; “A Kazakhstani”—64%; 47% of the young people surveyed did not know how to respond to this question (see Fig. 1).

The structure of a person’s identity is always dominated by basic foundations, i.e., a human being, a man/woman. However, the distribution of the respondents’ answers demonstrates that ethnic self-identification occupies an equally important place. The number of Kazakhstani youth who cannot answer this question is also very significant. It allows to assume that traditional forms of self-identification (gender, ethnic) are not definitive or decisive for young people.

By offering a block of questions on interethnic relations, we received data that testify to the benevolent attitude of Kazakhstani youth towards other cultures. Distribution of opinions on the question “What are the attitudes of people of different ethnic groups at your place of residence?” showed that 56.4% of respondents consider them friendly; the answers to the question about conflicts and quarrels on ethnic grounds demonstrated that 86.8% of the young people surveyed had never experienced anything of the sort; 67.5% answered “Positively” to the question “How do you feel about the culture of other peoples?”; 83% of the surveyed students answered “Yes” to the question: “Do you have friends of a different nationality?”; 46.2% answered “Positively” to the question “How do you feel about interethnic marriages?” The ethnic component remains one of the most important in the structure of modern Kazakhstani identity, because it acts as the last stronghold in conditions of uncertainty, fluidity and blurring of values. At the same time, the ethnic identity of the majority is not burdened with either a sense of their own superiority, or hostility towards others, or radical nationalism. From the responses, we can infer that young people regard interethnic relations in modern Kazakhstan as calm and peaceful, the respondents demonstrate a high level of tolerance to other identification behavior models and acceptance of the “otherness” of values of other cultures.

Figure 1



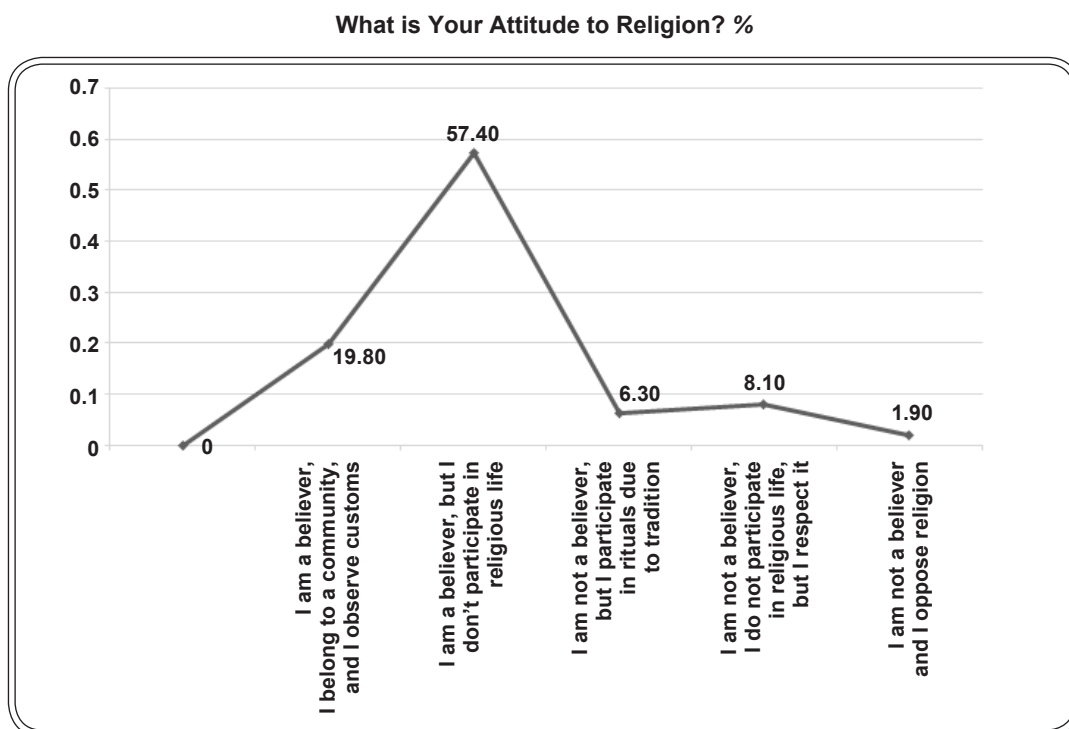
In our investigation of the linguistic identity of young Kazakhstanis, we inquired as to which language they use more often when communicating with family members. The answers were distributed as follows: “mostly Kazakh, sometimes Russian”—27.2%, “only Kazakh”—26.5%, “only Russian”—19.3%, “Russian and Kazakh, equally”—17.7%, “mostly Russian, sometimes Kazakh”—9.1%. There is a significant increase in the share of Kazakhstan youth who use the Kazakh language in everyday life. Also, 62.8% of the surveyed students study at colleges and universities in the Kazakh language, and 37.2%—in Russian. The increase in the share of Kazakh youth speaking the Kazakh language is associated both with changes in the ethnic structure of modern Kazakhstan (a general decrease in the number of people of other ethnicities in the republic), and the state’s active language policy that promotes a positive image of the Kazakh language. In addition, the nation-building process has caused a revival of interest in the Kazakh language and culture as an identification marker. But the main trend is the high tolerance of young people to Kazakh-Russian bilingualism, including among Kazakh-speaking youth.

## Identity and Religiosity

The students were asked the question: “What is your attitude to religion?” (see Fig. 2). The answer “I am a believer, but I don’t participate in religious life” was selected by the majority of participants—57.4%; the answer “I am a believer, I belong to a community, and I observe customs” was selected by 19.8% of respondents; 6.3% of respondents selected the answer “I am not a believer, but I participate in rituals due to tradition”; 8.1% consider themselves non-believers, but respect religion.

This demonstrates the existence of two main groups among student youth—those whose identification with religion is weak and those whose identification with religion is crucial for them. Only 1.9% of the respondents turned out to be opposed to religion (“I am not a believer and I oppose religion”). Students’ low interest in religious life is also confirmed by the distribution of responses to the question “Have you participated in religious ceremonies or rituals?” 63% of the respondents do not

Figure 2



participate in religious ceremonies and rituals, 25.5%—did participate in them. At the same time, 76.8% of the young people surveyed consider themselves Muslim, 11.5%—Orthodox. These two religious communities are dominant in modern Kazakhstan, which is confirmed by our research data. 6.6% of the respondents could not indicate their religious affiliation.

To the question “If you are an unbeliever, how do you feel about believers?” the following answers were obtained: positive—54.5%, indifferent—34.3%, negative—3.2%. This distribution of responses indicates the indifferent attitude of the surveyed student youth to the religiosity of other people. The distribution of answers to the question “Do you agree with the statement that ethnicity influences the choice of a particular religion?” indirectly confirms our opinion about the weak influence of religion on the identification models of Kazakhstani youth. Thus, 36.6% of students indicated that they do not agree with this opinion, 34%—agree, 28.8% sometimes agree with it.

The figures that demonstrated the religious identity of the respondents do not reveal a conscious appeal of young people to religion. The religiosity of young people is superficial and lacks in practical meaning, except for the conformity to the traditional religion of their ethnic group. Religious identification presupposes a more rational and methodical behavior than that which is documented among the “believers”—the external, ritual and cult aspects prevail in their behavior.

## Identity and Patriotism

To the question: “Do you intend to leave Kazakhstan?” 42.9% of the respondents responded “No”, 34.4%—“Not yet, but it is possible,” 16.7%—“Yes.” We see that migratory sentiments are latently present in the value structure of student youth.

The question “What, in your opinion, is included in the concept of Kazakhstani patriotism?” showed that for students it is only “Pride for their country, for its authority”—58.6% and “Readiness to stand up for its defense”—50.7%, rather than the desire to work better for the good of your country, material and spiritual wealth, the desire to help the representatives of their ethnicity in every possible way, or the feeling of superiority of their ethnic group.

To the question “How do you feel about the spread of Western values?” the following answers were received: “Tolerant”—39.7%, “Indifferent”—21.6%, “Positive”—19.9%, “Negative”—17.2%. The question “How do you feel about the revival of national traditions and customs?” showed that 47.5% were positive, 29.5%—tolerant, 13.2%—indifferent, and 8.6%—negative. The revival of religious traditions elicited the following responses: “Tolerated”—38.1%, “Positively assessed”—32.4%, “Indifferent”—17.4%, “Negative”—10.8%. This indirectly speaks of the absence of a definitive, clear attitude towards both global/pro-Western and traditional, ethnic, religious values.

Particularly interesting was the distribution of answers to the question “What do you consider the chief element that underlies the concept of ‘Kazakh’?” For the majority, it is only “Language” (69.2%). But such answers as “State” (94.9%), “Territory” (93.5%), “Religion” (88.7%), “Common history” (84.3%), “Nationality” (76.5%), “Culture” (61.3%), “Traditions and customs” (55%) were indicated by the majority of the respondents as irrelevant to the concept of “Kazakh.” The dominance of ethno-linguistic identification among students and weak identification ties with the state, territory, culture and religion are apparent. More often than others, representatives of the Kazakh-speaking student youth identified with the concept of “Kazakh,” and they also support the intensive development of the Kazakh language. But there are also some young people in the survey sample (both Kazakhs and non-Kazakhs) who support official bilingualism.

The results of our research allowed us to describe the structure of identity of Kazakhstani student youth and come to the following conclusions:

- one of the dominant elements in the structure of identity of Kazakhstani youth is ethnicity;
- Kazakhstani youth is characterized by a high level of tolerance to other cultures’ identification models;
- the linguistic identification model is formed on the basis of the Kazakh language, but the main tendency is the high tolerance of young people to Kazakh-Russian bilingualism, including among Kazakh-speaking youth;
- there are two main groups among Kazakhstani student youth—those who weakly identify themselves with religion and those for whom it is a definitive element of their identity; simultaneously, the majority of the young people surveyed are indifferent to the religiosity of others;
- we documented the dominance of ethno-linguistic identification among students and weak identification ties with the state, territory, culture and religion.

The data obtained demonstrates that the structure of the identity of modern Kazakhstani youth is uncertain, blurred and contains contradictions and inconsistencies. In a bizarre way, it combines traditional, global and civic values. This situation sharply raises the question of feasible strategies for influencing the formation of new identification models before both the state and society.

## *Conclusion*

Modern Kazakhstani youth is a new generation of Kazakhstanis, approximately the same age as the state’s independence itself. They reached their current age in the conditions of Kazakhstan’s

independent political existence. Their identity has been shaped in the process of ambiguous tendencies of civil nation-building, the revival of the Kazakh nation and the national religion of the Kazakhs.

Analysis of the research results demonstrates that today there are several key characteristics of the young Kazakhstanis' identity. Thus, there is a generally shared understanding of the need to preserve interethnic peace and harmony in the country. Interethnic relations are not burdened with either a sense of their own superiority or hostility towards others, which serves as a guarantee of the formation of civic identity among young people. Nevertheless, there are signs of the strengthening of ethnic nationalism. Ethnicity and religiosity are perceived as a given, an inherent and natural element. The constructed nature of ethnic identity, its political engagement is seldom understood. This is especially true of the Kazakh identity, which is being reconstructed through state policy and media resources.

Young people are not an active socio-political group in Kazakhstan. For the most part, it is not characterized by criticism or protest, and it cannot be considered a problematic group. Young people are often indifferent and passive. Along with the positive impact of increasingly complex identifications, alarming trends associated with the traditionalization of youth are apparent. It comprises a heightened importance of ethnic identity, family values and ethnic language.

Traditionalist ethnic identity cannot be competitive in the context of increasing globalization, since it does not work towards full integration into the world community and the creation of an attractive image of the country, but creates a threat of non-transparency and self-isolation.

Currently, there is a strong competition for new identity models for Kazakhstani youth, and the main aim is to determine which of them is the most viable and serves the development of society.

We assume that this study can become another "puzzle" in the formation of a holistic image of the specifics of youth identity and material for the subsequent study of this issue, using sociological, as well as ethnographic, anthropological, psychological, and other methods.

Deep scientific reflection on how modern Kazakhstani youth adapts to the multidirectional conditions of modern existence—globalization and traditionalization—can contribute to understanding the need to intensify the work in youth-related state policy sphere.

## MIGRATION TRENDS IN KAZAKHSTAN: EXPLORING MIGRATION CAUSES AND FACTORS

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### **ABSTRACT**

**T**he article examines the issues of emigration of the population of Kazakhstan, the reasons and factors influencing the decision of citizens to leave the country.

The analysis was based on the fall 2018 sociological poll results, which comprised responses from 3,215 Kazakhstani citizens and in-depth interviews with 143 experts in different civil service, science, education, and economics branches.

The results thus obtained showed that labor migration predominated: people were driven by the desire to earn more, to realize their professional potential, to receive better education and professional training. We have also discovered that the low quality of education and lack of favorable conditions for the development of the younger generation are the two other causes of the outflow of Kazakhstanis from their homeland. The state is not doing enough to persuade young

specialists and scientists to remain in the country, which explains the gradual increase of intellectual migration and brain-drain.

The results brought us to a conclusion that certain political factors, including poorly protected legitimate rights, corruption and

certain related reasons, are fairly important for those determined to leave.

Many of those who are ready to leave, the older generation in particular, are kept back by family and friendly ties and the habitual life style.

**KEYWORDS:** migration, factors, causes of migration, migration policy, Kazakhstan.

## Introduction

International migration is an inalienable component of globalization caused by economic, political and other processes unfolding in the changing world. Migration is present in practically every region of our planet. It is especially obvious in the developing countries: these potential sources of cheap labor force make the studies of the causes and factors of migration an important component of our understanding of the changing population strength in the world and prevention of the most probable social and economic problems in the long-term perspective.

According to the International Migration Organization, in the last two decades the number of international migrants remained fairly stable: 281 million were living outside their homelands in 2020 against 173 million in 2000 and 221 million in 2010. Today, international migrants comprise about 3.6% of the world's total population.<sup>1</sup>

According to the latest studies, people become international migrants under the pressure of economic, political and social factors.<sup>2</sup> International migration is driven by the desire to find better jobs and higher wages.<sup>3</sup> The political factors—discrimination, violations of basic human rights and clumsiness of the authorities—are also not ignored as key factors of the decision to emigrate.<sup>4</sup> Sociologists point to family ties and network connections in the target country, which obviously make it easier to find a job, accommodation and acquire information indispensable for smooth resettlement.<sup>5</sup>

Migration processes in Central Asia and their factors stir up a lot of plausible interest in the academic community. There is an opinion that migration is gradually becoming an important part of the economies of Central Asian and other post-Soviet states.<sup>6</sup> Experts believe that people leave the

<sup>1</sup> See: *International Migration 2020 Highlights*, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2020 (ST/ESA/SER.A/452).

<sup>2</sup> See: F. Docquier, G. Peri, I. Ruysen, "The Cross-Country Determinants of Potential and Actual Migration," *International Migration Review*, No. 48, 2014, pp. 37-39.

<sup>3</sup> See: B. Krasniqi, N. Williams, "Migration and Intention to Return Entrepreneurial Intentions of the Diaspora in Post-Conflict Economies," *Post-Communist Economies*, Vol. 31, No. 4, 2018, pp. 464-483; I. Arif, "The Determinants of International Migration: Unbundling the Role of Political, Economic, and Social Institutions," *The World Economy*, Vol. 43, Issue 6, 2020, pp. 1699-1729.

<sup>4</sup> See: M. Nejad, A. Young, "Want Freedom, Will Travel: Emigrant Self-Selection According to Institutional Quality," *European Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 45, 2016, pp. 71-84.

<sup>5</sup> See: S. Jain, "For Love and Money: Second-Generation Indian-Americans 'Return' to India," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 5, 2013, pp. 896-914.

<sup>6</sup> See: E. Taukebayeva, M. Zhumabekov, B. Saparov, R. Khaytmetov, "Understanding State Failures in the Central Asian Region," *Academic Research in Educational Sciences*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2020, ISSN 2181-1385.

region because their countries of choice offer a wide choice of jobs, efficient use of professional skills and social lifts.<sup>7</sup>

In their joint article, Eric Fong and Kumiko Shibuya have written that labor migration predominates in the majority of regions.<sup>8</sup> As could be expected, the expert communities and the governments throughout the world are worried by unfolding migrations. Population outflows negatively affect the competitiveness of states, their economic and social sustainability and their development as a whole. In recent years, Kazakhstan has been demonstrating a negative migration balance: the number of emigrants was bigger than the number of immigrants. This causes a lot of scholarly and, what is even more important, practical interest: the results of relevant studies may help improve migration policies and, to a great extent, prevent migration.

We have posed ourselves the task to *identify the factors responsible for the desire to leave Kazakhstan for other countries*.

Our results have demonstrated that migrants are driven by economic and political problems in their country and personal contacts with Kazakhstani who have already settled abroad.

## Gathering Information and Methods of Studies

The academic community is convinced that mixed research methods are the best instrument of comprehensive and varied analysis of the object of studies and impartial scholarly assessments.<sup>9</sup> We relied on quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Our analysis is based on the results of the sociological poll carried out between 21 September and 19 October, 2018 in all regions of Kazakhstan, including its capital Nur-Sultan and the cities with a republican status with the total sample of 3,215 respondents of 18 and older. Women comprised 60.1% of the total (1,932), men, 39.9% (1,283).

Young people aged 18 to 29 (1,014 people in all) comprised the main age group—31.6% of the polled; people aged 30 to 39 (921 in all)—28.7%; those aged 40 to 49 (678 people)—21.1%; there were 514 respondents aged 50 to 59 (15.9%); 88 people (2.7%) among the polled were over 60.

People with higher education formed the biggest respondent group (70.3% or 2,261 people); specialists with secondary special and professional education constituted the second biggest group, with 16.2% (519 people), followed by the group with post-graduate education (masters, PhDs, and doctors of science (9%, 289 people); 4.5% of the respondents (146 people) had secondary education.

The majority of the polled were civil servants (66%, or 2,123 people); employees of the law and order structures and the military comprised 0.5% of the polled, or 15 people); employees of budget organizations, 12.6% or 406 people; the share of students was 15.9% (512 people); the business community was represented by 3% of the polled, or 97 people; jobless and self-employed—1% (62 people).

The poll was conducted in Kazakh and Russian using the Google Forms online poll instrument; the results were analyzed in the SPSS program.

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<sup>7</sup> See: M. Gubaidullina, Zh. Idrysheva, *et al.*, “The Contribution of Migration to Sustainable Development: Western Vector of Migration from Central Asia (the US Case),” E3S Web of Conferences, Vol. 159, 2020, available at [https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202015902003].

<sup>8</sup> See: E. Fong, K. Shibuya, “Migration Patterns in East and Southeast Asia: Causes and Consequences,” *The Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 46, 2020, pp. 511-531.

<sup>9</sup> See: C. Moorley, X. Cathala, “How to Appraise Mixed Methods Research”, *Evidence-Based Nursing*, Vol. 22, 2019, pp. 38-41.



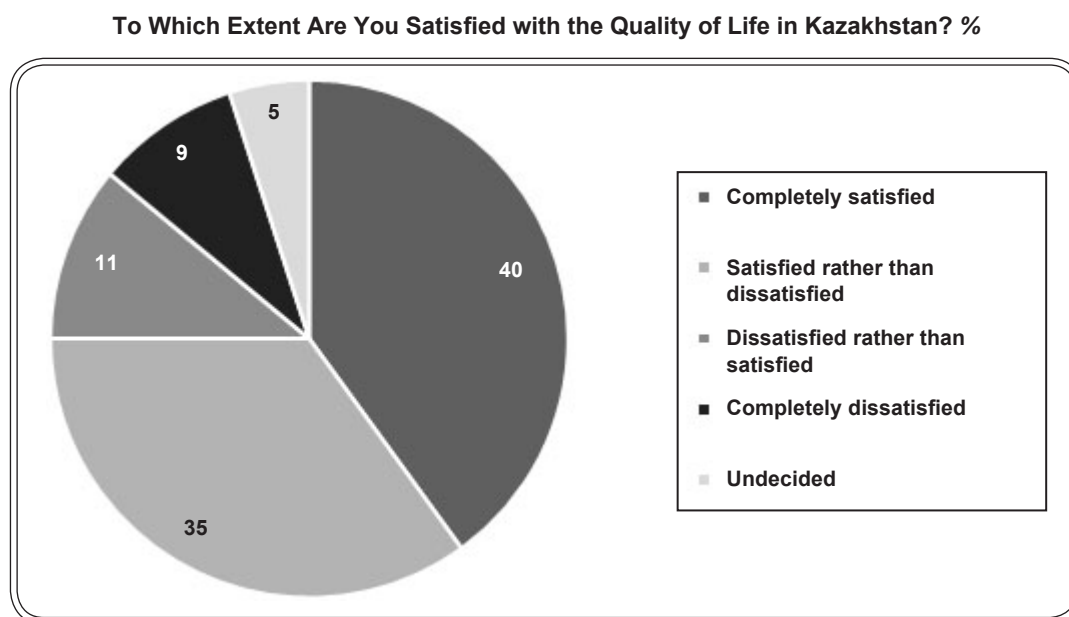
The expert interviews within this project were carried out in Nur-Sultan, Almaty, Aktau, Karaganda, Petropavlovsk, Ust-Kamenogorsk, and Shymkent. We interviewed 143 experts in education, science, civil service and the private sector.

At the same time, our statistical portrait of the migration trends relied on official information of the Committee for Statistics, Ministry of National Economics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and programmed and strategic migration-related documents.

## Results

It is repeatedly pointed out that people emigrate in search of better jobs, more efficient realization of their professional potential and higher living standards.<sup>10</sup> Our results showed that the majority of citizens of Kazakhstan are satisfied with their quality of life: 40% of the polled expressed their satisfaction with the quality of life; 35% said that they were satisfied rather than dissatisfied (see Fig. 1). The level of satisfaction with the quality of life depends on many factors: professional, social and economic status and confidence in the future. Despite the high level of satisfaction, however, our deeper studies revealed the fact that over 46% of the respondents were ready to emigrate.

Figure 1



Natasha C. Parkins is convinced that migration is, on the whole, accelerated by the lack of economic and social opportunities in the home country.<sup>11</sup> This is partly confirmed by the results of our poll, according to which 23% of Kazakhstanis are attracted by high living standards and high salaries (20%) in other countries. The problems related to corruption drive away 10% of the respondents, while

<sup>10</sup> See: M. Gubaidullina, Zh. Idrysheva, *et al.*, op. cit.; F. Docquier, G. Peri, I. Ruysen, op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> See: N.C. Parkins, "Push and Pull Factors of Migration," *American Review of Political Economy*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2010, pp. 6-24, available at [<https://libezproxy.syr.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/push-pull-factors-migration/docview/912208903/se-2?accountid=14214>].

9% are dissatisfied with the low technological level of the economy's production sector. The third group of potential migrants consists of those attracted by the social package offered in Western countries (7%); stability (6%) and people dissatisfied with the low level of medicine in Kazakhstan (6%). There are problems associated with the realization of the legitimate rights of citizens, the economic crisis, price volatility and the high level of crime (less than 5% of the respondents) (see Fig. 2).

Expert interviews provided similar answers: higher wages, better social support and high standards of living in other countries:

*"First of all, it's the quality of life, labor conditions and social insurance. I am leaving the country because in Europe and America it is much easier to find jobs upon graduation. In Kazakhstan it is not that easy for educated people to find jobs according to their wishes and professional skills. It is next to impossible to reveal your potential"* (male, 30, civil servant, Astana).

*"Skilled people move abroad because their abilities are not appreciated here. I speak about well-educated engineers and experts in nuclear physics and chemistry. Their abilities are appreciated in the form of academic degrees, while in foreign companies they are appreciated in the form of high wages. In Kazakhstan recent graduates can only count on courier or cleaning jobs"* (male, 25, civil servant, East Kazakhstan Region).

Monthly incomes are the common indicator of the social and material status, which makes the question "To which extent are you satisfied with the level of your wage?" highly relevant. The majority of the polled (50%) were dissatisfied with their low monthly incomes; 43% of the polled were more or less satisfied (see Fig. 3).

The polled experts pointed to the problems of **self-development, self-realization and the desire to receive a good-quality education** as the reasons for emigration and brain drain:

*"Our people emigrate because here they cannot move higher and get well-paid jobs. A young university graduate has no adequate skills, no experience in the chosen profession and, therefore, no prospects. Emigration and foreign language courses are his only options. Even those who graduated from a college in Almaty would not be appreciated in Kazakhstan"* (female, 38, civil servant in Almaty).

*"There are several main reasons: living conditions in our country differ a lot from America, where life is comfortable. Economic conditions are very different—they are worse in our country and are much better in the other countries that attract our people. There it is much easier to realize yourself as a professional and probably as an individual"* (male, 24, civil servant, Astana).

*"First and foremost, young people emigrate to receive a good education. A strongly motivated, developed and talented young person (not all of them can be described in these terms) has all the reasons to move abroad to study"* (male, 53, civil servant, North Kazakhstan Region).

Despite the negative trend, certain experts pointed to the **temporary nature of the outflow from Kazakhstan** explained by positive shifts in reforms:

*"First and foremost, I think that the living conditions offered there are probably affordable. I have never been abroad, so I do not know for sure. Secondly, wages and salaries are probably higher, yet we should take into account that the living standards are also higher. This is a temporary phenomenon"* (male, 27, civil servant, Mangystau Region).

*"Our youth is highly ambitious, we are open to the world, we are not closed. They can see where, how and who live abroad. They probably cannot get this here and now and cannot and do not want to wait. They need everything now. I hope that this is a short-lived phenomenon. If we realize our programs and strategic plans, we will become a flourishing state and our young people will no longer look abroad and plan emigration, which is something that we see today"* (male, 46, civil servant, Astana).

The respondents from the North Kazakhstan Region were very concerned by the pace of educational migration to the Russian Federation, where tuition is lower and the prestige of universities higher:

Figure 2

Main Reasons for Migration, %

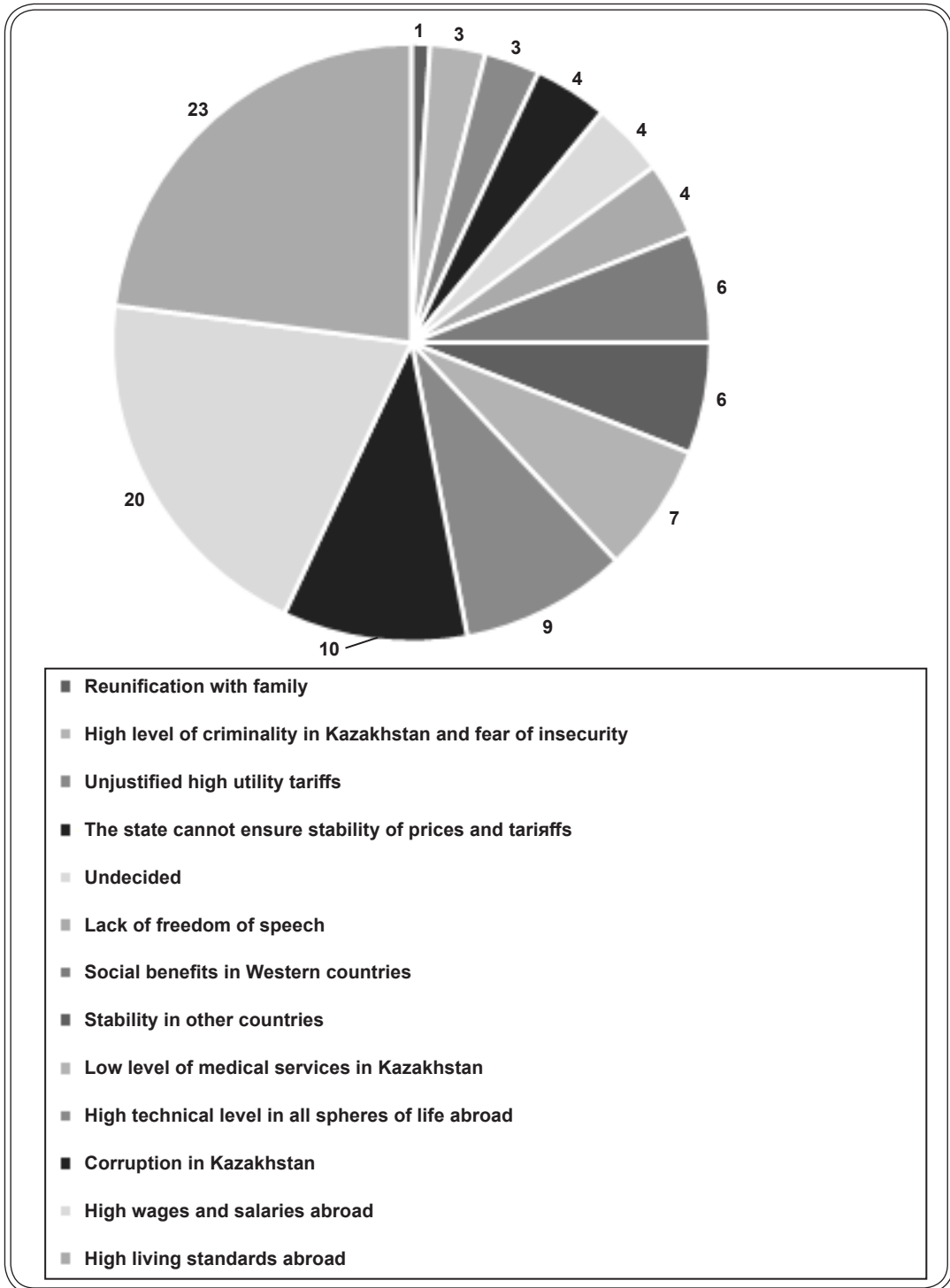
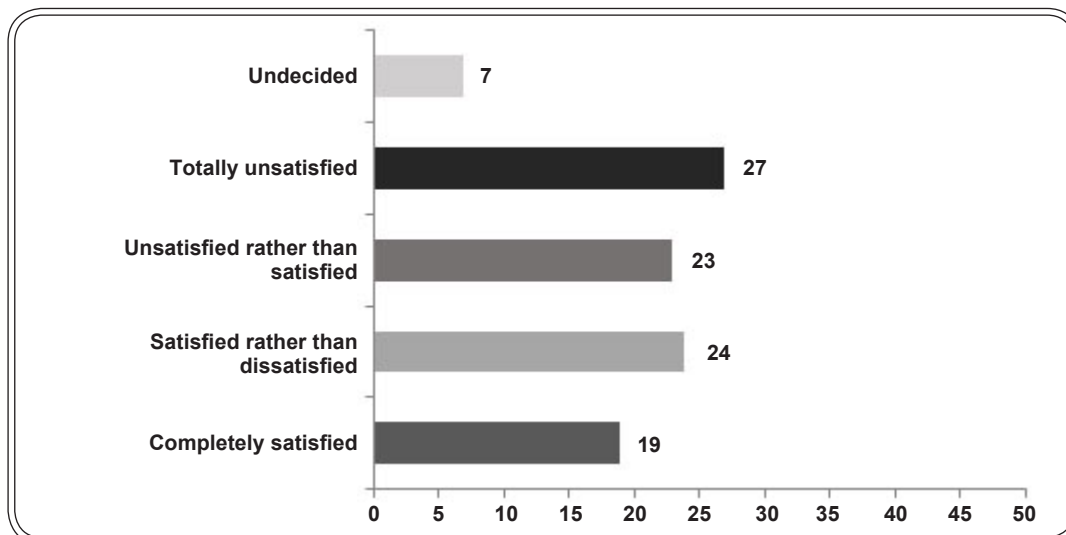


Figure 3

To Which Extent are You Satisfied with Your Wage? %



*“I wonder why school graduates move there. Because it is much easier to be educated through grants in neighboring countries. They go to other states, attracted by the living conditions and the education”* (male, 58, civil servant, North Kazakhstan Region).

*“The image is very important. Omsk with its million-strong population is the capital of Western Siberia; there are several well-known universities with long histories and respected teaching cadres. This is about the image, yet money is no less important. In Russia higher education is much cheaper than here. For example, annual tuition at our Asfendiyarov Medical Academy is 800,000 tenge. In Omsk it is 600,000-500,000 tenge. Education is much cheaper in Russia. Education at the North Kazakhstan State University is more expensive than in Omsk. The Agrarian Academy is cheaper than in Kazakhstan”* (male, 40, civil servant, North Kazakhstan Region).

**The majority of the Kazakhstani citizens plan short labor migration.** They do not contemplate permanent resettlement: they want to work and live with their families in Kazakhstan:

*“I was invited, and I wanted to work, but never thought of leaving Kazakhstan forever to settle in another country. I was satisfied with the conditions in which I could develop and carry out certain research programs. Everything was OK there. My children and my roots are here, and I want to live and die here”* (female, 56, lecturer, Almaty).

*“I think I would have gone abroad to learn Western skills to apply them in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan is our country, our Motherland”* (male of 24, civil servant, Karaganda Region).

Some of the respondents explained their intention by **patriotic feelings and the desire to be useful in their country**. Older respondents were dead set against changing the way of life:

*“No, I will not go anywhere, I like it here, we could and can go abroad. We have relatives abroad, but even my children are not considering emigration. Our roots are here, everything we have is here”* (female, 44, civil servant, North Kazakhstan Region).

*“No, I’d rather stay here, in my settlement and will develop it so that people could get better incomes. I’d rather go forward to become the leader and patriot of my home country”* (male, 26, civil servant, East Kazakhstan Region).

*“Today I have no such plans; if as a young man I had the opportunities available to the young generation today, I would have done the same”* (male, 46, civil servant, Astana).

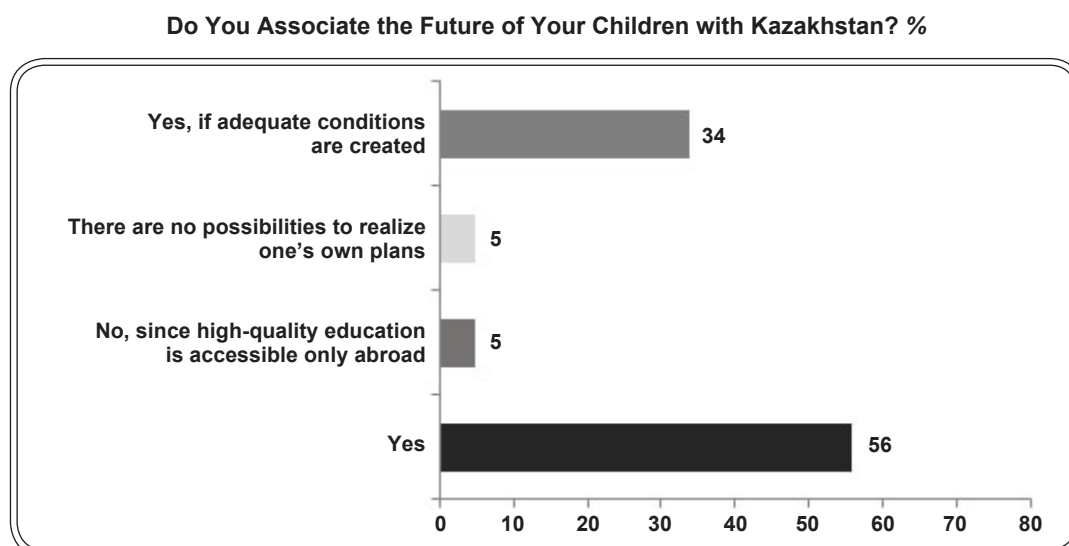
A small part of the respondents, however, said that they were ready to move abroad if offered good jobs and good conditions:

*“Well, certainly. Had I been offered a good job there and adequate housing, if my family accepted this I would have moved”* (female, 38, civil servant, Almaty).

*“If we are talking about foreign countries, I would look attentively at any foreign country. Judging by our neighbors, we are not the worst. Also, conditions should be good and I would be interested in this country. If not, I would still have said: well, let’s try”* (male of 29, civil servant, East Kazakhstan Region).

The respondents were asked to assess the **state of the social sphere in Kazakhstan**, including the system of education and additional education for children. The question “Do you associate the future of your children with Kazakhstan?” received 56% of positive responses. On the other hand, 10% of the respondents firmly refused to associate the future of their children with Kazakhstan, which offered no high-quality education and limited self-realization potential. According to 34% of the polled, the outflow from the country could be stemmed only by better conditions for development and education (see Fig. 4).

Figure 4



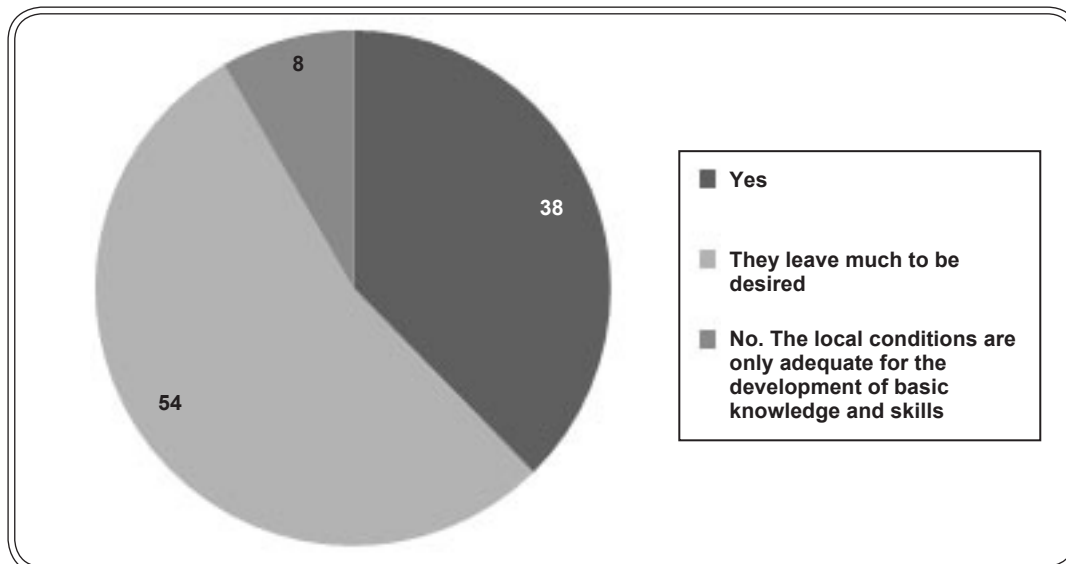
Meanwhile, there is an important fact: a relatively big share of the respondents (62%) are not satisfied with the conditions in which they raise their children. The inadequate level of education in Kazakhstan forces parents to educate their children in developed countries; not infrequently, children educated abroad do not return, but find jobs and homes there (see Fig. 5). There are many reasons to believe that the outflow from Kazakhstan is caused by the parents’ desire to find better conditions and brighter prospects for their children.

Meanwhile, the following arguments are offered as an explanation for the **low quality of training at Kazakhstan’s universities**:

- **The inadequate level of professional competence of the teaching staff at universities** is explained by the shrinking number of university lecturers of “Soviet times” as a model of teaching skills. The younger generation of the respondents, however, is convinced that the Soviet teaching methods were outdated, which makes the services of “Soviet lecturers” unnecessary:

Figure 5

**Are You Satisfied with the Conditions  
in Which Your Children Grow and Develop? %**



*“Professionalism of the teaching staff is below standards”* (female, 39, teacher, Almaty).

*“For example, there are people who studied in the Soviet Union, but there are new technologies that are appearing today and these people should be taught to use them”* (male, 25, civil servant, Mangystau Region).

*“Regrettably, this generation of experienced people is gradually disappearing, while the young specialists do not fit all requirements”* (male, 37, civil servant, Astana);

- **The profession of a university lecturer is not popular** among highly skilled specialists because of **low wages and inadequate social support**:

*“There are not many lecturers who are interested in what they are doing; others, to tell the truth, are barely surviving. They need money for sustenance and remain in this profession, but do not develop their skills. They spend a lot of time, up to 90% of their working hours, dealing with papers and documents instead of developing and teaching students”* (male, 30, teacher, Astana).

*“Today, people stay away from universities: the wage is sixty thousand tenge, while the workload forces them to spend a lot of time at work. Not many people want to work for sixty thousand”* (female, 56, lecturer, Almaty);

- **Corruption at universities and inefficient management** are the two factors that explain the low development level of the higher education system:

*“I should say that, unfortunately, corruption has reduced to naught the entire system of higher education in this country. On the whole, repercussions might be very negative both for the country and society”* (male, 37, civil servant, Astana).

*“I am convinced that ours is the most corrupt educational system; it is much more corrupted than the customs service, police and civil service”* (male, 40, civil servant, North Kazakhstan Region).

*“In big universities the quality of education is probably worse; they are too big and too inflexible, which is bad and costs a lot. They do not teach students adequate competences”* (female, 42, lecturer, Almaty);

- **Paid education** is one of the major stumbling blocks on the road to higher quality of education at our universities: accessible to all who can pay, it kills competitiveness among students:

*“I do not understand paid medical education: indeed, an indifferent student who paid for his education will hardly become a good doctor. I do not understand paid education at either medical or pedagogical universities. Human lives and development of our children cannot and should not depend on money paid for education”* (female, 47, civil servant, North Kazakhstan Region).

*“Education is paid, and the number of graduates is much greater than before. The quality casts doubt: a lot of graduates cannot find adequate jobs”* (female, 58, civil servant, North Kazakhstan Region).

*“Today, when anybody with money can enroll at a university, the quality of higher education in our country leaves much to be desired”* (female, 43, civil servant, North Kazakhstan Region);

- Many respondents spoke of a **lack of motivation in the student milieu**: many of them are not concerned with the quality of their education:

*“Those who enroll to study will study. In this case, the quality of the pedagogical staff is not that important; it is much more important what the student wants”* (female, 37, civil servant, North Kazakhstan Region).

*“Many students enroll at universities to get a diploma; they are not interested in their future profession. The teaching staff, therefore, see no reason to try too hard”* (male, 47, civil servant, Astana).

*“Much depends on the students themselves. I have often heard from professors that only 5 or 7 students out of 100 work hard. Others spend time at seminars and lectures with telephones in their hands”* (male, 64, Almaty).

At the same time, 60% of the respondents positively assessed the possibilities of professional development in Kazakhstan; while 40% were more or less satisfied or even displeased.

According to the results of our opinion poll, *political factors* are also present among migration factors. We have already written that, according to the academic community, observance of the basic human rights is one of the fairly important determinants of migration.<sup>12</sup> About 20% of the respondents pointed to the deficiencies of the national human rights legal system; 12% pointed to repeated violations of rights in all spheres of life; 6% pointed out that those wishing to protect their legal rights and interests need money or good contacts at the very top (see Fig. 6). About half of the respondents, 49% to be more exact, are convinced that the laws of Kazakhstan efficiently protect the rights and interests of its citizens.

In the course of our poll the respondents were invited to assess the **efficiency of the instruments of state support of citizens in different spheres (business, science, etc.)**. According to the respondents, the state supports businesses and those who received the Bolashak presidential stipend. The vulnerable population groups are only partially and inefficiently supported. The society is convinced that state support of young specialists, scientists and talented people is inadequate and not efficient enough (see Fig. 7).

<sup>12</sup> See: C. Werner, C. Emmelhainz, H. Barcus, “Privileged Exclusion in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan: Ethnic Return Migration, Citizenship, and the Politics of (Not) Belonging”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 69, No. 10, 2017, pp. 1557-1583.

Figure 6

**Do You Believe That the Rights of Citizens Are Protected by the Laws of the RK?**

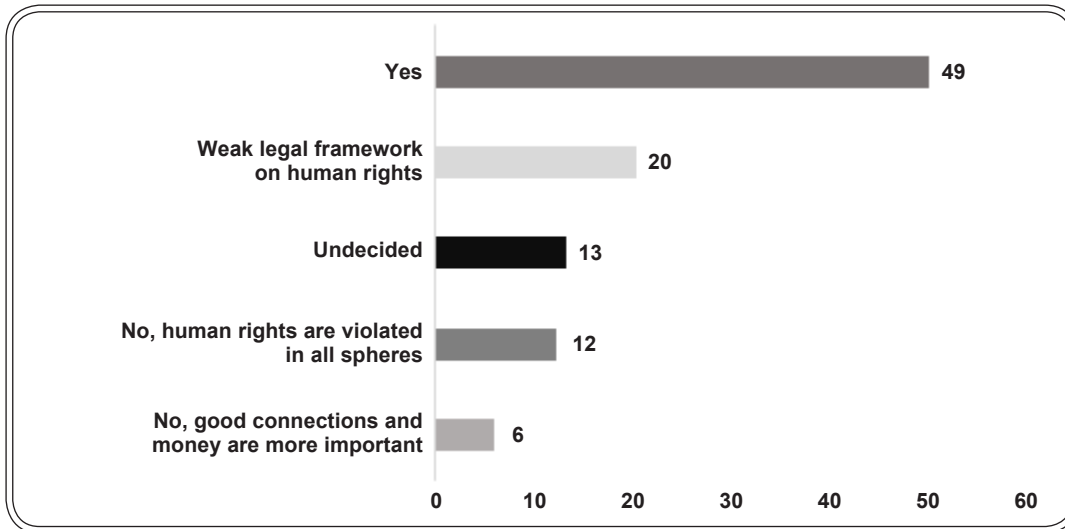
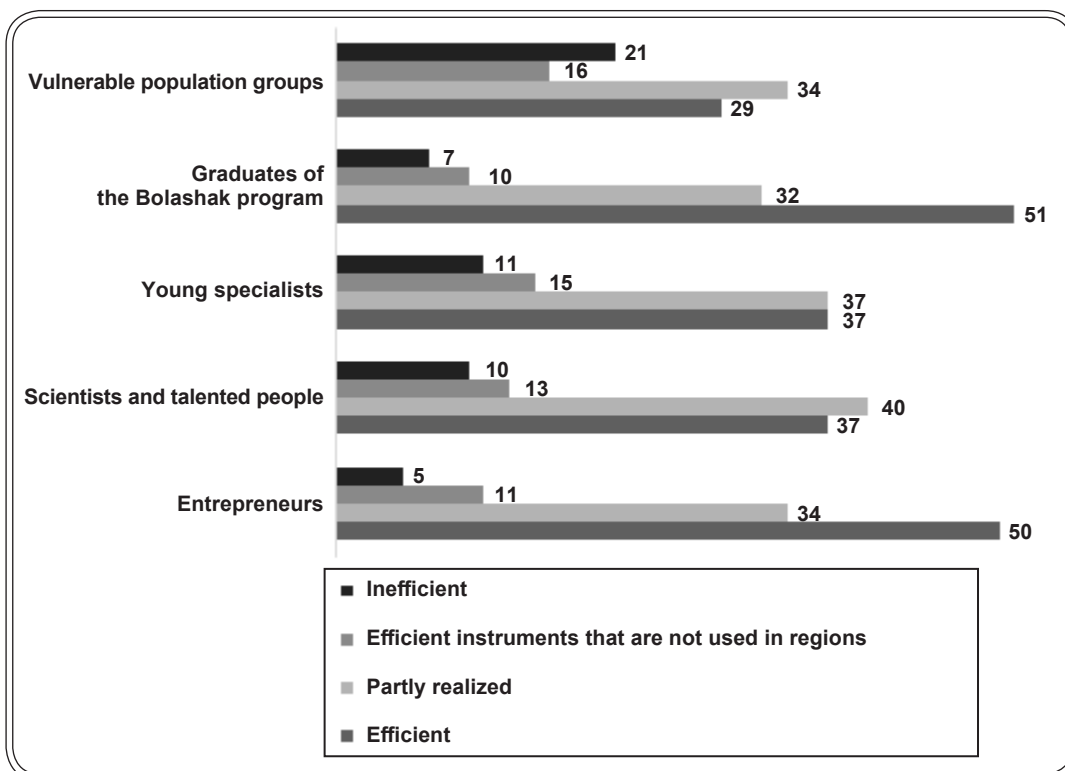


Figure 7

**Assessment of the Efficiency of State Support, %**





## *Conclusion*

The results of our studies have demonstrated that migration in Kazakhstan is caused, to different degrees, by social, economic and political factors. The academic community has already pointed out that they are common to all, predominantly developing, countries.<sup>13</sup>

Employment and wages are the two most important and relatively common problems. The majority (50% of the polled) of Kazakhstanis are dissatisfied with their monthly incomes, hence labor migration in the context of international migration.<sup>14</sup> They are attracted by the high living standards and high incomes in foreign countries, good chances to realize their professional skills and make a career. This coincides with the results of other studies carried out in Kazakhstan and Central Asia.<sup>15</sup> Some of our project participants have stated that the negative migration trends were only temporary phenomena, and referred to the measures intended to improve the social and economic conditions in Kazakhstan.

Our results confirmed that the education system was very important for the development of the younger generation. Our poll has shown that society is deeply concerned about the low quality of available education. This explains why people do not associate the future of their children with Kazakhstan and prefer to educate them in countries with higher living and educational standards. Those who assessed the level of higher education in Kazakhstan pointed to corruption and the low level of competence and inadequate training of the teaching staff. The respondents were dissatisfied with the state measures designed to support young specialists and scientists. Some experts explained this by the low status of teachers and scientists and the level of wages and salaries in educational establishments. The academic community agreed that migration of promising and educated Kazakhstanis to the West deprives the country of its labor force and, what is even more important, its intellectual elite.<sup>16</sup>

Political situation, high level of corruption and low level of protection of human rights were mentioned as migration drivers. The citizens are not quite satisfied with the current human rights legislation (20% of the respondents); 18% of the respondents are convinced that their rights are limited in many spheres, and that money and connections are the best instrument of dealing with all sorts of problems. There were scholars who deemed it necessary to point out that the rights of national minorities are infringed upon, especially of those with a “temporary status.”<sup>17</sup>

To sum up: the results mean that the social, economic and political institutions of Kazakhstan should demonstrate more efficiency. They should pay more attention to the level of wages and salaries and encourage professional and personal development. This also applies to the problem of the development of children and support of young specialists and scholars, otherwise an outflow of young and educated may create not only an intellectual but also a demographic gap in the future.

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<sup>13</sup> See: F. Docquier, G. Peri, I. Ruysen, op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> See: E. Fong, K. Shibuya, op. cit.

<sup>15</sup> See: B. Bokayev, R. Ismailova, Z. Torebekova, “Affecting International Migration Trends through a Multi-Faceted Policy: Kazakhstan within Central Asia and the EAEU,” *Romanian Political Science Review*, Vol. XX, No. 2, 2020.

<sup>16</sup> See: M. Gubaidullina, Zh. Idrysheva, *et al.*, op. cit.

<sup>17</sup> C. Werner, C. Emmelhainz, H. Barcus, op. cit.

# RETURN MIGRATION TO TAJIKISTAN: FORMS, TRENDS, CONSEQUENCES

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## A B S T R A C T

**T**his paper aims to study the trends of labor migration (voluntary and forced) from Russia to Tajikistan and the peculiarities of the reintegration of returning migrants into Tajik society. Labor migration is the main driver of economic growth for Tajikistan and the most effective tool in the national fight against poverty. However, many migrants from Tajikistan do not have a formally documented status in Russia, which makes their predicament extremely difficult and vulnerable. One of the most sensitive measures for Tajik labor migrants was the introduction of administrative penalties through expulsion and the imposition of a massive ban on labor migrants from entering the Russian Federation. This has led to an increase in the return migration of Tajik migrants to their homeland. The article clarifies the concept of return migration, reveals the reasons for the return of labor migrants

from Russia to Tajikistan and identifies the specific features of reintegration and the socio-economic situation of returning migrants in Tajikistan. The authors establish that a significant share of returning migrants have already reached retirement age after working in Russia for decades, but they do not receive a pension either in Tajikistan or in Russia. Unfortunately, as of today the Government of Tajikistan has not developed any special programs for the reintegration of returning migrants due to lack of funds and lack of experience in this area. Most returning migrants are forced to solve their problems on their own or resort to the help of their families and relatives. In fact, the government does not hold an interest in the massive return of labor migrants, since the increase in their number worsens the socio-economic situation and the general state of the labor market.

**KEYWORDS:** *return migration, voluntary and forced migration, deportation, expulsion, labor migration, Republic of Tajikistan, Russian Federation.*

## *Introduction*

### Relevance of Research

Departure of labor migrants to the Russian Federation has become a widespread phenomenon and a significant socio-economic phenomenon for the Republic of Tajikistan. According to the Ministry of Labor of Tajikistan, 600,000 labor migrants work in Russia, including 70,000 women. Russian sources believe that the figure may be as much as 1 million people.<sup>1</sup> Many migrants from Tajikistan to Russia do not have a formally documented status, which makes their predicament extremely difficult and vulnerable. It is no coincidence that the Government of Tajikistan continuously insists on carrying out immigration amnesties for its citizens in Russia, including deported migrants.

<sup>1</sup> See: S. Rukhullo, "Dushanbe i Moskva prorabatyvaiut vopros amnistii trudovykh migrantov," Radio Ozodi, 8 February, 2020, available at [<https://rus.ozodi.org/a/30423883.html>].

Labor migration is the main driver of economic growth for Tajikistan and the most effective tool in the national fight against poverty. About a third of the country's GDP is generated by remittances.<sup>2</sup> In 2019, labor migrants sent over \$2.7 billion home to Tajikistan.<sup>3</sup> The Government of the Republic of Tajikistan attempts to support and stimulate external labor migration in every possible way. Meanwhile, Tajik authorities are gradually attempting to expand the geography of countries receiving labor migrants, i.e. to diversify labor export. The countries of the Middle East (Qatar, UAE), East Asia (Japan, Republic of Korea), and Turkey are becoming new directions of labor emigration of Tajik citizens. However, Russia and Kazakhstan are still the main importers of labor migrants.

The measures taken by the Russian Federation to tighten the regulation of migration and migration policy are extremely sensitive for the socio-economic and political life of the Tajik society. Despite numerous arrangements and signed agreements between the Republic of Tajikistan and the Russian Federation, as well as Russia's declared migration policy (i.e., the Concept on Migration Policy until 2025 indicates that Russia attracts labor migrants from the republics of the former U.S.S.R.), there is a tightening of migration practices and procedures, which significantly complicates the predicament of labor migrants, including Tajik citizens. One of the most sensitive measures for Tajik labor migrants was the introduction of administrative penalties up to and including expulsion, and the imposition of a wide-sweeping ban on labor migrants from entering the Russian Federation. This has led to an increase in the return migration of Tajik citizens to their homeland. Due to the pandemic, in March 2020 the state border was closed for Tajik citizens who could not enter Russia. Despite the increase in the scale of return in recent decades, the problems of reintegration of returning labor migrants remain a poorly understood topic.

## Scope, Objectives and Methods of Research

The paper aims to study the trends of return labor migration (voluntary and forced) from Russia to Tajikistan and the peculiar features of the reintegration of returning migrants into Tajik society. The following tasks were completed for that purpose: clarification of the concept of return migration; identification of the reasons for the return of labor migrants from Russia to Tajikistan and the specifics of reintegration and the socio-economic situation of return migrants in Tajikistan.

In the course of the study, interviews were conducted with experts and returning migrants in Moscow, the Moscow region and Tajikistan. Due to the pandemic, some respondent interviews, including with deported/expelled labor migrants, were carried out remotely via telephone and Skype. Along with Tajik citizens, the sample included several citizens of Uzbekistan, many of whom are ethnic Tajiks, who often work together, and their cases are tried in "collective courts." In-depth interviews were conducted with 43 citizens of the Republic of Tajikistan and 12 citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan, who were returned to their homeland by the decision of Russian courts (deported).<sup>4</sup> We also used some of the initial results of a sociological study of labor migrants in Russia, con-

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<sup>2</sup> See: "The Amount of Remittances in Tajikistan are Decreasing, Incomes of Citizens Are Falling, and Prices Are Rising," Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting, 1 December, 2020, available at [<https://cabar.asia/en/the-amount-of-remittances-in-tajikistan-are-decreasing-income-of-citizens-are-falling-and-prices-are-rising>].

<sup>3</sup> See: S. Rukhullo, op. cit.

<sup>4</sup> See: F.T. Khonkhodzhayev, "Institutsionalnye problemy migratsionnoi sistemy: sravnitelny analiz Rossiiskoi Federatsii i stran Sredney Azii," *Nauka. Kultura. Obshchestvo*, No. 1, 2019, p. 119, available at [<https://www.elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=37166665>].

ducted by scientists from the Institute for Demographic Studies of the Federal Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences in January 2021 (sample N = 245 people).

The reports of the NGO Civic Assistance Committee, which actively monitors and analyzes the problems of expulsions and the protection of the rights of migrants, were examined.<sup>5</sup> For a more in-depth study of the problems of expulsion of foreign citizens and trends of return migration from Russia to Tajikistan, we have summarized the official statistics of the state authorities of the Russian Federation (the Main Directorate for Migration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia, the Federal Migration Service of Russia, Rosstat) and the Consulate of the Republic of Tajikistan in Moscow. We also collected data from media reports and public reports of organizations and the articles by Russian and foreign lawyers and scientists who work in the field of labor migrant rights protection in Russia.<sup>6</sup>

## Return Migrant Categories and Reasons for Their Return to Tajikistan

The work defines a returning migrant as “a migrant, a citizen of Tajikistan who previously worked and/or lived in Russia for over a year and returned to Tajikistan voluntarily or forcibly with the assistance of state bodies.”

Returning migrants to Tajikistan can be divided into two categories:

- (1) those who return voluntarily;
- (2) those whose return was forced (deported and expelled).

The legal categories of expulsion and deportation differ significantly in terms of grounds and procedures. Expulsion is a type of administrative punishment and is carried out only by a court decision. Deportation is carried out on the basis of the decision of an official of the migration authority (General Administration for Migration Issues of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia) or the border service (FSB of Russia).

The first category of voluntarily returning workers comprises approximately 80% of the total flow of Tajik labor migrants returning to Tajikistan. This category of returning migrants is quite diverse. It includes migrants who have completed their labor activities in Russia or other countries; migrants who are tired of working and are returning home for a break; migrants who fall ill or become disabled abroad; migrants who returned for family and other reasons; as well as victims of human

<sup>5</sup> See: K. Troitskiy, *Administrativnye vydvoreniia iz Rossii: sudebnoe razbiratelstvo ili massovoe izgnanie*, Grazhdanskoe sodeistvie Committee Report, available at [[https://refugee.ru/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Doklad-o-vidvoreniiakh\\_pechat.pdf](https://refugee.ru/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Doklad-o-vidvoreniiakh_pechat.pdf)].

<sup>6</sup> See: A.A. Babayev, T. Dzhurazoda, *Vozvrashchenie trudiaschchikhsia migrantov—grazhdan Respubliki Tadjikistan: problemy i novye vyzovy*, Dushanbe, 2016, p. 41; L.F. Delovarova, “Vozvratnaia migratsiia v Tsentralnoi Azii: osnovnye faktory i potentsial razvitiia programm dobrovolnogo vozvrashcheniia i reintegratsii v regione,” *Nauka. Kultura. Obshchestvo*, No. 1, 2020, pp. 6-16, available at [<https://www.elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=42923606>]; B.I. Ismatulloev, “Pravo na svobodu peredvizheniia i vybor mesta zhitelstva v konstitutsionnom zakonodatelstve Rossiiskoi Federatsii i Respubliki Tadjikistan: sravnitelny analiz,” *Yuridicheskie issledovaniia*, No. 7, 2020, pp. 42-53 [DOI: 10.25136/2409-7136.2020.7.33207], available at [[https://nbpublish.com/library\\_read\\_article.php?id=33207](https://nbpublish.com/library_read_article.php?id=33207)]; *Vozvratnaia migratsiia: mezhdunarodnye podkhody i regionalnye osobennosti Tsentralnoi Azii*, ed. by S. Ryazantsev, The International Organization for Migration (IOM)—U.N. Migration Agency, Almaty, 2020, p. 242; F.T. Khonkhodzhaev, “Otsenka sotsialno-ekonomicheskikh posledstviy migratsii naseleniia Respubliki Tadjikistan,” *Nauka. Kultura. Obshchestvo*, No. 3-4, 2019, pp. 98-109, available at [<https://elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=42834815>]; M. Yaroshevich, P. Kazmerkevich, F. Irnazarov, et al., *Vozvratnaia migratsiia i vyzovy v Tsentralnoi Azii: analiz riskov 2017*, IOM, Astana, 2017, p. 68, available at [<https://www.elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=32274824>].

trafficking. From our point of view, in order to define the boundaries of the return migrant cohorts more clearly, it is necessary to exclude migrants who leave for their homeland for an annual leave. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, many labor migrants from Tajikistan came to work in Russia and Kazakhstan as seasonal workers in construction and agriculture in the spring, and then returned to their homeland in the fall or winter.<sup>7</sup>

We presume that the people who returned to Tajikistan due to physical disability, illness, retirement age, family reunification, etc. should be considered voluntarily returning migrants. The exact number of such migrants returning to Tajikistan is unknown, but it is clearly in the range of several tens or even hundreds of thousands of people. The number of migrants of pre-retirement age provides a relatively accurate estimate of the size of this category. Thus, according to the 2015 report of the Federal Migration Service of Russia, the number of foreign citizens working in the Russian Federation in the 50-59 age category was approximately 6.2%, and at the age of 60 or more—0.3%, including about 10,000 citizens of the Republic of Tajikistan.<sup>8</sup> According to a survey by the Institute for Demographic Studies of the Federal Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences, conducted among labor migrants in January 2021, about 1.6% of respondents were aged 50 and over. According to the Main Directorate of Internal Affairs of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia, 1,934,000 citizens of the Republic of Tajikistan were registered for migration in 2020, including 649,000 initially, including 507,000 people for work purposes.<sup>9</sup> It means that if we extend the results of the sociological survey to the general population, approximately 31,000 Tajik migrants in Russia were of pre-retirement age (50 years and older). Potentially, these migrants can join the ranks of returning voluntary migrants to Tajikistan.

The number of migrants forcibly returned to their homeland is also significant. In 2015, Russia introduced a re-entry ban for certain categories of foreigners, which covers approximately 2 million people (mostly immigrants from Central Asia, including Tajikistan). The entry ban can extend for up to 10 years.<sup>10</sup> According to the Main Directorate for Migration Issues of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in 2019, 250,000 immigrants were banned from entering Russia (see Table 1).

The number of returning migrants forcibly deported or expelled to Tajikistan was unstable and depended primarily on the tightening of migration practices in Russia. Police often intensify checks, and courts make quick decisions on expulsion from the country under the pretext of registration rule violation or other circumstances. Our research in March-April 2020 demonstrated that with the onset of the isolation regime in Russian cities during the COVID-19 pandemic, the police intensified checks on migrants, and many were expelled for formal violations. For example, our April 2020 research showed that, although the Russian authorities have simplified migration procedures (registration, patents, work permits, temporary residence permits, visas have been extended until 15 June, 2020), in reality, the police increase pressure and the frequency of checks of labor migrants in Russian cities. According to human rights activist Valentina Chupik, with the beginning of the self-isolation regime, the number of reports from foreigners about illegal detention and extortion of bribes from the police,

<sup>7</sup> See: S. Ryazantsev, "Labour Migration from Central Asia to Russia in the Context of the Economic Crisis," *Russia in Global Affairs*, 31 August, 2016, available at [<https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/labour-migration-from-central-asia-to-russia-in-the-context-of-the-economic-crisis/>].

<sup>8</sup> See: *ItoGovyy doklad o migratsionnoi situatsii, rezultatakh i osnovnykh napravleniakh deiatel'nosti Federalnoi migratsionnoi sluzhby za 2015 g.*, Moscow, 2016, p. 22, available at [[https://pda.guvm.mvd.ru/upload/site1/document\\_file/ItoGovyy\\_doklad\\_na\\_19.02.16.pdf](https://pda.guvm.mvd.ru/upload/site1/document_file/ItoGovyy_doklad_na_19.02.16.pdf)].

<sup>9</sup> See: *Otdelnye pokazateli migratsionnoi situatsii v Rossiiskoi Federatsii za yanvar-dekabr 2020 goda s raspredeleniem po stranam i regionam*, Data of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia dated 21 January, 2021, available at [<https://xn--b1aew.xn--p1ai/Deljatel'nost/statistika/migratsionnaya/item/22689602/>].

<sup>10</sup> See: *Uiazvimos' migrantov i potrebnosti integratsii v Tsentral'noi Azii: osnovnye prichiny i sotsialno-ekonomicheskie posledstviia vozvratnoi migratsii. Regional'naya polevaya otsenka v Tsentral'noi Azii 2016*, IOM, Astana, 2016. 288 pp.

as well as requests for legal advice from the Tong Jahoni NGO in March-April 2020 grew sharply (twofold) compared with 2019.<sup>11</sup>

Table 1

**Number of Foreign Citizens Under Administrative Penalty in Russia in 2015-2019, people**

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Banned from entering Russia</b>	<b>490,893</b>	<b>229,013</b>	<b>210,708</b>	<b>253,581</b>	<b>250,823</b>
<b>Expelled and deported</b>	<b>117,493</b>	<b>60,042</b>	<b>68,998</b>	<b>130,131</b>	<b>125,200</b>
<b>Held civilly liable</b>	<b>369,287</b>	<b>271,014</b>	<b>334,145</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>n/a</b>

*Source:* Compiled by the authors based on data from the Main Directorate for Migration Issues of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia, available at [<https://xn--b1aew.xn--p1ai/Deljatelnost/statistics/migracionnaya>]; judicial statistics data of the Judicial Department at the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, available at [<http://www.cdep.ru/index.php?id=79>], as well as on the basis of the Survey of Judicial Statistics on the Activities of Federal Courts of General Jurisdiction and Justices of the Peace in 2019, Department at the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, available at [[http://www.cdep.ru/userimages/sudebnaya\\_statistika/2020/Obzor\\_sudebnoy\\_statistiki\\_o\\_deyatelnosti\\_federalnih\\_sudov\\_obshchey\\_yurisdiksi\\_i\\_mirovih\\_sudey\\_v\\_2019\\_godu](http://www.cdep.ru/userimages/sudebnaya_statistika/2020/Obzor_sudebnoy_statistiki_o_deyatelnosti_federalnih_sudov_obshchey_yurisdiksi_i_mirovih_sudey_v_2019_godu)].

It should be noted that the general trend towards tougher labor migration control measures in Russia began earlier, in 2013, after the amendments made to the Code of Administrative Offenses. Violators were banned from entering Russia for five years. Due to the tightening of migration policy, over 300,000 citizens of the Republic of Tajikistan were deported and expelled from the Russian Federation (see Fig. 1).

The formal reasons for the expulsion and deportation of labor migrants from Russia are varied. Source analysis shows that most of the expulsions are related to regime of stay violations—absence or delayed registration at the place of stay, and the absence of a patent.<sup>12</sup> The share of minor violations is also significant: absence of health insurance, working in a different field than declared (a migrant receives a permit limited to one specialty, and works in another, which is considered illegal labor activity). Migrants were also deported for administrative offenses (fines for road accidents, traffic violations, etc.). In some cases, migrant workers were deported even for the debt on their mobile phone bill. The number of foreigners expelled from Russia reached its peak in 2018, with 253,000 people (see Fig. 2). All of the above testifies to the fact that the excessive rigidity of Russian migration policy leads to ordinary people, who are deprived of information and are unfamiliar with Russian laws or those who cannot register in the apartments that they rent, being turned into illegal migrants instead of malicious criminals.

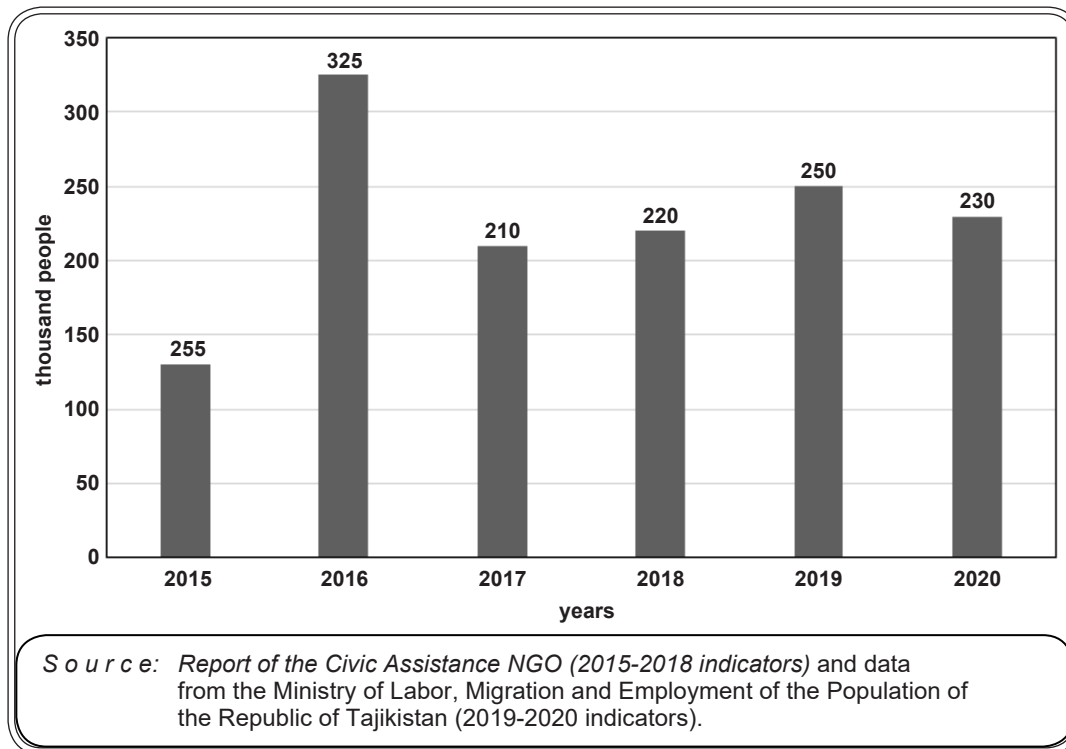
The problems of migrants held in the Temporary Detention Centers for Foreign Citizens (TD-CFC) in Russia deserve special attention. TDCFCs are institutions where foreign citizens await their administrative expulsion (until relatives or friends buy them tickets or, in very rare cases, until they

<sup>11</sup> See: S. Ryazantsev, Z. Vazirov, M. Khramova, A. Smirnov, “The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Position of Labor Migrants from Central Asia in Russia,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus. English Edition*, Vol. 21, Issue 3, 2020, p. 66, available at [DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37178/ca-c.20.3.06>].

<sup>12</sup> See: *The European Court of Human Rights. Case of Kim v. Russia. Judgment of 17 October, 2014* (Application no. 44260/13); *Migranty, migrantofobii i migratsionnaya politika*, ed. by V.I. Mukomelia, Moscow Bureau for Human Rights, “Akademia,” Moscow, 2014, p. 114.

Figure 1

**Number of Citizens of Tajikistan Who Are Banned  
from Entering Russia in 2015-2020**



are sent home at the expense of the Russian budget). In Moscow there are two TDCFCs with a combined capacity of 1,400 people, and there is a total of 76 TDCFCs in Russia. The monthly maintenance expenses per foreigner awaiting deportation, amount to about 20,000 rubles, and the expulsion itself costs the budget up to 40,000 rubles.<sup>13</sup> Paradoxically, migrants may be spending years in TDCFCs as they await their expulsion.

Observations show that the centers are primarily filled with citizens of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. According to the Muhojir.info news agency, during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic (19 May-30 May, 2020), the Tajik authorities returned 680 Tajik citizens to their homeland from the Russian TDCFCs on special flights.<sup>14</sup> According to Tajik human rights activists, NGOs and the labor migrants themselves, the organization of return from Russia requires significant amounts of money (300-400 euros for air tickets, 2,500 rubles for COVID-19 tests). Labor migrants who return from such centers also requires reintegration into Tajik society.

Although the economic and political relations between the Republic of Tajikistan and the Russian Federation are close, many agreements have been signed, including those on migration, the predicament of Tajik migrants in Russia remains difficult. Often, the tightening of Russian migration

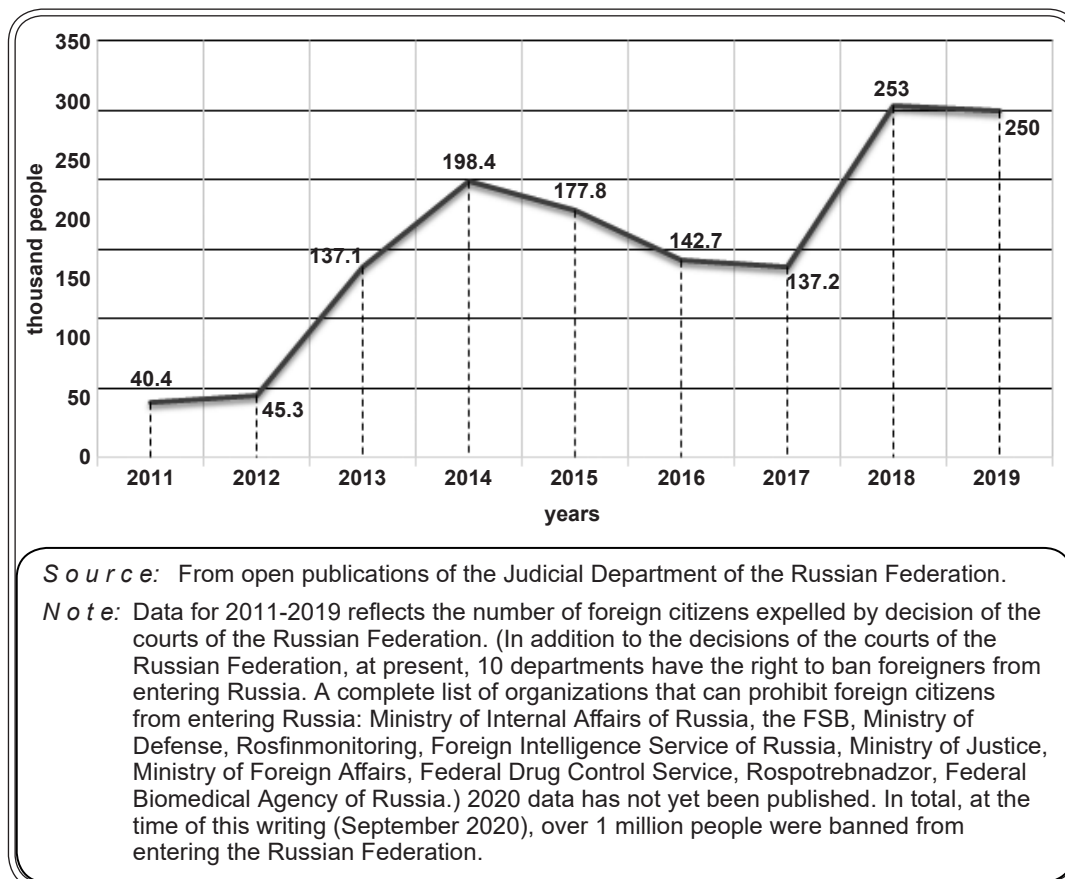
<sup>13</sup> See: Interview with A.B. Paskachev, Head of the Congress of the Peoples of the Caucasus, member of the Council for Interethnic Relations under the President of the Russian Federation, *Izvestia*, 28 April, 2017, available in Russian at [<https://iz.ru/news/694817>].

<sup>14</sup> See: "Ostavshikhsia v Rossii v TSVS grazhdan Tadzhiqistana vernuli na rodinu," Muhojir.info, 1 June, 2020, available at [<http://muhojir.info/news/1069>].



Figure 2

**Number of Foreign Citizens Administratively Expelled  
from Russia by Court Decision in 2011-2019**



legislation is used to resolve foreign policy issues: when disagreements arise, in Russia, as a rule, a wave of deportations of migrants begins (i.e., the “pilot case”).<sup>15</sup> After official requests from Tajikistan and negotiations, the Russian side usually makes concessions. For example, in 2017, Russia held a migration amnesty. It covered over 100,000 labor migrants—citizens of Tajikistan who were on the black list, including 12,000 who were deported for up to ten years due to the acquisition and use of false patents and other documents, and about 5,000 people who were banned from entering Russia due to being diagnosed with infectious diseases. Many migrants were removed from the list and acquired the opportunity to re-enter Russia.<sup>16</sup> But for the most part, the 2017 amnesty affected those labor migrants who were in Russia with expired registrations or unpaid patents (i.e., who violated Paragraphs 4 and 8 of Art 26 of the Federal Law on the Procedure for Leaving and Entering the Russian Federation).

<sup>15</sup> See: O. Gerasimenko, “‘Polëtkorrektnost’ po-russki,” *Kommersant*, 21 November, 2011, available at [<https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1816106>]; M. Yusufzoda, “Tadzhikskikh migrantov nekotorye strany ispolzuiut kak instrument davleniia,” *Radio Ozodi*, 22 November, 2019, available at [<https://rus.ozodi.org/a/30286344.html>].

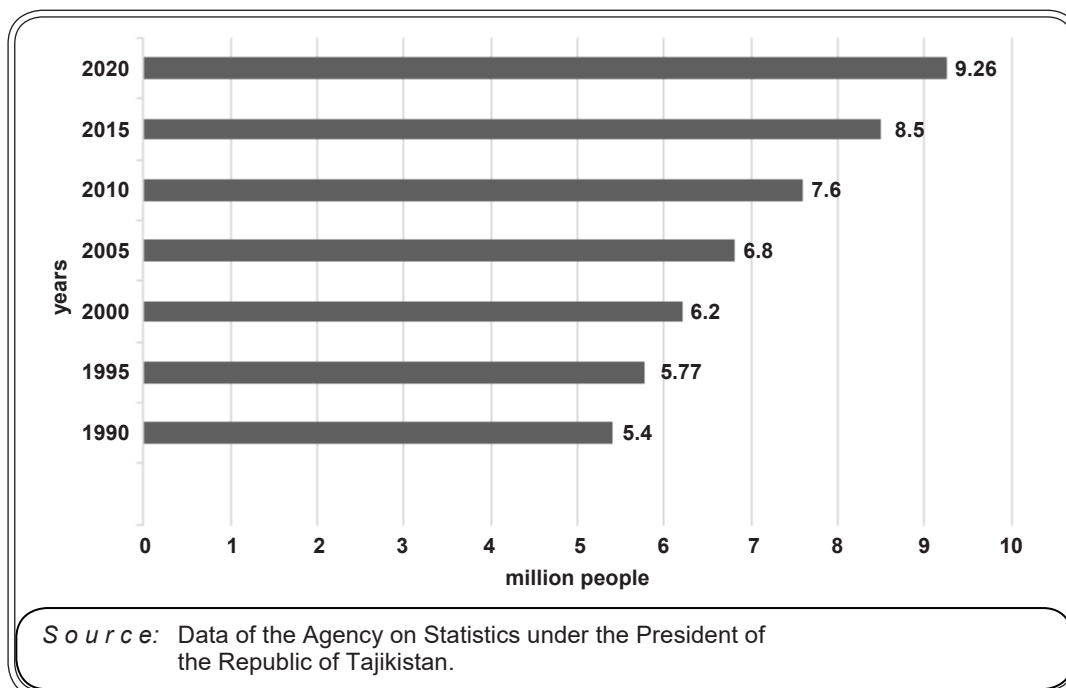
<sup>16</sup> See: Asia-Plus, 18 April, 2019, available at [<https://asiaplustj.info/news/tajikistan/society/20190418/pyat-problem-tadzhikskikh-trudovih-migrantov>].

## Returning Migrants on the Tajik Labor Market

In Tajikistan, annual population growth averages 2-2.5%. In 2020, the size of the population reached approximately 9.3 million, while in 1990 it was only 5.4 million (see Fig. 3). In the medium term, the population of Tajikistan continues to grow rapidly and, according to the U.N. Population Division forecasts, in 2023 the population of Tajikistan will cross the 10-million mark.<sup>17</sup> The country's labor resources number 5.8 million people (60% of the total population). Another 2 million people (approximately 33%) are adolescents who will soon join the workforce. People who are older than working age, or retirees, make up 700,000 people, or about 7% of the population.<sup>18</sup> Every year 200,000 young people enter the labor market of Tajikistan, with 90% of them looking for work outside the republic.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, only 2.3 million people (about 40% of the population) are employed in Tajikistan. If these migration trends persist, young people will continue to leave the country and look for work abroad. There is an acute problem of creating new jobs in the country, primarily for young people.

Figure 3

Population Dynamics in the Republic of  
Tajikistan in 1990-2020



<sup>17</sup> See: *United Nations. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Population Division. World Population Prospects 2019, Volume I: Comprehensive Tables.*

<sup>18</sup> See: TAG News Agency, 1 November, 2019, available at [<https://tajikta.tj/ru/news/v-tadzhikistane-chislo-pensionerov-priblizhaetsya-k-700-tys-chelovek>].

<sup>19</sup> See: F.T. Khonkhodzhaev, "Institutsionalnye problemy migratsionnoi sistemy..." p. 117.

The environment in Tajikistan has been unfavorable for the development of small and medium-sized businesses. Entrepreneurs point to a high tax burden and frequent inspections by various government agencies among the key problems. According to the World Bank index (Doing Business), the republic has a complicated business environment, which does not allow newly returning migrants to start their own business.<sup>20</sup>

In 2019 (as of 01.10.2019), 553,100 individual entrepreneurs were registered in the country, of which only 293,400 were actually operating, that is, 260,000 individual entrepreneurs have closed their business.<sup>21</sup>

During the COVID-19 pandemic, in the first half of 2020, 12,600 business entities (460 legal entities [companies, enterprises] and about 12,200 individual entrepreneurs) were liquidated in the republic. The situation in Tajikistan's economy has deteriorated, people were losing their jobs en masse, and the problem of employment was becoming more acute. The return of migrants under these circumstances is an additional burden on the country's social and economic spheres. For example, hundreds of deported migrants in search of work are registered with two large *mardikor* (wage earners) markets in Dushanbe. The migration services of Tajikistan have registered 21,000 returning migrants deported from Russia.<sup>22</sup>

During in-depth interviews, returning migrants in Tajikistan were asked about employment-related support measures. The responses showed that the measures taken by the Tajik authorities to provide jobs do not cover the bulk of returning migrants. For example, respondents from among the deported stated that when they apply to state bodies, they only receive offers to undergo paid retraining. Upon completion of these courses, they would have to look for work on their own, and the state cannot offer them work for decent wages. According to official data, in 2018, the Ministry of Labor, Migration and Employment of the Population of Tajikistan promoted the retraining of 1,462 people, and offered permanent jobs to only 812 people.<sup>23</sup> These are very insignificant figures against the background of the fact that in 2018 alone 220,000 Tajik citizens were banned from entering Russia, and an additional 200,000 in 2020.

With the introduction of the COVID-19 high alert mode in Russia and the closure of borders, migration flows have sharply decreased, and the socio-economic situation has deteriorated abruptly for most in the face of rising unemployment in Tajikistan. A significant part of potential labor migrants did not manage to leave for Russia for the spring/summer season, when summer cottage and construction work begins.

Other Tajik migrants, who were already in Russia, have lost their jobs. According to our April 2020 survey, about 28% of those surveyed were laid off and unemployed at the time of the survey, and 37% were on unpaid leave. It turns out that 65% of the surveyed labor migrants had no sources of income during the pandemic. As shown by a survey during the COVID-19 pandemic, the overwhelming majority of respondents, or 84%, lost their income.<sup>24</sup>

Many labor migrants from Tajikistan are currently finding it difficult to survive in Russia without work during a pandemic. The Russian economy also has significant problems, so, after the borders open, Tajikistan should expect a new wave of returning migration of a part of labor migrants who have lost their jobs in Russia.

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<sup>20</sup> See: F.T. Khonkhodzhaev, "Otsenka sotsialno-ekonomicheskikh posledstviy migratsii naseleniia Respubliki Tadjikistan," p. 104.

<sup>21</sup> See: Asia-Plus, 22 October, 2019, available at [<https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/economic/20191022/v-tadjikistane-zakrili-svoe-delo-260-tisyach-individualnih-predprinimatelei>].

<sup>22</sup> See: S. Rukhullo, op. cit.

<sup>23</sup> See: *Report of the Commissioner for Human Rights in the Republic of Tajikistan for 2018*, available in Russian at [<http://www.vhk.tj/images/reports/ru/Doklad-UPCH-RT-2018-rus.pdf>].

<sup>24</sup> See: S. Ryazantsev, Z. Vazirov, M. Khramova, A. Smirnov, op. cit., p. 67.

## Problems of Reintegration of Returning Migrants and Reintegration Programs in Tajikistan

The situation was also difficult for returning migrants in Tajikistan before the COVID-19 pandemic. Back in April 2019, a report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) noted the problem of protecting the rights of migrant workers and members of their families, and expressed concern about the lack of effective reintegration mechanisms and procedures. The Government of Tajikistan received recommendations to implement programs aimed at the reintegration of returning migrants, including providing professional retraining and jobs, as well as developing and stimulating entrepreneurship among them.<sup>25</sup>

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Central Asia is implementing the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Program (AVRR). So far, AVRR is most successful in Kazakhstan. Despite Tajikistan's participation, many problems of returning migrants remain unresolved in the country. Nevertheless, the current national and international legal framework in the migration sphere can become the basis for the development of the institution of return migration in the Republic of Tajikistan as well.<sup>26</sup>

Let's consider the key problems of the reintegration of returning migrants in Tajikistan.

An important problem for returning migrants is the impossibility of receiving a pension either in Tajikistan or in Russia, despite the fact that many migrants have worked and paid taxes in Russia for many years. Only recently was the Agreement on Pension Provision between the EAEU countries signed, allowing residents of the EAEU countries to make pension contributions both in the national pension systems and in the country of employment, to issue and receive pensions both in their country of citizenship and in the host country. These rules for the formation of pensions came into force in 2020.<sup>27</sup> But as you know, Tajikistan is not included in this integration association. Currently, the issue of support for the returning migrants of retirement age remains unresolved. In 2016, the Republic of Tajikistan and the Russian Federation discussed and prepared a draft agreement on the regulation of pensions for Tajik labor migrants, but this document has not yet been signed. Meetings and negotiations are currently being held and public promises are being made about an early resolution of the issue. Most of the returning labor migrants of retirement age we interviewed in Tajikistan stated that they do not have a pension and are unable to sustain themselves. There are currently about 700,000 pensioners in Tajikistan, with the average pension of 315 somoni (about \$31). In 2019, the payout of disability pensions to 4,600 people was suspended in Tajikistan; there was a total of 17,700 such cases since 2014. They need to undergo a second medical examination at the State Service of Medical and Social Expertise in order to start receiving pensions again.<sup>28</sup> However, experts testify that this is not always possible due to village inaccessibility, the high transportation costs, and their state of health. By cutting pension expenditures, the state actually shifts social costs to the population.

<sup>25</sup> See: *Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. CPR/C/TJK/CO/3*, available at [[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR/C/TJK/CO/3&Lang=Ru](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR/C/TJK/CO/3&Lang=Ru)].

<sup>26</sup> See: *Vozvratnaia migratsiia: mezhdunarodnye podkhody i regionalnye osobennosti Tsentralnoi Azii*, p. 90.

<sup>27</sup> See: A. Mainulova, "Pravitelstvo prestupaet granitsu," *Kommersant*, No. 227, 10 December, 2019, available at [<https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4188167>].

<sup>28</sup> See: B.V. Nadirov, "V Tadzhikestane priostanovlena vydacha pensii po invalidnosti bolee 4,6 tisyacham chelovek," *Asia-Plus*, 5 February, 2019, available at [<https://asiaplustj.info/news/tajikistan/society/20190205/v-tadzhikistane-priostanovlena-vidacha-pensii-po-invalidnosti-bolee-46-tisyacham-chelovek>].

Many migrants from Tajikistan see obtaining a residence permit in Russia or Russian citizenship as one of the solutions to the problem. Although it is a rather difficult and time-consuming process, many respondents follow this path. For this, many use the State Program for the Return of Compatriots to Russia. Despite all the difficulties and obstacles, several tens of thousands of Tajik citizens receive the citizenship of the Russian Federation annually: in 2018 this number was 35,700, in 2019—44,700, in January-June 2020—31,300. In 2018, over 10,000 Tajik citizens applied to the Pension Fund of the Russian Federation for pensions on the basis of their residence permit (according to the Russian legislation, foreign citizens with a residence permit can receive a pension in Russia).

People of working age who lost their health while working abroad, or who were expelled and deported, also face psychological problems. In addition, returning migrants, who worked abroad under unfavorable conditions, often get sick. Given the limitations of local labor markets, unemployment and poverty, as well as severe psychological stress due to the new life situation, migrants who have been denied re-entry to Russia are becoming one of the most vulnerable groups and are at high risk of recruitment by terrorist, extremist and criminal groups.<sup>29</sup>

## *Conclusion*

Given the significant scale of labor migration, return migration has always been a noticeable phenomenon for Tajikistan. But it has been particularly actualized due to the intensified deportations and expulsions during the tightening of migration procedures in Russia, as well as the return of labor migrants due to the COVID-19 pandemic before the closure of state borders in 2020. The number of returning migrants depends to a large extent on migration procedures and the economic situation in Russia. As a rule, the tightening of checks by law enforcement agencies leads to an increase in expulsions or deportations of labor migrants from Russia.

Returning migrants face social, economic and psychological difficulties at home, primarily, it is difficult for them to find work and reintegrate into society. A significant part of returning migrants who have worked in Russia for decades, have already reached retirement age, but do not receive a pension either in Tajikistan or in Russia. Upon arrival in their homeland, most returning migrants are unable to receive a pension and are left without a livelihood in old age. The problem of pension payout has been discussed several times between the governments of the Republic of Tajikistan and the Russian Federation, but is unlikely to be practically resolved in the near future.

Unfortunately, at this point, the Government of Tajikistan merely has any special programs for the reintegration of returning migrants due to lack of funds and lack of experience in this area. Most returning migrants are forced to solve their problems on their own or resort to the help of their families and relatives. In fact, the government is not interested in the massive return of labor migrants, since the increase in their number worsens the socio-economic situation of the population and the general state of the labor market. Political, economic and diplomatic measures are required to solve the problems of migrants returning to Tajikistan. It is necessary to continue diversifying labor markets, stimulate job creation, and encourage organized forms of labor migration. Information support and availability of information, including legal, to labor migrants, are required. Tajikistan also needs to intensify the negotiations with Russia on matters of amnesty for labor migrants.

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<sup>29</sup> See: *Vozvratnaia migratsiia: mezhdunarodnye podkhody i regionalnye osobennosti Tsentralnoi Azii*, p. 145.

# RELIGION IN SOCIETY

## FEMALE RELIGIOSITY IN POST-SECULAR SOCIETY: ISLAM IN KAZAKHSTAN

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## A B S T R A C T

**T**oday, religious renaissance across the post-Soviet space has moved into the center of academic attention mainly because post-Soviet countries have found themselves at the crest of religious awareness in the form of revived traditional religions. In Kazakhstan, this process has taken the form of Islamic revival, the religion of the autochthonous population, which lived in the territory of the contemporary state.

According to many authors, the family is the main religious socialization institution: mothers as its main agents play the key role in raising the younger generation. This means that female religiosity requires close attention and detailed studies.

With this aim in view, we carried out an online opinion poll among women 18 years and older in all regions of Kazakhstan to identify the interconnection between religious practices and involvement in religious

life, on the one hand, and confessional self-identity, on the other, as well as the role of demographic statistical data (age, in particular) in shaping religious consciousness. We paid a lot of attention to the correlation between the degree of religiosity and the presence of Islamic dogmas in everyday life.

Our studies brought us to a conclusion that the faithful generally tend to overestimate the extent of their religiosity. This means that the majority of our respondents can be described as conventional believers whose knowledge of the main Islamic dogmas is weak and who do not observe religious practices. Religious holidays and fasting are the two most frequently observed practices; praying and religious clothes are the two frequently avoided practices. Their performance requires a lot of time and the need to change appearance and lifestyle.

**KEYWORDS:** *female religiosity, religious identity, confessional (self)identity, religious socialization, religious practices, religious consciousness.*

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

### **Problem Statement**

As one of the fundamental social institutions, religion has not lost its importance in the contemporary world. According to the forecasts published by the Pew Research Center, by 2050, only 13% of the planet's total population will remain outside any religion (in 2010, their share was 16%). It is expected that by 2050 Islam as the fastest growing religion will achieve parity with Christianity for the first time in history: there will be 2.8 billion (or 30% of total population) Muslims; and the figure for Christianity will be similar, at 2.9 billion, or 31%.<sup>1</sup> "Contemporary Islam as a confessional network is open, it can spread far and wide, it demonstrates great adaptability to the changing conditions and (as distinct from the majority of religions) is not rigidly centralized; there are no hierarchies and

<sup>1</sup> See: "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050," available at [<https://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050>], 2 March, 2021

complicated decision-making mechanisms, which speaks of its fairly good future in the epoch of globalization.”<sup>2</sup>

Today, Islam is one of the quickly developing religions in Kazakhstan. According to the latest (2009) population census, the majority of Kazakhstanis (70%) spoke of themselves as Muslims.<sup>3</sup> Abdurmalik Nysanbayev, a scientist from Kazakhstan, has written that the share of those who belong to religious communities and follow all religious norms is much smaller, not higher than 12-13%. The rest (about 60%) are not involved in religious life, do not belong to religious communities, do not attend services and do not follow religious rules, which makes their religiosity nominal.<sup>4</sup> Today, the question of religiosity and, what is even more important, of the degree of religiosity, remains a topical one in Kazakhstan.

## Review of Previous Research

The academic community has never let the problem of religious identity and its formation out of sight and treated the processes of religious conversion,<sup>5</sup> Islamic identity,<sup>6</sup> the role of religious identity in the context of national<sup>7</sup> and civil identities<sup>8</sup> and inclusiveness/exclusiveness of religious identity<sup>9</sup> as the most topical.

The doctoral thesis of Gulim Dosanova “Female Religiosity and New Muslim Practices in Kazakhstan,” in which the author discussed practicing women Muslims living in the capital of the Republic of Kazakhstan,<sup>10</sup> and the research project “Girls and Women in the Context of the Religious Situation in Kazakhstan” carried out by the Institute of Equal Rights and Equal Possibilities of Kazakhstan (Almaty) with the support of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Kazakhstan<sup>11</sup> can be considered the most important among the recent research on female religiosity.

<sup>2</sup> E. Baydarov, “Globalizatsia i Islam: problemy i protivorechia,” *Mir cheloveka. Filosofskiy i obshchestvenno-gumantarny zhurnal*. No. 1 (51), 2012, pp. 32-37.

<sup>3</sup> See: “Itogi natsionalnoy perepisi naseleniya 2009 goda,” available at [<https://stat.gov.kz/census/national/2009/general>], 2 March, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> See: A.N. Nysanbaev, E.E. Burova, A. Saylaubekkyzy, “Osobennosti identichnosti kazakhstantsev v usloviakh polikulturnogo obshchestva,” *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, No. 7, 2019, pp. 37-47.

<sup>5</sup> See: *Religioznye konversii v postsekuliarnom obshchestve (opyt fenomenologicheskoi rekonstruktsii)*, Collective monograph, ed. by A.Kh. Bizhanov, Institute of Philosophy, Political Science and Religious Studies KN MON, Almaty, 2017, 431 pp.

<sup>6</sup> See: M.K. Bektenova, *Formirovanie islamskoi identichnosti v postsekuliarnom obshchestve: kazakhstanskii realizm*. Doctoral (PhD) thesis: 6D020600—Religious Studies.—Institute of Philosophy, Political Science and Religious Studies, Almaty, 2017, 135 pp.

<sup>7</sup> See: M.S. Shaykemelev, “Kazakhskaya identichnost v kontekste modernizatsii obshchestva,” Monograph [Second revised and enlarged edition], Institute of Philosophy, Political Science and Religious Studies KN MON RK, Almaty, 2020, 230 pp.; N. Tutinova, B. Meirbayev, A. Frolov, K. Bagasharov, “Republic of Kazakhstan: Ethnoreligious Identity as an Integration Factor,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus. English Edition*, Vol. 20, Issue 4, 2019, pp. 147-160.

<sup>8</sup> See: *Қоғамдық сананы жаңғырту міндеттері аясындағы қазақстандық бірегейлікті қалыптастыру: 3 кітап* (Formation of Kazakhstan Identity in the Context of Modernization of Public Consciousness. Book 3), IFPR KN MON RK, Almaty, 2020, 668 pp. (in Kazakh).

<sup>9</sup> See: *Қазақстандағы діни бірегейліктің инклюзивтілігі мен эксклюзивтілігі мәселелері: Ұжымдық монография* (Problems of Exclusiveness of Religious Identity in Kazakhstan: collective monograph), IFPR KN MON RK, Almaty, 2020, 236 pp. (in Kazakh).

<sup>10</sup> See: G.M. Dosanova, *Zhenskaya religioznost i novye musulmanskie praktiki v Kazakhstane*, Doctoral (PhD) thesis: 22.00.00—Sociological sciences.—Lev Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, 2010, 129 pp.

<sup>11</sup> See: M. Uskembayeva, T. Rezvushkina, *Polozhenie devushek i zhenshchin v kontekste religioznoi situatsii v Kazakhstane. Gendernoe issledovanie*. Akvfn, 2018, 306 pp.



In view of academic importance of both publications, we deem it necessary to point out that until today the Islamic identity of Kazakhstani women was not treated as a special phenomenon. The “gender aspect is especially important, since socialization in families depends on mothers rather than fathers. ... This means that their personal experience, which they share with their children, is much richer.”<sup>12</sup>

So far, scholars of sociology of religion have not yet agreed on the criteria for assessing the degree of religiosity. “There are those (the French school of Gabriel Le Bras) who concentrate on religious practices, while others point at religious self-identification as the main factor.”<sup>13</sup> Antonina Kirillova, who studied religiosity of Muslim migrants,<sup>14</sup> and Ekaterina Grishayeva, who worked with Orthodox Christians,<sup>15</sup> relied on the performance of religious rites.

Other scholars treat religious self-identification as a real criterion of religiosity.<sup>16</sup> Some authors tried to reconcile both indicators.<sup>17</sup>

In an attempt to identify the roles of different religious practices in shaping religious self-identities, we proceeded from the following basic hypotheses:

1. Respondents tend to exaggerate the degree of their religiosity: women may follow certain religious practices guided by their preferences and believe it enough to speak of themselves as practicing believers.
2. Importance of religious practices correlates with their duration: the strictly limited practices are more popular than those that require daily observance.
3. Young women between 18 and 29 years of age and women who are 61 and older are two most religious population groups. The former consider religion a source of social experience, while the latter associate religion with axiological transformation and preparation for afterlife.

## Research Sample

We carried out our poll between October 2020 and January 2021 to study the specifics of religious identity of female Muslims. Our general sample was 5,703,744 women, who identified themselves as Muslims (we arrived at this figure on the basis of the population census of 2009). The sampling frame was 750 women over 18 years of age; the poll was carried out in two stages: a quota sampling by age, place of residence and nationality at the first stage and snowball sampling at following stages.

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<sup>12</sup> G.S. Shirokalova, O.K. Shimanskaia, A.V. Anikina, “Sushchestvuiut li gendernye osobennosti religioznosti studentcheskoy molodezhi?” *Sotsiologicheskie issledovania*, No. 6, 2016, p. 78.

<sup>13</sup> V. Bakrac, M. Blagievic, “Konvetsionalnaia religioznost molodezhi Chernogori.” *Sotsiologicheskie issledovania*, No. 12, 2014, p. 106.

<sup>14</sup> See: A.I. Kirillova, “Vovlechenost v religioznye praktiki kak faktor integratsii migrantov,” *Sotsiologicheskie issledovania*, No. 2, 2016, pp. 119-128.

<sup>15</sup> See: E.I. Grishayeva, O.M. Farkhitdinova, V.A. Shumkova, “Religioznost veruiushchikh Ekaterinburgskoi metropolii: ot ortodoksii k postsekuliarnoy eklektike,” *Sotsiologicheskie issledovania*, No. 8, 2017, pp. 106-117.

<sup>16</sup> See: E.I. Arinin, D.I. Petrosian, “Osobennosti religioznosti studentov,” *Sotsiologicheskie issledovania*, No. 6, 2016, pp. 71-77; S.V. Ryzhova, “Osobennosti izucheniia religioznoi indentichnosti rossian,” *Sotsiologicheskie issledovania*, No.10, 2016, pp. 118-127.

<sup>17</sup> See: V. Bakrac, M. Blagievic, op. cit., pp. 104-110.

## Social-Demographic Characteristics of Sample

Women of several age groups were involved: 18-29 years, 42.8%; 30-45, 28.7%; 46-60, 19.3%; 9.2% of women in our sampling were over 61. The respondents resided in three cities of the republican status: Nur-Sultan, 3.2%; Almaty, 7.9%, and Chimkent, 6.0%. All 14 administrative regions were divided into 5 geographical regions—Northern (that supplied 11.6% of the respondents); Southern (43.5%), Eastern (6.1%), Western (16.0%) and Central (5.7%). At the time of our studies, 49.7% of the polled women were married; 45.2% had no husbands (40.9% of them were never married; 1.9% were divorced, 2.4% were widows). Half of the polled women (52.8%) had higher education; one-fifth, incomplete higher education (20.3%), the number of women with secondary and secondary specialized education was small: 8.9% and 8.8%, respectively; 6.4% of the polled had academic degrees. The shift towards women with higher and incomplete higher education is obvious and explainable. Despite possible inaccuracies in representation, it has an advantage that allowed us to focus on and study in detail this most socially active population group, which is involved to a much greater extent than the others in all economic and social processes.

One-third of the polled were university or college students (34.1%), 18.8% spoke of themselves as specialists in education and medicine; 7.5% were employed in the service industry; 6.53% presented themselves as businesswomen; 4%, as civil servants; the same share of the polled were employed in industry, construction, transport and communications. The law and order structures employed 2.4% of the polled; 0.4% worked in agriculture, 11.2% were either temporarily unemployed and/or were on maternity leave; 8.5% were pensioners.

The majority of the polled assessed their material status as average or above average. This means that nearly half of the polled (46.7%) cannot afford luxury goods (cars and flats); one-third of the polled (30.3%) belong to the top-earning group: they can afford anything at any price; 13.5% belong to the lower middle class who cannot afford TV sets, refrigerators, etc.; 1.9% spoke of the themselves as the lowest-earning social group: 1.6% of them cannot afford clothes (which can be assessed as comparative poverty); 0.3% of the polled women are absolutely poor—they cannot ensure their basic food requirements. The number of the respondents below the living standards is probably larger, since 7.9% remained “undecided.” This means, in particular, that they do not want to discuss their low living standards.

For several reasons our sampling was shifted towards the middle and higher economic groups. Objectively, this happened because at all times the middle class was and is society’s cornerstone of sorts, therefore, detailed studies of this social group suggests conclusions about the socioeconomic frame of society as a whole. There are certain subjective reasons which we have mentioned above: people do not want to discuss their real social status, they prefer to upgrade their material incomes in questionnaires. On the whole, it is commonly believed that these shifts do not affect or do not greatly affect the poll’s representative value.

## Distribution of the Respondents by Degree of Religiosity

Our first question was about the degree of religiosity as assessed by the polled themselves on a scale ranging from profoundly religious, who observe all forms of religious practices, to atheists. This was a filter that left only religious people in our project; those who selected the variants “I am an agnostic” and “I am an atheist” were removed from the poll.

The high degree of religiosity among women is connected with the religious renaissance of the last few decades, evident throughout the post-Soviet space. According to sociologists, there were relatively more women than men among the believers in Soviet times. According to the studies carried out by N. Tezherova, the share of women among the faithful was relatively high: they dominated among those who took part in holidays, performed religious rites, attended church services and belonged to religious communities.<sup>18</sup> This is true today, which is confirmed by the studies carried out by Margarita Uskembayeva and other scientists.<sup>19</sup>

The degree of religiosity is just as important. We have opted for the following scale: an active believer involved in religious life who observes all religious rites and a conventional (cultural, passive) believer who, while not involved in religious life, speaks of herself as a believer.

The majority (68.5%) spoke of themselves as conventional believers, whose religious life is limited to celebration of religious holidays. This is explained, in particular, by the fact that religion as part of the centuries-old national traditions developed into one of the ethnoreligious characteristics. Most of our respondents, therefore, treat religion as part of their national identity.

There were 30% among our respondents who spoke of themselves as active believers; later, however, we discovered that a considerable part of our respondents overestimated the degree of their religiosity and that the share of women who observed all religious practices (praying, fasting (uraza), hijab and reading religious literature) was not as large as expected. It seems that self-identification as an active believer

- (a) rests on performance of certain (selected) religious obligations and
- (b) allows the respondent to speak of herself as a Muslim, first and foremost, and as a practicing believer for whom religious consciousness is the basic one.

Young girls and women of two age groups—18-29 and 30-45—demonstrate high religious activity (35.2% and 32.6%, respectively); 26.1% of women of 60+ speak of themselves as religiously active; the age group of 46 to 60 demonstrates the lowest degree of religiosity (21.4%).

The contingent of believers is growing younger; religious institutions are moving to the fore as some of the most important socialization agents which shape the worldview of the younger generation. There is a reason for the relatively small number of believers in the 46-60 age group:

- (a) the respondents of this age group spent the largest part of their conscious life in an atheist society and
- (b) as an economically active population group, they cannot dedicate much time to religious practices.

The degree of religiosity is inversely proportional to the educational level. The number of active believers is highest among women with secondary education (53.7%), while the share of women with academic degrees in the same category is two times lower (25%).

This can be explained by the illusory compensatory function of religion, when the believer tries to change her life through religious practices (prayers, spells, etc.).

The next question was related to the specifics of religious denomination as another filter needed to identify the respondents of religious identities unrelated to our project: the answer “other religion” meant disqualification.

As a result, we identified 49.4% of the respondents as Sunni Muslims of Hanafi madhab, which is an expected result: the majority of the Islamic ethnicities of Kazakhstan belong to this religious school. A small group (1.7%) represented Shi‘a Islam; 0.4%, Salafi Islam; 0.3% of each group were

<sup>18</sup> See: V.G. Pivovarov, *Religioznost: opyt i problema izucheniya*, Mary Book Publishers, Yoshkar-Ola, 1976, 184 pp.

<sup>19</sup> See: M. Uskembayeva, T. Rezvushkina, op.cit.

Malikites and Shafites of Sunni Islam; 0.1% were Hanbalites. This group consisted mainly of Azeri and Chechen women, whose ancestors had belonged to these schools and madhabs for centuries.

Slightly less under one-half of the respondents (47.7%) know nothing about the school to which they belong, which means that

- (a) the majority of Muslims are Muslims by birth, they accept Islam as part of their ethnic culture and
- (b) there is no interest in religious life and religious knowledge.

Several researchers have pointed out that ethnicity and religion are treated as close or even identical phenomena in Kazakhstan.

We have identified the following correlation with the degree of religiosity: over half of the conventional Muslim women do not know to which school of Islam they belong; the similar value among practicing believers is two times lower. This means that the respondents who speak of themselves as cultured Muslims accept Islam automatically (see Table 1).

Table 1

**Awareness of Belonging to a Branch or School of Islam in the Respondents with Different Degrees of Religiosity, %**

No.	Group of Respondents by Degree of Religiosity	Aware of the Trend/School of Islam to Which They Belong	No Clear Answer
1	As a practicing believer I observe all religious rules (pray five times a day, etc.)	72.1	27.9
2	I am a believer, but I limit myself to religious holidays, rarely attend mosque	43.3	56.7

The above means that religious knowledge among the population of Kazakhstan (including its female part mainly involved in raising the younger generation) is not high. This makes it a fertile soil for information of all sorts being spread by groups with different intentions and increases the danger of radicalization of women.

## The Main Social Institutions and Agents of Religious Socialization

The answers to the question about the agents of religious socialization confirmed beyond doubt that the religious component of identity has shifted from the older to the young generations. An absolute majority (60%) answered that they had learned about religion from their parents; this means, albeit indirectly, that the majority of the respondents learned about their religion in childhood. This is confirmed by Gulnar Baltanova, Russian expert in Islamic studies who has written that atheist ideology turned Islam into a “kitchen religion.”<sup>20</sup> This helped it survive in the minds of common people. “The fact that the family was and remains ‘the main carrier of religiosity’ has been confirmed by many

<sup>20</sup> G.R. Boltanova, *Musulmanka*, Logos, Moscow, 2007, 376 pp.

studies. In Ivanovo, for example, 20.8% of the respondents were raised as believers (75% of them were women, 25%, men). The studies carried out in 2007 among students revealed that religious education affected girls more than young men.<sup>21</sup>

The age-related factors demonstrate an obvious trend: the older the polled group, the lower the role of parents as suppliers of information about religious identity. The relatively high index of relatives as sources of information for the 60+ respondents has stirred a lot of interest. We have explained this phenomenon by the fact that they were raised during the time of militant atheism and learned about religion from their younger relatives (children, etc.). Today we are observing re-socialization of the elder generation, for whom their adult children serve as agents.

When talking about degrees of religiosity, we found out that for both categories of the respondents, parents were the primary agents of religious socialization; one out of five women from among conventional Muslims could not remember from whom and when she had heard about religion for the first time (see Table 2).

*Table 2*

**Sources of Information about Religion:  
Respondents of Different Religiosity Degrees, %**

No.	Groups of Respondents by Degrees of Religiosity	I am a Practicing Believer, I Observe All Religious Rules (pray five times a day, etc.)	I am a Believer, but I Observe Only Religious Holidays, Rarely Go to Mosque
1	Parents	62.1	58.7
2	Spouse	3	1.7
3	Relatives	11.6	6.5
4	Friends	3	2.3
5	Teachers at university, school	3	4.4
6	Employer, colleagues	0	0.6
7	Religious figures (imams, mullahs, etc.)	6	2.9
8	The media	0.4	0.6
9	Do not remember	8.2	20.8
10	Other	2.6	1.5
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

## **Correlation between Religious Self-identification and Observance of Religious Practices**

In our attempt to define the interconnection between religious practices, their observance and self-identification of the respondents, we proceeded from what Charles Y. Glock said about the five

<sup>21</sup> G.S. Shirokalova, O.K. Shimanskaia, A.V. Anikina, op. cit., p.80.

dimensions of religious commitment: ideology (adherence to the principal beliefs), ritual activities (rituals and practices), experience (the “feeling” aspect of religion), the intellectual side of religion and practice (sometimes subdivided into private and public rituals) and consequences.<sup>22</sup> We will concentrate on ritual activities and practices and their outcrops in secular life as two dimensions of primary importance for our purposes.

In all confessions, the following practices are most important: attendance of religious services, prayer, fasting and observance of religious holidays. It should be said that Islam presents five basic requirements to its followers: Tawhid (monotheism); uraza (fasting), praying, zakat (a form of alms-giving) and hadj. In view of the fact that according to the rules of Islam women are not obliged to attend mosques and perform hadj on their own without male protection, and that zakat is obligatory only in the presence of sufficient income, these points were removed from our list of indicators.

Tawhid, the belief in oneness of Allah as the Creator, explains why we offered our respondents certain statements that contradict monotheistic principles and relied on the questionnaire suggested by Demian Beliaev<sup>23</sup> and elaborated by Ekaterina Grishayeva.<sup>24</sup> Having adjusted them to our purposes, we added certain indicators: belief in numerology, feng shui, psychics, amulets and assistance from the souls of the dead.

These questions were selected out of many other variants for the following reasons:

- (a) (false)sciences—astrology, numerology, feng shui—are very popular today;
- (b) our choice of the faith in amulets, psychics and souls of the dead is explained by the fact that for a long time Tengrianism remained the dominant religion in what is contemporary Kazakhstan, retreating gradually under the pressure of Islam.

The answers were distributed as follows:

- “Amulets help people”—39.5%
- “I trust psychics and fortune tellers and seek their help”—22.5%
- “Souls of the dead can help their living relatives”—45.5%
- “I believe in astrology and horoscopes”—30.5%
- “I believe in numerology”—36%
- “I believe in feng shui”—16.5%

According to the above, nearly half of the respondents believed in souls of the dead that help their living relatives and in the power of amulets, which can be explained by historical and geopolitical circumstances, such as Tengrianism, which is based on the cult of ancestors, and the fairly slow expansion of Islam across the territory of contemporary Kazakhstan, which took nearly eleven centuries (7th-18th centuries).

Today, belief in astrology and numerology is fairly popular among Muslim women due to the widespread interest in new esoteric teachings that may offer life-planning methodologies.

One-fifth of the polled believe that psychics can help sort out certain problems.

The correlation between these answers and the sociodemographic characteristics of our respondents is highly interesting: the respondents between 46 and 60 years dominate in all categories except “souls of the dead help their living relatives.”

<sup>22</sup> See: C.Y. Glock, R. Stark, *Religion and Society in Tension*, Chicago, 1965.

<sup>23</sup> See: D.O. Beliaev, “Opyt empiricheskogo issledovania geterodoksalnoy religioznosti v sovremennoy Rossii”, *Sotsiologicheskie issledovania*, No. 11, 2009, pp. 88-98.

<sup>24</sup> See: E.I. Grishayeva, O.M. Farkhitdinova, V.A. Shumkova, op.cit.

We have discovered that the educational level merely affects beliefs: indeed, religion and the faith in the supernatural are irrational and, therefore, cannot be rationally analyzed.

As could be expected, Muslim women seek support of their dead relatives (51.5%); they believe in amulets (44%); trust recommendations of numerologists (42.3%) and astrologists (34.4%); one-fourth of them turn to psychics; one out of five follows the rules of feng shui in everyday life.

Here is another surprising fact: nearly one-third of practicing Muslim women are also willing to seek the support of the souls of their dead ancestors (32.4%), believe in amulets and charms (28.9%), nearly one out of five considers numerology and astrology sciences (21.7% and 18.8%, respectively); 13% have admitted that they seek support of psychics. The majority of women who identify themselves as deeply religious adepts of a monotheist religion are not alien to religious syncretism (see Table 3).

*Table 3*

**Indicators of Religious Syncretism  
in Respondents of Different Degrees of Religiosity, %**

No.	Groups of Respondents by Degree of Religiosity	I am a Practicing Believer, I Observe All Religious Rules (pray five times a day, etc.)		I am a Believer, but I Observe Only Religious Holidays, Rarely Go to Mosque	
		Partially or Completely Agree	Partially or Completely Disagree	Partially or Completely Agree	Partially or Completely Disagree
1	“Amulets help people”	28.9	71.1	44.0	66.0
2	“I trust psychics and fortune tellers and seek their help”	13.0	87.0	26.7	73.3
3	“Souls of the dead can help their living relatives”	32.4	67.6	51.5	48.5
4	“I believe in astrology and horoscopes”	18.8	81.2	34.4	65.6
5	“I believe in numerology”	21.7	78.3	42.3	57.7
6	“I believe in feng shui”	8.7	91.3	20	80
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>		<b>100</b>	

The next block of questions is related to the ritual aspect of religious identity; it contains questions about reading religious literature, observance of religious practices: praying, fasting (uraza), religious holidays and wearing religious clothes (hijab).

An analysis of the results obtained revealed that religious holidays are the most popular and most frequently observed religious ritual. An absolute majority (96.3%) celebrate, to different degrees, Kurban ayt (bayram), Oaza ayt (bayram), etc. This is explained not only by the religious factors, but also by the mentality of the local population. Hospitality is one of the distinctive features of the people of Kazakhstan and Kazakhs as the titular nation.

Fasting is another frequently observed ritual (71.2%), which is explained by several religious and practical factors.

The religious factors include

- (a) possible exoneration of sins;
- (b) available information found in religious literature about the doors to heaven that would open only to those who fast.

The practical reasons include

- (a) fairly short fasting time (one month a year) and
- (b) the simplicity of the procedure compared with other religious practices: unlike praying, fasting requires no time.

According to our poll, fasting is a habit in the younger (18-29-year-old) and elder (over 61) generations: 79.4 and 75.4%, respectively. Young girls treat religion as an important channel of socialization through which they acquire life experience. Women of 61+ are mainly pensioners who reassess their values, revise their interests and priorities and prepare themselves for the afterlife.

Only 10% of those who spoke of themselves as practicing Muslims do not fast; the share is three times higher (32.9%) among conventional Muslims. Here is another interesting fact: the number of women who fast every year is 70.3% among active Muslims, while the index is three times lower (37%) among cultural believers (see Table 4).

*Table 4*

**Fasting among Respondents of Different Degrees of Religiosity, %**

No.	Do You Fast?	I am a Practicing Believer, I Observe All Religious Rules (pray five times a day, etc.)	I am a Believer, but I Observe Only Religious Holidays, Rarely Go to Mosque
1	Yes, every year	70.3	37.9
2	Yes, according to circumstances, once in several years	9.1	16.4
3	Yes, I fasted for the first time last year	8.6	9.4
4	No, I do not fast	6.0	27.1
5	I fasted in the past, but do not fast now	3.9	5.8
6	Other	2.1	3.4

Our questions about reading religious literature produced the following results. Slightly over half of our respondents read the Koran and the Hadiths relatively regularly. We divided the respondents into several groups according to their answers. The group that frequently reads religious books comprised 13.3% of the respondents (4.33% of them read every day, 9.04%, several times a week); 20% read rarely (5.7% read once a week, 15.3%, once a month). A similar share of the respondents read very rarely (19.9%), while a large share of the respondents (one-third) admitted that they do not read religious literature and receive information about religion from other sources.

We have discovered that the respondents of 18-29 and over 61 read religious books more often than members of all other groups. At the same time, women between 46 and 60 have practically no interest in religious literature.



Education, likewise, is responsible for the interest in religious literature. The greatest share of those interested in religious literature (68.7%) was found among women with secondary education, while the share was much lower (47.8%) among women with higher education.

As could be expected, the share of those interested in religious literature is higher among practicing Muslim women (75.4%) than among conventional believers (43.5%). The number of women who frequently read religious literature among the active believers is six times higher than among conventional believers (see Table 5).

*Table 5*

**Reading of Religious Literature by Respondents of Different Degrees of Religiosity, %**

No.	Do You Read Religious Literature?	I am a Practicing Believer, I Observe All Religious Rules (pray five times a day, etc.)	I am a Believer, but I Observe Only Religious Holidays, Rarely Go to Mosque
1	Every day	10.8	1.5
2	Several times a week	21.1	3.7
3	Once a week	11.2	3.3
4	Once a month	18.5	12.3
5	Several times a year	13.8	22.7
6	Do not read	14.7	44.6
7	Other	9.9	11.9

Praying five times a day (namaz or salah) is another ritual component of religious identity. We added the option “pray several (not necessarily five) times a day,” since during the pilot project we encountered respondents who had just started their religious practices, or, being too busy, limited praying to one or two times a day.

A considerable number of women (63.7%) do not follow this practice; it is observed by a quarter of the polled (23.7%), out of whom 17.4% pray five times; 6.3% pray at certain times (in the morning or in the evening) depending on their schedule: part of the prayers fall on working/studying hours. For different reasons (time shortage, negative attitude of parents to praying, lack of habit, etc.) 7.6% of the Muslims discontinued praying.

Women between 40 and 60 turned out to be less religious; at the same time, women over 61 (13%) said that they pray at least several times a day. Half of them (50%) said that they had started praying a year before. This confirms our hypothesis that after retiring they experience an axiological transformation that leads to a greater appreciation of religious values.

Young women between 18 and 29 (10.3% of them) pointed out that they stopped praying for certain reasons.

Praying is a habit with women with secondary (31.3% pray five times and 3% several times a day) and specialized secondary (25.8% pray five times and 10.6% several times a day) education. Among women with incomplete or/and complete higher education and academic degrees, the share of those who pray does not exceed 20%.

It should be pointed out that only 60.9% of the respondents who spoke of themselves as active believers pray five times a day; 6.9% of this group stopped praying for certain subjective reasons (they were not ready, it was hard to fit praying into work or studies, parents objected to this practice,

etc.); 15% of those who called themselves conventional Muslims either pray or do not pray five times a day, half of them discontinued praying (see Table 6).

*Table 6*

**Praying by Respondents of Different Degrees of Religiosity, %**

No.	Do You Pray?	I am a Practicing Believer, I Observe All Religious Rules (pray five times a day, etc.)	I am a Believer, but I Observe Only Religious Holidays, Rarely Go to Mosque
1	Yes, I pray five times a day	49.4	3.3
2	Yes, I pray several times a day	11.6	3.9
3	Prayed in the past, but no longer do	6.9	7.9
4	No, never prayed	29.2	79
5	Other	1.3	1.6
6	Undecided	1.7	4.4

Religious clothing turned out to be the least popular of religious practices: only 8.8% of the respondent wear a hijab. According to worldwide practice, religious identity needs a lot of time, sometimes the whole life, to be completely accepted. In most of cases, the process ends with head covering, which means that the woman has completely accepted Islam.

Hijab is worn mostly by women between 30 and 45 (15.8%); the share of those who wear hijab is the smallest among women of 46-60 (3.5%).

The share of those who wear a hijab is the largest among women with specialized secondary (18.2%) and secondary (14.9%) education and those with academic degrees (10.4%). Only 5.3% of girls with incomplete higher education wear a hijab, which can be indirectly explained by the fact that secular institutions, including higher educational establishments, ban hijabs.

Interestingly, only 28% of those who speak of themselves as practicing believers in observance of all religious practices wear a hijab (see Table 7).

*Table 7*

**Wearing Hijab by Respondents of Different Degrees of Religiosity, %**

No.	Do You Wear a Hijab?	I am a Practicing Believer, I Observe All Religious Rules (pray five times a day, etc.)	I am a Believer, but I Observe Only Religious Holidays, Rarely Go to Mosque
1	Yes, I wear a hijab	28	0
2	I wore it before, do not wear it now	1.3	0.8
3	Never wore	62.1	93
4	Other	3.9	1.7
5	Undecided	4.7	4.4

The above suggests that the hijab is no longer a marker of religiosity: many women follow all religious practices, yet only put on a hijab during praying.

The practical part of religious identity reveals the extent to which women are ready to follow religious norms in everyday life. To clarify the point, we asked several questions about religious sins, such as murder of innocent people and zinah, pre-marital sex.

Abortion without medical indications was supported, to a certain extent, by 24% of the polled women, while 21.9% refrained from a definite answer and preferred the “neutral” variant. The majority of women of 61+ disagreed with this statement (6.6%), while the respondents between 18 and 29 and 46 and 60 agreed: 26.6% and 28.1%, respectively.

Strange as it may seem, the attitude of women in both groups (either practicing or conventional Muslims) does not differ to any noticeable degree: 19.4% in the first group and 25.9% in the second group do not object to abortions.

The idea of civil marriage without nikah (a marriage contract) is supported by 14.4% of the polled; a more or less similar number preferred not to answer this question.

Retirees (82%) are staunchly against civil marriage, and not only for religious reasons: the elder generation cherishes the values of traditional marriage. Different shares of respondents in different age groups believe in sustainability of civil marriages: 15.1% of the respondents in the 18-29; 14.6%, in the 30-45 and 17.9%, in the 46-60.

A quarter of women with secondary education accept the idea of a civil marriage; in all other groups the share is 13-15.6%.

Among practicing Muslims, 10.4% supported the idea of a civil marriage; the share among conventional Muslims was 16.2% (see Table 8).

*Table 8*

**Acceptance of Civil Marriage and Abortion without Medical Indications by the Respondents with Different Degrees of Religiosity, %**

No.	Assessment of Acceptance	Acceptance of Civil Marriage without Nikah		Acceptance of Abortion without Medical Indications	
		I am a Practicing Believer	I am a Conventional Believer	I am a Practicing Believer	I am a Conventional Believer
1	Fully support	6.2	7.7	9.5	11.6
2	Partially support	4.3	8.5	10	14.3
3	Neutral	7.6	18.4	17.1	24
4	Partially oppose	17.5	23.8	22.3	25.3
5	Fully oppose	64.5	41.6	41.2	24.8
Total		100		100	

### *Conclusion*

Our studies of the Muslim population of Kazakhstan suggested the following conclusions. The majority of the respondents belong to a group of conventional believers, who are not well-versed in

the dogmatic foundations of Islam and not involved in religious practices. The majority of the polled women tend to exaggerate the degree of their religiosity; they speak of themselves as practicing believers, while fulfilling only a few selected practices and rites: religious holidays and fasting. Praying five times a day and wearing a hijab are the least popular in this group, which is probably explained by the obvious fact that religious holidays and fasting do not require a lot of time and last from one to three days (for holidays) and one month (for fasting—uraza). They are approved by society to a much greater extent than other practices. At the same time, praying and wearing a hijab requires time; our respondents treated them as serious changes for which they should prepare themselves. Our respondents and society as a whole believe that praying can be postponed until retirement. Girls between 18 and 29 and women 61+ are two most religious age groups. We have already mentioned that the younger generation born in independent secular Kazakhstan treats religion as a socialization channel. Women of the older generation associate religious identity with axiological transformation and preparation for the afterlife. The economically active women between 46 and 60 demonstrate the lowest degree of religiosity, probably due to the lack of time and are convinced that religious practices can wait until retirement.

On the whole, the majority of those who identify themselves as believers understand religion superficially.

The above suggests that the number of women who speak of themselves as Muslims, and as practicing Muslims, will increase, yet the share of devout believers who observe all practices will remain small.