

## CENTRAL ASIA IN SEARCH OF NEW PATTERNS OF INTERACTION

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***ANNOTATION:*** *The factors that led to the development of a new strategy, significant changes in regional policy, the priorities of the strategy, and the likelihood of their execution in the nations of the region will all be examined. There will be research done on the region's common problems and how the EU experience could be used as a guide. It addresses the requirement for EU expertise in promoting regional integration while considering the various developmental stages of the region's countries. The outcomes of the EU's neighborhood policy and the shift in foreign policy from normative power to principled pragmatism are particularly mattering. This transition was sparked by the emphasis on how close neighbors affect the security, immigration, terrorism, and economic health of Europe while also offering a practical plan for addressing more pressing issues of regional and global security.*

***KEYWORDS:*** *Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia, Model of Development, Capacity Building, Regional Connectivity, Economic Resilience, Geopolitics, International Cooperation, Regional Integration, Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States.*

### ***Introduction***

The Central Asian states, as well as the broader post-Soviet region, were charged from the start with addressing some of the most difficult problems that affected almost every part of their daily lives. Naturally, the leaders of the nations that made up the former Soviet Union attempted to draw on existing world experience when performing this job within the framework of integration goals.

One way or another, the hard situation in those years pushed the post-Soviet states to create various forms of integration. If only for this reason, it is too early to make definitively negative assessments of the prospects

of this process. Definitely, we can only say that in the way of its implementation according to the European model, there are so far insurmountable objective and subjective obstacles.

In the post-Soviet space, processes of different significance and direction were taking place, negatively affecting the integration of the Commonwealth states. The Commonwealth states had to overcome the severe consequences of the political collapse of a single state and the all-Union national economic complex, the rupture of established production, technological and economic ties between enterprises, the destruction of a single financial and monetary system, etc. The process of establishing state institutions of power and management was complex, reforming economic and social relations.

Market reforms in the Commonwealth states, considering their national specifics and orientation, further strengthened the negative results of the collapse of a single state and a common economic space, since their target was fundamental changes in the socio-political system and the system of economic relations [79].

With the general focus of reforms on the creation of a socially oriented market economy, the change of economic relations in the post-Soviet states is carried out according to various scenarios based on different approaches to the choice of priorities, stages and timing of their implementation, the mechanisms and tools necessary for this. This circumstance objectively reflects the differences in the socio-economic situation of states, the correlation of socio-political forces, national characteristics and traditions, the expectations of the population and the degree of its readiness for reforms.

Institutional transformations in the states of the Commonwealth are limited mainly to the tasks of power and strengthening of existing political regimes, bringing the economy out of the crisis into a phase of stabilization and recovery, and reducing social tension in society. Market transitions are carried out to the extent that the leaders of states and part of the emerging national elite understand the potential dangers of conservation of the old or new, but deformed, flawed political and socio-economic relations, and at the same time are limited by the fact that these

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<sup>79</sup> Shumsky N. Prospects for Post-Soviet Integration and the Commonwealth of Independent States. - Society and economy. 2015, No. 11-12, p.274.

reforms seriously affect the interests of existing and emerging new elite groups, and are also fraught with tendencies to destabilize society.

Unsettled interstate and interethnic, or even military conflicts between Russia and Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Armenia (Nagorno-Karabakh), in Georgia (Abkhazia, partly Adzharia), Moldova (Transnistria), Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan<sup>80</sup> do not contribute to the integration processes in the post-Soviet space. In its current state, the CIS is unable to resolve them either by economic or political means. Russia, without claiming to be the only peacekeeper, provides the main assistance in maintaining peace and stability in the zone of these conflicts, while not always receiving proper support and understanding from other Commonwealth states.

On the one hand, in economic terms, most of them cannot exist in isolation. Specialization, participation in the international division of labor and, consequently, trade with other states is the only way for them to economic well-being. On the other hand, it is in Central Asia, for example, that a capacious common market can be created, especially given the significant reserves of most types of natural raw materials, the existence of a single transport network, the experience of creating and operating a single electric power system, and main oil and gas pipelines.

### ***Regional segments***

The Central Asian region of the Commonwealth consists of five Central Asian republics that were part of the USSR: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan with a total area of 4 million square meters. km, with a population of over 50 million people, including about 5 million Russian-speaking population. The new states of Central Asia have common historical roots in terms of belonging to the Eastern civilization. The peoples inhabiting them, except for the Tajiks and related ethnic groups, mainly belong to the Turkic-speaking group.

Historically, it is difficult enough to draw boundaries between these peoples, and the ethno-national situation in the region was largely

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<sup>80</sup> See Sébastien Peyrouse, Jos Boonstra and Marlène Laruelle, "Security and development approaches to Central Asia. The EU compared to China and Russia," EUCAM Working Paper 11, 2012, 16. An example in this regard is the 'Community Security Initiative', which has been launched jointly with the OSCE in the aftermath of the 2010 crisis in Kyrgyzstan.

complicated precisely by the arbitrary establishment of administrative boundaries in the Soviet period. The peoples of the Central Asian countries, for the most part, profess the Islamic religion. At the same time, it should be noted that despite the important role of Islam in shaping the cultural community of this region, the degree of Islamization of the republics is very different.

The problems of acquiring state identity, maintaining sovereignty and territorial integrity, as prerequisites for integration, were common to all states of the Central Asian region. In the current post-Soviet configuration, these republics never existed as independent states. Since in the USSR the borders between them were established according to the administrative principle, and for centuries the territorial formations that had been formed were in the nature of valley-oasis associations there is a danger that the process of sovereignization may develop further into separatism, reinforced by ethnic and clan conflicts.

In fact, even during the period of Soviet power, the ruling elites in the Central Asian republics were very sensitive to the question of which historical regions representatives get access to the levers of real power. In principle, what is happening here is a kind of paradoxical fusion of the system of completely feudal and clan-based views on power, which was established back in the Soviet period, with nationalist mindsets. To the greatest extent, this issue escalated in Tajikistan, where "localism", coupled with clan struggle and confrontation between various ethnic groups, led to the civil war of 1992-1997, which practically destroyed the economy of the republic and affected the situation in neighboring states.

In principle, the republics of the region face a common task: to prevent any violation of territorial integrity, including on the territory of neighboring states, which would be very dangerous in terms of setting a precedent. Of particular importance in this regard is the destruction of one of the important "Soviet" pillars of the political and economic stability of the states of Central Asia - the system of protecting strategic security from external and internal threats.

As analysts from Central Asia note, "in the early years of independence, the picture of the foreseeable future of the Central Asian states was, for their governments and, to a certain extent, for public opinion, more or less clear. For the states of the region, the Turkish version

of development was attractive, where a society with a Muslim population chose a secular path of development, a democratic political system and a market economy”<sup>81</sup>. However, the weakness of Turkey itself revealed over the past period, primarily in the economic and civilizational fields, has led to a gradual weakening of the attractiveness of the image of Turkey and the Turkish model of development in the region. Largely under the influence of the specified sum of factors and, we repeat, the consequences of socio-political development during the Soviet period in the Central Asian states, with the exception of Tajikistan, a rather uniform political system has now developed. It manifests itself as “authoritarianism with fragments of political pluralism and some freedoms” in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and as totalitarianism in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.”<sup>82</sup>

The crisis phenomena of the 1990s, which engulfed the economy and social sphere of the Central Asian states in the conditions of disruption of the economic ties established within the former USSR and the search for optimal models for reforming national economies, turned out to be deep and protracted, as in the CIS as a whole. Quite indicative are some statistical data that very clearly characterize the social processes of those years. Throughout Central Asia in the 1990s, there was a serious general economic breakdown and a decline in production, while Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were in the worst position in terms of macroeconomic indicators. In Kyrgyzstan, the republic's GDP was 1995. 50% of level 1990. There was a decline in both industrial production (in 1995. - 35% of level 1990), and agricultural (by 43%). In Tajikistan, the decline in material production in 1991. amounted to 12.5%, in 1992. - 33.7%, and in 1993 and 1994. there was a catastrophic recession: the damage from the civil war was estimated at 7 billion dollars, and the fall in industrial production in various industries was 50-80% <sup>83</sup>. Gross capital formation decreased in all countries, especially in Kazakhstan - in 1991-1996 gross fixed capital formation decreased by 2.8 times <sup>84</sup>.

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<sup>81</sup> Esenov M. Central Asia on the Threshold of the 21st Century. Central Asia and the Caucasus. // [www.ca-c.org/datarus/esenov3/1998-shtml](http://www.ca-c.org/datarus/esenov3/1998-shtml)

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Annakulyeva G. Trends in the Development of the Central Asian Society. Central Asia and the Caucasus. [www.ca-c.org/datarus/annakulyeva/1998-shtml](http://www.ca-c.org/datarus/annakulyeva/1998-shtml)

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

In addition, the collapse of the Soviet administrative system deprived the new states of their usual “backdoor” ways in solving emerging problems. Thus, in Turkmenistan, the program "Grain" put forward by the leadership of the republic, the implementation of which assumed the achievement of grain independence and the provision of free bread in 1997, was failed. But if in the past the problems of the created deficit were solved by directives with supplies from state reserves, then in independent Turkmenistan a wave of bread riots swept due to the lack of bread. Tension in society was relieved by large supplies of flour from Iran. <sup>85</sup>

As for the realization of the foreign trade potential for solving the problems of economic development, in this area the Central Asian states faced the same difficulties as the rest of the post-Soviet countries. In the former USSR, the economies of the republics were heavily dependent not only on inter-republican ties, but also on allied state subsidies. The trade turnover of the Central Asian republics with other former Soviet republics accounted for an average of over 87% of their total exchange with the outside world<sup>86</sup>. Naturally, the countries of the region tried to overcome the difficulties that arose in connection with the rupture of inter-republican ties primarily by expanding mutual trade, searching for new markets and trading partners, as well as attracting foreign capital to implement large projects for the construction of new and reconstruction of existing enterprises. Nevertheless, we note that their initial hopes for serious financial support from Western countries and international economic organizations were far from being fully realized, which, at a difficult stage in the formation of young states, preferred to take a wait-and-see attitude.[<sup>87</sup>]

Soon after the Soviet Union was destroyed in 1991, the idea of a Central Asian union was born. Even though all nations joined the newly established Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), further regional cooperation was deemed necessary.[<sup>88</sup>] They were unable to take part in

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<sup>85</sup> Dzhabiev A. N. Economy of Turkmenistan: ways and directions of development

Central Asia and the Caucasus. [www.ca-c.org/datarus/dzhabiev/2013-shtml](http://www.ca-c.org/datarus/dzhabiev/2013-shtml)

<sup>86</sup> European Commission, Central Asia. DCI Indicative Program 2011–2013, Brussels, 2011, 14–15

<sup>87</sup> Esenov M. Central Asia on the Threshold of the 21st Century. Central Asia and the Caucasus. // [www.ca-c.org/datarus/esenov3/1998-shtml](http://www.ca-c.org/datarus/esenov3/1998-shtml)

<sup>88</sup> Rumer, Boris; Zhukov, Stanislav (1998). [Central Asia: The Challenges of Independence](#). New York: M.E. Sharpe. p. 104. [ISBN 9780765632982](#). Retrieved 5 April 2018

the integration process because Tajikistan was engulfed in the Tajikistani Civil War (1992–1997), which was fought between government forces and different Islamist rebel organizations backed by the Taliban. Turkmenistan chose against joining the CIS or Central Asian integration in favor of maintaining its neutrality. On September 23, 1993, the remaining three republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan signed a pact to construct an economic union. On February 10, 1994, a "one economic space" was declared, and on July 8, 1994, an Interstate Council with an Executive Committee was established. The Central Asian Union is open to all CIS members, in theory.<sup>89</sup> The Union was given a military component as well. Tajikistan joined the CAU as an observer in 1996 while still engaged in civil conflict. A Council of Defense Ministers was established, and a peacekeeping force was established under the auspices of the UN. In September 1997, the peacekeeping force conducted its first training exercises on the soil of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The five former Soviet Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan would form a new Central Asian Union, according to a proposal made by Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev on April 26, 2007, to create an economic and political union akin to the EU<sup>90</sup>. The presidents of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have thus far signed a document establishing an "International Supreme Council" between their two countries. A Treaty of Eternal Friendship has also been signed between Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. A free trade zone will also be established by Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

Even though the planned new union had the support of the presidents of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan by 2008, former Uzbek leader Islam Karimov flatly rejected it. But integration was once again discussed after Karimov's passing in 2016. Organizer and host Nursultan Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev of Uzbekistan, Sooronbai Jeenbekov of Kyrgyzstan, Emomali Rahmon of Tajikistan, and Akja Nurberdiowa of the Turkmen parliament participated in the new Central Asian Summit on March 15 in Astana. The meeting was hosted at the Aqorda Presidential

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<sup>89</sup>Ibidem

<sup>90</sup> Ibidem

Palace by President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan. The leaders of Central Asia met for the first time in nearly ten years at this summit.[91]

It is impossible to deny the existence of objective prerequisites that determine the necessity and reality of the integration of the Central Asian republics. There are a number of objective prerequisites that dictate the need to expand cooperation between the Central Asian republics. From the point of view of geographical position, all the republics are located in the central part of the Asian continent, far from the seas and oceans, as a result of which their geopolitical position is equally unfavorable, since they are completely dependent on neighboring states in terms of access to trade routes. In any perspective, the well-being of these countries will be linked to the stability in certain states and the nature of relations with them.

In addition to the above-mentioned prerequisites for the integration of the Central Asian republics, economic prerequisites play perhaps the main role. Despite the fact that the economy of the republics, within the framework of the all-Union division of labor, had a largely one-sided agrarian and raw material specialization (taking into account their natural and climatic conditions) and served primarily the needs of the Union and other republics, many experts believe that in the course of the country's economic integration could largely complement each other: Turkmenistan was mainly focused on gas production, Uzbekistan - on cotton growing, Kyrgyzstan - on sheep breeding, Tajikistan - on hydropower.

On the other hand, it should be noted a number of factors that also have an ambiguous effect on the development of foreign economic relations of regional states, their economy as a whole and, accordingly, on the implementation of integration. For example, the region has rich reserves of such minerals as oil, gas, gold, uranium, zinc, etc., but they are unevenly distributed throughout the region: Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have the largest reserves. This circumstance, as well as the high costs associated with the process of extraction and processing of resources, should have pushed the countries of the region to strengthen cooperation in this area, but so far, rivalry is more likely to be seen in this area, as, for example, the development of the situation on the legal status of the Caspian Sea shows.

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<sup>91</sup><https://www.euractiv.com/section/central-asia/news/fri-astana-hosts-little-publicised-central-asia-summit/>



The creation of the Central Asian Community, and especially the Treaty of Eternal Friendship, in principle, laid the necessary legal basis for the development of integration in the region.

It appears that the region is moving toward unification at the moment, which will enable the Central Asian states to quickly find solutions to their challenges, especially those related to bolstering security. According to last year's data, Kazakhstan's GDP at purchasing power parity was \$460.7 billion, Uzbekistan – \$202.3 billion, while Turkmenistan – \$94.8 billion, Tajikistan – \$25.8 billion, and Kyrgyzstan – \$21 billion. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have had mutually complementary economies since Soviet times, including such industries as water use, energy, transport, agriculture, telecommunications, etc. All this creates a good basis for the revival of the Central Asian Union, which will allow Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to create a kind of "safety cushion" in the economy. Moreover, unlike the EAEU, it will be possible to try to involve not only Tajikistan in this association, but also Turkmenistan, with which Uzbekistan has developed good relations in recent years.[92]

However, recent efforts to advance regional integration did not exclude the creation of fresh foreign policy trajectories. The OSCE, Organization of the Islamic Conference, and Economic Cooperation Organization all accepted new members from the region's five states (it also includes Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, Azerbaijan and Afghanistan). With other international financial institutions like the Asian Bank, Islamic Development Bank, World Bank, IMF, and EBRD, communication has been established.

After 2016, the foreign policy and good neighborliness of Uzbekistan opened the door to regional cooperation, which became an important impetus for further strengthening relations with the regional countries. For example, over the past period, many changes have taken place in and around the region, while some issues have come to the fore, and some have lost their relevance. Such changes in the political, economic, social, cultural and other.

Regional cooperation helps the Central Asian states to better manage their interdependence, unlock and increase their potential for economic

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<sup>92</sup> Shustov A. Will Tashkent and Astana revive the Central Asian Union? / Eurasia Expert, February 21, 2017 <https://eurasia.expert/vozrodyat-li-tashkent-i-astana-tsentralno-aziatskiy-soyuz/>

growth, influence in international affairs, and assert their independence and uniqueness.

The countries of the region, being traditional and natural parties to the negotiation process, maintain balanced and constructive relations with representatives of the Afghan government, which determines it as the main force in the international security system, where Central Asia has occupied and will continue to occupy an important determining position. In particular, this is clearly seen on the example of several international platforms: The International Contact Group on Afghanistan, the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group, the 6+2 and 6+3 Contact Groups initiated by Uzbekistan and rehabilitated by the head of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev in the framework of the High-Level International Conference on Afghanistan: "Peace Process, Security Cooperation and Regional Interoperability", held in March 2018.

Most likely, the Trans-Afghan logistics project "Termez - Mazar-i-Sharif - Kabul - Peshawar" promoted by the Republic of Uzbekistan in the near future can become the main transport route connecting the states of Central Asia along the shortest route (only 760 km.) to the Karakorum corridor and further to the Pakistani to the seaports of Karachi-Qasim and Gwadar, thereby reducing the length of almost all existing transit networks in the region by 30% with a projected throughput volume of cargo transportation of at least 15-20 million tons per year. The significance and effectiveness of the trans-Afghan project is associated with the synchronization of the construction of the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan-China railway, which connects China with the countries of Central Asia along an alternative trans-regional route (433 km), in which the international community is heavily interested.

### ***Conclusion***

The closely coordinated efforts of countries in the international arena in collaboration with such entities as the European Union on such matters as the peace and sustainable development of Afghanistan will undoubtedly strengthen the stability in Central Asia. Describing the regularity of such trends, S.Safoev, First Deputy of the Senate of the Republic of Uzbekistan noted that today there is "... the need to create a legal and, in the future, an institutional framework for interaction on key issues of the international

agenda and, first of all, to promote the socio-economic reconstruction of Afghanistan. The main factor in making the favorable environment in Central Asia irreversible is the strengthening of confidence-building measures. It is important to formulate principles, conceptual foundations for understanding the essence of processes, in the development of which a significant role is assigned not only to state and non-governmental, but also to private, business structures"<sup>93</sup>.

The emergence of a new political environment in the area shows that the Central Asian nations' process of closer involvement in bolstering peace and stability in the region has become an objective reality, and openness in relations with one's nearest neighbors lays the groundwork for sustainable development throughout the entire world.

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<sup>93</sup> <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2022/05/13/afghanistan/>

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