

II. МИНТАҚАВИЙ РИВОЖЛАНИШ ТРЕНДЛАРИ

Тренды регионального развития

Trends of Regional Development

EVALUATING INDICATORS OF INTEGRATION IN CENTRAL ASIA

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Abstract: *The Central Asian (CA) integration process is a complicated, diverse topic that must be evaluated using unbiased techniques to ensure future success. A thorough analysis of the available literature on integration in Central Asia served as the foundation for the methodology creation and indicator selection to quantify integration in the area. The viability of choosing indicators that will help monitor integration processes in the CA area will be examined via case studies and qualitative and quantitative research findings. The study's findings helped define the scope of upcoming activities in the area and allowed for identifying the process's advantages and disadvantages in Central Asia.*

Keywords: *Central Asia, Integration process, Economic integration, Methodology, Evaluation indicators*

Introduction

Integration indicators reflect the depth of integration between member states.¹ Official meetings and conferences, comments, and efforts of CA leaders are used to actively debate the problem of Central Asian nations' integration. Positive aspirations concerning integration are prevalent now in the Central Asian area. However, it is hard to predict whether these aspirations will materialize into actual integration initiatives. The people of the Central Asian area have similar cultural and civilizational values, linkages to one another economically and

¹ EAEU. (2019). *Analysis of integration processes*. Eurasian Economic Commission.

https://eec.eaeunion.org/comission/departement/dep_makroec_pol/analiz-integratsionnykh-protsessov.php

historically, especially in terms of language and ethnicity, and shared security risks to all governments. It enables all stakeholders to claim that regional connection and integration are priorities in today's political, economic, and social realms of CA nations' lives. At the same time, the Central Asian countries are experiencing the moment of formation as an independent subject of geopolitics.

Developing methodology and indicators for assessing integration in Central Asia requires a comprehensive approach, as integration can refer to different aspects and directions. Despite the relatively low density of regional integration mechanisms, organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Asian Development Bank, the Eurasian Development Bank, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia have taken active steps to develop these indicator systems.²

Integration processes in Central Asia

Integration processes in Central Asia have to be based on mutually beneficial cooperation in any issues. Let us start from the economic integration. Economic integration can be assessed from measures of direct investment, trade, and infrastructure logistics. Therefore, studies on economic integration rely on indicators such as the level of cross-border trade, the number of investment projects and the degree of regulatory convergence (Rasoulinezhad et al., 2022³; Taghizadeh-Hesary et al., 2020⁴; Kudaibergenova, 2018⁵; Medukhanova et al., 2022⁶).

Karymshakov & Sulaimanova's (2021) analysis of empirical estimates based on panel data for the period 2009-2017 proved that the quality and quantity of infrastructure in Central Asia have a positive impact on trade flows as measured by the volume of exports and imports.⁷ Given the remote geographical location of

² De Lombaerde, P. (2021). Adding numbers to complex processes: Asian integration indicator systems in perspective. *Asia and the Global Economy*, 1(2), 100017. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aglobe.2021.100017>

³ Rasoulinezhad, E., Sung, J., Talipova, A., & Taghizadeh-Hesary, F. (2022). Analyzing energy trade policy in Central Asia using the Inter-country Trade Force Approach. *Economic Analysis and Policy*, 73, 441–454. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eap.2021.12.003>

⁴ Taghizadeh-Hesary, F., Yoshino, N., Kim, C. J., & Morgan, P. J. (2020). Regional Economic Integration in Asia: Challenges and recommended policies. *Journal of Economic Integration*, 35(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.11130/jei.2020.35.1.1>

⁵ Kudaibergenova, D. T. (2018). Eurasian Economic Union Integration in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. *The Eurasian Project in Global Perspective*, 97–112. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315233109-8>

⁶ Medukhanova, L. A., Serieva, Zh., & Sarybayev, M. S. (2022). History and prerequisites for Economic Integration of Central Asian countries. *Bulletin of "Turan" University*, (1), 200–209. <https://doi.org/10.46914/1562-2959-2022-1-1-200-209>

⁷ Karymshakov, K., & Sulaimanova, B. (2021). The impact of infrastructure on trade in Central Asia. *Asia Europe Journal*, 19(S1), 5–20. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10308-021-00613-7>

the Central Asian countries, the results of Karymshakov & Sulaimanova (2021) showed that a regional approach to infrastructure development is essential and policies regarding infrastructure development should be linked to further regional economic interest.⁸

Transport infrastructure and logistics are an integral part of the infrastructure integration of Central Asian countries and are directly linked to economic integration. Transport infrastructure development depends on investments in constructing and repairing roads, railways, and airports (CAREC Program, 2020)⁹. The construction of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railroad connecting China with Central Asia is expected to significantly improve the region's integration into the global economy (Настоящее Время, 2022)¹⁰ and good logistics and simplified customs procedures will make the transportation of goods more efficient. As a result, it can significantly reduce transportation costs, and the development of regional transport corridors can contribute to the integration of Central Asia (Ports and logistics scoping study in CAREC countries, 2021)¹¹.

Central Asia's infrastructure integration also requires energy. Kazakhstan is one of the biggest oil producers. Dependence on oil exports requires CA nations to find alternate energy sources during geopolitical crises. Solar and wind energy development may minimize hydrocarbon reliance. Uzbekistan aims to produce 25% of its power from renewable sources by 2030 (ВИЭ, 2021¹²; Игнатъева, 2020¹³). To improve efficiency, experts urge Central Asian nations to build transmission lines and pipelines.

Central Asian countries should cooperate to develop a common energy security strategy and a regional energy governance mechanism (OSCE, 2022)¹⁴.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ CAREC Program. (2020). *Carec Transport Strategy 2030*. URL: <https://www.carecprogram.org/?publication=carec-transport-strategy-2030>

¹⁰ Настоящее Время. (2022, July 26). *Проект железной дороги Китай – Кыргызстан – Узбекистан*. Настоящее Время. <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/proekt-zheleznoy-dorogi-kitay-kyrgyzstan-uzbekistan-mozhet-startovat-osenyu-obyasnyayem-pochemu-ona-vazhna-dlya-vseh-stran-tsentralnoy-azii/31958781.html>

¹¹ Ports and logistics scoping study in CAREC countries (2021) Азиатский банк развития [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/690856/ports-logistics-scoping-study-carec-countries.pdf> (accessed: 31.01.2023).

¹² ВИЭ. (2021). О'zbekiston Respublikasi Energetika vazirligi. URL: <https://minenergy.uz/ru/lists/view/32> (accessed: 31.01.2023).

¹³ Игнатъева А. (2020). *Узбекистан планирует к 2030 г. увеличить долю возобновляемых источников*. Новостной портал о ТЭК России и Мира Neftegaz.RU. <https://neftegaz.ru/news/Alternative-energy/652847-uzbekistan-planiruet-k-2030-g-uvelichit-dolyu-vozobnovlyayemykh-istochnikov-energii-do-25/>

¹⁴ OSCE. (2022). Organization for Security and co-operation in Europe. https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/8/9/513790_0.pdf

Significantly, CA countries have already developed their energy development strategies and “partially restored bilateral and multilateral cooperation in energy trade”¹⁵ (OSCE, 2022, c.43). The countries now aim to create a unified strategy that will allow CA countries to “utilize common resources to meet individual country needs while ensuring the long-term sustainability of energy supply”¹⁶ (OSCE, 2022, c.43). It is a direct path to “energy security in the region” and infrastructure integration ¹⁷ (OSCE, 2022, c.43).

The discourse of political integration is also a significant approach in the context of integration processes and is widely broadcast. Political integration issues include regional security, diplomatic cooperation, and the development of regional organizations and institutions. Studies on political integration rely mainly on primary qualitative information and analyze indicators such as the level of political commitment to integration, the level of cooperation and coordination among regional actors, and the effectiveness of regional institutions and organizations (Beglov, 2010¹⁸; Krambs, 2012¹⁹; Kemelova & Zhalkubaev, 2003²⁰).

In addition to economic and political integration, a number of studies have focused on the cultural and humanitarian aspects of cooperation and integration in Central Asia, emphasizing issues such as exchange of cultural goods and services, preservation of cultural heritage (Abdrakhmanov, 2022²¹; Sobirovich, 2020²²; Moldakhmet et al., 2014²³; Konuspayeva et al., 2023²⁴). According to Moldakhmet et al. (2014), cultural and humanitarian cooperation is the most

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Beglov, I. F. (2010). Central Asia Regional Water Information Base – CAREWIB. *Water and Food Security in Central Asia*, 179–195. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-9974-7_18

¹⁹ Krambs, T. A. (2012). Central Asia and the Afghanistan security dilemma: Amelioration, retrograde, or status quo? Central Asia's role in Regional Security regarding Afghanistan after 2014. *Connections: The Quarterly Journal*, 12(2), 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.11610/connections.12.2.01>

²⁰ Kemelova D., Zhalkubaev G. (2003). Water, conflict, and regional security in Central Asia revisited // *New York University Environmental Law Journal*, 11, C. 479–502.

²¹ Abdrakhmanov, K. (2022). Merchants of the Russian Empire Trading with Central Asia: Cultural-anthropological aspects. *Quaestio Rossica*, 10(5). <https://doi.org/10.15826/qv.2022.5.750>

²² Sobirovich, E. S. (2020). Synergetic aspects of the historical and cultural fundamentals of the development of confessional and philosophical doctrine in Central Asia. *The American Journal of Social Science and Education Innovations*, 02(10), 352–359. <https://doi.org/10.37547/tajssei/volume02issue10-57>

²³ Moldakhmet, M., Raikhan, S., & Ryskeldy, M. (2014). Contemporary cultural and humanitarian cooperation between the countries of Central Asia. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 122, 13–18. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.01.1295>

²⁴ Konuspayeva, G., Baubekova, A., Akhmetsadykova, S., & Faye, B. (2023). Traditional dairy fermented products in Central Asia. *International Dairy Journal*, 137, 105514. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.idairyj.2022.105514>

advanced compared to other areas of cooperation in Central Asian countries²⁵. This cooperation is undoubtedly based on both cultural and linguistic similarities (the Turkic language) of the Central Asian countries, except for the Tajik language, which is close to Persian, but has undergone Turkic linguistic influence.

The article by Hao et al. (2022) “An Integrative Analytical Framework for Water, Energy and Food Security for Sustainable Development at the Country Scale: A Case Study of Five Central Asian Countries” provides a framework for assessing Water, Energy and Food (WEF) security in the CA region²⁶. Hao et al. (2022) applied the authors' algorithm to study five Central Asian countries for security assessment and found that Kazakhstan has the highest level of security in terms of VEP, followed by Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan; Tajikistan demonstrates the lowest level of security²⁷.

In another case study Eltazarov S., Bobojonov I., Kuhn L., & Glauben T. (2021) evaluate the accuracy of satellite data in weather risk mapping for agricultural index insurance in semi-arid and arid zones of Central Asia²⁸. The study compares the accuracy of three globally available satellite datasets (GSMaP, CHIRPS and GLDAS) with ground-based weather information for 14 different indicators using Uzbekistan as an example. The use of satellite data can provide necessary data for climate services of the whole region and can facilitate integration on many aspects.

A case study by Zhang et al. (2023) assesses the development potential of agricultural land in Central Asia using multi-criteria decision analysis (MCDA) and an analytical hierarchical process (AHP)²⁹. The results of Zhang et al. (2023) can serve as a guide for future cropland development in Central Asian countries³⁰.

²⁵ Moldakhmet, M., Raikhan, S., & Ryskeldy, M. (2014). Contemporary cultural and humanitarian cooperation between the countries of Central Asia. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 122, 13–18. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.01.1295>

²⁶ Hao, L., Wang, P., Yu, J., & Ruan, H. (2022). An integrative analytical framework of water-energy-food security for sustainable development at the country scale: A case study of five Central Asian countries. *Journal of Hydrology*, 607, 127530. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhydrol.2022.127530>

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Eltazarov, S., Bobojonov, I., Kuhn, L., & Glauben, T. (2021). Mapping weather risk – A multi-indicator analysis of satellite-based weather data for agricultural index insurance development in semi-arid and arid zones of Central Asia. *Climate Services*, 23, 100251. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cliser.2021.100251>

²⁹ Zhang, H., Song, H., & Hou, C. (2023). How Do Overseas Economic and Trade Cooperation Zones along the Belt and Road Affect the Economic Growth of Host Countries? *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 15(4). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15042894>

³⁰ Ibid

Therefore, the literature review helped to summarize the different types of integration and example indicators that can reflect the state of integration (Table 1).

Table 1. List of indicators that can be used to measure integration in Central Asia

	Type of integration	Indicators	Content of indicators
1.	<i>Political integration</i>	Cooperation between countries Existence of regional organizations Countries working together to resolve regional conflicts	Demonstrate the degree of political cooperation and coordination among the countries of the region, including the level of intergovernmental agreements and the effectiveness of regional organizations in promoting integration
2.	<i>Economic integration</i>	Trade volume Cross-border investment Flow of goods, services and capital between countries	Demonstrate the degree of economic interdependence and cooperation among countries in the region, including trade integration, investment flows, monetary integration, and the development of regional supply chains
3.	<i>Social integration</i>	Level of migration Level of cultural exchange between countries Level of cultural diversity within countries	Measure the degree of social and cultural exchange and cooperation among people in the region, including the level of cross-border mobility and the degree of intercultural exchange and understanding
4.	<i>Cultural integration</i>	Multilingualism Religious diversity Number of mixed marriages Ethnic composition Cultural diversity Media representation	Assess the extent to which different cultural groups in a society are able to coexist and interact harmoniously with each other

5.	<i>Infrastructure integration</i>	Availability of transportation infrastructure Logistics efficiency index Energy complex	Measure the degree of integration of infrastructure systems in the region, including transportation, energy and communication networks
6.	<i>Institutional integration</i>	Institutional capacity Legal framework Political stability Economic cooperation Stability of the political system Administrative efficiency	Characterize the development of common institutions, legal frameworks and regulatory systems that promote integration in the region
7.	<i>Human development integration</i>	Human Development Index (HDI): Life expectancy Level of education Extent to which people have access to health, education and other basic services Gender inequality Gender gap.	Used as benchmarks to equalize regions with different levels of development

Central Asia's integration types show its nations' collaboration and coordination. Central Asia's integration indicators help analyze its state and development. These indicators are needed to guide policies and initiatives to promote integration in the region and monitor its progress.

Despite particular prerequisites and the existence of cross-border cooperation, there is still no “institutionalization of multilateral cooperation” and thus no “full-fledged regional integration association.”³¹ Batsaikhan & Dabrowski (2017) find that the main challenge is to shift from commodity-based growth strategies to market-oriented diversification and the adoption of a wide range of economic, institutional and policy reforms³².

³¹ Махмутова Е.В. (2018). Центральная Азия в поисках собственной интеграционной модели. Вестник МГИМО Университета, (4 (61)), 78-91. URL: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/tsentralnaya-aziya-v-poiskah-sobstvennoy-integratsionnoy-modeli> (дата обращения: 03.06.2023).

³² Batsaikhan, U., & Dabrowski, M. (2017). Central Asia — Twenty-five years after the breakup of the USSR. *Russian Journal of Economics*, 3(3), 296-320. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ruje.2017.09.005>

There is also the problem of poverty in CA countries the factors of which are linked to each other in “*vicious circles*”³³. The breaking is “possible through systemic solutions in three public spheres - education, labor market and development institutions”³⁴.

Conclusion

This article discusses the methodology for assessing regional integration in Central Asia. Integration affects various aspects, the main of which are economic, historical, and cultural foundations. It is important to note that the regional integration of the Central Asian countries is an essential political, economic, and social aspiration of the region's countries. Central Asia has various types of integration, reflecting different aspects of cooperation and coordination among the region's countries.

CA countries must develop a methodology for selecting appropriate indicators for a comprehensive measurement of integration in Central Asia. These indicators will serve as a basis for assessing the status and progress of integration and define policies and initiatives to promote further integration. Despite cross-border cooperation, multilateral cooperation has yet to be formally institutionalized in the CA region. It hinders the creation of a full-fledged regional integration association. Economic diversification emphasizes the importance of shifting from commodity-based growth strategies to market-oriented diversification. Systemic solutions are needed in education, the labor market, and development institutions that can help break the cycle of poverty.

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³³ Arzhaev, F. I., Andriukhin, V. Y., & Saprynskaya, D. V. (2022). Systemic poverty modelling: Case of Central Asia. *MGIMO Review of International Relations*, 15(6), 86–111. <https://doi.org/10.24833/2071-8160-2022-6-87-86-111>

³⁴ Ibid

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