

Regional Cooperation And Security Issues In Central Asia

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Abstract

This article examines the regional cooperation and security issues in Central Asia in the framework of New Regionalism and Liberal Institutionalism theories. The aim of this article is to determine Kazakhstan's role in strengthening cooperation in the context of Central Asian regional cooperation and security issues. Central Asian regional cooperation and security problems and Kazakhstan's initiatives with regard to these topics have also been discussed. Moreover, this study emphasizes the important factors of cultural, psychological and communicative closeness of Central Asian states, which are necessary for strengthening the integration and determining common interests.

Keywords: *Central Asian Turkic Republics, Integration, Security Issues, Economic Cooperation, Kazakhstan.*

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INTRODUCTION

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union (SU) caused profound changes in the global system and a number of regional subsystems. The emergence of five new independent states in the center of the Eurasian continent - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan - marked the beginning of the formation of a new international political region - Central Asia (CA) - and the Central Asian subsystem. The new region has become a field of intersection of interests and an object of foreign policy influence of neighboring states - Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan, and global actors. The importance of CA is due to its geopolitical location between Russia, China, and Iran, its significant energy and natural resource potential, transport and transit opportunities, and proximity to the centers of armed conflicts (Afghanistan, Pakistan), which strongly affect international security. In this regard, CA region will remain as a sphere of intersection of interests and strategies of the states of the CA and external geopolitical players.

Historically, states have always used different political forms of uniting and interacting with other states with separate territories in order to resolve issues of joint security, defense, political and economic cooperation. Thus, Eurasia where regional organizations and states function, is not the exception. The Ottoman Empire, the SU and the Warsaw Treaty Organization are just some examples. A new wave of regional activity at the world level occurred in the second half of the 20th century. In the literature, such a worldwide trend of regionalism (organization) has been called the “new regionalism” which is regarded as a new era of regionalism that emerged as a response to new risks, and where participating states have ceased to be limited to formal interstate integration organizations (Soderbaum & Shaw 2003).

Let us outline the following features of the new regionalism. First: the intensity and increase in the number of regional organizations. Thus, if in modern times, from 1910 to 1930, only 4 organizations were established (the so-called period of “early regionalism”), then from 1944 until the end of the 1990s (the so-called period of “old regionalism”) there were already over 60 organizations, and since 1990 up to the present (the period of the “new regionalism”) there are more than 100 organizations. Second: the diversity of the universe. The new regionalism, unlike the old regionalism

which as a whole had a narrow focus on preferential trade agreements and security alliances, includes the cooperation of countries in all spheres of public life. So it is necessary to highlight important areas in the activities of regional organizations, such as the ecological sphere, humanitarian and cultural relations, the fight against terrorism and organized crime, etc. The third feature of regionalism is the diversity of views. In a number of regions, states are simultaneously participants in several international regional organizations that are different both in their areas of activity and in their goals of creation besides being competing players on the international arena. Another feature of regionalism can be distinguished by its diversity. Integration processes can be observed in many regions, however they do not follow the “European” path. The participating states have ceased to be limited to formal interstate integration organizations in modern conditions. The role and meanings of the regional organizations in the international relations on the activities of consultative formats (summits, forums, conferences, etc.) and the inter-parliamentary interactions have increased (Soderbaum & Shaw 2003:4-8).

Another aspect to consider within the theory of Liberal Institutionalism and the concept of alliance relates to its research question. Liberal institutionalism underlines the importance of international organizations for developing cooperation among states. Liberal institutionalists argue that international institutions are inclined towards promoting cooperation by making information transparent to all members, which leads to the decrease of the risk of cheating. Joseph Grieco (1990) believes that the distribution of the benefits or gains from the cooperation of the included states is the most crucial issue in any partnership system. States that generally have gains from the cooperation, are concerned on how to get more gains and leave other states worse off over time. The reason for this is the anarchical system in which states are being operated, where relative gains can affect the balance of power (Grieco, 1990).

Duncan Snidel (1991) and Robert Powell (1991) actually supported the Grieco’s idea by arguing that relative gains problem has not been overemphasized. Snidel believes that the issue of relative gains is highly related to a two-actor situation or to a number of states which have important asymmetries between them. States with nearly similar powers don’t have to be worried about relative gains. Likewise, Robert Powell thinks that

hostile or peaceful condition in world order is defining the significance of the relative gains problem. According to liberal institutionalism, it works better when the threat of using force is the last option to consider and the. As such, actors within the international system tend to cooperate when they are relatively secured and the relative gains problem is precisely low (Snidal 1991, Powell 1991, Grieco 1990).

With the creation of new Central Asian states in the 1990s in the Eurasian Post-Soviet era, the emergence of a number of large integration organizations were established (CIS, BSEC, ECO, EurAsEC, SCO), where along with Russia and neighboring countries – usually their initiators –the newly formed republics of the South Caucasus and CA joined.

Thus, Central Asian region poses new questions for the world community. What should we expect from the main geopolitical actors in the near future? How will the strategy of security and foreign policy of the Central Asian countries be built on their neighbors, world powers, international organizations and other centers of power? Will geopolitical stability in Eurasia, balance of power, balance of interests be preserved? How will the situation in CA develop and what is the level of risks and challenges faced by the countries of the region, and how can we characterize possible development paths?

The relevance of the topic is connected with the fact that CA has an important geo-strategic and geo-economic significance for the entire continent. At the same time, the region has a significant conflict potential. The study of the problems of political and economic cooperation is actual, since the analysis makes it possible to predict and correct the further development of relations. Of particular importance is the issue of mechanisms to counter the threats against security, that is, the creation of an effective system of integrated security capable of ensuring the real sovereignty of the states of the region.

Looking through the literature devoted to CA, three main topics that have been raised by specialists in the past years can be identified. First of all, their attention was focused on the problems of Central Asian security and on the issues of regional influence among external powers: Russia, China, the United States and European countries represented by the European

Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (Menon 2003; Harris & Xijiang 1993; Star 2005; Allison 2004a).

Second topic grabbing specialist's attention constantly on geopolitics is related to the control over the oil production, especially the transportation to the energy resources in CA region. On these issues, many articles and other works have been written, whose authors mainly analyze the possibility of the external players' controlling and creating new ways of delivering energy resources to world markets, as well as the political, economic and geopolitical consequences of those projects (Blank 2006; Cohen 2006; Dorian 2006).

The studies of the Central Asian political scientists and international experts dedicated to the problems of regional security and international relations and the external economic ties of the countries of the region, as was the rule, remained within the framework of the official interpretation of the national interests and foreign policies adopted in the Central Asian states. Hence, in the articles of Kassenov, the foreign policy direction of the states government is grounded, and its separate aspects are revealed (Kassenov, 1997; see also Aben, 1999; Laumulin, 2007; Narynski & Malgin, 2003; Karayanni, 2003; Tomberg, 2006; Yudanov, 2000).

Thirdly, the literature on Kazakh foreign policy is mainly written by Kazakh academicians, especially the main exponents of Almaty-Astana literature are precisely the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev (Nazarbayev, 1994), diplomat Mansurov (Mansurov, 1997), Kassenov (Kassenov 1995), Sultanov and Muzaparova (Sultanov & Muzaparova, 2003). Kazakh foreign policy had been defined as a policy with a "multivector" reach by above-stated officials since the state's independence in 1991.

According to the officials, Kazakhstan's foreign policy principles prioritized the following: strengthening state sovereignty, integrity and inviolability of borders, and protecting economic interests (Kassenov, 1995). Mansurov defined the three main pillars of Kazakh foreign policy as sovereignty, integration, and strategic partnership (Mansurov, 1997).

Secondarily, Kazakhstan's foreign policy had been outlined by some academicians. Their doubt was primarily in Kazakhstan's stance within the Central Asian and Caspian region. Nazarbayev's efforts to create a Eurasian Union (Dugin, 2004) and Kazakhstan's important role in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) push regional economic and security issues to the top of Kazakh political agenda (Sultanov & Muzaparova, 2003). Analyses of Richard Weitz has revealed facts of the cooperation between Kazakh regional policy and Caspian energy geopolitics, notably after the discovery of Kashagan in 2000 and the increasing political collaborations over pipeline projects in Eurasia (Weitz, 2008).

In the evaluation section of the study, besides the regional security from the economic aspects of CA and main priorities of cooperation in security, the security issues of CA and the role of Kazakhstan in regional security and cooperation are examined. The strategies and policies put forward by Kazakhstan for the strengthening of the regional security as well as economic and political relations are mentioned.

MAIN PRIORITIES OF REGIONAL COOPERATION AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF REGIONAL SECURITY IN CENTRAL ASIA

Regional cooperation and security, first of all, is the key element for the theoretical framework of the Regional cooperation (Fawcett 2012). Regional cooperation and security in CA should be based on fundamental assumptions regarding the history, geography, politics, economics, culture, language and religious community of the peoples of the region. This is due to the fact that CA, covering over 3.5 million sq. km, is home to over 64 million people. Economics of the CA states are interrelated. Region's states share energy, transport and irrigation networks and water supply systems.

Main priorities of cooperation in regional security and defense policy can be formulated as follows: development and implementation of coherent policies and joint action, coordinate activities of the competent authorities of the region in fighting against terrorism, extremism, illegal trafficking in arms and drugs, crime and illegal migration; adoption of joint measures to reduce potential for conflict of religious extremism and preservation of interfaith harmony in region; Development and implementation of

measures aimed at harmonizing national legislations of the States in the fight against terrorism; implementation of a single program to combat religious extremism, joint investigation, search operations on specific materials about the manifestations of religious extremism, requiring coordinated action; improving cross-border cooperation in suppression of drug trafficking as well as their illegal transit through territory of Central Asian states; harmonization of national legislation on border issues; curbing infiltration across borders of terrorist groups and other criminal elements; adoption of effective measures to isolate any manifestations of instability and conflict at border; joint decisions of issues related to the provision of mutual assistance in emergency situations, including on cross-border issues; ensuring effective cooperation on prevention and elimination of emergency situations of natural and man-made disasters (Klimenko, 2009:55-66).

Economic integration is an important factor in providing regional security. Currently, countries have different levels of socio-economic development. Close economic cooperation in the region would strengthen the mutually beneficial economic relationship. What kinds of measures should be taken? It requires the following: Creation of conditions for the revival of production, free trade, specialization and cooperation; the development of trade, labor and capital markets; formation of a system of support and sharing of strategic resources, transportation arteries, communications, manufacturing facilities; foundation of a common free trade and customs area; harmonization of legislation in the field of investment and trade (Dadabayeva & Kuzmina, 2014:22-31).

Strong dependence on natural and water resources in the region can create, for example, joint water, energy, transport and food specialized consortiums. This would combine the basic resources for implementation of specific economic projects, transport and logistics infrastructure as well as food security. Practical examples of cooperation in investment sphere between countries are available. A few years ago, joint investment funds were founded between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, in amount of 101 million USD and between Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, in amount of 100 million USD (Chorshanbiyev, 2014).

Most important factor in providing regional security is a joint decision on the economic and environmental challenges, consolidation effort to provide national and regional security, countering global challenges and threats of our time. Particularly, Kazakhstan initiated a project to establish an International Water and Energy Consortium with the participation of the World Bank (the concept has been proposed by Kazakhstan in 2003 and in October 2004, was approved by the Heads of States of the “Central Asian Cooperation” Organization) (Weitz 2008:26-31). Nowadays, the economic and political conditions in the countries are in need of progress regarding their energy establishment; for example, Regional Water and Energy Consortium. It would create a mechanism that enables a joint management for the water resources and integrated energy networks as well as paving the way for the development of “equal energy partnership.” This was seen in the joint implementation of hydropower projects during the construction of Kambarata hydroelectric power plant in Kyrgyzstan and the Rogun hydroelectric power plant in Tajikistan. Currently, bilateral agreements are signed between Russia and Tajikistan on completing the construction of the Sangtuda and Rogun hydroelectric power plant in Tajikistan. A document on Kambarata hydropower plant (1 and 2) in Kyrgyzstan is, nowadays, well under construction. Construction of Sangtuda-1 hydroelectric power was planned at the beginning of 1980s, but stopped due to the lack of financial sources until the agreement signed between Tajikistan and Russia for financial support, and also Iran and Tajikistan will build Sangtuda-2 hydroelectric power station. The possibility of expanding the format of the construction of the hydropower facilities in Tajikistan with the participation of Kazakhstan is also under consideration (Naumova, 2008).

In this regard, issue of the joint use of the water in CA states has a great political significance. This, above all, would reduce the conflict between countries and threats to energy and food security. It would also contribute to the formation of regional zone of security, stability and economic development. It is also necessary to make diplomatic efforts in order to join Convention on the Protection and use of Transboundary Water courses as well as International Lakes.

The long-term socio-economic and political development of Kazakhstan largely depends on the availability of a favorable external environment, primarily in Central Asia. Therefore, Kazakhstan is interested in the politically stable, economically sustainable and safe development of the region and makes significant efforts to achieve this goal, including jointly working with the Turkic Council (Laumulin, 2010).

After gaining independence, Kazakhstan has conducted an active foreign policy. The multi-vector nature of its international policy was shaped during this period. Besides, it fully corresponds to the geopolitical position of Kazakhstan and its national interests.

The formation of Kazakhstan's foreign policy was accompanied by considerable difficulties of an objective and subjective nature. On the one hand, the difficulty was that this process began practically from the scratch. Kazakhstan did not have the traditions of foreign policy activity during the Soviet period (Mukhamedov, 1997). On the other hand, the end of the Cold War and the state of uncertainty and instability that followed the collapse of the USSR set the state a difficult task of adapting to a new geopolitical situation and developing foreign policy priorities that would correspond to the place and role of Kazakhstan in the world community.

In this regard, Tokayev notes that the authors of the concept of Kazakhstan's foreign policy faced complex tasks of comprehending and generalizing processes that took place outside the country. This was necessary, first of all, in order to accurately determine the place and role of Kazakhstan in modern international relations and to identify priorities in the foreign policy of the state (Tokayev, 1997: 85). Important significance at the stage of formation of Kazakhstan's foreign policy was the approval of Kazakhstan's positions in the United Nations. Kazakhstan declared its intention to render every possible assistance for strengthening the role and effectiveness of the world organization in such matters as maintaining peace and security (renouncing the nuclear legacy of the USSR), ensuring sustainable socio-economic development, establishing democracy and the rule of law (Sultanov, 2005:158).

The place of Kazakhstan in the system of international relations has been determined by its geopolitical location at the junction of Europe and Asia, its economic and military-political interests as well as the existing potential. Kazakhstan's foreign policy was tasked to ensure the full inclusion of the Republic of Kazakhstan in regional and sub-regional economic and political cooperation structures on the basis of universally recognized principles of international law as the main means of regulating disputes and contradictions (Laumulin, 2006).

Adhering to the principle of multi-vector foreign relations, Kazakhstan aspired to create a solid contractual and legal basis in all areas of foreign policy. Relations with the states of Asia, Europe and America were initially built on the basis of objective needs for ensuring Kazakhstan's long-term national interests. The main goal was to achieve the approval of the country's political independence and security, the recognition of the irreversibility of turning Kazakhstan into a subject of international relations. At the same time, great importance was attached to the signing of bilateral and multilateral international treaties. It can be said with certainty that these documents played an important role in strengthening Kazakhstan's statehood. Entering into relations with other states and international organizations, Kazakhstan has shown the desire to actively apply norms of behavior that are generally accepted in the modern world community. Thus, the Republic of Kazakhstan defined the framework for cooperation with other countries on the basis of consensus, mutual respect and mutual benefit (Laumulin, 2004).

Beginning from the first days of independence to this day, Kazakhstan's foreign policy priorities remain unchanged. It has an active, versatile and balanced foreign policy that can meet the challenges of the 21st century and is aimed at securing long-term national interests. Priority directions were and are the development of cooperation with Russia, the states of the Central Asian region, China, the United States, the European Union. Great importance is attached to interaction with the main countries of the Near and Middle East as well as Southeast Asia (Laumulin, 2004).

Kazakhstan's foreign policy is aimed not only at developing relations with states, but also at developing relations with various international organizations. In addition to the United Nations (UN), Kazakhstan cooperates with NATO in the framework of the Partnership for Peace program, and is also a participating country of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). During its accession to the OSCE, Kazakhstan pursued two main goals: achieving greater involvement of Kazakhstan and Central Asia in tackling European security issues and, through this, building a bridge between Euro-Atlanticism and Eurasianism, and enhancing the OSCE's role in conflict prevention and in addressing economic and environmental challenges (Tursunov, 2000:14).

Kazakhstan today is a full member of the international community. The Republic of Kazakhstan is perceived as a regional power with a strong economy and strong positions in the world. During the period of independence, Kazakhstan was able to resolve all territorial problems with the border countries, signing agreements with all neighbors on the delimitation and demarcation of state borders with a length of 14 thousand kilometers, including with Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan (Zhulamanov, 2013:431). Thus, the formation of the bases of the foreign policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan follows from the internal interests and needs of the country.

The formation of international economic ties of Kazakhstan began after the collapse of the USSR in the 1990s, and simultaneously with the transition from a centralized and planned economic system to a market economy. During this period, the republic also faced a multitude of economic problems connected with the break-up of previous economic ties within the framework of the USSR. The most important tasks of the country were the inclusion in the system of the international division of labor, support for market reforms, the creation of currency funds, the saturation of the consumer market, and the overcoming of the crisis in the transition period (Kharitonova & Vlasov, 2007).

Integration of Kazakhstan into the world economy causes active participation of the country in international currency and financial operations. The Republic has been a member of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank since 1992, actively cooperating with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the Asian Development Bank and other international and regional financial organizations (Alshanov, 2015).

Thus, today Kazakhstan is integrated into the system of international economic relations in a rather high degree. At the same time, the country faces a number of complex tasks to solve the problem of increasing the efficiency of its foreign economic relations. Among them, the diversification of exports towards increasing the share of value-added products, attracting foreign investment to the manufacturing sector of the economy, reducing the scale of illegal labor migration and the size of the country's external debt are of primary importance (Laumulin, 2004).

SECURITY ISSUES IN CENTRAL ASIA

Ensuring security is one of the top priorities in the domestic and foreign policies of the Central Asian states. The foreign policy course, the degree of its conformity to national interests as well as the economic, social and moral state of society and the domestic political situation in the country are crucial for the ability of the state to defend its interests and its security (Maslov 2000:12). Since the very beginning of their independence, the Central Asian republics have faced problems of ensuring regional and ethno-confessional security. Events related to the civil war in Tajikistan in 1992-1997 and the invasion of the territories of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in 1999-2000 by armed groups of militants of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan have become the peak of threats of terrorism and extremism. In addition, the geopolitical position of Central Asia has become the zones of influence of political instability and conflicts such as the Caucasus, the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China, Afghanistan, the Near East and the Middle East. The Central Asian security is, mostly, threatened by the situation in Afghanistan, where the Taliban provides great organizational and material support to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the radical Tajik opposition and the Uyghur separatists (Medetbekov 2011).

On 20 October, 1992, at the 47th session of the UN General Assembly, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, presented the idea of convening the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) to the world community. This initiative was dictated by the desire to introduce the existing world practice of ensuring security and stability into the Asian reality in order to give a course to the development of this Asian analogue of the “Helsinki process” (Bazhanov et al. 2000). In 1993-1994, CICA held meetings of experts on security issues on the continent. The initiative was supported by 15 states of Asia and international organizations consisting of the UN, OSCE, Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). According to the experts, the countries of the region faced a complex set of tasks that continue to remain relevant today. The major priorities of these tasks are: resolution of territorial disputes; real progress in the field of disarmament and arms control; harmonization of measures in the fight against illicit trafficking in drugs and conventional weapons, terrorism and international crime; Joint solution of environmental issues; ensuring economic growth in Asian countries (Tokayev, 2001:367).

The problem of unresolved territorial disputes is a sensitive topic in the relations of many countries of the region, which does not contribute in the strengthening of the atmosphere of trust and cooperation in Asia. The most striking hotbed of tension, incitement of interethnic and interreligious conflicts in CA is the Ferghana Valley, the most densely populated territory, one of the main agricultural regions of CA. The large cities of the Fergana Valley - Namangan, Andijan, Khudzhand and Osh - were the spiritual centers of the Muslim world; they had the main educational centers of religious management. The population in the region mostly professes Islam of the Sunni type, although there are some Persian-speaking Shiite groups (Olklot & Malashenko 2000:44).

The conflict potential of the Fergana Valley began to be realized in the last years of the existence of the SU. On the territory of the valley, as a result of the administrative division, there were three union republics, subsequently becoming independent states: Uzbekistan (Ferghana, Andijan and Namangan), Kyrgyzstan (Osh, Batken region) and Tajikistan (Leninabad region). Additional complications are caused by the existence of enclaves: Uzbek residing on the territory of Kyrgyzstan and Tajiks residing on the

territory of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. This has been obvious, which manifested itself in the conflict between Uzbeks and Meskhetian Turks in Fergana in 1989, in clashes between Tajiks and Kyrgyz at the border of the two republics in 1989 and the Osh tragedy in 1990. In total, there were 36 conflicts on the ethnicity ground in CA in 1991 (Lunev 1999:68). The large interethnic mosaic, widespread unemployment, close proximity to Afghanistan, the high level of religiousness of the population, the corruption of the authorities, the saturation of the region with drugs, easy money from the sale and transportation of drugs, interethnic and interdenominational disunity and latent ethnic discrimination still make the Fergana valley an undeveloped region in CA (Golunov, 2001).

At the beginning of the 21st century, ecological security is of vital importance for CA. CA is located in the disaster zone - the practical disappearance of the Aral Sea, caused by the predatory use of the water resources of the Amudarya and Syrdarya rivers. This catastrophe has serious negative effects on the gene pool of peoples, leads to changes in the environment and climate as well as irreversible natural processes, and negatively affects the economies of the countries of the entire Eurasian continent. One of the main threats to the region's security is the politicization of the situation in the sphere of water use. The Aral Sea, the Amudarya and Syrdarya rivers form the main water resources of CA, on which the life in the region depends. The need to revise the existing use of water systems is caused by the conflicts that have arisen from resolving the issues of joint exploitation of water and energy resources which was derived from the violation of the former centralized river flow management system in the Syrdarya (Koshanov & Khusainov 2001:92).

The issue of terrorism has become a serious problem affecting all the states of CA. This led to social and political unrest, chaos and instability in the region. The issue has become critical because of the common borders of Central Asian countries with Afghanistan and Pakistan. CA is concerned about these two countries, which have become launching grounds for terrorism.

Drug trafficking is a threat not only to the Central Asian region, but to the entire Commonwealth of Independent States; drugs undermine the foundations of states, and the situation in CA is the proof of that. The deteriorating socio-economic conditions in many parts of the region are ideal for the prosperity of the narcotics industry. Sharing common values of geography and history makes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan attractive for drug trafficking. CA is a transit for the drug flow from neighboring countries (Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan). Geography of the area is very convenient for the movement of drug couriers. For example, patrolling the Kyrgyz-Tajik border is difficult due to climatic and geographical conditions (Bayalinov, 1994). A certain potential for solving this problem exists in such regional structures such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, in which many states participate. These two organizations showed their way of transformation despite the emergence of terrorist threats in the region. An increase in the destabilizing role of the drug business in Asia can help create certain structures similar to anti-terrorist centers to combat the narcotics industry.

The food security issue is an important question in regional cooperation process. CA states have significant agricultural potential and offer high-quality agricultural production now. For example, Kazakhstan, a country with a prospering agriculture industry, is a devoted supporter of food security. In addition to the humanitarian aid assistance for the states in need, Kazakhstan is setting up an International Development Assistance Agency, KazAid to further strengthen that role (Dulac, 2014).

Owning a territory reciprocal to the size of Western Europe and about 80% of agricultural land of the country, Kazakhstan's role is essential in terms of promoting regional and global food security. The existence of 1.5 hectares of farmable land per person makes Kazakhstan the second highest in the world, and she consistently takes place among the world's ten largest wheat exporters (OECD 2013: 15). In 2011-2012 Kazakhstan's main harvest of roughly 27 million tons of grain, where 15 million tons were exported made it the sixth largest in the world. According to the report of The World Food Program, the northern region of Kazakhstan and the Punjab area of Pakistan in wheat markets are key markets to watch in

relation to regional wheat market dynamics and regional wheat viability (World Food Program 2011).

The OIC Food Security Fund which was initiated by Kazakhstan and headquartered in its capital Astana, aims to develop a system of mutual food assistance within the OIC. It includes the possibility of establishing a pool of food in the related countries (Nazarbayev, 2011). It is received with doubt that while Kazakhstan has launched another huge program in which it aims cattle breeding and meat production, to provide the Eurasian market and beyond. However, it has begun to import some beef and even horsemeat, a traditional Kazakh delicacy, so far. Although, Kazakhstan's confidence on its ambitious program continues, its tremendous agricultural potential attracts the attention of potential foreign investors too.

ACTIVITIES OF KAZAKHSTAN IN REGIONAL COOPERATION AND SECURITY

The processes of internationalization and globalization of economic relations occurring in the world create favorable conditions and make integrational cooperation between states and regions necessary. In the world, there is a mutual penetration of capitals of different countries, expansion of international trade, and liberalization of foreign economic activity. Legal mechanisms for the functioning and regulation of economic cooperation between countries have been developed and are successfully applied. Since the independence, Kazakhstan maintains an active work on translating the integration processes into practical directions; both in the direction of the Eurasian vector and towards the Central Asian Union taking the interests and priorities of the Turkic world into account (Laumulin, 2004).

The balanced multi-vector foreign policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan as well as the preliminary emphasis on historical subjectivity put the country's ability to preserve and multiply its newly acquired independence in an extremely difficult geopolitical situation. The additional power to the leadership position of Kazakhstan in Central Asia was given by the fact that the Kazakhstan's leadership accurately and promptly caught one of the most important global trends in the era of globalization - a tendency towards regional integration (Laumulin, 2006).

Regional security policy and strategy of Central Asian states aim to establish and protect their own national interests and are determined by the level of integration. Multilateral foreign policy of Kazakhstan allows the strengthening of the regional security and enhances the integration processes (Aris, 2013). Today, Kazakhstan is firmly taking the place of one of the regional leaders having proposed foreign policy initiatives to maintain regional security and strengthening cooperation. Kazakhstan's initiatives have led to the creation of several Eurasian regional organizations such as the Eurasian Economic Community, Eurasian Economic Union, Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), Collective Security Treaty Organization, SCO.

Kazakhstan has initiated many projects of the Eurasian Union. In December 1991, the CIS was established in Almaty. During the period of 1995-2000, almost all of the most significant integration initiatives in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) came from Kazakhstan and from her president personally. The Customs Union was in the process of formation, which in 1996 included only three states. A great victory in promoting the Eurasian idea was the creation of the Inter-Parliamentary Committee in Euro-Asia, which included Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan (Mukhamedjanov, 2011).

In the modern Eurasian concept, put forward by Nursultan Nazarbayev, true integration predetermines unconditional observance and respect for the sovereignty and independence of the states and for their equality. In today's East-West dialogue, the Eurasian initiative of Kazakhstan appears as a political, economic and cultural doctrine of interstate interaction based on the principles of tolerance, maintaining peace and stability in the region, and mutually beneficial partnerships. The idea of creating Eurasia and tolerance has become fundamental in the state policy pursued in the country. It harmoniously echoes with the spiritual nature and national peculiarity of the Kazakh people: tolerance, good-neighborliness, friendliness, openness. Closely interwoven with the national spirit, the idea of Eurasianism synthesizes tolerance in itself as a unity in diversity. As an ideology, the idea of Eurasianism promotes respect, acceptance and a correct understanding of the rich diversity of cultures of the world, forms of self-expression and manifestation of human individuality (Egorin, 2015).

Kazakhstan's position on keeping peace and security begins from 1992, at the 47th Session of the UN General Assembly, when the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev suggested the creation of CICA whose aims are similar to its European counterpart, the OSCE to some extent.

Nowadays, CICA is a forum for a full-fledged intergovernmental dialogue, consultations and consensus-based decisions on the regional cooperation and security issues in Asia. CICA covers about 90% of the territory (about 400 mln. square kilometers) and the continent's population and 72% of the territory of the Eurasian continent. Countries include more than 2.8 billion people, accounting for 45% of the total world population. CICA countries have significant energy potential and 40% of the world's oil reserves. The Organization consists of 26 members including the entire Eurasian continent from Turkey to South Korea, where seven states and four international organizations are holding the observer status (Olimat, 2015:31-33). It has had four summits until now, the last one was on 20-21st of May, 2014 in Shanghai, China. In the summit, China officially took possession of CICA chairmanship from Turkey. With the participation of the UN Secretary General, 47 states and international organizations attended the summit (Engvall & Cornell, 2015:16-18).

Currently, the CICA process has received world's attention and has been recognized worldwide. CICA is a particularly important and relevant institutional instrument for the maintenance of security and cooperation in the region that should take its rightful place in the new global security architecture. CICA has united most of Asian countries, which represent different cultures, civilizations and models of development. Drafts and main adopted documents have paved the way for the foundation of a political and legal framework for the cooperation within the CICA. Action plans have been accepted and taken into the agenda in almost all areas of the CICA (Engvall & Cornell, 2015).

As regards Eurasian security organizations, Kazakhstan is a member of both the SCO and CSTO. SCO comprises Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, along with five observer states and three dialogue partners (MFARK, 2014). Most of the experts of Russia, China and Central Asian countries argue that main aim of SCO establishment is

to align the “balance of power” in global world, which has been destroyed after the dissolution of Soviet Union. For Roy Allison, SCO is the most inclusive and prominent regional, or more properly macro-regional, consultative framework with a security dimension in CA. He argues that on one level this grouping (member countries) has been interpreted in the past as a potential balancing mechanism developed by China and Russia to counteract American hegemony at a strategic level (Allison, 2004b: 478).

Kazakhstan, Russia, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are the members of Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Providing national security, defense of sovereignty and territorial integrity for member states, strengthening armed forces related to military and organizational issues, and keeping a united system of air defense are the primary aims of the CSTO (Vasilyeva & Lagutina, 2016:44-46). In addition, the initiation of Kazakhstan’s on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation was significant. Newly elected President of the newly independent Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev’s one of the first historically crucial decisions was to close the second largest nuclear test site in the world in Semipalatinsk and voluntarily let go of the world’s fourth largest nuclear arsenal.

Kazakhstan has put forward a new model for the use of nuclear weapons considering the benefits of human development. Realized in March 2009, Kazakhstan created a nuclear weapon-free zone in CA alongside with other actors in the region. Central Asian action plan has been introduced by Kazakhstan to improve nuclear security, the avoidance of nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism (Kim, 2014:169-170). As the result of Kazakhstan’s efforts, the General Assembly adopted resolution 64/35, on 2 December 2009, declaring 29 August as the International Day against Nuclear Tests. Kazakhstan’s remarkable lead and deep engagement in non-proliferation as well as active role in collaboration with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO), intergovernmental group of experts and committees proves its active impact (Ramesh, 2016).

This voluntary nuclear disarmament was not caused by the inability of Kazakhstan to maintain nuclear weapons. Kazakhstan has all the necessary infrastructure for the implementation of a military nuclear program so she could have done it, if only she wanted to be a member of the exclusive club of nuclear powers (Joshua, 2013). Kazakhstan's decision to abandon the Soviet nuclear legacy was momentous and allowed the country to take its rightful place in the civilized community of nations. According to the former Prime Minister of Kazakhstan, former UN Deputy Secretary General, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan and currently the speaker of the Upper body of Parliament, Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev, Kazakhstan's anti-nuclear stance is a "trump" card for the international community (Tokayev, 2011).

The former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, who visited the so-called "Ground Zero" - the epicenter of the explosion at the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site- during his visit to Kazakhstan in April 2010, expressed his thoughts regarding Kazakhstan's voluntary renunciation of nuclear weapons saying "it is a unique case in the world practice". He called on the leaders of all countries, especially nuclear powers, to follow the example of Kazakhstan. According to him, it was "a genuine declaration of independence", which not only served Kazakhstan, but also inspired others to follow his example (CII MFA RK, 2011:22-23).

It can be concluded that Kazakhstan's foreign policy proposals have received support from the world community. They are the essence of Kazakhstan's political strategy for a decade ahead. Thus, Kazakhstan continues the balanced foreign policy, interaction not only with the West, but also with the states of Asia. Speaking at the solemn meeting dedicated to the 20th anniversary of Kazakhstan's independence, President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev noted that in the 21st century, Kazakhstan's true independence cannot be without active participation in regional and global integration processes (Zhdanov, 2016).

The President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev made a proposal to create a G-Global project on the basis of the Astana Economic Forum. The President noted that the platforms as G-20 and G-8 demonstrate inefficiency in the discussion on how to deal with the global economic crisis plan. The President of Kazakhstan proposed to radically expand

the number of participants in search of crisis-resolving mechanisms. The new communication platform was proposed to be named as the project “G-Global”. Kazakhstan has a more rational approach for assessing the prospects for the development of Eurasian cooperation and its needs (Sultanov, 2013).

The Foreign Policy Concept of the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2014, in the chapter “Country and Regional Priorities” notes that the Republic of Kazakhstan, having close historical and spiritual ties with the states of the Middle East, is interested in stable and sustainable development of this region. Kazakhstan will build partnership relations with them in all spheres of mutual interest. The practice of coordinating joint activities and mutual support within the UN, OIC, CICA and other international organizations will continue. Kazakhstan will continue to support the joint efforts of the international community in the issues of national reconciliation and political settlement in Afghanistan, participate in the socio-economic development of this state, and eliminate threats to regional and global security (Seidimbetov, 2012).

Nazarbayev’s idea of Eurasianism is recognized as an important ideological prerequisite for the development of the countries of the Eurasian region. The Eurasian Union is the most promising regional initiative, a well-conceived strategic plan for the 21st century. This project is aimed to give responses to the challenges of the present and the future. Thus, the Republic of Kazakhstan is one of the leaders and an active, consistent organizer of integration processes. The development of integration processes will help resolve economic, political and social problems, and improve the political climate, strengthen the friendship of peoples, their inhabitants and have much in common in history. Socio-economic realities have exposed the impossibility of solving most of the most acute problems of internal development alone. They are pushing new states to immediately translate relations into a mutually beneficial integration basis (Khlopun, 1997).

Socio-economic realities have become the worldwide challenge today when agreements on particularly close cooperation among individual groups of countries on the type of free trade zones, customs unions, and others have become an important factor in international economic relations - the number of such groups now exceeds 100. Almost all countries are parties

to one or more regional agreements. Kazakhstan is a member of several integration unions and communities - the CIS, the Customs Union of the three states, the Treaty on the Common Economic Space of the Central Asian States, the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). The issue of accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) has been completed recently; interest in the work of the BSEC is evident. Kazakhstan headed by Nursultan Nazarbayev, is one of the first to understand the importance of integration and continues in this direction (Allison, 2004b).

CONCLUSION

Ensuring regional security in Central Asia is associated with the prevention of major threats and challenges, in particular, drug trafficking, the spread of religious extremism and terrorism and illegal migration. Regional security is determined by the policy and strategy of the Central Asian states in the framework of ensuring and protecting their own national interests as well as the level of integration processes in the region. The multi-vector, balanced foreign policy of Kazakhstan allows to strengthen the regional security and expand integration processes among the states of Central Asia.

At the beginning of the 21st century, Kazakhstan, under the leadership of the President Nursultan Nazarbayev, has become one of the regional leaders firmly; successfully demonstrating the implemented foreign policy initiatives aimed at ensuring regional security and strengthening cooperation. The national security of Kazakhstan is inextricably linked with the state of cooperation among the Central Asian republics. The development of regional relations and interaction between the Central Asian countries have traditionally been in line with countering new threats and challenges, and in this context, Kazakhstan's interaction in international and regional security structures is an important direction of its foreign policy. Regarding the policy of relations with regional neighbors, Kazakhstan gives priority to large-scale cooperation as one of the leading countries in Central Asia. Thus, the main threats and challenges in Central Asia are the spread of terrorism, religious extremism, drug trafficking, illegal migration as well as the problems of transboundary rivers and ensuring water security, solving the issues of unified energy systems, the unresolved border disputes and the level of participation in regional integration processes.

A distinctive feature of modern integration process is in their spread not only to trade but also to the economic sphere of interstate interaction. Within the framework of integration, solutions are being sought for strengthening international security, combating new challenges, ensuring sustainable social development, preserving the environment, etc. States are trying to realize global political governance and solve global problems at the regional level.

What initiatives were proposed by Kazakhstan? One of the most fruitful initiatives is the organizations of regional unions: the SCO, the Eurasian Union, the Customs Union, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation. The creation of these organizations has a multifaceted nature since the relations between these states have developed long ago due to several historical reasons and affect the most important spheres of life of the peoples inhabiting them. Some of the states belonging to the Muslim world unite in this respect, although the degree of religiosity and the role of Islam in each state are not the same. Another element that influences relations is the commonality of borders, which has determined both positive trends in mutual cooperation, and negative aspects, in particular border disputes and disagreements.

Thus, Kazakhstan is a full-fledged actor of the world political process in ensuring regional security and initiating integration processes and associations. Systematically developing mutually beneficial relations in the mainstream of friendship and good-neighborliness with Central Asian states, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev is an adherent of the architect of building a stable and secure peace in the region.

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