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GCRF COMPASS Working Proceedings: Tartu Annual Conference, 10-12 June 2018

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Comprehensive Capacity-Building in the Eastern Neighbourhood
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sustainable communities



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Table of Contents

Annual Tartu Conference 2018 – COMPASS Working Proceedings.....	1
Preface	3
SHERZOD ABDULLAEV – Transformation of the international system and geopolitical identity of Uzbekistan	5
ALISA DEKHTIARENKO – Belarus and the Council of Europe: in search of cooperation.....	12
MUNIRA SHAHIDI and NARGIS NURULLA-KHODZHAEVA – National Cultural Security: The case of Tajikistan	17
ROZA TURARBEKAVA – Eurasian Economic Union: integration or imitation?	22
AKRAM UMAROV – Uzbekistan’s contemporary foreign policy on Afghanistan: theoretical and historical background.....	33
ANAR VALIYEV – State strategies in building European identity of Azerbaijanis: did it work?	44
ESKE VAN GILS –Internal cooperation and domestic legitimacy in Azerbaijan	52

Preface

GCRF UKRI COMPASS project (2017-2021) is a capacity-building project, supported by GCRF UKRI (ES/P010489/1). It brings together the Universities of Kent and Cambridge in the UK, and in the region - ADA University (Azerbaijan), Belarusian State University (Belarus), Tajikistan National University (Tajikistan) and the University of World Economy and Diplomacy (Uzbekistan).

These working proceedings are the outcome of COMPASS participation at the Third Tartu Annual Conference on Russian and East European Studies titled 'Reflecting on Nation-Statehood in Eastern Europe, Russia and Eurasia', 10-12 June 2018. The consortium presented two panels there: "Challenges for regional security & capacity-building in the eastern region and Central Asia (I): a domestic perspective", and "Challenges for regional security & capacity-building in the eastern region and Central Asia (II): an international perspective".

The papers address notions of regional security and capacity-building in the eastern region and Central Asia and look at Security as a key national priority encompassing a wide range of dimensions, including economic, political, and cyber security; as well as aspects of sovereignty, national identity, and international cooperation. The main themes of the panels can be divided between domestic and international considerations and perspectives. The papers together provide a deeper understanding of the intricacies and complexities in the Eurasian region and its interaction with the wider world. The papers reflect on the environment in which the Eastern Neighbourhood and Central Asia operate and function. Legitimacy for any nation-state, let alone a wider region, is a complex interplay of domestic and international factors, which are addressed here.

Presentations by Alisa Dekhtiarenko's (BSU) 'Belarus and the Council of Europe: in search of cooperation', Munira Shahidi and Nargiz Nurulla's (TNU) paper on 'Cultural National Security: the case of Tajikistan,' Anar Valiyev's (ADA University) 'State strategies in building European identity of Azerbaijanis: did it work?', and Eske Van Gils' (Kent) 'International cooperation and domestic legitimacy in Azerbaijan' addressed the issues in the first panel by considering internal factors in seeking legitimacy and providing a firm platform for identity building, nationalism and pride within Belarus and Azerbaijan. The paper on Tajikistan touched on the importance of cultural heritage in nation building and state formation. Tajikistan's unique historical trajectory has been displaced due to the creation of hard borders after 1991 which impacts its national heritage and thus the legitimacy of the political elite. The authors approached the topic of legitimacy through the lens of internal policy making and priorities in order to address the broader issue of governance and sustainability. By considering domestic issues and concerns the themes addressed in this panel thus closely relate to the scholarly debates on actorness, the 'Self' and 'Other', and the growing assertiveness of smaller states in international politics.

The second theme covered in the panels touched the international and regional perspectives, in which these states find themselves and operate. Sherzod Abdullaev's (UWED) Transformation of the international system and geopolitical identity of Uzbekistan, Roza Turarbekova's (BSU) piece on 'The Eurasian Economic Union: Integration or Imitation?', and Akram Umarov's (UWED) 'Uzbekistan's contemporary foreign policy on Afghanistan: theoretical and historical background' critically assess the notions of regional security and capacity-building in the eastern region and Central Asia, from an international perspective. The papers show that different dimensions of national security cannot be seen in isolation, and need to be considered in conjunction with a number of external and international challenges relevant for their development.

Taken together the papers look at challenges related to political economy; international relations; the interplay of internal and external legitimacy; and the role of the Eurasian Economic Union in regional integration and capacity-building.

SHERZOD ABDULLAEV¹ – Transformation of the international system and geopolitical identity of Uzbekistan

Introduction

The international system is undergoing a fundamental transformation. Understanding this problem has become a “common moment” for modern international scientific discourse. At the leading discussion platforms of the world, such as the Munich Conference on Security (Germany), the Davos Forum (Switzerland), the Valdai Discussion Club (Russia), the Shangri-La Dialogue Conference (Singapore) this issue is actively deliberated. In his speech to the country's foreign policy bodies on January 12, 2018, President of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev expressed this as well: “We all realize that the current challenging time confronts us with increasingly stringent requirements. Competitions, clashing of sundry interests, geopolitical controversies are aggravated in the world. In such extremely difficult and alarming conditions, we will not be able to achieve our goals without a tenacious foreign policy”.²

Globalization gives impetus to the integration processes, but the world has not become safer and more stable. Uncertainty and unpredictability become its distinctive features. Increasingly the role of nation-states is growing. The main burden of confronting emerging transnational threats rests with nation-states. National, regional and global security are becoming more and more interlinked.

The nature of transnational threats drastically impacts the need for interaction between nations. However, a serious deterrent in this process is the contradiction in the relations of geopolitical centers of power, tensions between regional powers, and the restoration of bloc thinking.

Nations seek to pursue a pragmatic policy in accordance with their interests. There is a departure from the ideological perception of foreign policy towards pragmatism and efficiency. *The questions of impartial perception of national interests, their correlation with history, geography, economic viability and reality are actualized.*

Traditionally, Western-centric international studies has ignored the role of national identity of states in foreign policy. The paradigms of neo-liberalism were put forward on the center stage, priority was given to the foreign policy concepts of big and powerful states. In their view, medium and small states in foreign policy are limited in their choice, vulnerable to external factors and balance of power. The present interpretation disregards the power of the national factor, the role of the system of values of society and identity. Nevertheless,

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² Mirziyoyev, Sh. M. (2018). The main goal of our diplomacy is the development of Uzbekistan's interests on the world arena// Narodnoe slovo, 13 January 2018.

through the reflection on national identity, the formation of conceptual bases for the adoption of policy-making decisions is possible.

Each nation has a unique geopolitical identity, its geopolitical code. It is drawn from an aggregate of its geographical location, history, culture and mentality, spiritual and civilizational affiliation and economic interests of the state. Experts like E.Gellner, S.Shulman, G.Shapiro, G.Dijkink, K.Flint and others put forward the idea of multidimensionality and complexity of the structure of national identities. Thus, a basic conclusion is drawn that academia and experts are accustomed to the old concepts, paradigms and dogmas of geopolitics. Such a perception of geopolitics without recognizing diverse geopolitical codes by actors of international relations precludes the detached understanding of the world.

The basic precondition for the realization of effective foreign and domestic policies is a constructive understanding of its place in the world, in the region, which enables us to articulate and pursue the national development goals with pragmatism. The first President of the Republic of Uzbekistan I.Karimov established the basis for the perception and realization of national interests; President S.Mirziyoyev continues this strategy further.

Uzbekistan has a complex and multi-layered geopolitical identity based upon its geographic, historical, religious and cultural attributes.

Geographically, Uzbekistan is located in the “heart” of Eurasia, as a bridge connecting Europe and the Middle East, South and East Asia, bordering such major states as Russia and China. They maintain close and mutually beneficial relations with wider Eurasia - Iran, India, Pakistan, and Turkey. Uzbekistan is an active member of the SCO, which brings together almost all Eurasian powers as participants, observers and partner countries. In this regard, the recognition of **Eurasian identity** is the most significant condition for the geopolitical identification of Uzbekistan.

Historically, Uzbekistan was part of the Russian Empire, then the USSR and now the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States). The CIS platform is interesting for Uzbekistan in the context of political and economic interaction with the countries of this part of Eurasia with which they have traditional and strong economic and humanitarian ties. The visa-free regime and economic preferences for CIS membership assist Uzbekistan to retain high trade turnover with the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan, steady trade and economic ties with Belarus and Ukraine, and establish mutually advantageous collaboration with other states. As President Sh. Mirziyoyev emphasized, “The CIS for Uzbekistan is not merely a “platform” for dialogue, exchange of opinions and “time check”. For us, it is the most important institution for practical cooperation in priority areas, and the member states of the Commonwealth are our natural partners, neighbors and friends”.³

³ Mirziyoev, Sh. M. (2017a). The President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoev speech at the CIS Heads of State meeting /// Narodnoe slovo, 13 October 2017.

Uzbekistan upholds constructive and mutually beneficial relations with the EU and with those countries that are commonly referred to as wider “West” (USA, Great Britain, Japan, South Korea, Canada, Australia). Active trade, economic, technological and humanitarian links with these countries reinforce Uzbekistan’s international interests. Mutual interest in cooperation in the energy and transport sectors along the East-West, North-South lines with access to European and world markets also facilitate this process. Uzbekistan is striving to augment its interaction within the framework of such essential structures as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The office of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) was reopened in Tashkent. Relations with the IMF and the World Bank continue to inform Uzbekistan’s global presence. In 2017 dozens of international treaties were signed with European and other Western partners, many agreements and contracts were concluded in the trade, economic, technological and investment realms for billions of dollars.

In order to establish mutually beneficial and equal cooperation, Uzbekistan conducts an active political and diplomatic dialogue with foremost European powers (Germany, France, Great Britain, Italy, Spain, etc.), and the states of the Visegrad Group (Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia). All this creates a reliable basis for further breakthrough in economic relations with this part of the world.

Uzbekistan is also part of the Islamic world and **has a highly developed Islamic identity**. Muslim countries belong to various geographic areas and have sundry military-political and economic platforms. The only international structure that unifies Muslim nations is the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Since 1996, Uzbekistan has become a full member of this organization. Within the framework of the OIC, Uzbekistan has initiated and continues to initiate various projects in the educational, cultural and tourism spheres. The chairmanship of Uzbekistan in the OIC Foreign Ministers Council in 2016 contributed to the growth of the country's authority in the Islamic world. In the framework of the OIC, Uzbekistan put forward the slogan “Education and Enlightenment - Path to Peace and Creativity”. Large-scale works are currently under way to establish Imam al-Bukhari International Research Center in Samarkand, and the Center for Islamic Civilization with the motto “Education against ignorance” is planned to be opened in Tashkent. Speaking from the rostrum of the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly in New York, President Sh. Mirziyoyev said: “The most important task we believe is to bring to the wide world community the truly humanistic essence of Islam. We cherish our sacred religion as the focus of the time-honored values. We strongly condemn and we will never reconcile with those who rank our great faith together with violence and bloodshed. Islam calls us to kindness and peace, preservation of a genuine human beginning”.⁴

⁴ Mirziyoyev, Sh. M. (2017b). The President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev speech at the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly/// Narodnoe slovo, 20 September 2017.

Historically, linguistically and civilizationaly, Uzbekistan recognizes itself as part of the Turkic world. Since the 1990s, Tashkent has participated actively in the process of cooperation of the Turkic-speaking countries. In 2009 Azerbaijan, Turkey, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan established the Turkic Council in Nakhichevan with Turkmenistan as an associate member of this organization. The Turkic Council embraced the states that are members of numerous economic and military-political alliances: Turkey is a member of NATO and part of the European customs area; Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan - members of the CSTO, and the Eurasian Economic Union. The member countries of the Turkic Council cooperate with each other in the political, economic and humanitarian spheres despite being members of these seemingly conflicting organisations. All the nations of the Turkic Council maintain constructive and mutually advantageous relations with Uzbekistan. Realizing its Turkic identity, Uzbekistan is profoundly interested and ready for close geo-economic and humanitarian interaction with the Turkic world **without prejudice to third States**. This is indicated by serious advancement in our relations with Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan, the advent of new accents in the Caspian strategy of Tashkent. Uzbekistan considers the development of large-scale trade, economic, technological and investment links with Turkey as one of its foreign policy priorities.

The most significant strategic objective of Uzbekistan's foreign policy is the formation of a security belt, good-neighborliness and cooperation in Central Asia. Chiefly, due to the efforts of Tashkent, a new geopolitical reality is being formed in the region. Strengthening cooperation and growing political trust among the Central Asian nations make the region more independent and equal.

There is a growing need to talk about the process of forming a “Central Asian identity” based on its common and special features. Speaking at the International Conference, "Central Asia: One Past and a Common Future, Cooperation for Sustainable Development and Mutual Prosperity" in Samarkand, President Sh. Mirziyoyev emphasized: “The peoples of our region are linked to each other by thousands of years of brotherhood and good-neighborliness. We are united by common history, religion, culture and traditions... The main goal is to turn by joint efforts the Central Asia into a stable, economically developed region. To do this, we need to jointly eliminate the conditions and causes which fuel and provoke the conflict potential, ensure the matching of national development prospects with region-wide priorities”.⁵

On the basis of what criteria can we speak about the Central Asian identity?

Firstly, it has a shared history, geography, and ethnogenetic heritage. There is a common spiritual and civilizational cosmos and worldview. They have shared myths, legends and stories, rites and rituals.

⁵ Mirziyoev, Sh. M. (2017c). The President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoev speech at the international conference “Central Asia: one past and common future for the sustainable development and mutual prosperity” in Samarkand /// Narodnoe slovo, 11 November 2017.

Secondly, with all the multiplicity of states that succeeded each other in the Central Asian region, the principle of statehood was based on the balance of secularism and spirituality. The secular state was balanced by the spiritual principle involving tolerance. In this context, we see a certain consistency and continuity in the region. It is vital to maintain this constructive balance between **the state, secularism and traditional values today**. This is very vital for understanding why, having gained independence, Uzbekistan maintained a secular and tolerant nationhood. These principles allowed Uzbekistan and other states of Central Asia to fight off extremism and terrorism.

It is tremendously momentous for all states of the region to fortify and develop an atmosphere of interreligious and interfaith harmony and tolerance. It is indispensable to seek measures that help lessen the divisions in the world. The international initiatives of President Sh. Mirziyoyev reflect on the key task of providing conditions for the self-realization of young people and to keep them away from violence.

Thirdly, the shared tasks of the transition period entailing the reform of political and economic structures bring the states of Central Asia ever closer. Central Asian states are building statehood and strengthening their sovereignty in an international context.

Fourthly, a new security structure is being formed in Central Asia - **a system of joint interests of the states of the region**. Its practical realization is probable only on the basis of combined actions and coordinated activities. This model is emphasized by the dynamic efforts of President of Sh. Mirziyoyev in strengthening regional ties. Due to the new quality of bilateral relations of Uzbekistan with Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, close regional cooperation is beginning to form in the region.

The solution of region-wide issues is also promoted by the fact that **the relations among the states of Central Asia are based on the principles of mutual esteem and common advantage, a firm commitment to national interests, which is lacking in contemporary international relations**. The level of trust is increasing between Central Asian countries.

Fifthly, the stable future and sustainable development of the Central Asian countries to a large extent depend on the achievement of peace in neighboring Afghanistan, with which we share a common history, geography, religion, languages and traditions. **A common Central Asian identity is impossible without taking into account the Afghan factor**. One of Uzbekistan's priorities is to fully uphold the integration of Afghanistan into the regional economic processes. As President Sh. Mirziyoyev stated: "this will be a major contribution to the efforts of the world community to ensure peaceful development in Afghanistan... Uzbekistan will continue to participate in the economic reconstruction of the

country, in the development of its transport and economic infrastructure and human resources”.⁶

Conclusion

Uzbekistan has religious, historical and cultural-linguistic affinities with many states around the world. **This creates many opportunities and no fewer challenges.** The processes taking place in international institutions like CIS, SCO, and OIC etc can influence Uzbekistan in one way or another. As a country with a complex geopolitical identity, Uzbekistan must take this specificity into account in domestic politics.

Uzbekistan considers constructive cooperation in all areas of geopolitical identity. **This is the key postulate in determining the place of Uzbekistan in the Eurasian, European, Islamic, Turkic and Central Asian regions.**

Bilateral relations are the root of Uzbekistan's foreign policy which allows it to cooperate with states that do not necessarily have relations with each other. This has the potential of providing region-wide stability and security., The deepening of bilateral relations with the states of Central Asia, the formation of equal and mutually beneficial ties with world and regional powers, the implementation of economic projects are the key priorities for Uzbekistan in foreign policy. The development of the East-West and North-South vectors, the consistent support of the basic principles of international law, and the strengthening of the country's defense capability are all vitally important for independent Uzbekistan. **It is this multilayered geopolitical identity that allows Uzbekistan to pursue an open, constructive and balanced foreign policy.**

Its geopolitical identification opens varied prospects for the establishment and strengthening of the new international image of Uzbekistan, the focal basis of which was laid by the Strategy of Action in five priority areas. Tashkent demonstrates dynamism and openness in all areas of its foreign policy course. This contributes to increasing the international political authority and image of the country as a reliable, responsible trade and economic partner, strengthening investor confidence, and stimulates more intensive international cooperation. A powerful and positive image of Uzbekistan can provide decisive competitive advantages in the contemporary global economy and hasten the achievement of the specified strategic goal - the country's entry into the list of developed democratic states of the world.

⁶ Mirziyoev, Sh. M. (2017d). The President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoev speech at the international conference “Central Asia: one past and common future for the sustainable development and mutual prosperity” in Samarkand /// Narodnoe slovo, 11 November 2017.

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ALISA DEKHTIARENKO¹ – Belarus and the Council of Europe: in search of cooperation

Introduction

When Belarus became an independent state in 1991 it opened a completely new chapter in its relations with European organizations in general and with the Council of Europe, gaining interest in expansion to the East, in particular. However, over 25 years later, the potential “new democracy”, Belarus, occupying a central position in geographical Europe, is still known as the only “black spot” on the European map. Belarus is the only non-member of the Council of Europe, an organization providing the citizens of its member states with effective judicial tools to defend their rights.

Many experts agree that the possibility of Belarusian membership is achievable and even came close to happening several times throughout the last 25-year history of the Belarus-Council of Europe cooperation. However, despite expanded cooperation today there are still several stumbling blocks that are not easy to overcome for either of the parties impeding smooth cooperation.

The **starting point** of the cooperation between Belarus and the Council of Europe was in 1993 when the country acceded to the European Cultural Convention. Later that year the Belarusian state officially applied for membership in the Council. Following the trend of expanding the organization to the East, the Council of Europe favorably received the initiative and provided the Supreme Council of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus with a unique "**special guest**" status. It gave the country several political benefits, but, most importantly, it added to the international image and importance of Belarus. In **the first period** after the beginning of their relations, Belarus showed **clear initiative** in developing diverse cooperation with the organization. The republic actively sought to establish contacts with the European states through organizing numerous meetings and events. Shortly after adhering to the Cultural convention, Belarus joined a number of other Council's conventions and mechanisms expressing its strong commitment to extending the cooperation in humanitarian as well as in political spheres.

The state consistently carried out steps necessary for entry, including the creation of an Inter-ministerial Cooperation Committee and even development of a detailed cooperation program in 1995. This period in an "**upsurge**" of cooperation was partly caused by the desire of the Council of Europe to expand its cooperation with the "young" states of Eastern Europe after 1991. Nevertheless, after 1995 the process of entry started progressively slowing down. Firstly, after the failure of the parliamentary elections in Belarus, the Council of Europe suspended further consideration of the membership application of Belarus and the developed cooperation program. Subsequently, the situation worsened when the

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Constitutional Referendum in Belarus in 1996 was declared undemocratic by the European states and cooperation between them in most areas was completely suspended. Later Belarus was even deprived of the “special guest” status.

Fast-forwarding to 2004, the situation became even worse with a shocking report of the special rapporteur at the time on disappeared politicians which led to a complete rupture of the contacts between PACE (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe) and the Belarusian parliament. From that time until the beginning of 2007 the relations between Belarus and the Council remained extremely tense, and Belarus did not pursue any attempts to restore its special guest status.

It was not until 2007-2010 that an improvement in the relations between the Republic of Belarus and the European states were seen which came to be known as the "Belarusian-European Thaw". At that time Belarus, having a hard time in mutual understanding with Russia, its main former ally in economic terms, started “turning its face” toward Europe.

That period was truly fruitful for the cooperation of Belarus and the Council of Europe. The highlight of that period was the elimination of the Council’s requirements for Belarus in order to restore the special guest status. The only condition left on the table was the abolition of death penalty in the country. However, the Belarusian authorities remained reluctant even to address a moratorium on capital punishment. Therefore, the Belarusian-European relationship “curled” again.

Between 2010 and 2014 all the fruits of cooperation of the “thaw period” went sour. The Council of Europe was dissatisfied with the numerous death sentences passed during this period, and again, doubted transparency and democracy of the presidential election in Belarus in 2010. All this brought Belarusian cooperation with the Council of Europe to a halt. The end of the “cold” period came in 2014, when the Belarusian president agreed to re-engage with PACE in order “to promote the national interests of Belarus through parliamentary diplomacy”. Moreover, that year was marked by the active role of Belarus in resolving international issues. European states positively assessed the intermediary role of Belarus in the Ukrainian crisis, and supported its balanced position in the issue.

Thus, the cooperation between Belarus and the Council of Europe started to gain momentum again. As a sign of the “warming” in Belarus-Europe relations the country hosted another visit of the special rapporteur of PACE in the context of improving relations between Belarus and the European states which were followed by more visits by [other western officials](#) to Minsk. A noticeable positive moment was the adoption of the new Action Plan for Belarus for 2016-2017 by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in 2016, which was later extended until the end of 2018. Nevertheless, in 2017 PACE made it clear that the restoration of the special guest status for Belarus, which had been the main goal for both sides for two decades, was still impossible due to the conclusions of the new special rapporteur’s resolution.

A cross-cutting theme throughout the whole period of Belarusian-European relations is the unresolved issue of the abolition of the death penalty in the country. It should be noted that for over a decade Belarus has remained outside the Council of Europe largely over the organization's opposition to capital punishment. Not only is Belarus the only country in Europe where this punishment is still used, but it also remains the only one to use it in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as well. Despite the fact that for many years the abolition has been the only requirement from the Council for political dialogue, the position of Belarus in this regard has remained a decisive "no". The main argument Belarusian authorities refer to in favor of preserving the death penalty is the result of the infamous referendum of 1996, when 80% of Belarusians voted in favor of it— however, it is slowly losing relevance in Belarus. In 2018, the Belarusian side hinted that the second referendum on this question was possible. In addition, human rights defenders point out that all the public surveys on the subject are usually held after a big case highlighted in the media, which indicates an impulsive emotional response from the public. For example, a survey was conducted after the terrorist attack in Minsk metro in 2011.

Secondly, at the time of the referendum there was no possibility of a life sentence, traditionally considered a comparable alternative and the maximum term of imprisonment was only 15 years. Since the previous referendum, there have been significant changes in Belarusian criminal law. Moreover, the referendum was of a consultative nature, which allows the Belarusian authorities not to take its results into account and introduce the moratorium as an independent decision, following the successful example of most of the European countries. Many human rights defenders are of the opinion, that capital punishment is a very emotional issue, which should not be resolved by a plebiscite. It should be noted that the West did not recognize the results of that referendum, which caused a significant deterioration of the Belarusian-European relations along with the country's loss of the special guest status in the Council of Europe. Activists believe that the Belarusian government is afraid that, if they touch the issue of death penalty, other decisions decided by the referendum of 1996 might also be revisited, for example, the election of the President and the prolongation of his term. Another important point concerning the death penalty is the personal support for its preservation by the head of the Belarusian state. However, after lifting the EU sanctions against Belarus in February of 2016, some recent statements of the head of the state indicate some potential for a change of heart on the subject.

During the international conference on death penalty hosted by Belarus in 2016, the president noted that the country had developed "its own interpretation of humanitarian issues, including on the question of human rights", directly linking the progress in the sphere of human rights with the economic situation in the country. This way, if the EU helps Belarus with the material well-being of its citizens, the country will naturally see a drastic change in public opinion on humanitarian issues including the death penalty. Therefore, the main issue appears to lay in a Belarusian attempt to "kill two birds with one stone". This way the moratorium is possible but it would be sold for the highest possible price. In April of 2018 the working group of the National Assembly of the Republic of

Belarus studying the problem of death penalty with the Council of Europe held a round table on the topic of capital punishment. One of the new conclusions was the possibility of a second referendum in the future.

Other than that, today the problem remains crucial and unresolved: PACE is regularly appealing to Belarus with the same demand of the abolition of capital punishment and condemning every Belarusian death sentence. So far, the Belarusian side does not substantially respond to these demands. Moreover, it appears that Belarus is used to the constant accusations from Europe and, behind closed doors, there is a common reference to the United States still using capital punishment as well.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it's fair to say that the whole process of development of the relations between Belarus and the Council of Europe is going very slowly with no real enthusiasm from the Belarusian side. It is safe to say that Belarus is taking its time to evaluate the potential benefits of each step it takes, trying to raise the stakes in what appears to be a trade off with the European countries.

By and large, the Belarusian side does not seem to have a big interest in becoming a member of the Council. One of the main benefits for Belarus there would be an improvement of its international image. However, in light of the events of recent years one can see that Belarus has found alternative ways of gaining political respect, such as, for example, hosting international forums and conferences, and mediating international conflicts.

If Belarus were to become a member it would get a new powerful platform for promoting the government's views among European parliamentarians and other officials. More importantly, it would be able to access other European organizations in order to potentially address the country's economic issues.

On the other hand, in case of membership, Belarus would have to make significant changes to its political regime, and commit to certain obligations, which the Belarusian leadership might not consider beneficial. As an example, there is neighboring Russia, which, being a Council member, suffered with having to pay substantial amounts to people suing the state in the European Court of Human Rights – one of the key mechanisms of the organization.

In addition, the potential membership, as well as the special guest status, does not imply any economic support or financial assistance – which is traditionally one of the main priorities of Belarusian foreign policy.

The Council of Europe, for its part, has made some real concessions in order to see Belarus in its list of partners, and, potentially, members. However, judging by the speed of the process and occasional periods of suspended high-level cooperation, it is hard to

believe the Council has Belarus as its priority. For now, the main motivation of the Council is to close the gap and include Belarus amidst its memberships because it hurts the organization's image and reputation. Other than that, there are no real incentives that would make PACE persistently follow this track of diplomacy, turning a blind eye to all of the country's internal issues.

These days, PACE's rapprochement with Belarus is following the common European-Belarusian relations normalization tendency, as both the organization and the state are looking for the "perfect moment" until either of them takes any real steps – apart from numerous visits, discussions, conferences and other diplomatic initiatives. It requires strong political will, compromises from both sides and mutually beneficial "trade" conditions for it to succeed.

MUNIRA SHAHIDI and NARGIS NURULLA-KHODZHAIEVA¹ – National Cultural Security: The case of Tajikistan

Introduction

Tajikistan occupies an important place in Eurasia and is heir to a vast cultural heritage which it has been cut off from since 1991 when it became an independent sovereign nation. Historically, Tajikistan was part of the larger Central Asian and Eurasian space which allowed for contacts and exchanges with the Islamic world, Persianate world and its Turkic neighbours. In Soviet times as well Tajikistan was able to connect to the cultural and social landscape of neighbouring Central Asian national republics. In other words, its long cultural history links it intrinsically with Central Asia and wider Eurasia which until recently was connected without the presence of hard borders. Over time due to global pressures Tajikistan has been truncated from its cultural history, whether with the rest of Central Asia or its links with the Persianate world and larger Islamic world. In recent times the concept of Eurasianism is taking centre stage especially with the most recent initiatives in the region, namely Eurasian Economic Union and the Belt and Road Initiative which have in some ways begun to address the very idea of Eurasianess. The drive towards creating institutional and physical infrastructure to connect Eurasia is at the heart of these initiatives. With this comes the need for communication and exchange of ideas which can accommodate the political, economic and cultural security of each nation. It is essential to locate Tajikistan's cultural and social security reside in this context.

In its search for its cultural heritage and its place in the new Eurasian concept, Tajikistan represents neither a Turkic nation nor a resource-rich nation state. So, what are the risks today for the culture of security of this small country in the south of the post-Soviet space? Cultural security in Tajikistan has many dimensions: linguistic, religious, political, economic, artistic etc. The most important dimension for national cultural security, however, is the art of communication. Although 'national in form, socialist in content' as the formula of the establishment of Soviet period has been met by intellectual elites, that challenge has raised an internal conflict in the community as a whole.

Tajikistan's cultural security

Established as an administrative, national unit of the USSR in 1924, Tajikistan has been gradually re-evaluating its 'own' cultural system of security, which has been traditionally connected with the neighboring 'national' units, who, in turn, were in fact multi-ethnic nation states. None of the Central Asian countries are 'pure' ethno-national states: each of them

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is in fact multi-ethnic and open. This has been the reason for hospitality and curiosity towards the 'other', which is a common characteristic of all the people of Central Asia.

Collaborative academic research of the vast Soviet space of the last century significantly impacted public consciousness via novels, music, theatre and cinema, creating a new Eurasian identity, the roots of which go back to the eve of the millennium and has been expressed in the 'Commentaries on Poetics of Aristotle', written by Ibn Sina/Avicenna (b. 980 in Bukhara).² Identifying *Love* as the core of poetics of a civil society in the Islamic world, while comparing it to Ancient Greece which was based on drama and tragedy, this Bukharian healer, philosopher and poet, made, according to a modern French researcher, Anna Mary Goishin, an 'intellectual revolution' in Medieval Europe.

A re-evaluation of this link between Central Asia and Europe of the past has become part of mainstream studies today, when the new post-WW2 generation found itself part of a vast Eurasian educational system of the second part of the XX c, i.e. the Soviet Union. However, this current generation has been disconnected from the longer-lasting tradition of the Islamic civilization. The core of the conflict has been created by 'vulgar atheism', violently planted into public consciousness during Soviet times. To protect the basic symbol of interpretation of the Islamic world in the arts, which can be summarized as '*Adam va Alam*' or 'Human & Humanity' in the last century, has opened up perspectives for the current globalizing world, and has been the main strategic task to reconcile in Tajikistan, especially the remaining elites from the Soviet period.

Although the last two-three decades of independent building of cultural policy in Tajikistan has been characterized as a release from the restrictions of the Soviet educational system, the process is restricted by the newly established economic system of a globalised capitalist world which is based on privatization. This creates questions for how Tajikistan fits into the Eurasian worldview and in the larger global context. How does Tajikistan harness its rich heritage which cuts across borders, ethnicities and cultural milieus?

How does a country privatize the spirit of freedom of Tajik-Persian poetics, known worldwide through the names of Ibn Sina/Avicenna, Rudaki, Khayyam, Hafiz, Mawlana Jalal ad-Din Rumi and their followers in the modern times in this small, mountainous country, bordering Afghanistan and China in the south and two highly ambitious countries - Uzbekistan and Russia in the north? The striking problems in Afghanistan, notably drug trafficking, terrorism, and illiteracy are recognized widely in Tajikistan. Though the President of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon, constantly reminds the global community about Afghanistan being an international problem, the appeal is still not truly heard by the global community. The formation of culture of a global community still cannot accommodate the diversity of cultures in today's globalising world. These players in Tajikistan's backyard are not only regional players but their actions have international repercussions worldwide. The

² Shahidi, Munira. *Ibn Sina And Dante*. Donish, 1986.

political, economic and cultural security of Tajikistan depends on how these countries interact, act and respond within and without. Additionally, the U.S. and the EU exert pressure in these countries as well. The issues of globalisation, Islamic radicalism, terrorism, resources and climate change are locally driven with global repercussions. In this way the region of Eurasia has influence not only locally but has global impact. However, these processes face many challenges both locally and globally.

In Tajikistan's bid to integrate different aspects of Eurasian culture the following example highlights the tensions and challenges that exist. I know the above from first-hand experience. A few years ago, as head of the Z. Shahidi International Foundation, I initiated a project entitled, "Music of the New Silk Road," dedicated to the centenary of the Tajik composer Z. Shahidi. As a part of this project, funded by UNESCO, we approached the Confucius Centre, which represents China's cultural policy at the Tajik National University. The aim was to invite Beijing opera to participate in our festival in Dushanbe, planning to display common aspects of national opera of China and Tajikistan, thus, demonstrating the contributions of both in the musical interpretation of Love versus Violence. Our argument was that the national modern opera in three countries – Tajikistan, India and China – were born almost in the same period, in the mid-20th century, around the 40s and 50s. However, this particular component of the project never came to fruition.

Our own experience as well as a number of other projects, oriented towards the creation of a new kind of cultural security via bringing young generations of academics, artists and policy-makers of the region and beyond together in order to forge a new common language which can represent both diversity and reflect similarities. However, this still remains marginalized in discussions and discourses within the global community and continues to cause ruptures and distance. There are many reasons for this type of ignorance, especially: the existing imbalance in the system of knowledge within the Eurasian space; lack of harmonious transition of inter-cultural communication between Eurasian national school of the past and the present, and last but not least "national interests," framed by mercantile corporative interests g/locally. Though development of culture of security is a crucial challenge for Tajikistan, which shares its cultural heritage with Afghanistan and Iran, bridging linguistic cultural cognition of the classical period into inter-lingua and inter-cultural cognition of modern times, a capacity which was created in Central Asia in the XV-XVI cc., has been unhesitatingly oppressed by notions of European modernity. Recognizing this tradition now as the main challenge of the cultural security of Tajikistan and the region, as a whole, could serve as a safe belt for the Islamic world as well as the globalizing world as a whole. Thus, I wish to respond to a number of questions, focusing on the art of communication as an element of mainstream regional Central Asian culture.

1. How is a newly emerging international, intercultural community of independent countries of Central Asia developing today, when the new rules and laws of the global market are forming mostly within the focus of 'surplus value' rather than the art of communication?

The starting point here is to understand what the role of the arts was in Central Asia during the last century and how did poetics of the arts, promoting originally integrated ethno-national diversity of the region survive the dividing of the regional space into 'national units', known to-day as the 'five *stans*'. First of all, it should be known, that the frames of Soviet/Russian ideology played a double standard in developing a national/regional ideology. On the one hand, the European system of education, as a basis for the Russian/Soviet system, was attractive for the Bukharian reformers/Jadids, who aimed to integrate it via the modern arts. The participation of a prominent Bukharian reformer, Ahmadi Danish in the Saint-Petersburg opera-house, where he recited a poem, dedicated to a contemporary Italian singer is a noteworthy example of the abovementioned direction.³ This principle was followed by Fitrat, Behbudi, Ajzi and many others at the eve of the last century; yet the innovation was brutally suppressed by Stalinist terror. Though the surviving reformists/Jadids, notably Ayni and his followers in the XX c. attempted to develop this tendency, their achievements were again under scrutiny by the new order of the globalising world. According to Drojina, the achievements of the musical culture of the last century are again under pressure from the traditional 'national' cultural market of our own days.⁴

Paradoxically, the new forms of self-expression of the people of Central Asia in the last century became vulnerable and marginalized from both the 'nationalizing' space of the post-Soviet region, as well as from the newly emerging Eurasian markets in the present day. Thus, the second question arises from this g/local reality.

2. How can Tajikistan integrate the lived experience of the region to match with the 'other' to create a space for common security?

Shared cultural heritage, such as newly styled novels, music, theatre and cinema are going through a difficult period of survival in the transition period of development, where academic knowledge in culture is restricted by the mercantile, consumer culture, easily manipulated, and only benefitting corporate interests.

A common global thread in the meaning of "cultural security" is the challenge for preserving the basic, human values of the national culture: historically open to sharing and benefitting from others.

³ Donish, Ahmad. *Puteshestvie Iz Bukhary V Peterburg*. Tadjhikgosizdat, 1960.

⁴ Drojina, Mariya "Ziyodullo Shahidi I Formirovanie Tadjhikskoy Kompozitorskoy Shkoly". *Ziyodullo Shahidi Va Afkori Bade'i*, Dushanbe, 2016.

Conclusion

Central Asia set within the context of wider Eurasia is facing challenges specific to its location and place in the world. Historically, Central Asia has been referred to both as the centre and the periphery. The ancient Silk Road passes through Central Asia, connecting the rest of Eurasia and the world through it. It has long been seen as the means of communication, exchanges, movement of peoples, goods and ideas, and it continues to evoke notions of commonality while still maintaining separateness which allows multiple cultures to thrive. The regions and peoples of Central Asia have maintained links and connections through the ages: Islamic empires, Mongol Empire, Khanates, Tsarist Russian times and also as part of the Soviet Union. In the present day, these ties are under threat because of the Westphalian notion of nation-states and the importance of borders. Tajikistan has to respond to modern challenges and integrate them with traditional notions which encapsulate different aspects of its heritage: Islamic, Persianate, Soviet and beyond. The role of China within Eurasia is important to consider and it is necessary to highlight the long historical traditions shared with China in the Eurasian space. The earliest interactions of Central Asian peoples were with China which needs to be revisited in light of today's Eurasia. It is essential for the nation to locate its stance on its cultural heritage and guarantee cultural security for its peoples in the context an increasingly globalising Eurasia which reflects both the local and the global, essentially the g/local.

ROZA TURARBEKAVA¹ – Eurasian Economic Union: integration or imitation?

Introduction

There are important questions for consideration when it comes to the discussion of the nature and role of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Is it a new regional integration project based on the economic principles of member countries? Or is it a reintegration of the post-Soviet space with fewer members? In order to address these questions it is important to address methodological tools of analysis when it comes to the explanation of regional cooperation in the former Soviet space and do so from the nuanced perspective of the most recent history and developments that are unique to this region. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the signing of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) agreement, regional economic development and agreements as well as the specific nature of the CIS, are some of the major issues that require further discussion in order to answer these stated questions.

The collapse of the post-Soviet space [the CIS]

Contextual analysis and historical institutionalism are useful tools for understanding the processes of regional building. History in itself allows to talk about such complex social phenomena as traditions, norms and values in international cooperation. It is important to look at the history and the background of the creation of institutions by different regional cooperation projects before starting to compare them. The wider Eurasian space includes many subregions with different sets and understandings of civilizational features, including social structures and institutions, norms, and cultural traditions, both tangible and intangible. That is why Eurasia is difficult to identify as a single region with one culture, one civilization, or a singular social practice.

The disappearance of a global actor such as the USSR and the declaration of the European Union as a new “global actor” following the 1993 Maastricht Treaty, indicated changes in international politics. In the immediate aftermath of the Soviet Union the region saw the development of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) established in 1991-1992 with the signing of the Alma-Ata Protocols that established the CIS. Despite the different approaches of assessing what the CIS is, the text of the agreement shows all signs of regional identity formation. The introduction to the Treaty, for example, cites the “historical community... peoples...” and Article 6 and 7 demonstrates the normative component that was close to the European notion which was one of the arguments in favor of supporting the fact that the former Soviet republics tried to imitate the EU². The

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² See the Agreement on the Establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States, 8.19.1991, see <http://cis.minsk.by/page.php?id=176>.

CIS agreement also signaled the creation of a “common economic space” understanding it as a space of “pan-European and Eurasian markets”³.

However, throughout the 1990s the former Soviet Union space continued to be fragmented despite the creation of the CIS. State-building in Russia and Russian foreign policy in the CIS was often reactionary. Despite frequent summits and a large number of signed agreements, the CIS was not a priority in Russia’s foreign policy in the early 1990s. The course of internal reforms in Russia reduced its active presence in the development of the CIS region. In particular, the economy of state funds in the military sphere influenced its position in preserving a single defense space. When Russia’s President, Boris Yeltsin, addressed the 1992 budget, for example, he declared the policy of significant cuts in defense spending that amounted to 50 billion rubles (Izvestia, 1991, January 24).

Another key example of CIS weakness was the problem with the division of the property of the Soviet Union which was discussed in 1992 with all the CIS heads present at the meeting. One of the most striking episodes was an unsuccessful attempt to maintain a single Black Sea fleet in Crimea. Ukraine declared its claims to a part of the fleet on January 5, 1992. For the whole of 1992, six summits of the CIS heads of state had to be organized to continue discussions. Institutionalization of the CIS was rapid but not very effective. Representations of interests and the overall political systems of all the former republics were still forming. Therefore, it was virtually impossible to conduct a parallel transfer of the part of sovereign rights.

The economically weak and landlocked republics of Central Asia mainly depended on raw-material extraction and were in the worst economic situation after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Despite the large reserves of mineral resources, their situation was unenviable, as they were cut off from maritime routes. The Russian government was not motivated to promote economic regional cooperation with these states and focused mainly on its own oil and gas exports.

In CIS, the Council of Heads of States and the Council of Heads of Governments⁴ functioned from the very beginning. But since the first half of the 1990s it was clear that the integration within the CIS functioned in the format of a “soft” or “civilized” divorce of the former Soviet republics. That said, Russia’s military-strategic interests demanded that the members support the idea of Eurasian integration in order to maintain Russian influence on its “southern flank”.

In Yeltsin’s memoirs, Russia’s first President, he recalled that the most important task of this period was the creation of a unified security system to prevent regional conflicts on the territory of the CIS (Yeltsin 1994, p. 171). As a result of that, the Presidents of Russia,

³ See Alma-Ata Declaration, 21.12.1991 - <http://cis.minsk.by/page.php?id=178>.

⁴ Guided by the the Interim Agreement on the Establishment of the Council of Heads of State and the Council of Heads of Government of the CIS.

Kazakhstan, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan signed the Collective Security Treaty (CST) on May 15, 1992 in Tashkent. When comparing the composition of the CST participants with the state-members composition of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), it becomes clear that there is continuity in terms of participating states and their interests.

In 1993, the emphasis in Russia's foreign policy changed. The key event in 1993 was the adoption of the CIS Charter (January 22). The adoption of the Charter became the prologue to the activation of Russia's foreign policy towards the former Soviet republics. In the second half of 1993 Russia became an active participant in the resolution of regional conflicts in the post-Soviet space. This was preceded by a short "romantic" relationship between the Russian President and the West. During his visit to London, President Yeltsin declared that the Russian nuclear arsenal will not be aimed at American cities from January 27, 1992 (Izvestia, 1991, January 25) in return for the promised provision of loans for reforms in the country. At the G7 meeting in Munich in June 1992 it was decided to allocate a loan of \$ 3.5 billion to Moscow (Russian News, 1992, June 18) - much lower than expected. The allocation of reduced loans from abroad, the growing tensions within between President Yeltsin's and the Supreme Council (formerly known as the Soviet Parliament), the negative consequences of early reforms and the collapse of the Soviet economy, as well as the disintegration of the post-Soviet space signified the "return" of Russia to the post-Soviet space in 1993. There were now restrictions on Russia's involvement in regional politics. The contradiction between the declared desire for reintegration and practical steps in doing it were most clearly visible in Russia's decision to contract the Russian rouble zone to the Russian borders, abruptly kicking out everyone else with the exception of Tajikistan.

Russia was most actively working with Azerbaijan and Georgia. The leader of the Azerbaijani state, Heydar Aliyev, made an appeal to the President of Russia with a request for mediation in the settlement of the conflict. As a result, the Transitional Agreement on Armistice was signed following which Azerbaijan joined the CIS. At the same time, negotiations were held in Moscow on the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict settlement that escalated in September. Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze also asked Boris Yeltsin to influence the Abkhaz side. As a result, the Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement on September 17 stating that if the military operations in Sokhumi were not stopped by 8 pm on the same day, Russia would cut off electricity throughout Abkhazia. In October 1993, Georgia also applied for participation in the CIS (Izvestiya, 16-19, September 24, 1993).

What can be concluded from the above is that the CIS project was a reintegration project but that it lacked political will from Russia. In its institutional design it did not use typical tools of ordinary diplomacy. Undoubtedly, this was the consequence of the fact that the de facto a single space still partly functioned but disintegration continued. The collapse of the unified security system due to the reduction in defense spending by Russia pushed President Yeltsin to adjust his position on the issue of creating collective forces of the CIS.

Other than security, one of the major factors of disintegration was the fragmentation of the currency space. By mid-1993, Commonwealth countries such as Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, and Turkmenistan announced their intention to introduce their own national currency. The contraction of the ruble zone was practically completed by the end of 1993 with the withdrawal of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. On August 27, 1993, the President of Russia issued a decree on the reorganization of the ruble system into a new ruble zone, where Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan were to enter. The Central Bank of Russia was entrusted with rendering assistance to these countries of the Commonwealth (Komsomolskaya Pravda, August 20-23, 1993). This decision was made because of pressure from the Supreme Council, which advocated the preservation of the ruble zone in this form.

State-building, domestic political conflicts and the emergence of new regional projects

As a result of the conflict on October 3-4, 1993, between the Supreme Council and the Government, which was resolved by force, the pressure from the parliament disappeared. The reformist, liberal government led by Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar insisted on the withdrawal of the Central Asian republics from the ruble zone (News, "Ostankino", November 3-4, 1993).

The domestic conflict in Russia became a contradictory factor. Separately it should be noted that in September 1993 Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, A. Adamishin, stated that Russia viewed Central Asia as a zone of vital interests ("Red Square", "Ostankino", September 18, 1993). However, in October 1993 the policy of reform became more relevant and geostrategic interests moved to the periphery. The process of state-building in Russia was controversial and different groups advocated different priorities in domestic and foreign policy. Representative institutions such as the Supreme Soviet and then the State Duma insisted on protecting ethnic Russian populations in the former Soviet republics and advocated for a more active policy in the CIS.

Yegor Gaidar's liberal government used the interim period between October and December 1993 when there was no parliament in the country to resolve the ruble zone issue. As a result of its contraction, Central Asian countries found themselves in an extremely difficult financial and economic situation but this was just the beginning of the construction process of the national economies.

Elections to the State Duma in December 1993 showed that the position of Russians in the former Soviet republics was extremely important for the electorate in Russia because it concerned family ties, issues of movement, and security. Yegor Gaidar's government policy did not find support in the new parliament. On the contrary, the negative image of the reformist government became a part of Russian political and academic discourse for

a long time. The victory of such parties as the LDPR and the Communist Party showed which foreign policy agenda was relevant at the time.

Despite the desire to reintegrate with a number of countries of the CIS, the process of disintegration led to the breaking of ties in the context of the collapse of the unified financial and economic system. The post-Soviet space as a single space became increasingly dysfunctional. Moreover, the CIS did not become a regional organization despite formal procedures and agreements. Instead it was used to solve such problems as the partition of the Soviet heritage. Even Russia's potential as the largest actor in the region was not sufficient to maintain a minimum level of integration.

Key Players in EAEU and their domestic policy development post 1993

With the adoption of the Constitution of the Russian Federation in 1993, as well as elections to the State Duma the internal institutional environment in Russia changed greatly creating a long-term framework for the main trends of domestic and foreign policy. A similar statement applies to the main participants of the EAEU - Belarus and Kazakhstan. The adoption of the Constitutions in Kazakhstan in 1993 and in 1995 ended the conflict between the national representative institutions in Kazakhstan just like they did in Russia. The outcome was the strengthening of the institution of the presidency with an emphasis on authoritarian elements. In Belarus this institutional plan was implemented by 1996.

The 1993 Constitution of the Russian Federation clearly demonstrated the powers of the President of Russia in the foreign policy sphere to be quantitatively and qualitatively voluminous in comparison with such well-known models of presidential republics as in the US or France. Wide expert discussions in the 1990s about the constitutional framework of state building showed that despite attempts to bring the presidential model closer to Western counterparts in Russia, and even more so in Kazakhstan and Belarus, super-presidential republics were created (Sakharov NA The Presidency Institute in the Modern M, 1994; Okunkov LA President of the Russian Federation, Constitution and Political Practice, M, 1996). It especially concerned the conduct of foreign and defense policy in these countries. In fact, the system of checks could be described as of a formal nature.

In my dissertation, "Foreign Policy Powers of the President of Russia (Theoretical and Practical Aspects)," 1997, I made the following conclusions concerning the closeness of the Russian model to the French and American models: first, the quantitative characteristics show the convergence of the positions of the US President and Russia. The dualism of executive power in France can also be traced in Russia but Russian dualism is not clearly outlined and is characterized by an imbalance in the system of checks on the growth of the power of the President. Secondly, cultural and political peculiarities in the formulation of the President's rights in the sphere of foreign policy are expressed in the consolidation of the principle of unity of command of foreign policy (from the definition of the main policy directions to the appointment of ambassadors). Thirdly,

the process of making decisions on the use of budget funds for foreign policy actions or the delineation of the powers of the government and the President in foreign economic policy is not transparent. Fourthly, the constitutional field of the foreign policy prerogatives of the Russian President is so broad that it can provide the basis for the irrepressible growth of authoritarian methods of foreign policy leadership. (Turarbekova RM The manuscript of the thesis, Alma-Ata, 1997, pages 37-38).

With regard to the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan the most important Article is Article 40 in which the powers of the President in the sphere of foreign policy were formulated very broadly. Over time the basis of the President's authority regarding foreign policy did not decrease, but was detailed and deepened further. The same assessment can be made about the institution of the Presidency in the Republic of Belarus. Within this context it is important to ask the following question: If these states with a super-presidential form of government create mechanisms of integration then Presidential power will be curtailed? What should be the institutional framework for a regional Eurasian organization in the event when the participating countries have these special political systems that are top-heavy and therefore not flexible?

Despite strong presidential powers, the Russian President could not fail to take into account the opinion of the State Duma in 1994-1996 which opposed his policies. The Duma essentially defined the two most important topics in Russia's policy towards the CIS. The first was the position of the Russian-speaking minority in the Commonwealth countries. The second was the ongoing imitation of the process of initiating reintegration. If the CIS as a failed project in connection with the fragmentation of the defense and currency areas was increasingly criticized then there was also an increasing demand for integration projects of other kinds. Such projects were the idea of the Union State on the part of Belarus put forward by President Lukashenko in 1996 and the on the establishment of the Eurasian Union of States put forward by the President of Kazakhstan in 1994.

The institutional structure of the Union State was built on the model of the CIS but with the inclusion of the parliamentary dimension thanks to active opposition from the State Duma where the Communists tried to implement their own foreign policy agenda. In accordance with the Charter of the Union of Belarus and Russia in 1997 the Higher Council and the Executive Committee of the Union were formed. The Parliamentary Assembly already existed since 1996 but with the growth of the Supreme Council the more balanced structure of the Union State became increasingly hierarchical. This logically followed from the political internal institutional design in Russia where power was concentrated in the hands of the new President.

Regional integration has not been driven largely by Russia. The President of Kazakhstan attempted to initiate regional building in the Eurasia framework. His 1994 lecture at the Moscow State University considered the initial introduction of the Eurasian project to the political discourse. Organisations like the EurAsEC (2002) and the Union State which can be considered prototypes of the EEU were projects initiated by Kazakhstan and Belarus.

The founding countries of EurAsEC were Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan. Ukraine and Moldova got observer status in 2002 and Armenia in 2003. The Union State, which is based de facto on exclusive principles is *an international economic organization created for effective promotion of the process of formation of the Customs space and the Single Economic Space*. As precursors to the EEU, the question that needs to be asked is why Moscow was not leading integration processes at least until 2011? It was only after Belarus and Kazakhstan proposed and tried to implement their projects in the region with varying degrees of success that Moscow began to exercise its still considerable influence in the post-Soviet space.

Transition from the post-Soviet to the new regionalism: “color revolutions,” new regional initiatives and the Russian project of Eurasian integration

The so-called “color revolutions” in 2003 in Georgia, in 2004 in Ukraine and in 2005 in Kyrgyzstan were regarded quite unambiguously by the Russian leadership as US interference in the internal affairs of these countries. These events marked the beginning of a new geopolitical game. It didn't matter what the nature of these events WAS since Russian political elite's perception of these events was unequivocally negative. Another reason for Russia's negative response was the EU expansion to the East. For President Putin it was a challenge as much as the US literal military presence in Central Asia and military operations near the CIS borders in Afghanistan (2001-2014) and Iraq (2003-2011). All these events and processes taken together provided an opportunity for the Communists, the main opposition force in Russia, to capitalize on discontent in the electorate.

On the other hand, favorable market conditions for the prices on mineral raw materials provided vast resources for the country's economic modernization as well as for a more offensive foreign policy. This is where the Eurasian Economic Union development begins according to the authors of “The Eurasian Economic Union: Integration Between the Ideal and the Real”, Minsk Dialogue (October 2017) written by E. Dovgan, E. Semak, and R. Turarbekova. This Report mentions that:

If we talk about the evolution of the idea and even the first attempts to found a single economic space, we can refer to the events of 2003. In particular, on September 19, 2003 in Yalta, where the Presidents of Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Russia signed the Agreement on the formation of the Unified Economic Space (UES). Then it was decided the project, apparently, was premature. And only three years later, in August 2006, during the informal summit in Sochi, a decision was made to activate the formation of the Customs Union but in the format of the troika: Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia⁵.

⁵ E. Dovgan, E. Semak, R. Turarbekova, “The Eurasian Economic Union: Integration Between the Ideal and the Real”

According to the same Report the pace of the Customs Union development was low up to 2010 and the integration processes started in earnest in January 2010. This was the time when an agreement on the Single Customs Tariff was signed. The unprecedented intensification of this process led to the formal establishment of the Single Economic Space in November 2011. At the same time the Declaration on Eurasian Economic Integration was signed and the Eurasian Economic Commission which institutionalized the foundation of the organization was established. In December 2011 the Presidents of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia adopted a decision “On the entry into force of international treaties forming the UES” from January 1, 2012. This was the beginning of the preparation of the Treaty on the EAEU which was signed on May 29, 2014 and entered into force on 1 January 2015.

The institutional design of the Eurasian Economic Union from the very beginning relied on previous integration projects and organizations such as the CIS, the Union State and EurAsEC. Nevertheless, it is considered fundamentally different because it was formally initiated by the Presidents of the three countries.

On October 3, 2011 Vladimir Putin published an article “A New Integration Project for Eurasia - the Future that Is Born Today”. This publication was a strategy document and contained a number of important proposals that are already offered as the present agenda of the integration plan.

The Russian President proposed to create a single economic space on the basis of the Customs Union and all the institutional spheres that he has identified are already involved in the process of Eurasian integration (macroeconomics, ensuring competition rules in the field of technical regulations and agricultural subsidies, transport, tariffs natural monopolies).

The next step was to prescribe a unified visa regime and migration policy. According to the same article of President Putin it is clear that this was not only a plan for economic integration but was to expand and become another actor in international politics. On October 17, 2011 the President of Belarus also published a response in the Izvestia newspaper in which he stressed the need to view the Eurasian Economic Union as part of Greater Europe avoiding such definitions as a pole. Finally, on October 24, 2011, the President of Kazakhstan, N. Nazarbayev, emphasized the economic dimension of the Union that had to be voluntary, equal for all participants and be based on the evolutionary nature of integration.

However the authors of the report of the Minsk Dialogue came to this conclusion that despite President Nazarbayev’s statements the project was implemented at a forced pace. In their opinion, the reason for such deliberate acceleration of events was the growing competition from the People's Republic of China and the European Union. They assigned a special role to the Eastern Partnership (EaP) which proposed the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU. An important part of this agreement was to create a

free trade zone between the Eastern European countries and the EU. This was seen as reason enough for Russia to promote Eurasian integration which could face up to the new challenges offered by the EU and the US.

Establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union: stress factors, imitation and its limitations

In January 2015 the Treaty on the Establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union came into force. Under the EAEU Agreement of May 29, 2014, such bodies as the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council (Supreme Council), the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council (Intergovernmental Council), the Eurasian Economic Commission and the Eurasian Court were founded.

By imitating the European Union, the most successful integration project, the authors of the Eurasian project counted on the positive experience of European integration. They borrowed the EU'S institutional management system in order to look like the EU but it has its limitations.

First, the vertical management system (as a pyramid) is conditioned by two factors: the tradition of the governance structure, since the formation of the CIS and the actual form of government of the participating countries, the presidential republics, with the exception of Armenia.

Secondly, the disintegration of the USSR and the conflict between executive and representative institutions led initially to the creation of a Super-Presidency, and when it comes to transferring a part of sovereignty to supranational institutions, this is perceived as a threat to the national sovereignty of all states, with the exception of Russia.

Thirdly, the asymmetry of the socioeconomic and military-political capital of the member countries naturally gives rise to fears from the small and medium-sized states of integration associations and the growth of distrust in the light of the crisis and conflict in Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014).

Fourthly, excessive haste in the design of the Union has created many obstacles related to the incompleteness of such stages of integration as the creation of the Single Economic Space.

In general these limitations have caused the future of the EAEU to be viewed in negative terms with serious criticism from both inside and outside. Internally, this is the result of unresolved issues of internal barriers and forced expansion of the EAEU. The situation with the protection of national interests on the institutional level is also unclear. Since the beginning of the creation of the Customs Union there were more than 600 barriers, exceptions and restrictions. The President of Belarus criticized this situation until recently. The problems identified by the Belarusian government in 2015-2017 meant a new stage

of conflict interaction within the framework of integration. President Lukashenko refused to sign the new Customs Code which guaranteed even greater integration of the economies of the Union's member countries for a long time.

as Additionally there was an unclear picture of the representation of national interests in the institutions of the EAEU. Externally, the EAEU has been beset by problems of Western sanctions against Russia, the fall of the oil prices and the devaluation of the ruble, the fall in the revenue of the budgets, the drop in household incomes and, as a result, a recession and a trade decrease. All this demonstrated the weaknesses of the economies of the EAEU member countries. As a response, the EAEU countries instituted protectionism which has become not only an instrument of the policy of the EAEU but also an instrument of the member countries within the Union.

Interregional competition of projects and large actors

The most serious challenge for the EAEU is its intermediate position in between the EU and China. Both powerful actors propose their regional initiatives- EaP ("Eastern Partnership" by the EU) and "One Belt, One Road (China) which can potentially influence the EAEU in the future. It means that the external design of Eurasia is still not complete. The decrease of the internal trade within the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015-2016, as well as the economic recession of the countries also influenced further integration. Furthermore, although the Belarusian-Russian disputes are considered as the main economic conflict within the EAEU, the presidential elections in Kyrgyzstan in 2017 unexpectedly led to the Kazakh-Kyrgyz customs conflict.

The sharp statements of the Kyrgyz President, A. Atambayev, regarding Kazakhstan's interference in the electoral process in the Kyrgyz presidential elections suddenly turned into a large-scale trade war. At the Council of Heads of Government of the CIS countries in Tashkent held on 3 November, 2017 the conflict was brought into the public space by the public speeches of the Premiers of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Sapar Isakov, the head of the Kyrgyz government claimed that Kazakhstan violated the CIS and WTO agreements as well as partial EAEU agreements between the two countries. Bakhytzhan Sagintayev, the head of the Kazakh government, argued against these allegations relying solely on the EAEU regulations. There were significant problems concerning the harmonization of the CIS, WTO and EAEU agreements. These discussions raise the question of how would the EAEU will function in connection to the OBOR developments in the future?

On May 17, 2018, the EAEU and China signed the Treaty on Economic and Commercial Cooperation. The agreement is only a framework right now and does not provide preferences. However, China wants to create a free trade zone with the EAEU countries but so far this issue has not been resolved.

For the member-countries of the EAEU integration is still largely philosophical and regional construction of Eurasia is a continuing process. The active regional policy of Russia, the European Union and China can cause conflicts not only in between small countries but also inside them.

Conclusion

Studying Eurasian Economic Union is a study in progress that leaves a lot of unanswered questions. In this piece we raised certain questions and tried to answer them. Looking at the Eurasian process there can be two conclusions drawn from the above- Eurasian integration is the reintegration of the post-Soviet space or the geopolitical project of Russia; or that it is real integration of the newly independent states in the basis of which only economic interests lie.

Both answers are still debatable as there are a lot of internal and external opinions about the nature and goals of the EAEU.

The ideas of regional integration relate to the wider integrational experiences and sometimes are compared to other regional integration projects, like the EU. In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union the new states still have a lot in common, so it would be incorrect to assign all of the successes of the integration to the new political elites.

By 2011 a lot changed in the context of international relations and in particular in the Eurasian region. So the active interest in further integration re-activated the integration processes in the EAEU. In the post-Soviet space the peculiarity of the institutional traditions including where the vertical links prevail over the horizontal ones must be considered before final verdicts are given. The social dimension is still poorly represented in the EAEU. The project of integration remains highly bureaucratic and elite-led. The EAEU remains somewhere between being a geopolitical project and a real emerging economic union but which comes with its own set of conflicts of interests, informal institutions and negotiation processes.

AKRAM UMAROV⁶ – Uzbekistan’s contemporary foreign policy on Afghanistan: theoretical and historical background

Introduction

In contemporary political science literature, the term "Central Asian region" is used not only to denote the territorial community of the five independent republics that emerged after the collapse of the USSR, but also the historical, economic, political and cultural past of these states. The five countries, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, occupy the centre of Eurasia, bordering on the great civilizational centres of the world. By applying the concept of Regional Security Complex, this paper will show that the notion of the "Central Asian region" is beginning to include Afghanistan, as it has a geographic commonality; shared historical and cultural past with the countries of the region and influences the strategic balance of the entire region. Traditionally, the events in Afghanistan and the impact of the intra-Afghan conflict on the regional security of Central Asia (CA) have been explored using the concepts of 'balance of forces', inherent in realistic and neo-realistic schools of International Relations; military power; the state of the armed forces; and rational choice. However, in my opinion, this is too narrow a view on the subject reducing it to certain aspects of the Afghan conflict and its impact on the Central Asian countries. It will be argued that it is not possible to give a full picture of what is happening without considering the root causes of the concerns in the region about the processes taking place in Afghanistan.

This paper will first set out the premises of the Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory, and will then assess how it can be applied to Central Asia: one view is to see Central Asia as part of a broader post-Soviet, or Eurasian, complex, however here it will be argued that we should consider Central Asia as a separate complex for a number of reasons. The paper will then turn to consider the role of Afghanistan in this Central Asian RSC, before concluding with several reflections on the security challenges and dynamics in the region.

The theory of Regional Security Complex

The influence of the situation in Afghanistan on regional security in Central Asia can be explained with the help of the theory of a regional security complex put forward by Buzan in 1983.⁷ Buzan defined the RSC as follows: a group of states whose main security concerns connect them so closely that their national security can not be considered in isolation from each other.⁸ In 1998, Buzan, together with Waever, redefined the theory of RSC, in order to avoid the state-centred and military-political orientation of the previous

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⁷ Buzan, B. (1983). *People, States, and Fear*. Brighton: Wheatsheaf.

⁸ Buzan (1983): p106.

version and accounting for the possibility of various actors and security sectors – a set of units whose main securitization, de-securitisation, or both are so interconnected that their security problems cannot be reasonably analysed or resolved separately from each other.⁹

An integral part of the theory of the RSC was the "theory of securitization", in which security issues included verbal threats and problems socially constructed as threatening.¹⁰ Hence, the problem is declared a threat, because it is perceived and publicly declared by the state as such. Furthermore, as Walt emphasizes, physical proximity tends to generate closer interaction on security issues between neighbours than among states located in different regions.¹¹

Central Asia as part of a Eurasian or post-Soviet RSC?

Buzan and Waever believed that there is a post-Soviet RSC, centred around the Russian Federation, the core of this complex which links the sub-complexes of the Baltic region (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia), the western group of former Soviet republics (Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine), Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) and the Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia) together.¹² The authors classify Central Asia as a *weak sub-complex*, in which internal dynamics are only just being formed with the strong involvement of Russia.

For most countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus, internal security is a top priority. The state system in some countries is so weak that security threats can cause a general crisis of political order and in some cases a civil war.¹³ According to Buzan and Waever, these security problems in Central Asia, as a rule, are more transnational than interstate in character. Bobokulov (2010), in relation to Central Asia, argues that the relations of the states of the region determine the content of regional security, both friendly and hostile. He defines regional security as "the regional states' recognition of the unity of their destinies - the community of existing threats, problems and interests",¹⁴ which is close to what the RSC postulates. If we exclude traditional distrust and competition for regional leadership between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan no model of friendliness or enmity among regional states was formed after 1991. Part of the explanation for the lack of regional security dynamics can be the weak armed forces that the countries of the region have (with the exception of Uzbekistan). Thus, the countries of Central Asia contain elements

⁹ Buzan B and O. Wæver (1998). *Liberalism and Security: The Contradictions of the Liberal Leviathan*, – Copenhagen: *COPRI Working Paper 23*: p201.

¹⁰ Buzan, B., O. Wæver, and J. De Wilde (1998). *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

¹¹ Walt, S. (1987). *The Origins of Alliances*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press: pp 276 - 277

¹² Buzan B. and Wæver O. (2003). *Regions and Powers: The structure of international security*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: pp397-436.

¹³ Idem.: p423.

¹⁴ Bobokulov, I. (2010). *Mezhdunarodno – pravovye aspekti obespecheniya regional'noi bezopasnosti v Centralnoj Azii: Voprosi teorii i praktiki: Diss. Doct. Jur. Nauk*. Tashkent: UWED: pp. 25-26. [International legal aspects for the provision of regional security in Central Asia: Theoretical and Practical Questions, PhD in law dissertation].

of an unstructured type (the state-building process has not yet fully taken place) and the region is relatively open to the influence of external forces.¹⁵

Lukin (2011) agrees that Central Asia continues to be a part of the post-Soviet space, since Russia still remains the dominant player here. However, the presence of China has also increased significantly, and this is not only due to the oil and gas reserves of Central Asia, but also because of the transnational threats of Uyghur separatism and Islamic extremism. In addition, Beijing is trying to prevent a scenario in which Central Asia can be used by its rivals (primarily the USA) to create threats to China's interests. Increased interest in the countries of Central Asia is also shown by India and Japan. Based on this Lukin asserts that the Central Asian countries can already be regarded to some extent as part of the Asian supercomplex of security, although for them membership in this supercomplex is still secondary, less significant in comparison with the post-Soviet, Russian-centric region security.¹⁶ Other researchers even believe that we can talk about the formation of a unified RSC in Asia. Voskresensky (2006) calls it "Great East Asia", including Central, South, North - East and South-East Asia in its composition.¹⁷

Central Asia as separate Regional Security Complex

At the same time, according to Nurzhanov, for many centuries Central Asia has developed as a deeply integrated geopolitical space. The troubled decade of the 1990s undoubtedly showed that modern Central Asia is an independent RSC.¹⁸ This view is supported by both Bobokulov (2012)¹⁹ and Tadjbakhsh (2012).²⁰ Furthermore, Klimenko (2011) states that: "Although it is impossible to say whether these five 'stans' will remain together even in the near future, many common threats and security problems give grounds for considering the region as the RSC."²¹ The Central Asian region has all the aspects that underpin a security complex: (i) Common regional borders determined by the state borders of the countries of Central Asia - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. (ii) An anarchic structure that includes two or more autonomous units (states) - the RSC includes five CA states. (iii) Polarity due to its economic potential, demographic and territorial factors. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan possess significant reserves of natural resources in the region; Turkmenistan has significant energy resources but does not have a great

¹⁵ Buzan B. and Wæver O. (2003): p426.

¹⁶ Lukin, A. (2011). *Teoriya kompleksov regional'noi bezopasnosti i Vostochnaya Azia*. Oykumena (2): 17-18

¹⁷ Voskresenskiy, A. (2006). *Bolshaya Vostochnaya Azia: mirovaya politika i energeticheskaya bezopasnost'*. M: Lenand: p226. [The Great East Asia: world politics and energy security]. See also Feigenbaum E. (2011). *Why America No Longer Gets Asia*. The Washington Quarterly: Spring 2011, 25-43.

¹⁸ Nurzhanov K. (2009). 'Changing security threat perceptions in Central Asia'. *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 11 (63).

¹⁹ Bobokulov, I. (2012). *Central'naya Azia kak regional'nij kompleks bezopasnosti: teoriya i praktika*. Central'naya Azia i Kavkaz 3: p126. [Central Asia as regional security complex: Theory and Practice. Central Asia and Caucasus]

²⁰ Tadjbakhsh, Sh. (2012). *Central Asia and Afghanistan: Insulation on the Silk Road, Between Eurasia and the Heart of Asia*. PRIO Paper. Oslo: PRIO: pp3-4.

²¹ Klimenko, E. (2011). *Central'naya Azia kak regional'nij kompleks bezopasnosti*. Central'naya Azia i Kavkaz 4: p10. [Central Asia as regional security complex: Theory and Practice. Central Asia and Caucasus]

demographic potential; and Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, taking into account the smaller number of people, the limited nature of natural resources and the complex mountainous landscape, are just entering the path of sustainable development. (iv) There is a social construction that encompasses amity and enmity between countries; in the region it is not easy to clearly distinguish between the models of friendliness or enmity. Among the states of Central Asia there are more often models of distrust, rivalry and limited pragmatic cooperation. There are no region-wide mechanisms (apart from IFAS and the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination), which include regulation of important issues for all countries. This can be explained by the lack of the necessary level of interaction between states and their leaders. A model of rivalry can be traced in the attempts of some countries to promote their energy projects without due regard for the interests of their neighbours.

The high degree of securitisation of problems can be attributed to terrorism and religious extremism, the fair and rational use of the region's water resources, the conflict in Afghanistan, and energy and transport problems.²² At the same time, a number of serious problems of regional security remain ambivalent. For example, the economic and technological backwardness from the advanced economies of the world, and the problems of ecology (with the exception of water issues), etc.

This RSC seems more applicable in this regard. It appeared over the past 25 years, after the independence of the Central Asian states, as a result of the internal transformation of the sub-complex. General historical, ethno-religious, economic and cultural ties and geographical proximity predetermined the emergence of this complex. The countries of the region have significantly strengthened their political and economic independence in comparison with the period after the collapse of the USSR when, under the influence of the Soviet economic complex and close contacts, Central Asia could be viewed as a sub-complex of a wider RSC under Russia.

It is difficult to imagine common important security threats for the countries of Central Asia and for instance the Baltic States, therefore, security ties between the Western group of states and Central Asia also decreased significantly. For example, it is difficult to talk about some serious threats to the security of Central Asia as a result of domestic political upheaval in Moldova in recent years. The connection with the Caucasian sub-complex is also not as pronounced. The main link between the security of the Caucasus and Central Asia remains the Caspian Sea and the interaction of the Caspian countries, but this issue directly affects only two countries namely Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. But any internal problems of the regional states can cause great concern and attract the attention of neighbouring countries in Central Asia. Within this model of a regional security complex for Central Asia, Russia's continued significant participation in regional security processes can then be explained by its status as a great power in accordance with the theory of the RSC, which does not obey the factor of geography and neighbourhood in security matters.

²² Faizullaev A. (2014). 'Institutions and Culture in Regional Interactions and Negotiations: The Case of Central Asia'. *Cambridge Central Asia Review* 1(11): p220.

If previously Russia was the main external player in the region, today China is seen as an increasingly important actor. China attaches increasing importance to Central Asia in its foreign policy, as well as the United States, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the EU, Iran, Turkey and others.

Regional security in Central Asian foreign policy

All the leaders of the region note the special role of neighbouring regional states in their foreign policy. The Concept of Foreign Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2014 - 2020 stated: "Kazakhstan is interested in the politically stable, economically sustainable and safe development of Central Asia. Realizing its responsibility and role in the region, Kazakhstan will make all-round efforts to ensure regional stability and security, and counter new challenges and threats, including those originating from adjacent territories."²³

In Kyrgyzstan, President Atambayev has not yet adopted a conceptual document on the foreign policy guidelines of the country. The media reported on its development, but so far it has not been officially approved. Since 2007 the term "Central Asia" has not even been mentioned, but the special role of the regional state is noted: "The common borders with the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, the Republic of Tajikistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan have historically determined close political, economic and cultural - humanitarian ties. The formation of a friendly environment and the strengthening of good neighbourliness on the principles of respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and general security is of key importance in the foreign policy of Kyrgyzstan."²⁴

The Foreign Policy Concept of Tajikistan states: "In the system of interstate relations of the Republic of Tajikistan, the neighbouring states of the region take priority positions. Tajikistan supports the further expansion of the positive, centuries-old and creative experience of the friendly coexistence of the peoples of Central Asia."²⁵

Turkmenistan in its Foreign Policy Concept for 2013 - 2017 mentions the importance of: "building harmonious and stable interstate relations in the regions of Central Asia and the Caspian basin, creating strong mechanisms for maintaining regional peace and security."²⁶

²³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2014). *Kontseptsiya vneshey politiki RK na 2014-2020 gg ot 21 yanvarya 2014*. Published at <http://mfa.gov.kz/index.php//ru/vneshnyaya-politika/kontseptsiya-vneshnoj-politiki-rk-na-2014-2020-g>. [Republic of Kazakhstan concept of foreign policy for 2014-2020 published on 21 January 2014].

²⁴ Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan (2007). *Kontseptsiya vneshey politiki Kyrgyzkoi Respubliki ot 10 yanvarya 2007*. Published at <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view//ru-ru/44569??ccl==ru-ru> [Kyrgyz Republic foreign policy concept from 10 January 2007]

²⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan (2015). *Kontseptsiya vneshey politiki Respubliki Tadjikistan ot 27 yanvarya 2015*. Published at <http://mfa.tj//ru/pravovaya-osnova-vp/kontseptciya-vneshney-politiki-respubliki-tadjikistan.html>. [Republic of Tajikistan foreign policy concept from 27 January 2015]

²⁶ Gosudarstvennoe informatsionnoe agenstvo Turkmenistana (2013). *Novie rubezhi sotrudnichestva vo mira i razvitiya*. Published on 8 January 2013 at <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/?id==33086>. [New frontiers of cooperation for the sake of peace and development].

Uzbekistan's main foreign policy priority as captured in the country's Foreign Policy Concept, is cooperation with the countries of Central Asia, where its vital interests are linked. Uzbekistan's foreign policy efforts in Central Asia include ensuring peace and stability in the region, resolving key issues through peaceful diplomatic means, including facilitating the settlement of the situation in Afghanistan, ensuring the equitable and rational use of water resources of the transboundary rivers in Central Asia and the environmental sustainability of the region. The Policy Concept furthermore sets the aims of completing the delimitation and demarcation processes of borders, the adoption of effective measures to combat new threats, and the establishment of close, mutually beneficial and constructive cooperation with neighbouring countries.²⁷

Specific significance is attributed to the conflict in Afghanistan, in all the Central Asian states' foreign policy and security agendas. The leaders of regional countries often argue that the conflict over the last 40 years in Afghanistan has had a negative impact on virtually all political and economic processes in Central Asia and is potentially one of the main destabilizing factors in the region.

To illustrate this: in Kazakhstan's concept of foreign policy Afghanistan is included in the list of priorities: "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".²⁸ President Atambayev of Kyrgyzstan assesses the importance of Afghanistan in the regional security system as "undeniable". In his opinion, "the processes taking place around this state play a key role in the geopolitical system of international relations, and developments in it have a direct impact on the security and geopolitical alignment of forces in the region."²⁹

President of Tajikistan Emomali Rakhmon repeatedly stated that the situation in Afghanistan creates a threat to the southern borders of Tajikistan and the CSTO member countries.³⁰ Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov stated that "Turkmenistan is a supporter of peace, security and sustainable development in

²⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2017-2021. *Mezhdunarodnoe sotrudnichestvo*. Published at <http://www.mfa.uz/ru/cooperation/>. [International cooperation].

²⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2014). *Kontseptsiya vneshey politiki RK na 2014-2020 gg ot 21 yanvarya 2014*. Published at <http://mfa.gov.kz/index.php/ru/vneshnyaya-politika/kontseptsiya-vneshnoj-politiki-rk-na-2014-2020-g>. [Republic of Kazakhstan concept of foreign policy for 2014-2020 published on 21 January 2014].

²⁹ President of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan (2015). *Tekst interv'yu Prezidenta Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki Almazbeka Atambaeva informatsionnomu aginstvu TASS, press*. Published on 6.07.2015 at http://www.president.kg/ru/news/intervju/66187_tekst_intervyu_prezidenta_kyrgyzskoy_respubliki_almazbeka_atambaeva_informatsionnomu_agentstvu_tass/. [President of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan Almazbek Atambayev interview text to the TASS information agency]

³⁰ Sputnik IA (2016). *Prezident Rakhmon zayavil ob ugroze granitsam stran ODKB iz Afganistana*. Published on 14.10.2016 at <http://ru.sputnik.kg/asia/220161014/11029759452/pprezident-rahmon-zayavil-ob-ugroze-granicam-stran-odkb-iz-afganistana.html>. [President Rakhmon announced the danger for the CSTO state borders from Afghanistan].

Afghanistan, initiating an exclusively peaceful solution of the issues existing in the neighbouring country and advocating the active involvement of new, long-term political and diplomatic methods".³¹

Lastly, Uzbekistan's Concept of foreign policy activity emphasizes that "Uzbekistan's policy in Central Asia is aimed at ensuring peace and stability in the region, and solving key problems of regional security, including facilitating the settlement of the situation in Afghanistan".³²

Afghanistan is seen as a threat to regional security not only by the leaders, the political establishment and the expert community for each country, but also the populations of Central Asia. Afghanistan was named the main threat to the security of Central Asian countries in opinion polls in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (51 and 16% respectively), with respondents expressing concern about the possibility of conflict overflow.³³ In Kyrgyzstan, 54% of respondents named Afghanistan as the biggest threat to their country,³⁴ and in Tajikistan, 22% of the poll participants called the Afghan conflict a source of threats and dangers to themselves.³⁵

Afghanistan and the Central Asian RSC

The crucial role of Afghanistan in Central Asian regional security can therefore also be seen in light of the RSC concept.

Buzan and Waever are convinced that most often the borders between regions are geographically defined by weak interaction zones or *isolators* (such as Turkey, Burma, or Afghanistan), which are turned in both directions, but which are not strong enough to unite the two regions into one whole. The concept of an isolator is important for the theory of the RSC, and it should not be confused with the traditional buffer state, whose function is at the centre of a strong securitization system, and not at its edge.³⁶

In the course of regional security processes in South Asia and the Middle East, Afghanistan has always remained an isolator that attracted its neighbours on all grounds, but at the same time kept them away from each other, rather than uniting them. According

³¹ Gosudarstvennoe informatsionnoe agenstvo Turkmenistana (2015). *Peregovori mezhdu Presidentami Gurbanguli Berdimukhamedovim i Mokhammadom Ashrafom Gani*. Published on 21.01.2015 at <http://turkmenistan.gov.tm/?iid==88065>. [Turkmenistan state information agency (2015). President Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov and Mokhammad Ashrafom Gani talks].

³² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan (2017).

³³ Esipova N. and Ray J. (2016). *Eastern Europeans, CIS Residents See Russia, U.S. as Threats*. Gallup, published at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1190415/eastern-europeans-cis-residents-russia-threats.aspx>

³⁴ Tsentral'no-Aziatskiy Barometr (2012). *Tsentral'noaziatskiy Barometr*. Published on 24.10.2012 at <http://m-vector.com/ru/news/?id==2289> [Central Asian barometer]

³⁵ Tsentral'no-Aziatskiy Barometr (2013). *96% Zhiteley Tadzhikistana schastlivi*. Published on 11.07.2013 at <http://m-vector.com/ru/news/?id==3313>. [Central Asian Barometer (2013). 96 % of Tajikistan citizens are happy].

³⁶ Buzan B. and Wæver O. (2003): p41.

to some scholars, despite the West's sustained involvement in Afghanistan as a result of the outbreak of the war in 2001, this basic characteristic is unlikely to change.³⁷ Priego (2008) considers that previously performing the functions of the isolator, Afghanistan, separating the opposing forces, suddenly became the centre of the new RSC, which can be called "South and Central Asia".³⁸

Historically, Afghanistan during the Timurids (14th century) and the Baburids (15th century) was part of a regional security complex stretching from the northern regions of modern Kazakhstan (the Golden Horde) to the coastal regions of modern India. The function of the insulator as carried out by Afghanistan was reached after the agreements between the Russian Empire and the British Empire on the delimitation of spheres of influence and the establishment of a "buffer zone" on the Afghan territory.

However, the destruction of the colonial system after the Second World War, the emergence of Pakistan and India, as well as the entry of Soviet troops into Afghanistan in 1979 changed the landscape of this region.

During the Civil War of 1992-1997, armed opposition appeared in Tajikistan. Radical extremist movements from Central Asian countries were based in Afghanistan in this period. Their attempts to infiltrate into Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in the late 1990s were stopped. However, Afghanistan has become a source of security threats, which actualizes the return to the historical structure of the regional security complex.

The urgency of the creation of the RSC is due to the involvement in the zone of the Taliban's activity of the northern and north-western provinces of Afghanistan, bordering Central Asian countries and which previously served as a buffer zone between the unstable southern and central Afghan provinces and Central Asian states.

Afghanistan's internal problems also affect its external contacts. Contradictions between political leaders representing different provinces of the country threaten its unity. The provinces of Afghanistan are increasingly establishing closer relations in the economic and security spheres with the bordering states rather than with other Afghan regions. The regional security complex of Central Asia is subject to strong influence of the northern provinces of Afghanistan in comparison with the western and southern regions of the country. At the same time, the southern and eastern regions of Afghanistan have close ties in almost all spheres with Pakistan and with the South Asian RSC.

Despite the fact that the theory of the RSC does not imply a line of delineation between the two RSCs within the territory of one country, as well as the simultaneous participation of one country in two RSCs, in the case of Afghanistan, its specificity should be highlighted.

³⁷ Idem.: p110-111.

³⁸ Priego, A. (2008). *Pakistan mezhdur regional'nimi kompleksami bezopastnosti Central'noi i Yuzhnoi Azii. Central'naya Azia i Kavkaz*, 6 (660): 63-83. [Pakistan between regional security complexes of Central and South Asia.]

The peculiar border between the RSC of Central Asia and South Asia passes through the central provinces of Afghanistan, while the northern and north-western provinces of the country are closer to the RSC of Central Asia, and the southern and eastern provinces to the RSC of South Asia.

The situation in the Afghan provinces of Herat, Badghis, Faryab, Jawzjan, Balkh, Kunduz, Takhar and Badakhshan, which share borders with the Central Asian states, is the determining factor in the perception of threats from Afghanistan by regional countries. All these provinces have established close economic cooperation with the Central Asian countries and actively cooperated with them. A significant proportion of the participation of regional states in the construction of socio-economic infrastructure and the provision of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan falls on these provinces and these regions are predominantly inhabited by ethnic groups with close ties to countries of Central Asia. The natural geographic separator of northern Afghanistan from the rest of the country is the mountain system of Hindukush, which practically stretches through the whole of the central part of Afghanistan.

Conclusion

In general, it is not yet possible to assert whether the complete loss of the function of the insulator by Afghanistan and the completion of its entry into the RSCs of Central and South Asia has been established. Given the serious internal conflict in the country and the significant influence of many external forces in intra-Afghan processes, it is difficult to view Afghanistan as a fully independent consolidated force capable of defining consensual internal and external priorities.

At the same time, these tendencies in the region go hand in hand with the highly controversial and difficult-to-predict processes in Europe, caused by the uncertainty of the overall development path in the region, the migrant crisis, terrorist activity, and the concomitant growth of nationalist and protectionist political forces in the West. The escalation of tensions in USA-Russian relations, internal political turmoil in the United States, the misunderstanding between the traditional EU-USA allies on a number of issues of global and regional concern, the conflict in the Middle East, the increase in terrorist activity in the developed countries of the world, along with the growing activity of China in the international arena under the brand "One Belt, One Road," which causes India's alertness - all can have a serious impact on sustainable development and the dynamics of economic growth in Central Asia.

There arises to a certain extent an unclear picture of the prospects for development of the Central Asian region. Along with the visible increase in the activity of several countries in Central Asia, in the general context there is a slight decrease in interest in the region which is causing its move to the periphery in areas of international political, trade and economic relations. This has the potential of tangible impact on the prospects of attracting new investments and technologies vital for sustainable development in the region.

Therefore, after the completion of the stage of strengthening statehood in the region, the countries of Central Asia desperately need external partners ready to assist in achieving the regional states' ambitious goals of comprehensive development. The external participants in the processes in Central Asia should unite their efforts without getting involved in a zero sum game in the region in order to establish their spheres of influence. Stability and sustainable development of Central Asia will benefit all neighbouring regions and the international community as a whole.

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ANAR VALIYEV¹ – State strategies in building European identity of Azerbaijanis: did it work?

Introduction

Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the country has undergone a tremendous transformation. In this context, demographic trends for the last decade have been quite favorable to the development of the country with a constant increase of population due to high birth rate. The economy of the country for the last 15 years has been booming. Much of Azerbaijan's economic success and prosperity is explained by the country's oil resources. Oil prices have increased during the last decade and oil and gas production has boomed. As a result, the GDP per capita also grew to EUR 3,411 in 2009. High oil revenues allowed Azerbaijan's GDP per capita to reach 54.3% of the average of 10 EU countries (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria). Windfall generated from oil revenues spurred the Azerbaijani government's initiative to spend a large amount of revenue on infrastructure projects such as roads, bridges, city beautification as well as conducting mega events. There were several reasons for striving for mega events but one of the main ones was to boost and reinforce the image of European identity of Azerbaijan (Valiyev, 2012).

Building Azerbaijani identity: European Identity

Azerbaijan has been unable to identify itself with any particular part of the world since independence (Cornell, 2010). Identification with the Islamic world was denied from the beginning because of widespread perceptions of its backwardness and the secular nature of the elites and majority of population in Azerbaijan. Although the Azerbaijanis declare their European identity, the question of being part of Europe has never been settled. Just as it did hundreds of years ago during the period of the first republic (1918-1920), Azerbaijanis are still struggling with questions of their European identity (Valiyev, 2016). European, or so called Western identity was an attractive idea among the Azerbaijani establishment and the people. For the last decade the Azerbaijani government used various strategies to reinforce a European identity in Azerbaijan and focused on European values. In 2013 the EU, that is the major exemplification of European values, had a modest level of support, with around 30% trusting EU while 37% were neutral in their attitude towards the EU. Around 30% of people surveyed answered they did not trust the EU and that was seen as skepticism of European Values among Azerbaijanis (CRRC, 2013). Another survey conducted in May of 2017 (EU Neighborhood Survey, 2017) ² showed

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² Between March and May 2017, a second wave of annual surveys was carried out across the six Eastern Partner countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine). The research was conducted within the framework of the EU-funded "OPEN Neighbourhood — Communicating for a stronger partnership: connecting with citizens across the Eastern Neighbourhood" ('EU NEIGHBOURS east') project. As part of the

surprising results. Almost every second Azerbaijani citizen (47%) had a very or fairly positive image of the EU, compared to 9% of the population who were negatively disposed towards the Union. A majority of Azerbaijanis strongly believed that the EU represented such values as human rights (overall 81% of people share this belief), freedom of speech, democracy and the rule of law (each 80%), freedom of the media and economic prosperity (each 79%), equality and social justice, individual freedom and honesty and transparency (each 74%). The European Union is the most trusted foreign institution in Azerbaijan: half of the population tend to trust the EU (51%), while just over one third tend to trust the UN (35%) and NATO (32%) and only a quarter trust the Eurasian Economic Union (26%).

These results show a significant change in the perception of Europe among Azerbaijanis. It is believed that the actions of the Azerbaijani government as well as aspirations of the people have impacted those views. Moreover, such a change in perception definitely affected the Azerbaijanis in their desire to belong to Europe. The following article will explore the actions of the government in its quest to build European identity in the country as well as the impact of these actions.

Mega Projects as a way to build European identity

One of the first chances to boost the Eurocentric identity as well as building the image of Azerbaijan in Europe fell on the country when Azerbaijan won the 2011 Eurovision Song Contest. In accordance with the rules of the competition, Baku had to host the 2012 Eurovision event. Initially Baku was not ready to do so. The city lacked a major venue for holding it; the absence of infrastructure was also an issue. As a result of having to hold Eurovision 2012 in Azerbaijan, Baku invested hundreds of millions in the event, most of which went to infrastructure projects. During the short period of 9 months, the government built and launched the Crystal Hall, a new convention hall for holding the song contest in 2012. Moreover, the government spent overall up to \$600 million for additional projects associated with beautification and city development, while direct costs for the organization of the event totaled \$34.3 million. Eurovision was the first event to put Baku and Azerbaijan at the center of entertainment in Europe. While for many Europeans the Eurovision Song Contest does not represent a major event, for Azerbaijan which joined the contest only 3 years before 2011, the victory in and ability to host it became testimony to its *Europeanness*. It was the first time Azerbaijan was able to symbolically associate itself with the rest of Europe. The majority of the population was thrilled with such symbolic association. Moreover, according to Internet Forum of Azerbaijan³, searches for Azerbaijan on Google increased eight-fold during the month following the 2011 song competition victory, while searches for Baku as a destination doubled. Meanwhile, interest in Azerbaijan grew by over 40 times on TripAdvisor. Finally, Baku hosting the Eurovision

opinion polling strategy, the purpose of the annual surveys is to investigate the opinion and the level of information that citizens of the EaP countries have about the EU in general and, in particular, about EU-funded cooperation and development programmes/projects. In order to monitor changes over time, the surveys are being carried out annually from 2016 until 2019.

³ Independent NGO

in May of 2012 put queries for Azerbaijan in the ten most popular searches of May (Ismayilov 2012). Beyond visibility, Eurovision had a certain impact on the identity of Azerbaijani population as well and especially the political and cultural establishment. The Azerbaijani population was able to actually 'live' in a European cultural milieu for the first time. For many people it was fundamental to re-appraise their roots of belonging to Europe while keeping national traditions and values (Ismayilov 2012). The opening and closing ceremonies of the song contest featured Azerbaijani culture and traditions, while the rest of the show represented European traditions. Azerbaijan's hosting of the Eurovision Song Contest in 2012 was the apex of the pro-European drive in Azerbaijan. Furthermore, three years later Azerbaijan was able to fulfill its goal of building its image and brand. The country was able to attract the attention of Europe and to bring a part of Europe to Baku.

After the success of the Eurovision contest and the holding of some other events of regional significance, Azerbaijani authorities felt the country was able to host a larger event of international scale. In particular, Azerbaijani authorities bid for the 2020 Olympic Games. Based on initial studies that put the hosting cost at \$20 billion, they suggested that oil revenues and private investment could finance the event. By the time of the bid, Azerbaijan had already built 13 new sporting complexes to bolster Baku's candidacy, with 23 additional buildings scheduled to be built by 2014. However, Baku lost the Olympic bid to Tokyo in 2012. Thus, the country shifted its strategy to attracting smaller-scale events or second-tier events, ostensibly with the aim of improving the city's portfolio to make another Olympic bid in 2024. On December 8, 2012, members of the 41st General Assembly of the European Olympic Committee (EOC) in Rome decided to hold the first ever European Games and Baku was awarded the rights to host the inaugural European Games in 2015. The decision was made as a result of secret ballot, where out of 48 votes, 38 were cast in favour of Baku. The EOC President Patrick Hickey stated after the voting:

'We stand at the origins of one of the greatest events in the sport history in Europe. I am proud to say: the first European Games will be held in 2015 in Baku. Our long-awaited baby has been finally born. And now we'll look after him carefully and raise it to make everything [is] at top notch in the beautiful city of Baku. And most importantly, that it was only the beginning—the first page of a multi-year, full and vibrant life of European Games.'

Hosting the first European Olympic Games helped Azerbaijan to promote itself as a part of Europe despite losing the Olympic 2024 bid. Planners were highly focused on preparing for the 2015 European Games, which were expected to bring 6000 athletes from 49 countries to Baku. The European Games featured up to 20 sports including 15 Summer Olympic and 2 non-Olympic sports. The Baku European Games Operations Committee (BEGOC) Chief Operating Officer Simon Clegg stated, 'This is going to be the most fantastic show ever staged in Azerbaijan, one that will make the Eurovision Song Contest seem like a small, local event.'. He further contended that attracting high-quality athletes was an important first step and it was accomplished by ensuring that 16 of the 20 participating sports could use the Baku Games as a qualifying or ranking event for the Rio 2016 Olympics. Baku wanted to ensure the Games would be broadcast all over the world,

from Australia to South America. The government altered its immigration policy to waive visa requirement for all participating athletes and officials in possession of accreditation cards. In addition, all foreign spectators received visas upon arrival based on proof of purchase of tickets. Some 6000 athletes and 3000 officials from the National Olympic Committees (NOCs) of Europe participated in the Games, which, as Clegg believed, became the 'second most important event in the history of Azerbaijan after the signing of the contract of the century in 1994', referring to the deal with an international consortium to develop the giant Azeri, Chirag and deep-water Gunashli (ACG) oilfields. It was estimated that the 1600 staff that BEGOC hired and the 12,000 volunteers would walk away with new skills and an appetite for volunteering in sporting and other types of events. Initial estimates placed the costs of the 2015 Games at around \$1 billion, including the construction of a \$720 million Olympic Stadium, which was inaugurated in June 2011 by Azerbaijan's President Aliyev, together with presidents of FIFA, Sepp Blatter, and UEFA, Michel Platini (Trend.az 2011).

The construction was finished by May of 2015, with a seating capacity of 65,000 viewers (BEGOC 2014). Within the stadium precinct there are warm-up and training facilities for athletes that include seating for up to 2000 spectators, parklands and parking facilities, as well as a new Athletes Village. Meanwhile, numerous other facilities were constructed to host this event, including 13 newly constructed, luxurious buildings for 5000 athletes. Although preparations were concentrated on new construction, planners intended to temporarily repurpose some older Soviet-era structures, as well as the recently built Crystal Hall. For Baku the major concern was to ensure international recognition and promote a good image. The appointment of Dimitris Papaioannou, the artistic director of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games ceremonies, at a similar position at the Baku 2015 opening ceremony spoke volumes about the intent to stage a show to remember. To impress the visitors it was essential the host city have all the attributes of major cities: international airport, a signature building designed by prominent architects, and other impressive buildings and cultural complexes (Jonas and Wilson 1999).

By the end of 2014 most of these facilities had been built. The newly inaugurated terminal in the Baku airport was a masterpiece of architecture: constructed in a triangular shape with rounded off angles, it was designed to accommodate about three million passengers per year. Several new magnificent buildings were constructed in Baku. The SOCAR Tower—the tallest building in Baku and the entire Caucasus—became home to the State Oil Company starting in 2015. The opening ceremony of the European Olympic Games, held at the new Olympic stadium, in the opinion of the local media commentators, had exceeded all expectations. Baku spent around \$100 million for a show that brought even Lady Gaga singing the John Lennon song 'Imagine'. Traditional music and about 2000 female dancers and artists set the stage for the flame-lighting ceremony, which officially opened the Games, followed by an exposition dedicated to the literary writing of the famous twelfth century Azerbaijani poet, Nizami Ganjavi. Another \$140 million was spent on the closing ceremony that concluded the 17-day event. The Presidents of Russia and Turkey as well as several other former Soviet Republics attended the event.

The European Games were successful for Baku since they presented evidence of Azerbaijan's modernity and its rise to international prominence. Officials claimed that the Games were a great opportunity for Azerbaijan, a nation that not many people knew much about before then. The rights for showing the Games were sold to European, US and Canadian companies. They also secured transmission of the Games to the Middle East and North Africa. 447 million households in China were also able to watch through CCTV, 56 million households in Japan, and 30 million households in India. Azad Rahimov, Minister of Youth stated after the Games that:

“It is very important for a country that gained independence only 23 years ago to position itself on the map of Europe as a European country. Very often the question [is asked,] ‘Where is Azerbaijan?’ After the Eurovision Song Contest and after the European Games, most people will know the answer. (Gotev 2015)”

The boost from the European Games allowed Baku to bid for other international events. Even before the European Olympic Games, Azerbaijan confirmed bringing the Formula 1 European Grand Prix to Baku in July 2016. For this event Hermann Tilke's architectural firm produced an urban highway in the city center. Baku as the host of Formula 1 stood together with Monaco, Singapore and other major cities. The cars circled around the Old City, a national historical and architectural reserve considered the most ancient part of Baku and included in the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Azad Rakhimov, Minister of Youth and Sport, spoke of the country's location at the crossroads of Eastern Europe and Western Asia as a new 'frontier': 'Azerbaijan is a modern European country that has established a reputation as a centre of sporting excellence. The deal to bring Formula 1 racing to Baku is a very significant new chapter in our ongoing success to attract the world's largest sporting events to our country' (Benson 2014).

Did it Work?

Debates—either within or outside of the country— on the role of sports events in nation building and identity construction are scarce. Did the European Games serve the purpose of bringing the country closer to Europe and European values? The successful regional policy of the EU in the 1990s and 2000s, along with its economic power, made Europe rather attractive for the country. The Eurovision Song Contest held in 2012 was the apex of the pro-European drive of Azerbaijani elite and public. That was the first time when Azerbaijan was able to send a message to the whole of Europe of its existence and show its inclination to culturally associate itself with European identity. However, institutionally the elites have not wanted to integrate into the European normative order with corresponding commitments, since it would require massive institutional reforms. Elites want to be culturally close to Europe, but are not eager and are unable to play by the rules of European institutions. The atmosphere of criticism and animosity that led to political boycotting of the Baku European Games by EU leaders also triggered reciprocal Euro-sceptic attitudes.

However, Cooperation with the European Union (Europe) is one of Azerbaijan's foreign policy priorities. Azerbaijan looks to the EU as a market for its resources and with the hope that the EU can become a force to counterbalance Russia in the region. For the last twenty-five years, the EU has been an important partner for Azerbaijan, providing around €333 million in technical, humanitarian, emergency, and food assistance. EU investments of €35 billion make it the largest investor in Azerbaijan. Moreover, the share of EU countries in Azerbaijan's foreign trade was 47%, far more than the country's trade with any other partner. In November 2016, the European Council [adopted a mandate](#) for the European Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to negotiate (on behalf of the EU and its member states) a comprehensive agreement with Azerbaijan. The new agreement will replace the 1996 partnership and cooperation agreement and should better account for shared EU-Azerbaijan objectives and challenges.

The unexpected results of UK's Brexit referendum in 2016 has significantly impacted the perception of Azerbaijanis about their country's future cooperation with the EU and European identity. Britain was a major investor in Azerbaijan and has played the role of Baku's EU champion. London has been the preeminent defender of Baku initiatives from within the EU, among other things advocating for the Baku-Ceyhan gas pipeline to Turkey and Europe as well as several other large projects. Britain's energy interests in Azerbaijan have allowed Baku, in turn, to better promote its own interests to EU members and obtain pro-Azerbaijani resolutions or statements from the EU on the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) issue. Obviously, Britain's decision to leave the EU does not mean that Baku will stop cooperating with Brussels. However, London's absence as a major player and supporter will make it difficult for Azerbaijan to receive the same level of EU support on a range of projects. If the EU is able to neutralize the Brexit impact swiftly—by fully engaging with Azerbaijan—then the effects of Brexit will be lessened.

The UK has consequential influence in Azerbaijan and in the South Caucasus in general. Besides the English language, the British education institutions are a major destination for Azerbaijani students. About 570 Azerbaijani students have received education or are currently studying at British universities through government-sponsored programs, and many more (hundreds) study there through other means. It is hard to anticipate how Brexit may impact this, but the expectation is that it would be more difficult for Azerbaijani students to study in the UK because they came through programs of consortia of European universities (such as Erasmus). Brexit would halt such cooperation; it would be difficult to get funding from the EU for any joint projects involving British universities. Perhaps the most important implication of Brexit on Azerbaijan is symbolic. For years, the trust of Azerbaijanis toward EU institutions was comparatively high and a majority of the population was willing to integrate into EU institutions. Most people in Azerbaijan observing Brexit see a possible disintegration processes happening, which makes them hesitant about seeking further integration with the EU. In parallel, there is the rise of the Eurasian Economic Union, which further decreases pro-European sentiments among Azerbaijanis, both citizens and politicians.

Conclusion

It is too early to analyze the actions of elites. However, it is hard to imagine that Azerbaijan would give up its European vector of development. Most of the strategic projects of Azerbaijan are primarily connected with Europe. The oil pipeline Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan; the Trans Anatolian Pipeline; the transport corridor from Central Asia to Europe and many other projects require European involvement. The Azerbaijani establishment would hardly be able or willing to sever relations with the EU. Furthermore, despite the harsh rhetoric and a halt on integration, the cultural image of Europe in Azerbaijan remains largely positive. Many students choose Europe as their destination for study, and many Azerbaijanis are frequent travelers to the EU, especially after the visa facilitation agreement.

Furthermore, the soft power of Europe in Azerbaijan should not be underestimated. Besides the technological advancements, entertainment industry, or even travel preferences, European education institutions are a major destination for Azerbaijani students. Thousands of Azerbaijani students are currently studying in Europe. Many students are studying in Europe through joint programs like Erasmus among others. Many of these graduates from EU universities have returned to find jobs in the Azerbaijani government. Establishing joint educational programs with Azerbaijani universities or creating new programs to educate Azerbaijani youth could serve as a great stimulus for people and improve the positive image of the EU. In addition to education, the West should pay specific attention to the media in the region. Today, most of the information Azerbaijanis receive is via local, Russian or Turkish sources. Airing of TV channels across the country, or establishing news services in the Azerbaijani language would allow local populations to get first-hand information, bypassing other sources of information. So far, only BBC and Radio Free Europe have limited Azerbaijani language services.

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ESKE VAN GILS¹ –Internal cooperation and domestic legitimacy in Azerbaijan

Introduction

This brief reflective piece summarises the arguments presented at the Annual Tartu Conference in 2018. The paper presented findings of a research on unintended effects of EU democracy and human rights promotion policies in Azerbaijan. The EU exerts a certain degree of democracy and human rights (DHR) promotion in its policies towards Azerbaijan. Arguably, the EU's pressure is not as strong as it could be, possibly due to the strong economic links between the two actors²– but the policy nevertheless poses a potential threat to the regime.

However, it was found that due to instrumentalisation of external pressure exerted on the Azerbaijani government, the regime in Baku actually managed to turn these pressures for political reform into a benefit and allowed it to strengthen rather than undermine its legitimacy. This summary will first set out the context of regime legitimacy and Western values promotion; it will then discuss which two main mechanisms are at play in the case of the EU and Azerbaijan; and lastly, it will briefly reflect on the consequences of these findings for EU relations with non-competitive regimes in its eastern neighbourhood.

Domestic sources of regime legitimacy

Legitimacy is crucial for any regime, of any nature. However, competitive and non-competitive regimes face different challenges and may respond differently to them, and may apply varying strategies to secure legitimacy for their rule. Non-competitive regimes can maintain the status quo partially through force (oppression), but it's argued that force may be undesirable and that it is insufficient in the long run:³ repression may secure survival of a regime, but not its resilience.⁴ For that, legitimacy is needed.⁵ In Azerbaijan, there are four key sources for the authorities' legitimacy at a domestic level. First, regime performance⁶ is based on economic growth, welfare provision, and security. The country's economy grew enormously since the 1990s, and compared to the early years after independence there is much more stability. However, inequality persists,⁷ and since the

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² See e.g. Gahramanova, A. (2009). 'Internal and external factors in the democratization of Azerbaijan'. *Democratization* 16 (4): 777-803; Warkotsch, A. (2006). 'The European Union and democracy promotion in bad neighbourhoods: The case of Central Asia'. *EU Foreign Affairs Review* 11 (4): 509-25; and Youngs, R. (ed.) (2010). *The European Union and Democracy Promotion: A critical global assessment*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

³ Grauvogel, J. and Ch. Von Soest (2014). 'Claims to legitimacy count: Why sanctions fail to instigate democratisation in authoritarian regimes'. *European Journal of Political Research* 53: 637.

⁴ Dimitrov, M. (2013). *Why communism did not collapse: understanding authoritarian regime resilience in Asia and Europe*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

⁵ Idem.

⁶ Marquez, X. (2016). 'The irrelevance of legitimacy'. *Political Studies* 64 (15): 23.

⁷ EC (2014) *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Azerbaijan: Progress in 2013 and recommendations for action*. Brussels: European Commission; Bölükbaşı, S. (2011). *Azerbaijan: a political history* (London, I.B. Taurus): 219.

economic downturn after 2015, regime performance has become a more complex source of legitimacy.

A second source of domestic legitimacy that can be used is that of leadership.⁸ The incumbent government of President Ilham Aliyev still gains legitimacy from the legacy of the his father, Heydar Aliyev. Heydar Aliyev still has high visibility in the form of references in the government's discourse; portraits displayed in public spaces; and a national holiday for his birthday – all contributing to the maintenance of a 'charismatic order'.⁹

A third major domestic source for legitimacy is perceived representation and accountability. Elections in Azerbaijan over at least the past fifteen years have been assessed as not free and fair by the international community.¹⁰ Yet elections, even if they are not free and fair, can serve legitimacy effectively. They help cohesion among elites, especially in times of economic decline; and expand support by giving a sense of accountability to citizens.¹¹ Elections can also 'signal invincibility' and show the opposition that "alternatives are unlikely",¹² thereby de-motivating the opposition. Setting certain boundaries within which the opposition is officially allowed to exist indeed forestalls severe (international) criticism regarding freedom for the opposition;¹³ while in reality it leads to marginalisation of opposition forces.¹⁴ This, in turn, can eliminate possible threats to the government's legitimacy.

The external dimension to domestic regime legitimacy

But perhaps the most interesting source of legitimacy in the case of Azerbaijan is international relations. Especially in circumstances where the domestic sources for legitimacy (mentioned above) are threatened, governments may reach out to international relations as a source for their legitimacy.¹⁵ Literature on legitimacy of non-democratic systems predicts that in response to pressure for political reform – such as through values promotion - governments aim for reduced international cooperation.¹⁶

However, due to interdependency between Brussels and Baku, this is not an option, and co-operation between Azerbaijan and the EU has actually increased over time rather than diminished. Interestingly and unexpectedly, the resulting interaction between the EU and Azerbaijan actually *benefits* the regime's legitimacy. There are two key mechanisms in place: 1) The EU's (and other international actors') facilitation of this behaviour; 2) The government's active use of strategies to capitalise on relations to turn certain elements into favourable outcomes.

(Unintentional) facilitation by the EU and other international institutions

⁸ Marquez (2016): 24.

⁹ Idem.

¹⁰ EC (2005). *European Neighbourhood Policy Country Report Azerbaijan COM (2005) 72 final*. Brussels: European Commission; EC (2010). *The Policy: What is the European Neighbourhood Policy?* Available at http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/policy_en.htm

¹¹ Dimitrov (2013): 6.

¹² Marquez (2016): 28.

¹³ Grauvogel and Von Soest (2014): 637.

¹⁴ Cf. Bedford, S. (2014). 'Introduction to the special section: Political mobilization in Azerbaijan: The January 2013 protests and beyond'. *Demokratizatsiya* 22 (1): 3-14.

¹⁵ Grauvogel and Von Soest (2014): 635.

¹⁶ Levitsky and Way in Schedler, A. (ed.) (2006). *Electoral authoritarianism: The dynamics of unfree competition*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers: 202; see also Grauvogel and Von Soest (2014): 639.

What appears to be happening is that the actions of the EU facilitate the use of a specific discourse by the government and thus provides it with a tool to enhance its own legitimacy. First, *continued cooperation* can be seen as a form of legitimisation of the regime as there is no *ex ante* conditionality imposed on the government and cooperation provides the international “recognition” which is much desired by regimes in the post-Soviet region.¹⁷ In similar fashion, the international community allowed the Azerbaijani government to gain membership of among others the Council of Europe, even though it did not conform to the norms. Second, the *EU’s absence in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution process* allows the government to capitalise on Brussels’ disengagement by pointing out the EU’s double standards, since the EU has been actively engaged in other conflict resolution processes. The government in Baku therefore emphasises the need for national independence and it can gain more legitimacy through acting as the main security provider for its citizens.¹⁸ Lastly, bargaining power has been used to make the EU remove part of its *criticism from the public space*, and to express it only behind closed doors. Because of the de-legitimisation of international criticism, and the counter-reactions that sometimes followed it (for instance, the arrest of more journalists after the European Parliament adopted a critical resolution in 2015),¹⁹ several policy-makers and representatives now believe that public criticism works counter-productively. In combination with media restrictions at a domestic level, this means that only a narrative favourable to the incumbent government is made available through mainstream national media.

Active strategies to avert EU threats to legitimacy

In terms of active strategies the Azerbaijani government has found different ways to neutralise the EU’s potential threats of DHR promotion. First, where it isn’t possible to remove EU criticism regarding DHR standards from the public space, a main reaction is to try *de-legitimise* it. As shown by Grauvogel and Von Soest (2014), regimes can neutralise potentially damaging external pressure by using it “to their advantage as symbols in the struggle for legitimation”.²⁰ For instance, the EU’s criticism on the state of DHR only targets the government, however, the regime can portray it as if the critique attacks the whole nation as such.²¹ Indeed, the government in Baku usually responds to EU criticism, be it through statements or reports, by issuing counter-reports and counter-statements.²² By portraying external criticism as an attack on the whole state, the authorities can “create a siege mentality”²³ which strengthens the discourse on the nation and national independence. Such an emphasis on national independence, in turn, can

¹⁷ Kavalski, E., (2012). *Central Asia and the rise of normative powers: Contextualizing the security governance of the European Union, China, and India*. London: Bloomsbury.

¹⁸ George in Wooden, A. and Ch. Stefes (Eds.) (2009). *The politics of transition in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Enduring legacies and emerging challenges*. Abingdon: Routledge: 85.

¹⁹ CPJ (Committee to Protect Journalists) (2015). *In Azerbaijan, Meydan TV reporters harassed, jailed*. Published on 18.09.2015, available at: <https://www.cpj.org/2015/09/azerbaijani-authorities-continue-harassment-of-mey.php>

²⁰ Grauvogel and Von Soest (2014): 635.

²¹ Cf. Grauvogel and Von Soest (2014): 644.

²² See for instance the statement by Azerbaijan’s ambassador to Belgium regarding criticism from the EU (Azernews 2017) or the government’s response to the OOCRIP report on the so-called ‘laundromat’ scheme, accusing the report to be financed by George Soros and Armenia (News.az 2017).

²³ Grauvogel, J. and Ch. Von Soest (2014): 646.

serve as 'ideological justification' for regimes²⁴ and appears to be a strong part of the Azerbaijani government's domestic legitimation.

Apart from counter-replies to expressed criticism, the EU is also *portrayed as 'disrespecting' the nation* on arbitrary grounds, which leads to claims of 'victimhood' and can strengthen domestic legitimacy further. It was already mentioned that the government feels the EU holds double standards regarding involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict; but officials also perceive Brussels as treating the country unfairly in terms of criticism on DHR, compared to other countries.

Another response to EU criticism is *lobbying and public relations activities*. Lobbying activities have undermined the implementation of DHR promotion policies, but have also discredited Western observers. Over the past years, several scandals have come to light putting into question the EU's (and other Western organisations') credibility. In 2017 the scale of the government's lobby activities was revealed with the so-called 'Laundromat' scandal,²⁵ confirming rumours that had existed for years about the extensive Azerbaijani lobby.²⁶

Conclusion

What appears to be happening is that the Azerbaijani government capitalises on its bargaining power to apply a number of policy strategies vis-à-vis the EU that help 'neutralise' the EU's pressure for political reform or to even transform potential threats into advantages, instead. The strategies discussed above fit within an increasingly more assertive foreign policy stance we observe not only in Azerbaijan but also in other states that do not (fully) align with the hegemonic liberal order in international politics.

What is remarkable is that usually, international cooperation enhances the implementation (imposition) of the international agenda in domestic contexts (in this case: the norms of the liberal order).²⁷ However, in the case of Azerbaijan, the opposite mechanism seems to occur: the Azerbaijani government uses its foreign policy and international relations to strengthen its *national* priorities and interests (national independence, regime legitimacy). In other words, the Azerbaijani government plays an *active* role in order to secure an outcome favourable to itself, using its bargaining power; an active discourse on national independence; and strategies to de-legitimise international criticism.

Further comparative research into other countries in the region should provide more insight into these reverse mechanisms and the unintended consequences of international cooperation with non-competitive regimes: whose resilience is being enhanced with such cooperation? How can unintentional aspects be removed? And how tensions between different interests on a domestic level can be addressed by international cooperating actors?

²⁴ Dimitrov (2013): 309; see also Marquez (2016): 23.

²⁵ 'The Azerbaijan Laundromat', OCCRP, 2017, available at: <https://www.occrp.org/en/azerbaijanilaundromat/>, accessed 20 October 2017.

²⁶ Knaus, G. (2015) 'Europe and Azerbaijan: The End of Shame', *Journal of Democracy*, 26, 3.

²⁷ Levitsky and Way (2006): 124.

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