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## CENTRAL ASIA AS A REGION OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

### *Abstract*

At the beginning of the third millennium, the region building process in Central Asia is more difficult than ever before to assess the role of the region in the international relations' system. In this regard, the issue of regional subsystems of international relations is of considerable interest against the background of the discussion on globalization. One of the most relevant examples in this regard is Central Asia. Today, the countries of Central Asia are in the focus of attention of global and regional powers, international financial and economic structures. In the 1990s, this region became a field of increasingly broad cooperation and at the same time an arena of competition between various forces, due to its geostrategic significance, potentially powerful oil and gas and other raw materials, and the prospects for building a powerful transport infrastructure. All forms and types of foreign policy interaction in Central Asia are developing with the direct and sovereign participation of the newly independent states of this region. It is in the hands of their leadership that the levers of final decision-making are able to determine the strategic prospects for regional development, and, consequently, to influence the overall course of history in such an interdependent world today. There are several periods in the history of Central Asia that have had a strong impact on the development of the region and its peoples. And, of course, each of these periods brought both positive and negative elements to the historical processes of this vast part of the land.

**Key words:** Central Asia, region building, regional integrations, sovereignty, statehood.

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## ОРТАЛЫҚ АЗИЯ ХАЛЫҚАРАЛЫҚ САЯСАТ СУБЪЕКТІСІ РЕТІНДЕ

### *Аңдатпа*

Орталық Азиядағы жаңа тәуелсіз мемлекеттерінің қалыптасу кезеңінің өзіндік ерекшеліктері болды. Алайда, орталық Азияның геосаяси аймақ ретінде халықаралық қатынастар жүйесінде маңызының артуы жаһандық процестермен қатар келіп, өңірді аймақтық қауіпсіздік бойынша аймақтық ұйымдардың қалыптасуына ықпал етті. «Орталық Азия» ғылыми концепциясының ғылыми әдебиеттерде пайда болғанына көп болмағанына қарамастан, қазіргі таңда аймақ елдерін зерттеуде «пост кеңестік Орталық Азия», «Орта Азия» немесе «Үлкен Азия» түсініктерінің орнын басуда. Алайда, Орталық Азия елдерін ортақ колониалды тарихи кезеңнен басқа не біріктіреді? Халықаралық қатынастар немесе кез келген әлеуметтік ғылымда қандай теория Орталық Азия аймағының ерекшелігін түсінуде көмектеседі? Мақалада Орталық Азия аймағының қалыптасуын негізгі үш негізгі ерекшеліктеріне тоқталып өтеді. Аймақтың өзге өңірлерден ерекшелігін ескере отырып, аймақтың интеграцияның даму траекториясына талдау жасалынады. Ретроспективті анализ «Орталық Азия» аймағының тәуелсіз аймақ ретінде қалыптасу ерекшеліктерін анықтау мақсатында қолданылады. Екіншіден, Орталық Азия мемлекеттерін ортақ біріктіруші құндылықтар мен бірегейліктерді әлеуметтік конструктивизм теориясы аясында талдау жасайды. Аймақтағы қауіпсіздік мәселесі күрделі геосаяси, экономикалық және әлеуметтік сипатқа ие. Қазіргі таңда қауіпсіздіктің қауіп-қатерлері көбейгені айқын. Бір жағынан қарағанда, Орталық Азия мемлекеттеріне тікелей қауіп жоқ, дегенмен әлемнің саяси сахнасындағы ойыншылардың күштер балансының өзгеріске ұшырауы Орталық Азия мемлекеттерінің жағдайына әсерін тигізбей қоймайды. Орталық Азия өзінің геостратегиялық орналасуы мен едәуір қорлық әлеуеті арқасында әлемдік державалар үшін қызығушылық тудырады. Бүгінгі таңда әлемдік державалардың қызығушылығы қауіпсіздік аясында Орталық Азия мемлекеттерінің әлемнің жетекші елдерімен көпжақты ынтымақтастығын жеделдетуге байланысты туындайды. Осы ынтымақтастықтың негізгі мақсаты кеңестік дәуірден кейінгі кеңістікте және оның Орталық Азия аймағында тиімді қауіпсіздік жүйесін қалыптастыруы болып отыр. Осы

орайда «Орталық Азия» елдерінің халықаралық қатынастар жүйесіндегі рөлі мен ықпалы күрделеніп, маңызы арта түсті. Бүгінде Орталық Азия елдері әлемдік және өңірлік державалардың, халықаралық қаржы-экономикалық құрылымдардың басты назарында. 1990-шы жылдары бұл өңір геостратегиялық маңыздылығына, әлеуетті қуатты мұнай-газ және басқа да шикізат ресурстарына байланысты өңір негізгі геосаяси мүдделер тоғысына айналды.

**Түйін сөздер:** Орталық Азия, аймақтану, аймақтық интеграция, суверинитет, мемлекеттік институт.

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## **ЦЕНТРАЛЬНАЯ АЗИЯ КАК РЕГИОН МЕЖДУНАРОДНОЙ ПОЛИТИКИ**

### *Аннотация*

В начале третьего тысячелетия процесс регионального строительства в Центральной Азии становится как никогда сложным для оценки роли региона в системе международных отношений. В этой связи вопрос о региональных подсистемах международных отношений представляет значительный интерес на фоне дискуссии о глобализации. Одним из наиболее значимых примеров в этом отношении является Центральная Азия. Сегодня страны Центральной Азии находятся в центре внимания мировых и региональных держав, международных финансово-экономических структур. В 1990-е годы этот регион стал полем все более широкого сотрудничества и одновременно ареной соперничества различных сил, что обусловлено его геостратегическим значением, потенциально мощными нефтегазовыми и другими сырьевыми ресурсами, перспективами создания мощной транспортной инфраструктуры. Все формы и виды внешнеполитического взаимодействия в Центральной Азии развиваются при непосредственном и суверенном участии новых независимых государств этого региона. Именно в руках их руководства находятся рычаги принятия окончательных решений, способных определять стратегические перспективы регионального развития, а, следовательно, влиять на общий ход истории в таком взаимозависимом современном мире. В истории Центральной Азии есть несколько периодов, оказавших сильное влияние на развитие региона и его народов. И, конечно, каждый из этих периодов вносил как положительные, так и отрицательные элементы в исторические процессы этой огромной части страны.

**Ключевые слова:** Центральная Азия, регионализация, региональные интеграции, суверинитет, государственность.

### **Introduction.**

The relationships between the five states (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan) in different areas has been studied as united in one region so-called Central Asia. Quite often, the topic of integration and cooperation of the region has been discussed among analysts, scholars (Allison, Roy. 2008; Bohr, Annette. 2004. etc) and at some level among political leaders. between political leaders [1].

The emergence of a new Central Asian region after the independence of five newly independent republics has changed the geopolitical and geo-economic position of the entire Eurasia. Central Asia is not only returned to its transit potential, connecting a series of vast regions of Eurasia (Asia-Pacific, Middle and Near East, etc.), but also the led to form a new region in the centre of the vast Eurasian continent.

However, in the region since the 2017, discussion has received new impetus and developed in a new shape. Cooperation has become an important political agenda of the region's leaders, but solution has not been found yet. The common trend in all post-colonial nations is being reluctant to integration process. In that regard, Central Asian nations are not exception, the concept of sovereignty is very important factor due to the its Russian-Soviet dominated colonial past. According to the theory of regionalism, unions, associations, at some level require the transfer of certain amount of sovereignty (absolute independence) from national level into the institutional level.

From my point of view, this was one of the main reasons of partial failure of central Asian regionalism/integration/region building at the early period of independence. Central Asian regionalism has been the subject of debate around the region since the early 1990s [2]. Despite the absence of exclusively Central Asian regional institutions, the idea of a regional cooperation framework for Central Asia (CA) proved to be viable in the last 30 years. Surprisingly, there are numerous factors, which brings together the

five states CA nations as a single region. For instance, we can highlight historical arguments (common colonial past), common ethnical, religious identity and geopolitical arguments.

The historical argument is Central Asia has been a thriving region along the silk road since ancient times. The importance of CA comes from two main facts. First, Central Asia was home to several advanced states and civilizations that made important contributions to the world's scientific, political, cultural, and industrial processes. CA was a place where great nations' interests met. Secondly, due to its geographical location, Central Asia has always played the key role of a crossroads of trade, cultural and civilizational exchanges on a global scale. However, Central Asia lost its central place in global exchanges due to the emergence of sea and air transport in world trade, as well as due to the fall of the Central Asian region under the political and military influence of external powers [3].

From the point of Central Asian view region-building process, the creation of CA regional structures will allow to regain the region its importance in global trade and economic exchanges as an independent regional unit. In this article, I will try to find the decent answers to my research questions covering up by three sections.

First and foremost, I will define the concept of Central Asia as a region. During the soviet dominancy period CA hadn't considered as an independent region in world politics. Instead, in that time CA had been considered as a periphery of Moscow, consequently all the important decision had been made in Moscow on behalf of region [4]. After collapse of USSR, all newly independent 15 states begun to create their own identity in various ways. CA as a region started to create common identities, rules, norms artificially. In that regard, I suppose theory of social constructivism helps us to understand what factors brought together CA states as a single region during the early periods of independence.

Therefore, in this section I will apply theory of social constructivism to the Central Asian reality. Second, I will shift to region-building process after the 2017. The reason is since the 2017 regional integration process has been developed in new mode due to the unexpected change of leadership in Uzbekistan and later planned power transition in Kazakhstan. In this section, I aim to define the probability of new region building attempt under the new leadership in two main leading nations. Last, but not least, I will analyse the uniqueness of Central Asian region-building process in general. In this section will try to find proper response to questions, like what makes Central Asian regionalism unique? and etc.

## **Results and Discussion.**

### **CA as a region and social constructivism, togetherness, common identity.**

We have to draw lessons from the experience gained both in Central Asia and abroad in order to better organize the discussion about Central Asian region building process. While studying CA, we shouldn't not limit ourselves analysing the geopolitical or security dynamics of Central Asian regionalism, or simply describing the organizational and structural aspects of regional initiatives. Also, the debate about region-building in Central Asia should not be limited by studying solely external actors or the views of the regime. Rather, we should promote a theoretical approach to study Central Asia in the map of comparative regionalism by examining the normative foundations of regional policy or by paying attention to how Central Asia is or is not being created as a region under the influence of multiple actors, norms, and processes. Most importantly, we should not consider Central Asian regionalism either as a linear implementation of the "formula for economic integration" or as a finished product. We have to avoid subjective categories. Instead, we believe that Central Asian regionalism can be best understood through a constructive approach that views regionalism as a social construct.

Further development of the concept of Central Asia as a single region triggered the emergence of a number of theoretical concepts of international relations which aimed to analyse various aspects of the development of the region. For example, the theory of realism (as well as neo-realism) analysed region from the prism of "revival of the great game". In contrast, theory of liberalism sees region as an emerging region, which lacks process of modernization, democratization and building civil society. Advocates of the theory of social constructivism sees the region a forming region under the new post-soviet values and reviving pre-colonial identity with elements of realism and liberalism. Alexander Wendt calls his theory structural idealism, meaning a combination of two methodological approaches. He argues that structural factors are more important for understanding social reality than agency factors [5]. Since 2005, among the political leaderships of the Central Asian countries has begun to re-think about the military and political presence of external actors (Western countries) in the region, when the situation with their "humanitarian intervention" in Afghanistan has been worsened. So they turned their attention to non-Western values and concepts. They began to act in accordance with the well – known statement of a prominent representative of the theoretical

school of "constructivism" Alexander Wendt, which is "anarchy is what states make of it". As a result, non-western "central Asian common" values helped to fill ideological vacuum to establish interstate relations between themselves and with the outside world.

Further on I would like to common idea, identity which makes them together, still lack of idea about how to link the common holiday with region building process. For example, national holiday "Nauryz". This is a holiday which celebrates across the region, including Iran at early spring season on 21,22 of March, annually.

### **Central Asia under three new leaderships (Uzb, Kz, Kg)**

In the last three decades the five Central Asian republics have been affected by several trends in the region.

Central Asian countries in the period from the 1990s to 2005 demonstrated great attempts at regional integration, which is clearly shown by the creation of such structures as the Central Asian Economic Community (CAEC) and the Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CAC) and etc.

Two presidents, Islam Karimov and Nursultan Nazarbayev, launched integration by signing the "Agreement on the common economic space" in Tashkent on January 10, 1994 [6]. The presidents of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan joined this process a bit later. The leaders of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan also signed the "Alma-Ata Declaration" in 1997 with the intention of establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia. In addition, some coordinating bodies were created and many other documents were signed, for example, within the framework of the CAEP, more than 160 multilateral cooperation documents were signed and more than 50 economic projects were adopted, but they ultimately did not lead to the creation of a single deeply integrated space [7]. Attempts by the Central Asian states were not successful as supposed develop at intraregional cooperation from 1994 to 2005.

However, since 2017 the idea of "new integration" within the framework of the planned union of Central Asian states has been gaining popularity in Central Asia. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan claimed as main two cores around which hypothetical regional integration can develop. In his speech on September 17, 2017 at the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly, President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev announced the creation of a new political atmosphere in the region and called for organizing regular consultative meetings of the heads of Central Asian states [8]

Trends in after 2017 Central Asia indicates that the region is experiencing not only the revival of the "failed integration process", but also deeper transformations of a global nature. In the context of radical global transformations of the early XXI century for central Asia the question is for being objecte or subjecte in the international system is obviously, crucial when choosing strategic perspectives and models for further development.

### **Uniqueness and main features of CA region-building**

The states of the region differ from each other not only in economic and social development, but also with resources which they own. Thus, international relations in Central Asia have not yet acquired a stable character, nor has a solid foundation been created for such internal unity that would allow us to unconditionally consider the Central Asian region as a political and integration whole [9].

All the 1990s were spent in Central Asia under the sign of creating the foundations of newly independent states. This was a very difficult time, as the new political institutions and leaders had no experience in building independent systems of government. One of the critical tasks they had to solve was the early establishment of a national ideology, which would become a kind of paradigm, the defining features of state institutions and nation building process. That is one of the main reasons which delaying the process of region building process in the region. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the collapse of communist ideology and left nothing alternative to the states. Central Asian nations were in a state of "ideological vacuum" which radical Islam, nationalism, and various sects have tried to fill it. All this ideological competition could turn into a threat of large-scale destabilization, which was clearly shown by the Osh events of 1990 and the civil war in Tajikistan (1992-1997) [10]. Ensuring the effective functioning of newly emerged state institutions required a "strong leadership", otherwise it would not function properly, and the country will be constantly in a fever. In Central Asia leaders could not create a new national identity within the state and, in parallel, a new regional identity on regional level.

The positive trends in relations between the Central Asian states observed after the change of power in Uzbekistan at the end of 2017 and later in Kazakhstan. Those process does not seem quite similar to the previous numerous "re- sets".

Probably, at this stage we can't talk about the beginning of regional integration in Central Asia, but the normalization of interstate relations, the settlement of fundamental contradictions, understanding and readiness for dialogue and cooperation between the countries of the region at this stage.

If a second attempt brings more luck than previous one, then the question of the economic prerequisites will be critical aspects for further development. If the construction of supra- regional identity (identity above the state) will be able to respond to tough questions like "What do we have in common in order to unite?", then the economic aspect should provide an answer to the question "why should we unite?".

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## **САЯСИ МӘДЕНИЕТТІҢ ДЕМОКРАТИЯЛЫҚ ЖАҢАРУЫ**

### *Аңдатпа*

Саяси мәдениеттің өлшемі тарих өтінде қалыптасқан мәдени-рухани байланыстармен қабыстыра зерттелді. Осы жолда «демократия» түсінігінің мәні ашылып, оның жан-жақтылығы қарастырылды. Соның негізінде «демократияның» мәні бүгінгі заманауи құндылықтармен байланысы зерделеніп, оның қоғамдағы қызметі сараланды. Бұл жолда биліктің көріну формасы да мәдениетпен өлшенетіндігі тарих өтіндегі саяси жүйелермен салыстырмалы зерделенді. Әлем халқының дүниетанымындағы саяси мәдениеттің атқарған қызметі демократиялық өлшемдермен байытылды. Бүгінгі тәуелсіздікке қол жеткізген елдің саяси мәдениеті демократиялық жолмен жаңғыруы үшін мемлекеттің ұлттық құндылықтар мен діни құндылықтарды өзіне жинап, былайғы әлемдік дамумен