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Central Asia Today:

Countries, Neighbors, and the Region

Sunatullo Jonboboev/
Mirzokhid Rakhimov/
Reimund Seidelmann (eds.)



Cuvillier Verlag Göttingen
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RUSSIA AND CENTRAL ASIA

SERGEY YUN

0 ABSTRACT

This contribution describes the relations together with its historical ambivalences between Russia and Central Asia in its political and economic dimension. It refers to the discussions of the role of Russia in the Tsarist and Soviet period and highlights the challenges of Central Asia in the Russian view – such as the drug trade, religious fundamentalism, and related terrorism. Further, it details the economic aspect in the “mosaic” of bilateral relations with Central Asian states from energy trade/transport to migrant workers. It covers the different quality of relations for example the close cooperation with Kazakhstan to the complex challenges in the relations with Turkmenistan and discusses the Russian role in regional and transregional organisations in and beyond Central Asia.

1 MOTIVES OF RUSSIAN POLICY IN CENTRAL ASIA AT THE INTERSECTION OF HISTORY, IDEOLOGY, AND INTERESTS

For the Russian social and political discourse, “Central Asia” is predominantly a term denoting an autonomous region comprising five contemporary states: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The territories, where these sovereign countries lie, were incorporated or brought under Moscow's military and political control as early as at the times of the Russian Empire. In the 1730's the Kazakh nomad tribes began to accept Russian sovereignty, their prime motivation being the search for security against the forays of the Jungar Khanate. The incorporation of the Kazakh tribes into Russia continued as long as up to the 1860's. At its latest stage, it was driven by the pressure from the Southern Khiva and Kokand Khanates and resulted in the establishment of the Russian jurisdiction over the Northern Kyrgyz tribes. As to the Kokand and Khiva Khanates as well as the Bukhara Emirate, which occupied the Southern part of Central Asia and were ruled by the chiefs of the Uzbek tribes, these states were forcefully transformed into Russian protectorates in the late 1860's. Later the Kokand Khanate was abolished and its territory became a separate province within the Russian Empire. The last territories conquered by Russia were those of the Turkmen tribes in the first half of the 1880's and part of the Pamir territory at the border of Afghanistan in the early 1890's, which is now in Tajikistan.

Nowadays various aspects of the Tsarist and Soviet periods of the Central Asian history are a subject of controversies in the academic community. It is commonly known that the Soviet historical mythology put emphasis on the assertions that Central Asian territories joined Moscow voluntarily and made substantial progress in their social and economic development. On

the contrary, of crucial importance for the historians of Central Asian countries are the theses about the colonial essence of Russian governance in Central Asia and all the negative consequences, which are commonly associated with colonialism. But the truth is somewhere in-between. It is in this balanced and equidistant way that the problem of the "Tsarist period" is addressed in the collective volume "Central Asia within the Russian Empire" published in Moscow under the editorship of Sergey Abashin, Dmitriy Arapov and Nailia Bekmakhanova in 2008. There, of special interest is the idea that the political and ideological motives connected with Russia's consciousness of itself as of a "world power" were the determining factors of Russian Empire's expansion in Central Asia. As to the economic interests and policies – they were of secondary importance. Thus, the expenditures incurred for the state with the aim of controlling the region were more often than not greater than the revenues for the budget received while the objective of transforming the region onto the Imperial Center's economic appendix or its cotton base became an element of the conscious state policy not earlier than on the eve of the World War I¹.

Anyway, such a long period of coexistence within the single state has accounted for the development of powerful common elements in the everyday lives of the countries of Central Asia and Russia, which became independent states at the end of 1991. These commonalities ranged from the existence of a wide stratum of ethnic Russians and the wide usage of the Russian language by the local populations of Central Asia to joint transport and energy arteries. Along with real bonds stereotypes of thinking and mutual perception were inherited which continue to influence the current politics. One of the fundamental stereotypes of Russian leadership's strategic thinking is viewing Central Asia as part of the "near abroad", the area of states that had once been parts of the Soviet Union and joined in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) after its collapse. The "near abroad" includes the East European part (the Western part of the post-Soviet space) – the Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia. The Russian authorities still regard the countries of the "near abroad" as the area of their special interests. The special status, which the CIS countries, including Central Asia states, have in Russian policies is mainly explained by the geopolitical considerations. It is not without a reason that the Russian elite sees Russia as a great power and one of the poles of the sought-after multi-polar world where decisions – no longer dictated by the Western countries – would be made on the basis of compromise and consensus among all the poles of influence (the principle of group leadership). Accordingly, Russia's political leadership and responsibility in the CIS space should both demonstrate its international great-power capabilities and mobilize the followers of Russian approaches to international problems. According to a renowned Russian expert Alexey Malashenko,

¹ Abashin Sergey/ Arapov Dmitriy/ Bekmakhanova Nailia (ed.): *Tsentralnaia Azia v sostave Rossiyskoy imperii* [Central Asia within the Russian Empire], *Novoie literaturnoe obozrenie* Moscow 2008, pp. 132-135, 149-151.

"The entire post-Soviet space is itself secondary. Russian activism in this space is determined by the ways it can be incorporated into the relations between Russia and Europe, Russia and China, Russia and the Muslim world (...) Psychologically it is the single and the last part of the Ecumene where the Kremlin can (...) feel itself a political leader"².

Taking into consideration the beginning of the real economic integration of the Eurasian Economic Community's (EurAsEC) core countries, Russia, Belarus. and Kazakhstan, the current version of Russia's traditional strategy is represented by the "Eurasian Union" concept. The programmatic article of Russian President Vladimir Putin published by the *Izvestia* newspaper on October 3, 2011, interprets the "Eurasian Union" as a "powerful supranational association capable of becoming one of the poles in the modern world and serving as an efficient bridge between Europe and the dynamic Asia-Pacific region"³. It was on September 14, 1995, that President Yeltsin's Decree confirmed a unique document, "Russia's Strategic Course in Relations with the CIS Member States", which continues to be in force. There Russian interests in the CIS space were defined as "our major vital interests in the areas of economy, defense, security, protection of the rights of Russian citizens" and one of the main objectives was formulated as "the consolidation of Russia as the leading force in the development of a new system of inter-state political and economic relations in the territory of the post-Soviet space"⁴. At the same time this document does not provide any clear differentiation of Russian interests, aims and concrete objectives in the separate regions of the CIS. No such differentiation is to be found in a more general and lengthy official paper, "The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation", whose latest version was adopted on February 12, 2013. However, in practice for every CIS region Russia has its own specific set of concrete interests and policy objectives which go beyond the limits of geopolitical schemes, thus refusing Aleksey Malashenko's thesis of the secondary importance of the post-Soviet space.

As to Central Asia, of crucial significance is the fact that the Russian leadership perceives this region as "a natural extension of Russia's security zone"⁵. Firstly, many military objects, which are still in use and important for Russian defense capabilities, remained after the bre-

² Malashenko, Alexey: *Tsentrlnaia Azia: na shto raschityvaet Rossiya?* [Central Asia: What Does Russia Rely On?], Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Moscow 2012, p. 7.

³ Putin, Vladimir: A new integration project for Eurasia: The future in the making (*"Izvestia"*, 3 October 2011), <http://www.russianmission.eu/en/news/article-prime-minister-vladimir-putin-new-integration-project-eurasia-future-making-izvestia-3->.

⁴ *Strategicheskii kurs Rossii s gosudarstvami – uchastnikami Sodruzhestva Nezavisimyykh Gosudarstv* (Москва, 15 сентября 1995 г.) [Russia's Strategic Course in Relations with the CIS Member States (Moscow, September 15, 1995)], <http://mid.ru/bdomp/ns-osndoc.nsf/e2f289bea62097f9c325787a0034c255/4e3d23b880479224c325707a00310fad!OpenDocument>.

⁵ This formulation was used in July 2013 by a high-level Russian diplomat at a meeting in Moscow with young scholars from Russia and Central Asian countries.

kup of the USSR in the territories of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Among them are even the elements of the Russian strategic nuclear forces missile attack prevention system. Near the Balkhash Lake in Kazakhstan there are three radiolocation stations responsible for the detection of ballistic missiles and space objects in Asia. A communication center of the Russian Navy located in Kyrgyzstan's Chui Province provides radio communication with ships and submarines, radio-technical intelligence, and radio-electronic surveillance. At the Sanglok Mountain in Tajikistan the optical-electronic center "Nurek" of the space control system is located which is capable of controlling space objects above Eurasia, North and Central Africa, and the waters of the Indian, Pacific and Atlantic Oceans⁶. A priority for Moscow is to retain the long-term right to use these objects on acceptable administrative, legal, and financial conditions.

Secondly, Central Asia is regarded as a zone from or through which grave transnational security threats are penetrating into Russia. Of special concern is drug-trafficking spurred by the expansion of deliveries of drugs from Afghanistan into Russia. To cope with it, even a new agency was established, the Federal Drug Control Service. According to its data for the first 9 months of 2013, "(...) 5.6 % of Russian population (about 8 million people) take drugs regularly or occasionally (...)". The transparency of the Russian border for drug trafficking is officially acknowledged: "(...) For instance, less than 4 % of all drug seizures in Russia occur at the Russian –Kazakh border while the average world indicators range from 40 % to 70 % (...) "⁷.

The radical political Islamism and the terrorist threat it induces is another serious security threat for Russia, where about 20 million Muslims live. The reasons for its proliferation are primarily internal and enrooted in the situation in the North Caucasus, but a certain ideological, organizational, and financial role of external forces – especially of Afghanistan under the Taliban regime – cannot be denied. Central Asian political regimes also confront the radical Islamic opposition. There is information about the activities of the same radical Islamist organizations both in Russia and in Central Asian countries. Russia is undoubtedly interested in maintaining the predominantly "moderate" nature of Islam in the region.

Russian authorities also point out that Russian activism in the region is stimulated by the fact that, despite significant emigration, more than 5 million Russian-speakers still live in Central Asia. Taking into account the demographic crisis in Russia, Moscow is interested in the on-

⁶ Paramonov, Vladimir / Stolpovski, Oleg: Russia and Central Asia: Bilateral Cooperation in the Defence Sector, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom Shrivenham 2008, pp. 2-11, <http://www.da.mod.uk/colleges/arag/document-listings/ca/08%2815%29VP%English.pdf>.

⁷ Informatsionno-analiticheskaya spravka o narkosituatsii v Rossiyskoy Federatsii i rezultatakh borby s nezakonnym oborotom narkotikov za 9 mesiatsev 2013 goda [Report on the drug situation in the Russian Federation and the results of the fight against drug trafficking for 9 months of 2013], <http://www.fskn.gov.ru/pages/main/prevent/3939/4052/index.shtml>.

going resettlement of Russian-speakers to Russia, but this should be a controlled process and not an avalanche resulting from the social and political destabilization of Central Asia. On the whole, to combat transnational threats in Central Asia Moscow sets such policy objectives in the region as the preservation of the social and political stability of secular regimes, the consolidation of the potential of local security agencies, the expansion of the presence of the Russian military, border guards and special services, and the promotion of the economic development of Central Asian countries. As Moscow was not ready for pursuing active policy in Afghanistan regarding this country as the zone of NATO forces' responsibility, cooperation with Central Asian states remains one of the few means allowing Russia to contain the threats of Afghan origin before they reach its own territory. The Russian military base in Tajikistan, its largest foreign land base with the military personnel of around 6000, is considered "(...) Russia's vanguard at the southern borders of the CIS (...)" with the "(...) potential of containment and stabilization (...)"⁸.

As it has traditionally been in the history of relations, Russian economic interests in Central Asian countries are of secondary importance. With the exception of Kazakhstan, the markets of Central Asian countries are not among priority destinations for Russian exports. In 2012 Uzbekistan accounted for just 0,4 % of Russian trade turnover, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan for 0,2 % each, Tajikistan for 0,1 %. Initially Moscow's interests focused on two specific tasks: to provide the access of Russian companies to the extraction of resources in Central Asia and to retain Russia's monopoly on the transit of Central Asian resources to the European market. In this context the task of special importance is still to prevent the construction of the Trans-Caspian pipeline. Later some Russian companies from other sectors of industry launched investment projects in ferrous and non-ferrous metallurgy, power industry, mobile connection and telecommunications, food industry, etc. but the extraction of energy resources continues to prevail⁹.

In the 2000's labor migration from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan stimulated by the economic growth and demographic crisis in Russia and became an important element of these countries' relations with Moscow. It is estimated that migrants from Central Asia account for more than a half of foreign citizens working in Russia. However, exact data are missing; under the conditions of the visa-free regime shared by Russia and all the Central

⁸ See the interview with Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia Grigoriy Karasin: *Eto vlozhenie v budushchee etikh stran i v nashi strategicheskie interesy* [This is an investment in the future of these countries and in our strategic interests]. In: *Kommersant*, September 10, 2013, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2274864>.

⁹ Sinitsyna, Irina: *Economicheskoe vzaimodeistvie Rossii i stran Tsentralnoy Azii: tendentsii i perspektivy* [Economic cooperation between Russia and Central Asia: Trends and Prospects], The University of Central Asia Bishkek 2012, pp. 33-40, <http://www.ucecentralasia.org/downloads/UCA-IPPA-WP5-RussiaInfluence-Rus.pdf>.

Asian countries except Turkmenistan, an enormous illegal market of labor migration has developed. According to the estimates of the Russian Federal Migration Service of March 2013, 5 million migrants worked in Russia, with at least 3 million among them having no work permits. Remittances from migrants have become an important factor of social, economic and political situation in Central Asian countries, accounting for up to 50 % of Tajikistan's GDP, 30 % of Kyrgyzstan's GDP, and from 15 to 20 % of Uzbekistan's GDP¹⁰.

A number of factors determine a special place reserved for Kazakhstan in Russia's Central Asian policy. First and foremost is the fact that Kazakhstan is the sole Central Asian country sharing a border with Russia. The common border of more than 7500 kilometers was a mere administrative line in Soviet time and is nowadays weakly controlled and easily penetrable for criminal activities. Equipping its whole perimeter according to the up-to-date requirements would demand enormous expenditures from Russia. The integration within the EurAsEC allows Moscow to concentrate on a less expensive consolidation of the Community's outer perimeter part of which was a heavily fortified Soviet border.

Secondly, an important role in the relations belongs to economy, including the cooperation between the 12 Russian and 7 Kazakh border regions. The economic interactions between Russia and Kazakhstan are much more intensive than between Russia and the rest of Central Asia. In 2012 Kazakhstan's share of Russian trade turnover was 2,7 %, which is three times higher than the cumulative share of the other four Central Asian countries. In Central Asia, Kazakhstan is the absolute leader in attracting Russian investment and investing into Russian economy. Since Soviet times Kazakhstan's Northern regions are economically more interconnected with the Southern parts of the Russian Urals and West Siberia than with the rest of Kazakhstan. In the fabric of bilateral relations a special place belongs to the Baikonur Cosmodrome which Russia rents from Kazakhstan. Baikonur was the USSR's principal cosmodrome and retains this status for Russia both for peaceful and military purposes, although Russia has already started the construction of a new "Vostochnyi" cosmodrome. Located in Russia's own territory, in the Amur Region, it would be a full-fledged substitute for Baikonur.

Thirdly, among Central Asian countries it was the sovereign Kazakhstan, which inherited the highest share of Russian-speaking population. According to the data of the Soviet census of 1989, the share of Russians in Kazakhstan was 37,8 % and almost equalled that of the Kazakhs (39,7 %). Since then many Russians emigrated from the country, but their numbers continue to be significant (23,7 % or about 3,8 million) while the population of Kazakhstan's North-Eastern regions bordering on Russia is still predominantly Russian-speaking. The totality of geographic, economic, humanitarian, military, and other factors provides for a strong

¹⁰ The data was provided in July 2013 by Elena Kuzmina from Moscow Institute of Economy of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

loyalty of Astana to Moscow and for a mutual multi-faceted interest in a stable and constructive relationship.

When viewed from abroad, the motives of Russian policy are sometimes interpreted simplistically. The emphasis is often put on the geopolitical aspect, other interests are obfuscated, and the Russian policy is represented as an inflexible course of frontal pressure aimed at retaining its dominance. In reality the complex of the above-mentioned Russian interests in Central Asia, a complicated internal context in Russia as well as in the regional countries and the uneasy international context both within and around the region present the Russian leadership with a series of difficult dilemmas. The aspiration for the maintenance of leading positions in Central Asia inevitably collides with the sovereign status of Central Asian countries and their search for diversified external connections as well as with the growing interest in Central Asia demonstrated by other extra-regional players. The existence of other, more important priorities in the Western part of the post-Soviet space and in the Caucasus raises the problem of resources available for Russia's Central Asian policy. The multilateral initiatives in Central Asia are restrained by controversies dividing the regional countries. Open borders and the visa-free regime continue to tie Central Asian countries to Russia but "benefit" the proliferation of transnational security threats. The protection of Russian-speakers' rights is a sensitive problem in Russian internal policies, but it is inextricably linked with the fears that pedalling this issue might endanger other Russian interests in Central Asia. These elements combine to produce a complicated milieu where the bilateral and multilateral components of Russia's Central Asian policy took shape and developed.

2 RUSSIA AND CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES AS A MOSAIC OF BILATERAL RELATIONS

Central Asian countries pursue a multivector policy and try to maneuver among various international actors. They all do so, in order to preserve maximum freedom of operation, but the impact of such policy upon their relations with Russia varies. As a result the system of bilateral relations between Russia and Central Asian countries represents a kind of mosaic. If the degree of Russian presence in the country and the degree of country's orientation towards Russia are taken as the main criteria, then Kazakhstan can be considered the closest to Russia. It is followed by Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan that are very different, but also loyal to Russia. Uzbekistan comes next, as it is an ally of Russia, but zealously pursues the course towards limiting its dependence on Russia. The last is Turkmenistan, whose leadership has gradually reduced the ties with Russia to the minimum. It is noteworthy that this whole trend generally correlates with the history of both voluntary and forced inclusion of Central Asian territory into Russia in the 18th and 19th centuries.

For reasons indicated in the previous section Kazakhstan from the very beginning holds a special place in the Central Asian policy of Russia, and the current nature of bilateral relations makes it possible to consider Astana as the closest ally of Moscow in the region. Russia officially labels the ties with Astana 'trust-based' and falling within the framework of 'strategic partnership and allied relations'. Relations between Russia and Kazakhstan are significant in volume, diverse and supported by intensive contacts at all levels, but they are not free from problems and disagreements. From the legal standpoint, bilateral relations rely on the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance of May 25, 1992, that parties plan to replace with a new framework document taking into account progress in relations made over the last twenty years. It was only in 2005 that the parties succeeded in settling the border issue by the way of mutual concessions when they signed a treaty on delimitation of land border. Demarcation of border is to be completed soon. In 1998 Russia and Kazakhstan were the first among Caspian Sea states to agree upon the common approach to the legal status of the Caspian Sea. According to this approach, the Northern part of the seabed should be divided into national sectors, while the body of water should remain in common use. Foreign policy cooperation is characterized by proximity of the key positions and close interaction of the two countries, but that does not mean that Astana unconditionally supports any actions undertaken by Moscow. For instance, Kazakhstan, just as another close post-Soviet ally of Moscow – Belarus –, did not follow suit in acknowledging independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The ties in the field of military security and defense have been constantly strengthened. They include, inter alia, the supply of Russian military equipment at preferential prices, free-of-charge training of Kazakh military personnel in Russia, and the use of test sites in the border regions of Kazakhstan by the Russian army. In January 2013 the parties signed an agreement to create a united regional air defense system. In January 2014 the ministries of defense of the two countries agreed on the joint use of the radiolocation stations near the Balkhash lake and military sites in the border areas of Russia and Kazakhstan. President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev is well-known as a long-term proponent of multilateral ties and integration in the Eurasian space. Kazakhstan is an active participant of pro-Russian Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). In the 2000's Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus managed to agree upon the launch of real integration within the Customs Union to be followed by integration within the Common Economic Area and Eurasian Economic Union. But at the same time the Kazakh elite is not ready to concede sovereignty in other areas and resists the attempts of Moscow to impose loose interpretation of the future integrated union that would cover security, internal affairs and defense. The fuel and energy sector remains the main area of economic cooperation. Kazakhstan transports most of its oil export through Russia using the Makhachkala-Tikhoretsk-Novorossiysk pipeline (no less than 2,5 million tons), the Atyrau-Samara pipeline (no less than 15 million tons) and the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC), which was put into operation in 2001 (36 million tons in 2010, 29,9 million tons of Kazakh oil among them). Northern export of Kazakh oil shipped to Europe through Russia is characterized by natural geographic advantages and

the leadership of Kazakhstan strives to increase the volume of oil pumped and, for instance, insists on driving CPC up to its full capacity (67 million tons). In 2010 the parties managed to agree upon conditions of CPC's expansion, including tariff on oil transit through Russia. In its turn, Russia supplies oil to oil processing plants in the North of Kazakhstan and transit of Russian oil to China through Kazakhstan is planned for 2014. Kazakhstan also plans to increase production and export of natural gas, but the Russian position regarding gas transit has always been very negative as Russia does not want Gazprom to face additional competition in Europe. Instead of transit, Kazakhstan supplies gas to the Russian gas processing plant in Orenburg but the price of gas is a controversial issue. In addition to oil and gas, the two countries supply each other with electric energy and coal, cooperate in uranium extraction in Kazakhstan and develop other types of cross-border economic ties. Overall, the near-border cooperation between the two countries produces 40 % of their mutual trade turnover. Starting from 2003 Russia-Kazakhstan Interregional Cooperation Forum holds its regular meetings under the auspices of the two countries' presidents. The lion's share of Russian carrier rockets is still launched from the Baikonur space launch facility. In 2004 Russia and Kazakhstan signed an agreement to extend the lease of the Baikonur complex until 2050. Baikonur is understood both as a cosmodrome infrastructure and a town of Baikonur located nearby. The parties also agreed to create and jointly use the space missile complex Baiterek, which would allow Kazakhstan to enter the international market of commercial space services. Kazakhstan was to finance the project and Russia was to be in charge of research, engineering, and production aspects of the complex construction. However, construction was never launched. Astana explains this by a change of Russian priorities, as Moscow places its stake on the construction of a new space launch facility in the Russian territory, while Moscow justifies it by the drastic rise of the project budget. Russian decision to build a new cosmodrome can be partly explained by 'fatigue', caused by attempts of Kazakhstan to change the terms of Baikonur complex operation for its own benefit. In the meantime, Russian authorities confirm their intention to use Baikonur until the end of its lease. In accordance with the roadmap signed in December 2013, Baiterek complex is to be established and taken out of lease, i.e. transferred to Kazakhstan, no later than in January 2015¹¹. The current level of relations between Russia and Kazakhstan, the compromises on complex issues, and the establishment of the Customs Union – all this became possible, among other things, due to the change in the Russian policy after Vladimir Putin came to power. One should primarily mention the trend towards shifting from 'big brother' policy to more equal and balanced relations with Kazakhstan, where mutual consideration of interests and parity are meant to prevail. Russian diplomacy has attempted a similar maneuver with regards to another major

¹¹ Dorozhnaia karta po sovmestnomu ispolzovaniu kompleksa "Baikonur" na 2014-2016 gody [Roadmap for sharing "Baikonur" complex in 2014-2016], http://gorodraketa.ru/img_news/Road_Map_2014-2016.png.

Central Asian state – Uzbekistan, whose relations with Russia were limited and went into a crisis since the middle of 1990's.

Moscow and Tashkent signed a framework agreement on cooperation in May 1992. Unlike the 1992 agreement between Kazakhstan and Russia, this treaty did not envisage allied relations, but made a reference to the CIS Collective Security Treaty (CST), which was signed in Tashkent on May 15, 1992, and stipulated mutual assistance in case of aggression. Civil war in Tajikistan was a key military and political problem at the time. Immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union Russia and Uzbekistan pursued coordinated policies, but later their disagreements regarding the Tajik issue became one of the reasons for the curtailment of bilateral ties. Moscow supported the Kulyab clan that as a result of war seized power in the country to the detriment of the Khudzhand clan, which used to dominate in the leadership of Tajikistan during the Soviet times and was traditionally oriented towards Tashkent¹². The Uzbek political elite is characterized by sustainable perception of Uzbekistan as the most powerful state and leader of the Central Asian region. This predetermined their strategic course towards ensuring autonomy of the country in the key areas and preserving maximum freedom in decision-making, as well as a rather negative attitude to interstate integration projects and strong reaction to situations where Tashkent believes its interests to be ignored¹³. Energy independence achieved by mid-1990's, combat-capable armed forces, absence of a common border with Russia enabled Tashkent to have a tough reaction to actions of Moscow in the region and pursue the policy of limiting bilateral ties starting from mid-1990's. In 1999 Uzbekistan did not extend its membership in the CST but entered GUAM – the union of CIS countries with anti-Russian inclinations. In 1999-2000 Moscow attempted to bring back the equilibrium into Russian-Uzbek relations in the midst of an aggravated military and political situation in Central Asia. It was then that Tashkent and Moscow renewed their military and technical cooperation and rapprochement of foreign policy positions began to show. For instance, the joint statement of the two countries' presidents issued in May 2001 contained ideas that are very close to Russian foreign policy principles, such as the need to enhance efficiency of the United Nations "(...) in today's unipolar world (...)", support of the "(...) efforts of the international community to ensure inviolability and integrity of the ABM Treaty (...)", etc. The statement emphasizes that

"Russia believes that Uzbekistan plays a crucial role in Central Asia, especially in construction of a reliable regional security system. Uzbekistan, in its turn, acknowledges Russian

¹² Troitskiy, Evgeniy: *Tsentrlnaia Azia v mezhdunarodnykh otnosheniyakh (1992-2009 gg.)* [Central Asia in International Relations (1992-2009)], Lambert Academic Publishing Saarbrücken 2011, pp. 117-118.

¹³ *Interesy Rossii v Tsentralnoy Azii: sodержanie, perspektivy, ogranichiteli* [Russia's interests in Central Asia: the content, perspectives, and constraints], Russian International Affairs Council Moscow 2013, p. 12, http://russiancouncil.ru/common/upload/RIAC_Central_Asia.pdf.

strategic interests and regards Russia as a reliable guarantor of Central Asian states' development, as well as peace and stability in the region"¹⁴.

The Russian-Uzbek rapprochement took longer to progress due to the start of the U.S. military campaign in Afghanistan and the U.S.-Uzbek rapprochement in 2001. Gradual cooling of relations between Tashkent and Washington reached its peak in 2005 due to the Andijan events and enabled Russia to achieve certain successes in its relations with Uzbekistan. In 2005 Russia and Uzbekistan signed the Treaty on Allied Relations. The same year Tashkent withdrew from GUAM and in 2006 it joined Eurasian Economic Community and Collective Security Treaty Organization. Uzbekistan ranked first among Central Asian countries in terms of volume of Russian arms acquisition¹⁵. However the new stage of rapprochement between Moscow and Tashkent soon demonstrated its limits that can be explained by the fundamental contradiction between the course pursued by Moscow to ensure its leading position in the region and the desire of Tashkent to preserve foreign policy autonomy and maintain greater balance in relations with powers outside the region. Uzbek membership in the EurAsEC was rather formal and was withdrawn in 2008. As for the CSTO, Tashkent pursued the policy of selective cooperation, did not support the plan to develop multilateral operational potential and left the organization in 2012. This decline in relations did not, however, led to the roll-back to the 1990's. Instead, the two countries reached a mutually acceptable level of relations founded on allied commitments and absolute predominance of bilateral interaction, while preserving different approaches to security in the region. No doubt, risks associated with NATO troops withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014 push the countries towards cooperation. In the context of improved political climate, bilateral economic and trade relations also received a boost. Agreements in the oil and gas sector were of special importance – i.e. on the large-scale long-term procurement of Uzbek gas by Gazprom (8,7 billion cubic meters in 2012) and on investment of the Russian Lukoil company in the gas production in Uzbekistan. At the same time Tashkent refused to transfer control over Uzbek gas transportation system to Gazprom. Russia is the main trade partner of Uzbekistan, the main market for some Uzbek industries (automotive industry, fruit and vegetables), and the key destination for Uzbek migrant workers. However this does not constitute insurance even for projects implemented by large Russian businesses in Uzbekistan. In this connection one should mention the cases of de facto expropriation of assets of the largest Russian milk and dairy producer Wimm Bill Dann in 2010 and the property of the Russian mobile MTS operator in 2012.

¹⁴ Sovmestnoie zaiavlenie Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii i Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan [Joint Statement by President of the Russian Federation and the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan], <http://2002.kremlin.ru/pressa/2001050404.html>.

¹⁵ Kozyulin, Vadim: Central Asian Military Potential: Prospective Cooperation with Russia. In: Security Index, vol. 13, # 1, 2008, pp. 50-51.

Relations between Russia and Turkmenistan are also characterized by a very complex dynamic. It is well-known that gas export is the key for the Turkmen economy and state. Ashkhabad inherited only the Northern route of gas export from the USSR, namely via pipeline through Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Russia. Russian gas monopolist Gazprom carried out transit of Turkmen gas to financially reliable European markets until November 1993 and then allowed to direct Turkmen gas only to the less reliable CIS markets, while maintaining a strict position regarding the transit price. As a result, in 1997 export of Turkmen gas was interrupted for a long time. Problems in relations with Gazprom made it the main foreign policy priority for Ashkhabad to overcome Russian monopoly and diversify gas exports. Political leadership of Turkmenistan also gives high priority to maximum limitation of any external influence on domestic dynamic. The government placed restrictions upon involvement of foreign capital in oil and gas industry, as well as cross-border flows of persons, goods, and information. In the course of regime consolidation in the 1990's Ashkhabad purposefully curtailed cooperation with Moscow in a number of areas, except for gas export. It was indicative that in 1999 Turkmenistan terminated the indefinite treaty on joint protection of the Turkmen border; Russian border officers were withdrawn then. Ashkhabad announced its neutrality in foreign policy and distanced itself from CIS integration, pursuing instead bilateral relations with neighbors as potential destinations of Turkmen gas exports. In the 1990's Turkmenistan managed to put into operation only a small gas pipeline to Iran. For the new Russian leadership personified by Vladimir Putin, the key issue was that of conditions, under which Russia could remain the key – if not the sole – route for Turkmen gas exports. In 2003 Moscow managed to sign a long-term agreement with Turkmenistan on purchase of Turkmen gas until 2028. Under this agreement, the volume of gas export to Russia (with a purpose of re-export) was to rise from 5-6 billion cubic meters in 2004 to 70-80 billion. starting from 2009¹⁶. The price of gas was not specified, but it went up every year and it was planned to tie it to average European figures starting from 2009. However Moscow's concessions regarding volume and price did not prevent Ashkhabad from agreeing upon construction of another export route to Iran and a large gas pipeline to China (up to 30 billion cubic meter a year). Both gas pipelines were put into operation in late 2009-early 2010. Combined with reduced demand for natural gas in Europe, this prompted Gazprom to reconsider its obligations. For instance, in 2012 Russia imported only 10,9 billion cubic meter of gas from Turkmenistan, thus becoming only one of many buyers for Ashkhabad and losing its strategic importance¹⁷. On the other hand, liberation from the 'shackles' of strategic gas partnership enabled Russian authorities to feel greater freedom, when it comes to protection of rights of the Russian-speaking population. It is well-known that all Central Asian countries pursue the policy of ethnic natio-

¹⁶ Soglashenie mezhdru Rossiyskoy Federatsiey i Turkmenistanom o sotrudnichestve v gazovoy otrasli [Agreement between the Russian Federation and Turkmenistan on cooperation in the gas industry], http://mid.ru/BDOMP/spd_md.nsf/0/C1AE6B73F727431644257C6F0036C8D3.

¹⁷ Zakupki gaza [Gas purchases], <http://www.gazprom.ru/about/production/central-asia/>.

nalism ensuring domination of the title nation in all areas to the detriment of interests and rights of the Russian-speaking population of Central Asia. However Russian authorities usually prefer not to use available leverage, fearing that this might damage other interests in the region. This is in sharp contrast to the policy of Moscow with regards to Russian-speaking population of Latvia and Estonia. In the meantime, Ashkhabad is known for its very tough policy restricting rights of Russian speakers. In 2003 in exchange for the framework gas agreement Moscow agreed to sign a protocol terminating bilateral Russian-Turkmen agreement on dual citizenship. Turkmen authorities did not wait for the protocol to enter into force and issued a decree demanding persons with dual citizenship (around 100.000 persons at that time) to make their choice within two months. Implementation of that decree was accompanied by large-scale violation of Russian speakers' rights, including confiscation of their apartments. De facto displacement of Russian speakers was met with very strong feelings in Russia, but reaction of Russian authorities was reserved. Moscow confined itself to postponing the protocol ratification, expressing its dissent over the possibility of its retroactive application. The fate of persons with dual citizenships residing in Turkmenistan drew Russian attention again in 2013, when Turkmen authorities announced that they would not issue new models of foreign passports to such persons. This time Russian leadership agreed to put greater pressure on Ashkhabad. President Putin was personally involved in negotiations and the parties managed to reach the agreement that Russia would ratify the 2003 protocol in exchange for Turkmenistan acknowledging the status of persons having dual citizenship in case of all persons, who had acquired such citizenship before the protocol was signed. However this compromise does not exclude the possibility of a new aggravation, as far as the constitution of Turkmenistan forbids dual citizenship.

Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are small and poor Central Asian countries characterized by very weak public institutions, chronic political instability, and high permeability for cross-border security threats. They are more susceptible to Russian assistance programs, but this does not guarantee complete loyalty of these countries with regards to Moscow in the context of active involvement of the powers from outside the region. Moscow has signed bilateral treaties on allied relations with both states – with Kyrgyzstan in 1992 and with Tajikistan in 1993. Border control forces were transferred under the Moscow command and started to ensure security of the state borders. The Soviet 201st motorized rifle division stationed in Tajikistan also remained under Russian control. The Kulyab clan consolidated power in Tajikistan with support of the Russian military, which created a favorable situation for preservation of the leading position of Moscow in the country. In 1999 Moscow and Dushanbe signed the Treaty on Allied Interaction between Russian Federation and Republic of Tajikistan Oriented to the 21st Century and agreement that mentioned the stationing of Russian military in Tajikistan as a Russian military base. In the 2000's the resource base of the Russian foreign policy was enhanced and the range of policy instruments used in bilateral relations with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan was constantly expanded. The volume of military, technical, and economic assis-

tance went up, loans were given and written off, oil products were supplied at preferential prices, Russian public and private companies invested in Tajik and Kyrgyz economies, primarily in their hydropower sector. In the case of Tajikistan this enabled Moscow to obtain preferential terms for the Russia military base in 2004 and register the ownership of the optical-electronic center "Nurek". Russia and Kyrgyzstan also reached an agreement to establish the Russian military airbase in Kant in 2002. At the same time this did not prevent the authorities of the two countries to insist on transferring control over the state borders to the local border forces. On the threshold of NATO troops withdrawal from Afghanistan Moscow continues its course towards increasing the volume of assistance to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, in order to make them more reliable links in its 'security chain'. For instance, it is planned to implement two large-scale programs of military and technical assistance aimed at modernizing armed forces of the two countries – 1,1 billion \$ to Kyrgyzstan and 200 million \$ to Tajikistan¹⁸. Moscow's relations with Bishkek and Dushanbe are not so smooth. Kyrgyz authorities did not always consistently fulfill their agreements with Moscow, as it was under President Bakiyev for instance. President Bakiyev pledged to close the U.S. military base in Manas in exchange for Russian willingness to invest 1,7 billion \$ in the country's hydropower and render economic assistance of more than 0,5 billion \$ but he never fulfilled this pledge. As to Tajik authorities, Moscow believes that they regularly make unacceptable economic demands in exchange for Russian military and political presence in the country. The de facto failure of Russia to implement the obligation to invest into construction of Rogun hydroelectric power plant in Tajikistan due to tough opposition of Tashkent became a serious 'trauma' for bilateral relations. However Moscow is generally successful in keeping Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in its sphere of predominant influence.

3 MULTILATERAL COOPERATION BETWEEN RUSSIA AND CENTRAL ASIA: FROM WORDS TO DEEDS

Initially, the multilateral track of Russia's policy in Central Asia was indistinguishable in Moscow's desire to involve all former Soviet republics in the CIS structures. The September 1993 Treaty establishing an Economic Union was signed by all the CIS countries except Ukraine. In order to implement the treaty, in April 1994 all CIS members approved an agreement on a free trade zone. But ultimately the Commonwealth-wide economic integration failed. Then in 1995 Moscow decided to accept and promote economic integration with a variable geometry. On January 06, 1995, Russia and Belarus signed a Customs Union agreement. Kazakhstan joined it in the same month, Kyrgyzstan did it in March 1996 and Tajikistan in February 1999. However, this new and narrower format to achieve full-fledged integration was not successful

¹⁸ Россия vooruzhit Kirgiziyu i Tadjikistan [Russia will arm Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan]. In: Kommersant, October 2, 2013, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2309780>.

either. Customs Union member states ignored the free trade regime, applied unilateral measures to restrict imports, arbitrarily changed the tariff rates, and did little to harmonize their legislation¹⁹. In 1998, Kyrgyzstan became a member of the WTO without coordination with other members of the Customs Union.

Turkmenistan was the only Central Asian state, which did not join the 1992 Collective Security Agreement which was considered a cornerstone of military security in the post-Soviet area. But notwithstanding the escalation of the civil war in Afghanistan, in the 1990's the CST remained a declaration of intent without the mechanisms for the development of joint military capabilities. In 1999 Uzbekistan as well as Georgia and Azerbaijan refused to extend their membership in the CST. The Batken events, which took place in July and August 1999 and saw a penetration of gunmen belonging to the radical Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in the territory of Kyrgyzstan, pushed the new Russian leadership first to strengthen its multilateral military cooperation with the Central Asian countries. The key step taken by the counties in May 2001 was the decision to create the Collective Rapid Deployment Forces of the Central Asian region (KSBR) consisting of the troops from Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. The KSBR became the third CST regional force along with Russia-Belorussia joint troops in Eastern Europe and Russia-Armenia coalition force in the Caucasus.

In 2002 the CST members adopted the charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Throughout the 2000's they expanded joint military planning, exercises, training, and technical cooperation in order to develop CSTO combat potential. In 2003 the Russian air-base in Kyrgyz Kant was announced to become part of the KSBR. In 2009 CSTO countries agreed to develop the Collective Rapid Reaction Forces (KSOR), which have about 20.000 soldiers and are designed to fulfill a wide range of tasks, ranging from conflict resolution to disaster management. Besides the security sector, the consolidation of the CSTO contributes to the promotion of Moscow's political objectives in the region. CSTO members provides support for Moscow's position on controversial international issues. Regarding the eventual deployment of third countries' military bases in Central Asia, which is a very sensitive issue for Moscow, in 2011 the CSTO countries agreed that it should have the consent of all members of the organization. The CSTO framework is also used to conduct two annual multilateral operations to combat cross-border threats, i.e. 'Channel' (drug trafficking) and 'Illegal' (illegal migration). However, their effectiveness is low due to the fact that they last only for one week in the year.

The inter-ethnic clash in Southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 was a serious challenge to Russia's foreign policy. Moscow's decision in favor of non-interference was difficult to take; it turned out to be well advised but it had a negative impact on the reputation of both Russia

¹⁹ Zevin, Leon (ed.): *Rossia i strany Tsentralnoy Azii: vzaimodeistvie na rubezhe tysyacheletiy* [Russia and Central Asian states: Interaction at the turn of the millennium], Nauka Moscow 2006, p. 182.

and the CSTO as guarantors of stability in Central Asia. In the wake of the crisis in Kyrgyzstan the CSTO took measures to improve crisis response organization. Of particular importance is the decision to let the CSTO deploy the KSOR to a member state if it appealed for help in a crisis situation in the broader sense and not only in case of an aggression²⁰. Another obvious challenge for the CSTO will be the situation in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of most NATO forces.

In 2000 Moscow was able to revive the economic integration within the CIS countries. On October 10 an agreement was signed to create the Eurasian Economic Community as an international organization on the basis of the Customs Union. The Decision to establish a full-fledged customs union consisting of the core EurAsEC member states (Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia) was adopted much later in 2006. The custom union was launched on January 01, 2010, when the common customs tariff was put into effect. Since January 01, 2012, the parties are building the Common Economic Space aimed at ensuring free movement of goods, services, capital, and labor force. It is further assumed that an effective implementation of the treaties on the Common Economic Space as well as an eventual agreement on common approaches in other economic areas (macroeconomic, fiscal and competition policy, common rules for energy and transport markets, etc.) should lead to the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union from January 01, 2015, onward.

Although the integration within the EurAsEC has been very intense for the last few years, complex issues are still to be tackled. First, both Kazakhstan and Belarus oppose excessive 'political dimension' for economic integration. For instance, they are reticent to the Russian proposal to establish a "Eurasian Interparliamentary Assembly" as a EurAsEC legislative body. Second, there are still important exceptions to the regimes of the Customs Union and the Eurasian Economic Community, on which the parties have yet to reach an agreement. For example, it concerns Russian oil and petroleum products that are imposed export duties which are an essential part of the Russian state budget. Third, it's not clear what will be the terms and price of economically weaker Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan's entry into the Custom Union. Bishkek applied for membership in 2013 while Tajik authorities stand aside and promise to revise the issue after Kyrgyzstan's entry as it will result in sharing a border with the Customs Union.

The CSTO and the Eurasian Economic Union are top priorities of Russia' multilateral diplomacy in Central Asia. All other initiatives are considered as complimentary and should not cause damage to the Russian-led organizations. Russia, along with China and all Central Asian countries except Turkmenistan, is part of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The SCO has become an example of pragmatic cooperation between Moscow and

²⁰ Troitskiy, Evgeniy: Turmoil in Kyrgyzstan: A Challenge to Russian Foreign Policy, *UI Occasional Papers* 2012, # 8, p. 32, <http://www.ui.se/eng/upl/files/79297.pdf>.

Beijing to curb the U.S. influence in Central Asia, as well as to encourage cooperation against cross-border threats. At the same time, taking into account the sharp strengthening of Beijing' role in the Central Asian countries' economy, Russia have torpedoed Chinese proposals to develop multilateral economic cooperation within the SCO.

It is worth noting that Moscow does not reject the idea of cooperation between the CSTO and the NATO in Central Asia. For instance, as far back as 2006 the NATO-Russia Council launched a training project for Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asia to build regional capacity against drug-trafficking. However, the United States followed by the European Union actually refuse to recognize the CSTO as a potential partner, citing its ineffectiveness. In fact it looks like an old zero-sum logic of geopolitics, that Moscow has been much criticized to follow, is driving Western capitals to the detriment of the common security interests in Central Asia.

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