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# Uzbekistan in the context of Regional Security and Global Change

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## Conference Proceedings

Editors: Prajakti Kalra and Eske van Gils

### Table of Contents

Preface.....	2
ROY ALLISON – Challenges and prospects for Central Asian regionalism .....	3
FABIENNE BOSSUYT – The European Union’s new strategy for Central Asia: A game changer or more of the same? .....	8
BAKHTIYOR ISLAMOV, DONIYOR ISLAMOV, and SITORA PRIMOVA - Uzbekistan’s support for the synergy of the TRACECA and "Belt and Road Initiative" Projects .....	13
ELENA KOROSTELEVA - Resilience: another buzzword or a new opportunity for more adaptable governance?.....	19
DONIYOR KURBANOV – Uzbekistan’s new regional policy: Implications for international cooperation in wider Eurasia .....	26
RUSTAM MAKHMUDOV - EU-Central Asia cooperation after the adoption of the new EU regional strategy ..	29
HAROUN MIR – An outlook for a sustainable peace in Afghanistan .....	33
IRINA PETROVA - The European Union’s evolving approach towards governance in Central Eurasia .....	39
VICTOR SHADURSKI – Belarusian-Uzbek relations: achievements and perspectives .....	43
MUNIRA SHAHIDI – Personal contacts in Cultural Diplomacy of Central Asia .....	48
JACOB L. SHAPIRO – Uzbekistan as a Eurasian power: Opportunities and challenges .....	53
HUASHENG ZHAO – Uzbekistan’s important role in the Afghan issue.....	59

## Preface

The conference entitled 'Uzbekistan in the context of Regional Security and Global Change' was organized by the University of World Economy and Diplomacy (UWED) on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> November 2019, under the aegis of the GCRF COMPASS project, led by the University of Kent. The conference addressed the importance of and directions for the continuing transformation of Uzbekistan. The position of Uzbekistan became a major factor in defining geopolitics of Central Asia after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Tashkent was effectively seen as a driver for stability and a strong supporter of national sovereignty and regional identity. Since 2016, national reforms have made the country more open, effective and competitive on the international level. Uzbekistan is increasingly playing an important role in creating the conditions for regional solutions especially with regards to Afghanistan.

This conference brought together academics from the GCRF COMPASS consortium including members from the Universities of Kent, Cambridge, ADA University, BSU, TNU and UWED, and wider afield - from other UK universities, the USA, Russia, Uzbekistan, China, Belgium and Afghanistan, as well as local and international policy-makers, to discuss some of the latest developments in the region. GCRF COMPASS's goals to further understanding and build capacity vis-à-vis Eurasia and the UK was the main focus of the conference. The broad range of established and young scholars who attended the conference serves as testimony to the importance of the latest research and discussions about the wider Eurasian region especially with regards to Afghanistan and Uzbekistan.

These Conference Proceedings include some of the papers that were presented at the conference which reflect on the aforementioned issues. The papers are solely the work of the authors, representing work in progress, and displayed in an alphabetical order.

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The [GCRF COMPASS project](#) (ES/P010849/1, 2017-21) is an ambitious UK government capacity-building funding initiative, aiming to connect UK research with regional global scholarship, to address the challenges of growth and sustainability in the developing countries. Notably, the COMPASS project led by the University of Kent, together with the University of Cambridge as its partner, seeks to establish '**the hubs of excellence**' at the top-level HEIs in Belarus, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, to enable them to become the centres of knowledge sharing and transfer for **research integration, impact governance, and sustainable communities**.

# ROY ALLISON<sup>1</sup> – Challenges and prospects for Central Asian regionalism

## Introduction

The early effort at regional self-organisation among the Central Asian states, to form distinct 'Central Asian' regional institutions, was done in the absence of a real Central Asian identity. The launch of Central Asian Union (CAU) in July 1994 occurred at a difficult period of transition and failed to develop in the second half of that decade. In 1998 the formation of a Central Asian Economic Community (CAEC) was announced. This seemed to be a new form of the Central Asian Union but it set up an awkward and ineffective superstructure formed of an Intergovernmental Council on the presidential level, councils of prime ministers, ministers of foreign affairs and defence and an executive committee. There were meetings but little policy development. Much of this was abolished when the CAEC was relaunched as the Central Asian Cooperation Organisation (CACO) in December 2001.

CACO was a modified cooperation framework between Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. It announced its commitment to the diversification of political dialogue, to the improvement of regional economic integration and to mutual understanding over the creation of a single economic space. It also paid some attention to relations with Afghanistan (Afghanistan was invited to join CACO as an observer in December 2002). However, a major problem remained. Behind much rhetoric, the CACO, like its predecessor regional structures, had a poor record of effective coordination during 2002-2004, whether in economic, trade or security affairs. Little was achieved over practical problems on the use of water, energy, transport and communications, or about moving gradually towards a common Central Asian market via a customs zone and a free trade zone. CACO's resolutions mainly were declarative, a kind of 'virtual regionalism'.

Russia then joined CACO at a summit in October 2004. This spelled the end of the Central Asian states efforts at self-organisation on a regional basis. It also emphasised the problem of reaching compromises in a regional format. President Karimov implied that within CACO Russia could act as a guarantor to solve conflict situations among Central Asian states. However, Russia was hardly ready to mediate in or able to reconcile intricate disputes between Central Asian states. Russian interest in joining CACO was driven instead by the strategic importance of the Central Asia region for Russia.

As it turned out CACO did not prove to be an effective vehicle for Russian strategic ambitions. It is not surprising, therefore, that Russia pressed for CACO to be merged into a more clearly Russia-dominated 'virtual integration' structure, the Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC), which had been launched in October 2000, and emerged from a failed previous attempt at a

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<sup>1</sup> Professor, Oxford School of Global and Area Studies, University of Oxford.  
Contact: roy.allison@sant.ox.ac.uk

Customs Union. This merger placed the exclusively Central Asian ethos of CACO into a broader framework. When CACO and the EARC were merged in October 2005 it was described as a move to rationalise institutions with broadly overlapping goals. But former Uzbek President Karimov was probably correct when he talked scathingly about the absence of real cooperation in CACO between Central Asian presidents.

### **New regional integration initiatives**

By 2005 some of the overt tensions between the larger Central Asian states had subsided or been deflected. They had common worries: the implications of coloured revolutions, the need to resist politically inspired Islamic groups as well other transnational security threats. In April 2007 former Kazakh President Nazarbayev proposed that the Central Asian countries should develop as a 'single space', to create an area of economic prosperity as a barrier against international terrorism, religious extremism, drug trafficking and illegal migration. This shifted the emphasis to counteracting transnational challenges.

Through the 2000s and beyond, the quality of the Kazakh-Uzbek relationship was a key factor for any chance of resurrecting the original impulse of the mid-1990s for regional coordination between the Central Asian states, beyond a weak Kazakh-Kyrgyz alignment. Turkmenistan continued to reject regional approaches and Tajikistan's involvement was mostly nominal, because it lacked finances for joint projects and remained heavily dependent on Russia in military-political relations. However, as leaders of new states seeking to reinforce their sovereignty, the relationship of presidents Nazarbayev and Karimov was not close. Nazarbayev's first visit to neighbouring Uzbekistan was only in March 2006.

When the CACO was merged into the EAEC in 2005 Karimov suggested that Uzbekistan could join the EAEC, which happened in January 2006. This was not an easy step because the EAEC had been quite strongly associated with Nazarbayev's effort to assert Kazakhstan's role in Central Asia. Since the EAEC was founded Nazarbayev viewed it as an opportunity to advance his longstanding ideas for some kind of loose Eurasian integration involving Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (as well as Russia and Belarus). It was easy to interpret this as an effort opposed to Uzbekistan's regional influence.

When Uzbekistan joined the EAEC the latter became more Central Asian in composition. But it was not a Central Asian structure as such. Russian weight in the EAEC was obvious (Russia had 40% of the voting rights; Belarus, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan had 15% each; and Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan had 7.5% each). The EAEC made no breakthroughs in economic cooperation or trade – the fields which chiefly define its formal profile. So its purpose may have been more about mutual political support.

However, political and security coordination with Russia could anyway be done better through the other large Russia-dominated regional structure, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, which had a largely similar membership to the EAEC. EAEC and CSTO representatives at times simply changed chairs when leaders who participated in both bodies

met in the same venue. In this sense it seemed logical to merge these two structures, and try to develop economic goals in a separate structure. Indeed the EAEC did not last, Uzbekistan withdrew from it in 2008 and a plan to set up a separate customs union between Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia was reportedly agreed already in July 2007. This formed the background to the Customs Union and later the Eurasian Economic Union.

### Explaining past failures of Central Asian regional self-organisation

How are we to explain this failure to develop regional institutions among just the Central Asian states? First, *state capacity* – the administrative, economic and other capacities of the states - has been a serious problem for the implementation of well-meant projects on a regional scale. This capacity varies greatly between the Central Asian countries.

Second, we should take account of *ideational* factors. The effort by Central Asian states to forge their national identities and to give substance to their sovereignty had a centripetal effect, pulling apart rather than together. It discouraged the search for region-wide common features and interests and made it more difficult for national leaders to commit to deeper cooperation that requires real concessions in the interest of a wider regional framework of mutual benefits. Essentially there is a deep tension between nation-building and region-building. In the 1990s and 2000s there remained various underlying intra-regional tensions between the states. There were also problems of border demarcation, which divided ethnic communities and natural resources.

Thirdly, there are significant *economic and trade barriers* to overcome. By comparison *ad hoc* forms of cooperation in response to immediate security problems are much easier to achieve. But the higher goal of regionalism in foreign and security policies has often developed in other world regions on the basis of regional economic and trade arrangements. The goal of some kind of Central Asian customs union that underlay the CAU, CACO and the EAEC suggests a similar approach to developing this first 'layer' of regional interaction. However, there have been formidable barriers to this goal or even to the creation of well-functioning regional markets in Central Asia.

A major obstacle is the impact of the Soviet-era transport infrastructure. But a deeper problem is that economic and trade relationships between Central Asian states have tended to be non-complementary and competitive. This results in differences in comparative advantage from regional projects. The incentives to cooperate are unequal. Basically there has been limited scope for regional trade between just the five Central Asian countries themselves. However, the potential benefits of integration rise sharply, especially for Kazakhstan, once the concept of the 'region' is widened to include large regional neighbours – China, Iran, Turkey, Russia and the Indian subcontinent. But in the 2000s the policies in Central Asia limited market access to this wider regional market by artificially increasing already high transit costs, so regionalism was not encouraged on this basis.

Fourth, regionalism in Central Asia was weakened by the competitive power relationships of major powers, Russia, the United States and China. This resulted in different bilateral relationships of Central Asian states with these powers. After around 2003 there is more evidence of this kind of competitive bilateralism. Although the American role declined it was gradually replaced by a stronger Chinese presence. An effort to manage this Chinese role collectively through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation has been only partially effective.

### **Conclusion: Future prospects for Central Asian intergovernmental consultations**

In the current period there are positive enabling conditions and a strong logic to develop a less institutionalized high-level inter-governmental *Central Asian consultative process*. This kind of consultative process has been difficult in the past, given problems of border demarcation, water management and other divergent interests in Central Asia. However, since 2017 these differences have eased. This allowed a Central Asian Leaders' Consultative Working Meeting to be held in March 2018 in Astana. This good-spirited meeting imposed no obligations and created no unrealistic expectations.

The current consultative process may first address lower level practical tasks. But a more ambitious eventual goal would be to broadly address various common local threats and risks, which all parties understand can only effectively be addressed jointly. The need for this initiative to extend to cover security policy is prompted by the risks of returning jihadist radicals from the Middle East; the increasingly volatile conflict in Afghanistan with American force reductions and uncertain peace negotiations, involving a changing cast of actors; the increasing complexity of regional connections between extremism, narco-trafficking and transnational crime; as well as by the need for coordinated Central Asian perspectives in relation to UN bodies.

Thematic priorities of such broader consultations should include responses to *terrorism*; this should continue to engage with expertise in this field in the United Nations, as well as in the SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure. But the new consultation process would be suited also in principle to better discussion of ongoing concerns about separatism. Different perspectives on this core issue, which are perhaps irreconcilable, have existed in the SCO and CSTO behind the formal discourse since 2014. An exclusively Central Asian dialogue could also help boost the regional identity of the long standing proposal for a Central Asian Nuclear-Free Zone.

Preconditions of such a new consultative mechanism should be respect for national perspectives, decision-making based on consensus and the intention to avoid any elaborate structure or bureaucracy. Any supra-national structure for dialogue in particular is unrealistic; this would raise concerns over sovereignty and the operation of national jurisdictions. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan may be more prominent in fostering these new consultations, building on their recent positive interaction. But Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan should also have a sense of ownership over the dialogue, and neutral Turkmenistan's recent demonstration of its wish to engage in pragmatic cooperation with its neighbours should be explored in this

context. The effective involvement of Turkmenistan would distinguish this dialogue from all the other structures referred to above.

There exists a considerable body of scholarly and expert work in universities, research institutes and Academies of Science about previous dialogue processes and structures for regional cooperation in Central Asia, as well as about similar dialogues among developing states more generally. There is obviously also much practical experience in the diplomatic community and UN to draw upon. Scientific and academic exchanges in the region and with experts in the wider international community can help with thinking about the practical task of formulating a more sustainable consultation process than some past efforts at regional cooperation. Finally, information and debate among civil societies in Central Asian states on the desirability of growing regional interaction is necessary. This is important to help overcome stereotypes and build support for future regional initiatives which will have practical consequences for local communities.

# **FABIENNE BOSSUYT<sup>1</sup> – The European Union’s new strategy for Central Asia: A game changer or more of the same?**

## **Introduction**

This paper provides an early assessment of the European Union’s (EU) new strategy for Central Asia,<sup>2</sup> which was launched in May 2019. In particular, it evaluates whether the new strategy can enable the EU to further optimise its role as an external actor in Central Asia and whether it can ensure that the EU’s involvement in the region produces tangible and lasting results, especially in view of contributing to the sustainable development of the Central Asian countries.

Over the past two decades, the EU’s role in Central Asia has gradually evolved from an invisible and ineffective donor to that of a more full-fledged external actor. The strategy that the EU developed back in 2007<sup>3</sup> played an important part in enhancing the EU’s role in Central Asia. Nevertheless, 12 years after the strategy was launched, the EU still punches below its weight in the region, where it clearly plays second fiddle to Russia and China. And admittedly, it is still facing substantial challenges in having a tangible impact in a region considered as one of the most authoritarian in the world.<sup>4</sup> Hence, the question remains how the EU can optimise its role as an external actor in Central Asia to ensure that its involvement in the region produces tangible and lasting results, and effectively contributes to the sustainable development of the Central Asian countries. Now that the EU has launched its long-awaited new strategy for Central Asia, the question is also whether the new strategy will be up to this challenge, and thus whether it will effectively enable the EU to further optimise its role as an external actor in Central Asia.

## **Balancing and building synergies via a ‘non-exclusive’ partnership**

Although the EU has become an increasingly important actor in Central Asia, its influence remains only secondary to that of Russia and China. It would be naïve to think that one day the EU will become as influential in the region as Moscow and Beijing; in fact, this is not the EU’s ambition. However, if we consider that China’s and Russia’s engagement poses both opportunities and challenges for Central Asia and that the region remains vulnerable to the influence of these two dominant actors, then it becomes straightforward to acknowledge that the EU occupies a distinct position as an external actor in Central Asia. This applies on two accounts.

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<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Ghent University. Email: fabienne.bossuyt@ugent.be.

<sup>2</sup> European Union (2019). ‘Joint Communication on the EU and Central Asia: New opportunities for a stronger partnership’. Published on 15.05.2019 at: [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/62411/joint-communication-eu-and-central-asia-new-opportunities-stronger-partnership\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/62411/joint-communication-eu-and-central-asia-new-opportunities-stronger-partnership_en).

<sup>3</sup> Council of the EU (2007). ‘The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a new Partnership’. Published on 31.05.2007 at: [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/st\\_10113\\_2007\\_init\\_en.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/st_10113_2007_init_en.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Bossuyt, Fabienne (2019). “The EU’s and China’s development assistance towards Central Asia: low versus contested impact”. *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 59(5-6): 606-631.

First of all, the EU is considered by the Central Asian states as an important actor in terms of balancing the influence of Russia and China. The EU is perfectly aware of this, and even explicitly mentions this in the new strategy. Secondly, and related to the first point, the EU is also an important actor in Central Asia in terms of offering alternative models and solutions, especially in specific soft policy areas, including education, environmental protection, border management and technological innovation. Given that the EU is considered to be a role model for modernisation in these specific fields throughout the region, it is uniquely placed to offer support and to share its experience in these areas. In several soft policy areas, the EU has a competitive edge compared to other external actors. Also this aspect is now explicitly acknowledged in the new strategy of the EU.

However, at the same time, the EU should also build synergies in Central Asia with other external actors, including with China and Russia. This seems necessary for two reasons. First of all, this seems necessary as a way to maximize the impact of the EU's involvement in the region. Clearly, in certain policy areas, joining forces with other powerful actors will amplify the likelihood of having a positive and lasting effect rather than when doing it alone. Connectivity is one such area. Connectivity also stands out as an area where collaboration with China and Russia actually seems feasible. This is especially so for China, which recognises that it will need to cooperate with the EU if it is to successfully pursue its Belt and Road Initiative.

A second reason why the EU needs to build synergies with other external actors is to counterbalance or temper the negative effects of other actors' involvement, including those of Russia and China. Again, the area of connectivity serves as a prime example. By collaborating with China on investing in transport infrastructure, the EU could help to enhance the sustainability of these investments and ensure that they comply with international norms and standards, including transparency and environmental sustainability.

The new EU strategy for Central Asia fully acknowledges this need for building synergies with other external actors operating in the region. In fact, it is one of the key elements of the new strategy. This is captured in the aim of forging what the strategy labels a "non-exclusive" partnership with the countries of Central Asia. In the strategy it is outlined that in forging this non-exclusive partnership, the EU aims to help the region develop as a more resilient, prosperous and closely interconnected economic and political space. These aspects are singled out as the main, interlinked, priorities of the new strategy.

The EU believes these key priorities capture the niche areas where the EU has comparative advantages with other external actors. At first sight, it thus appears that the strategy does contain the necessary elements for enabling the EU to become a more influential and effective actor in Central Asia.

## **A more mature foreign policy actor**

All in all, the new strategy does represent a considerable improvement compared to the 2007 strategy. If anything, the new strategy testifies to the EU having matured as a foreign policy actor. Moreover, many of the key recommendations that have been given to the EU as part of the consultation process have been reflected in the new strategy.

First of all, the EU has redefined its interests in Central Asia, although perhaps not as prominently and explicitly as it could have, but at least it is clear that in redefining its interests the EU is taking into account the new global realities, as well as the new dynamics in and around the region.

Back in 2007, the EU was mainly drawn to Central Asia by the region's strategic location, its vast energy resources and market potential. As it now stands, the EU seems to be drawn mostly by the goal of maintaining stability and security in Central Asia, as well as the goal of tapping into the connectivity potential of the region.

The strategy also reflects a more accurate understanding of the region and the different realities and aspirations of the five countries. On this point, the EU explicitly states that it respects the national trajectories, aspirations and interests of each of its Central Asian partners and it will seek to deepen its engagement with the interested countries of the region that are willing and able to step up cooperation on shared goals.

Connected to this, the strategy also reflects a more realistic notion of the leverage that the EU has in Central Asia. It also does a better job at identifying how it can make a difference and in what ways it stands out. In this regard, it is clear that the EU has tried to take on board the central recommendation of making sure that the key areas to be covered in future EU-Central Asia cooperation reflect a match between the EU's comparative advantages (namely areas where the EU can provide real added value and achieve concrete results) and the vital needs of the Central Asian countries.

Given that the EU is considered a role model for modernisation and regional cooperation throughout the region, the EU now took advantage of this by stressing that it is uniquely placed to offer support and share its experience in specific soft policy areas like education and the environment.

## **Broad scope**

However, when looking at the strategy in more depth, it quickly becomes clear that the new strategy suffers from some arguably inevitable and even predictable flaws that are likely to undermine the potential of the strategy to deliver.

Like the previous strategy, the new strategy covers too many areas. The two priority areas of boosting resilience and enhancing prosperity are also very broadly defined. One of the key recommendations that had been given to the EU by several experts was that the new strategy for Central Asia should focus on fewer areas in order to increase its effectiveness. Basically, the advice to the EU was: do less but better. Given the relatively limited budget, doing a bit of everything is not effective. Despite the EU being among the main donors in Central Asia and despite a steady increase in the budget allocations for the EU's involvement in the region in the past decade, the financial resources that the EU has at its disposal to implement the strategy remain fairly limited, and this is unlikely to change.

Instead of following up on the recommendation of doing less and hence reducing the number of cooperation areas, the EU actually increased the number of cooperation areas, and even explicitly refers to a widening partnership agenda. That said, this is not really a big surprise. It was predictable that it would be hard to make the new strategy focus on only a few areas. One could say it is the nature of the beast. When it comes to EU foreign policy making, the policies will always have to reflect the varying priorities of the different EU member states and of the wide range of institutional actors involved in drafting and adopting the strategy.

## Conclusion

This paper has provided an early assessment of the EU's new strategy for Central Asia. The paper has shown that, at first sight, the new strategy appears to contain the necessary elements for enabling the EU to become a more influential and effective actor in Central Asia and represents a considerable improvement compared to the 2007 strategy. If anything, the new strategy testifies to the EU having matured as a foreign policy actor and reflects many of the key recommendations that have been given to the EU as part of the consultation process. However, this paper also critically evaluated the broad scope of the strategy and argued that the ambition of contributing to so many areas of cooperation is likely to undermine the EU's potential to deliver.

As a concluding remark, it should be pointed out that a more fundamental change in the EU's approach would be needed in order for the EU's involvement in the region to eventually have a more tangible and effective impact. Indeed, if the EU is serious about promoting resilience as a way to empower the Central Asian societies and to contribute towards a truly sustainable future for the Central Asian countries, then the EU would have to accept the Central Asian societies for what they are and advocate home-grown self-organisation and self-governance predicated on a deep understanding of the local meaning of good life.<sup>5</sup> The new strategy does not reflect any such approach, and instead shows that the EU remains too much entrenched in its own way of thinking and acting, which is literally miles away from the local way of thinking and doing things in Central Asia. As the EU's messages of democracy, good governance and human rights hardly resonate with the Central Asian societies, the EU will

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<sup>5</sup> Korosteleva, Elena (2019). 'Reclaiming resilience back: A local turn in EU external governance'. *Contemporary Security Policy*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2019.1685316>.

need to start embracing a more locally-inspired approach, which gives true ownership to the local societies of their own development.

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# **BAKHTIYOR ISLAMOV<sup>1</sup>, DONIYOR ISLAMOV<sup>2</sup>, and SITORA PRIMOVA<sup>3</sup> - Uzbekistan's support for the synergy of the TRACECA and "Belt and Road Initiative" Projects**

## **Introduction**

International transport corridors (ITC) play an important role in Uzbekistan, because it is one of the only two double landlocked countries in the world (along with Liechtenstein), which means it is landlocked itself and also surrounded by countries that do not have direct access to the ocean, namely: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan. The country's geographical location, practically in the center of Eurasia, far from seaports, necessitates the intensive development of underground (pipelines, telecommunication cables), land (truck roads and railways) and air transport corridors connecting Uzbekistan with markets in the West and East, North and South.

Today the ITC initiatives have become the most topical subject on the agenda of global development as well as international and regional economic, transport and trade relations. From the very beginning, Uzbekistan supported these initiatives of a large-scale mega-project as the state's priority strategic task.<sup>4</sup> The country implements many large investment projects: the construction and reconstruction of railways and roads, airports, the development of infrastructure for free economic zones and transport and logistics centers. It is important to form a coherent system of domestic and international transport corridors with a view to more efficient participation in the international market for by optimising and reducing the cost of cargo and passengers transportation. Many of these projects are implemented in the framework of the TRACECA project (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia) and the Belt and Road Initiative. In this paper, we consider that better coordination of these projects could create larger synergetic effects.

## **International logistics networks: TRACECA**

Currently, Uzbekistan has the highest density of road networks in the Central Asian region and has an integrated system of railway junctions connecting all regions of the country. With the launch of the international airport in Navoi (which is an aviation hub), this airport has become the largest center for air cargo transportation, offering comprehensive logistics services for air, road and rail transportation of goods. An international multi-

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<sup>1</sup> Professor, Doctor of economic sciences, Tashkent Branch of REU named after G.V. Plekhanov.

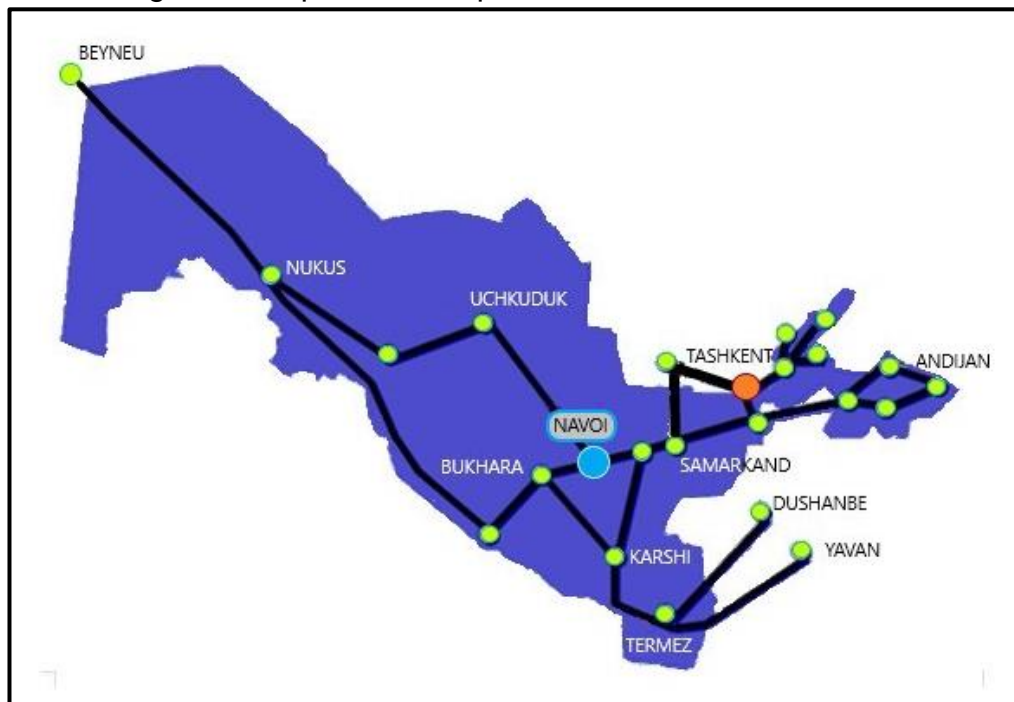
<sup>2</sup> Director of RB Asia, Tashkent.

<sup>3</sup> PhD student, UWED.

<sup>4</sup> Mirziyoyev, Sh. M. (2019). *Speech at the international forum "One belt, one road." "True East"*. 27 April 2019.

modal logistics center has been created on the airport, which combines air cargo to Europe, India, China, Japan, South Korea and the countries of Southeast Asia.

Figure 1. Map of main airport connections in Uzbekistan



*Source: adapted by the authors*

The position of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the international Logistics Performance Index (LPI) has improved significantly in recent years. However, Uzbekistan is still in the 99th position. While the republic's integration into the system of international transport corridors is being accelerated, the implementation of transit and export-import potential requires further improvement of all available modes of transport, as well as using traditional routes.

There are several projects that could become important new links between West and East, and Europe and Asia; and create additional synergetic effects in future. These include the EU's TRACECA project, the formation of the ITC Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Oman, as well as the construction of the railway Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan-China along an existing truck road as a part of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

From the beginning of the TRACECA programme, Uzbekistan tried to use its transport potential to benefit the development of transport connections between Europe and Asia. TRACECA promotes alternative international combined traffic, because of being a multimodal system of air, road and railway routes. Participation in the TRACECA programme had a positive influence on the transport sector of the Republic both from the point of view of infrastructure development and for institutional strengthening, legislation improvement and capacity building in the country. The programme, which started in 1993, provided technical assistance to Uzbekistan in the form of consulting support (worth about

10 million Euros), and investment projects (worth over 4 million Euros). Uzbekistan nowadays participates in the implementation of the Strategy of the Intergovernmental Commission (IGC) TRACECA up to 2026, based on a TRACECA Master Plan and proposals of the different countries, a plan of activities and an Action Plan for 2018-2021. Uzbekistan is also discussing its accession to the Agreement on Joint Financing of the Permanent Secretariat (PS) IGC TRACECA between the Governments of the Parties to the Basic Multilateral Agreement on International Transport for Development of the Europe-Caucasus–Asia Corridor as well as the Protocols and Agreements of TRACECA for ratification by Uzbekistan<sup>5</sup>.

### **The Belt and Road Initiative**

In the context of ITC initiatives, implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative is also opening new possibilities for the development of transport infrastructure and trade. The concepts of the TRACECA and BRI are focused not only on the trade agenda, but they also have a significant investment dimension. Relations between European countries, Central Asian states and China, which share a long history via the ancient Silk Road,<sup>6</sup> today have reached a new level of cooperation. China, for example, is one of the largest trade and investment partners of Uzbekistan and other countries of Central Asia. According to statistics, in 1992 the total commodity turnover of the PRC with the five Central Asian countries was about 0.5 billion US dollars. According to the Ministry of Commerce of the PRC, in 2012, after 20 years, this figure had risen to a record 46 billion US dollars, increasing 92 times.<sup>7</sup> In 2018, the trade turnover between Uzbekistan and China reached 6.42 billion USD, showing a growth of another 35%.

There are currently 1,121 enterprises with the participation of Chinese investments in Uzbekistan, of which 344 enterprises were created in 2018, which is more than double the figure for 2017. China has more than 8 billion US dollars of investments<sup>8</sup> in Uzbekistan that also included a variety of social projects, aimed at the human development,<sup>9</sup> the fight against poverty, and strengthening of the healthcare system.<sup>10</sup>

At the second meeting of the BRI forum, President Xi Jinping noted that he considered Uzbekistan as an important strategic partner and was ready to work together to achieve common development and prosperity, peace and stability in Central Asia. The financial capital scale project includes about 900 infrastructure projects (truck roads, railways,

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<sup>5</sup> TRACECA (2016). *Uzbekistan, its role in the IGC TRACECA and further activities is on the Agenda of discussion*.

<sup>6</sup> Erohin, X.H. (2017). "Trade between China and the countries of Central and North Asia: dynamics, structure, and major tendencies", p.117.

<sup>7</sup> Nabizhan, M.U. (2018). "Assessment of the Chinese initiative 'One belt - one road'" in: Cui Zheng and Qu Wenyi (eds.). p97.

<sup>8</sup> Alimova S. G. (2017) "Uzbekistan on the Great Silk Road". *Internauka* 2017, p68.

<sup>9</sup> Sputnik Uzbekistan (2019). *How the New Silk Road will help the republic: The President of Uzbekistan will take part in the International Forum "One Belt, One road" as part of his visit to China from April 24-27*.

<sup>10</sup> Ergashev B. (2019). "On the advantages and risks for the Central Asia of the project 'One belt, one road'". *CA-IR NEWS*.

ports, power plants, bridges, etc.) in more than 60 countries. The total amount, according to experts, ranges from 2 to 3.5 trillion US dollars.<sup>11</sup>

In order to fund such projects, China has established two new institutions: the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in the US, with a capital of 100 billion US dollars; and the Foundation of the Silk Road, whose authorized capital amounts to 40 billion US dollars, with plans to create a separate fund with capital worth 30 billion US dollars. The Foundation is also expected to attract funds from a number of state financial institutions of the PRC, including the New Development Bank, the Development Bank, the Export-Import Bank, and the Chinese Investment Corporation.<sup>12</sup>

The BRI is gaining a more and more global character day after day. It is supported by international organisations, and it is included in documents of the UN, G20, APEC, and others. What is the role of Uzbekistan in this global project and how does the BRI correspond with the country's national and state interests?

The development of international transport corridors is one of the most important priorities of Uzbekistan. The construction of the railway Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan-China within the framework of the BRI is a mutually beneficial project for all of its participants. Ultimately, Uzbekistan will get more direct access to China, as well as China with Central Asia and the Middle East, as well as to Europe. Cargo transportation time will be reduced by several days.<sup>13</sup> This will primarily improve trade relations, open new markets for Uzbekistan and for the rest of the project participants, create new jobs, bring profit from transit, and attract tourists. Reconstruction of new roads, including the creation of the Andijan-Osh-Irkeshtam-Kashgar corridor and the laying of the railway along this route will open a new prospective line of the BRI project.

## Major Markets

For Uzbekistan, the issue of security has always been relevant and a top priority. The continuation of "Hairaton - Mazar-i-Sharif" and construction of the railway from Mazar-i-Sharif to Herat will further open the way to the southern ports of Iran.<sup>14</sup> The possibility of access to the sea is an important motivation for Uzbekistan. The development of international transport corridors means not only access to new markets, it is also an opportunity for Uzbekistan to express itself more loudly on the world stage and attract more investments.

Uzbek-Chinese relations are actively developing in all areas, including trade, investment, energy, technology, the cultural and humanitarian sphere. All these areas will also help

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<sup>11</sup> Daliev F. (2018). "On the projects of the New Great Silk Road implemented in Uzbekistan". *Colloquium- journal*, 5 (16), pp14-15.

<sup>12</sup> Arabov, A. (2017) "One belt, one road" - what will Uzbekistan get?"

<sup>13</sup> "The Economic Belt of the Silk Road and Uzbekistan" (2017). Available at: <http://blog.review.uz/new/ekonomicheskij-poyas-shelkovogo-puti-iuzbekistan/>

<sup>14</sup> Aripov, E. (2019). "'One Belt, One Road': mega opportunity-megaproject". *People's Word* 2019: 144.

attract direct foreign investors in the framework of the BRI, which thanks to the geographical position will pass through Uzbekistan and create good opportunities to activate the investment flow.

An essential condition for the comprehensive development of countries is the introduction of innovations and the improvement of their scientific and technological potential. In this regard, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan proposed to create a comprehensive BRI partnership system in priority areas of scientific and innovative activity. It is known that the development of science and innovation requires a decent amount of finance, which is also an urgent issue for developed countries. The BRI is an opportunity to pool funds and accelerate scientific and technological progress, and to create various types of free economic zones by using the Chinese experience. An advantage is also the ability to exchange scientific personnel and improve the skills of specialists in Uzbekistan.<sup>15</sup>

## Conclusion

Despite the mega-capabilities described above, according to a number of experts, the large-scale projects also entail potential risks. For instance, with the creation of a railway from China through Kyrgyzstan to Uzbekistan further to Europe and the Middle East, a huge flow of imports is expected which can be a serious threat to the emerging domestic small and medium business.<sup>16</sup>

Is the Uzbek market ready for such competition, when there will be a dominance of Chinese goods in terms of both quality and price? Competition is a lever for development, but such a decomposition can cause some damage to the emerging market of Uzbekistan. Domestic producers currently do not experience such level of competition from Chinese goods, but when they open the road, the import of goods will increase and local producers should be ready for such competition.<sup>17</sup>

In general, the opportunities and prospects of the TRACECA and the BRI initiatives by far outweigh the potential risks. The new projects could provide a fundamentally new level for the development of trade, economic, scientific, technical, and investment relations with Europe and rest of Asia. The authors of this paper therefore consider that better coordination of these projects could create larger synergetic effects for Uzbekistan and all other countries involved into these projects.

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<sup>15</sup> Sun Lijie (S.D.). *Chinese Ambassador to the Republic of Uzbekistan. China and Uzbekistan follow the path of joint construction of "One Belt and One Path"*.

<sup>16</sup> Cheng Guo, Chen Lu, (2019). "Implications of 'One belt-one road' strategy for China and Central Asia". p165.

<sup>17</sup> Aubakirova A., Umirzakov S., Aitenov N., (2017). "The New Silk Road: Opportunities and Threats for Central Asia". *Central Asia and the Caucasus magazine*. p7.

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# ELENA KOROSTELEVA<sup>1</sup> - Resilience: another buzzword or a new opportunity for more adaptable governance?

## Introduction: problematising resilience

Resilience is now everywhere and has become “the everyday”: It seems to mean “all things to all people” and speak to every aspect of our daily lives—from “resilient” economies, cultures, sport, health, family, Brexit, to children’s TV (“resilient Peter Rabbit” on CBeebies), and even “resilient humanity” in “Doctor Who,” a popular BBC sci-fi series. It has also pervaded the governance agenda of major international institutions including the WB, NATO, UNDP, OSCE, and the EU: their focus is equally all-encompassing making “resilience” one of the most inclusive and popular terms of the day.

However, with this broad appeal, and a recent surge in popularity, are we sure we understand the concept of resilience well enough, to make full use of its arresting potential – especially living in the VUCA-world of today?<sup>2</sup> Is it just about an entity, be it a state, a community or a person, and its qualities including their “inherent strength” and “capacity”, the knowledge and development of which could make them more robust and responsive to change? Or is it also about how we should think today to make governance more adaptive, and communities more self-organizing in times of uncertainty and diminishing control, to enable them to build a life people have reason to value and strive for? To this end, should resilience always be associated with an emergency, or is it more about a long-term development, shaped by a sense of “good life” and communal values, and upheld by relevant institutions? More importantly, can resilience be engineered externally, as the policy world tends to believe? And if *not*, how to build resilience internally, in practice? Curiously, none of these questions would receive a clear or unifying answer today.

In the policy world, resilience was propelled to prominence with the EU Global Strategy.<sup>3</sup> It was understood both as a ‘local quality’, and as a new regime of governance, to help the EU de-centre to empower “the local” and “the person” to better respond to change in a 3-C world – namely, a world with more connectivity, complexity and contestation. However, when it comes to practice, resilience was turned immediately into a risk-management exercise, and “the local, in turn,” into a source of vulnerability/threat, deprived of agency, and requiring urgent security measures.

In the scholarly world there is a confused perception of resilience – from ‘papering-over the cracks’ to seeing it as a tool of neo-liberal governmentality, to be managed via externally engineered technologies of power and self-securitising practices. Only a few have come to appreciate its virtues, but even then, they doubt its potential in the age of the Anthropocene calling it an act of impossibility. Why bother with resilience under these circumstances?

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<sup>1</sup> Professor of International Politics and Jean Monnet Chair of European Politics, Principal Investigator for GCRF COMPASS project, University of Kent. Email: [E.Korosteleva@kent.ac.uk](mailto:E.Korosteleva@kent.ac.uk)

<sup>2</sup> Gnad and Burrows (2017).

<sup>3</sup> EEAS 2016

Is this a dead end for resilience as we know it, or more precisely, *not yet know it*? Resilience does have an arresting potentiality, provided it is “reclaimed” and “repatriated” back to “the local,” to belong to the “community,” a social system that “feeds upon deviations ... and thrives upon disruptions to *its own state of equilibrium* [emphasis added]”<sup>4</sup>, based on self-reliance, self-organisation and self-governance. We claim it to be self-governance, which would require a shift from the global to the local, to understand and engage with the local, but also to see if a set duality of governance—that is, providing external assistance as necessary and when requested – may work. If it is about the local, how do we then ensure the balance of power going back to the global, and especially a sense of cooperation needed for different orders to co-exist and thrive?

In my recently published article (Korosteleva, 2019), I look at how resilience is being defined in the policy and scholarly worlds to claim that resilience, if understood correctly – as both a quality and an analytic of governance – helps us to make “the person” centre-stage and governance more adaptive and responsive to their needs.<sup>5</sup>

### Resilience as a tool of EU governance

Resilience has rapidly spread driven by the desire to respond in a more sustainable way to the environment’s growing complexity and uncertainty. In the UK, for example, resilience became “part and parcel” of government thinking in the 2000s, defined as a strategy for “better preparedness and ability to respond to an emergency ... using local resources and knowledge”. The World Bank sees it as “a capacity to mitigate the impact of disaster-related asset losses on welfare”.<sup>6</sup> The OSCE, in turn, defines resilience as a “capacity to prevent and recover from hazardous events or shocks, but also as a “capacity to support a constant transformative action to allow societies to adapt in the face of continual change”. NATO, for example, uses the definition of “being prepared – that is, having thought, planned and exercised in order to ‘absorb, recover and then adapt to adverse events’”.<sup>7</sup>

This snapshot shows that the emphasis is on the *internal capacity* of an entity to prepare to cope with adversity, but a far greater emphasis is on the external intervention to help “engineer” a more resilient response to problem-solving. The underlying assumption is that a system can only develop resilience if it is amenable to external governing, which would assist the “internal” agency with knowledge and resources to help it recover and transform, to be able to mitigate future risks.

This is what forms the premise of the EU’s new thinking today: Being the world’s largest humanitarian donor, the EU saw resilience then as a *jointly engineered long-term effort* to “support populations at risk to withstand, cope with and adapt to repeated adverse events and long-term stress”.<sup>8</sup> To increase “resilience” of an entity meant activating the EU

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<sup>4</sup> Luhmann (1990).

<sup>5</sup> See also Korosteleva and Flockhart (forthcoming, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> World Bank (2016)

<sup>7</sup> Lasconjarias, 2017, p. 3

<sup>8</sup> European Commission, 2012, p. 2

machinery of governance to help the entity develop “internal” critical infrastructures to reduce the intensity of a variety of impacts.

To sum up, the first important iterations of resilience-thinking in the EU official (humanitarian-development) discourse were already ridden with tensions. On the one hand, the Commission saw “the local” as a critical beneficiary (and “a keeper”) of resilience articulated through the narratives of “inherent strength” and internal “capacity” to respond and transform, while the EU would serve as a mentor, a partner, and facilitator. On the other hand, the Commission explicitly espoused to deal with a volatile outside, a problem at source *externally*, through directive governance and “sound methodologies” of policy solutions prioritising interventions for resilience-growth. This meant investing effort predominantly in EU assistance to provide, assess, and risk-manage “the outside,” while ensuring that these resilience-building measures—“readiness, responsiveness and revitalization”—are also duly embedded in national programmes, in anticipation of the future “resilience dividend”.

From 2016, as developed by the EU Global Strategy, resilience became “a means not an end” to secure a more governable, and stable outside, especially at a time of crises and uncertainty. The uptake of this security turn in EU resilience-thinking was to make “the outside” more “predictable” and “manageable.” The downside was, however, the denial of agency to “the local”, and subsequent focus on “better risk-informed analysis and monitoring,” especially for “how external resilience can impact the EU’s own resilience in areas such as hybrid threats, cyber security, strategic communication and counter-terrorism”. If EU governance has not changed, why bring in resilience? As a fig-leaf measure – old governance in the new wineskins? The question here is more just about understanding resilience: it is about changing how we govern today 1) how to deal with a forever less governable outside, and 2) yet how to support it in its individuation for the “good life” worth fighting for.

### **Resilience: a scholarly perspective**

Resilience has predominantly been viewed by wider scholarship as “retrospective temporality,” with a focus on its origin and many meanings. A “prospective temporality” of resilience has been mainly adopted by a neo-liberal perspective displaying a range of similarities with the liberal logics of governance, most notably in the ideational production of autonomy and freedom for “the outside.” However, problems arise when it is applied to practice. Resilience as an analytic of governing aims to grow the capacity of local communities as self-referential social systems. Conversely, the neo-liberal agenda is committed to externalising “good governance” of Western institutions to local communities, which are then supposed to embed these solutions in the national programmes to make themselves sustainable.<sup>9</sup> –Its aim would be to engender a like-minded environment, but instead of reducing complexity it generates insecurity by making local communities dependable on the external source, and offering problem-solving measures of only a temporary nature.

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<sup>9</sup> Joseph (2013).

The most contrasting difference between resilience-thinking and a neoliberal agenda, however, lies in the production of freedom: the difference emerges when "good governance" interferes with the logics of internal capacity-building, thus denying agency to local communities.

Another contrasting feature of resilience-thinking to neoliberalism, is its grasp of complexity: neo-liberal thinking is about compartmentalising; resilience thinking is about emergent and "limitless" governance.

Resilience as 'present temporality' is an alternative way of thinking undertaken by the "Anthropocene". However, while affording a better understanding of resilience it is nevertheless often seen as an act of impossibility due to the lack of control over the outside.<sup>10</sup> "The global" in this resilience-thinking can only be conceived through "the local" and its governance domain, defined by more bottom-up and responsive regional orders. The Anthropocene has the advantage of breaking silos and external-internal boundaries in delivering governance for human empowerment. The Anthropocene imaginary "forces humans to confront the limits of knowledge" and promises "new ways of being and knowing without separations and cuts dependent on linear spatial and temporal conceptions of the world".<sup>11</sup>

Yet, the Anthropocene comes with its caveats. One relates to its path-dependent reactive temporality of thinking when responding to the challenges without setting the goals for development. Being in a reactive and perhaps more agile mode is one matter; but striving to make choices for the betterment of community is another, and it is this purposefulness, including planning, of collective living, that seems to be missing from the current Anthropocene-thinking. The second challenge is how to get there, when contextualizing resilience in each given case, without knowing "the knowns" or "the unknowns"; and when the boundaries of knowledge are no longer a blockage. The concept of governance is simply an act of impossibility in the Anthropocene.

We suggest to view resilience as *self*-governance with external assistance as necessary. Is realising and practising this kind of resilience possible? Could resilience be less than a buzzword especially for the world of practitioners?

### **Resilience: not a buzzword but not quite yet a silver bullet**

So, the main question remains: is resilience as self-governance – that is, "where governance is no longer a matter of intervening"<sup>12</sup> – possible in a policy world of embedded external-internal duality, faced with the increasing "uncontrollability" and growing complexity of a rapidly changing environment? For adaptive governance predicated on resilience as self-organisation to occur, it would require a shift from understanding resilience just as a system's

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<sup>10</sup> Grove & Chandler 2016

<sup>11</sup> Idem.

<sup>12</sup> Chandler (2014, p. 27).

quality, to its becoming an analytic of governance embracing complexity in full. In practice, this would mean the following:

First, for a policy world to embrace “self-governance” as resilience-building of local communities would mean, first, a shift away from instrumental security-predicated governance operating in a “world amenable to cause-and-effect understandings of policy-making”.<sup>13</sup> This is primarily due to how external governance has been intended to-date in a Western policy world: to secure the “unstable outside” using, where possible, existing problem-solving technologies of security governance, delivered via dissemination of best practice and security measures to bring “the outside” in line with the international “normal.” This ought to change, if resilience-thinking were to be properly applied, with a view of allowing the emergence of many different governing domains, and also the need to bring them to a “shared normal” under a renewed global governance architecture. This thinking clearly challenges the foundations of International Relations as a discipline for how “the global” should be understood and studied today.

Second, a shift away from the idea of engineering and managing resilience *outside-in* would be needed. Resilience-thinking has to offer a different kind of governing analytic, to start with the communities, and work their way “inside-out” when seeking assistance and advice as necessary, thus building up “the global” through “the local” and this way, making “the global” system far more connected, responsive and agile to the needs of the local communities.

Third, a new understanding of where resilience is constituted, namely in the local domain, as well as of what it means: the value of ‘good life’, identity, local ownership, inherent strength and resources. Each community would have an inner sense of what is invariably good for them as a collective, to be underpinned by respective primary institutions and governance structures in search for congruence between values and tradition, on the one hand, and achieving the ideational “Significant We”,<sup>14</sup> on the other. Many communities have tacit words to depict this sense of communal becoming. For example, the Arabic term “al-harak,” refers, as Sadiki argues to the “peoplehood” to encapsulate *their* vision for a better life,<sup>15</sup> comparable to “agaciro” in African,<sup>16</sup> “hygge” in Danish,<sup>17</sup> or “mahalla” in Kazakh. It implies, as Rutazibwa argues, people’s “understanding that [they] are the agents of [their] own change”,<sup>18</sup> a particular philosophy of life that draws on self-reliance and the inner knowledge of the people of what they are, and what they want to be, and could serve as a premise for resilience governance thinking.

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<sup>13</sup> Chandler (2014, p. 58).

<sup>14</sup> Flockhart (2006).

<sup>15</sup> Sadiki (2016, p. 338).

<sup>16</sup> Rutazibwa (2014).

<sup>17</sup> Flockhart (2019).

<sup>18</sup> Rutazibwa (2014, p. 5).

## Conclusion

Why is this understanding of resilience so important? Because it changes the foundations of International Relations – as a new analytic of governance: from global to local, and the person; and to more cooperative orders of the emergent multi-order world.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, we develop a new understanding of how an individual and their communities become more self-reliant in their development and better self-organised to meet the challenges and pressures of the changing world around them. Resilience as a quality and an analytic of governance helps to refocus on “the person” and the role of “local communities”: how best they can actualise their inherent strength and turn their capacities into capabilities to make social systems at all levels more responsive to their needs and a life worth living for. How to do it through resilience is, however, another matter, which I am certain, will be an enduring and exciting pursuit.

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<sup>19</sup> Flockhart (2016).

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# **DONIYOR KURBANOV<sup>1</sup> – Uzbekistan's new regional policy: Implications for international cooperation in wider Eurasia**

## **Introduction**

The contemporary foreign policy of Uzbekistan has been rapidly evolving since 2017 in accordance with dynamic shifts in the world and the region, as well as large-scale internal transformations and the opening of the economy and the country as a whole.

Promoting the country's foreign economic interests has become the number one task: increasing exports, attracting foreign investment and advanced technologies, improving the country's transport and transit situation, and developing tourism.

## **Uzbekistan's regional cooperation**

The main priority of Uzbekistan's foreign policy is a comprehensive improvement of relations with the countries of Central Asia, the promotion of effective collaboration in strengthening security and stability, and the development of regional cooperation. Over the past three years, breakthrough results have been achieved in this direction, including tremendous progress in resolving border problems and opening borders, enhancing cross-border trade and humanitarian exchange. All this made it possible to increase the level of mutual trust, improve the political atmosphere and strengthen stability in Central Asia, intensify trade and economic cooperation, and move on to the formation of a new regional cooperation agenda.

The most important achievement of this process of regional rapprochement was the launch on the initiative of the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev of the mechanism of Consultative Meetings of Heads of State of the region, the first of which was held in March 2018 in Astana, Kazakhstan.

Along with this, the most important task of foreign policy and foreign economic activity is the formation of a multifaceted system of strategic partnerships and cooperation with leading countries in the world and with international organisations, designed to provide an effective solution to the problems of modernising the economy, maintaining stability and security, and creating favourable conditions for regional cooperation. In this regard, the Head of State made high-profile visits to Russia, China, the USA and a number of leading European countries, to Korea and India. Negotiations on an Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU are ongoing. A visit of the leader of Uzbekistan to Japan is planned for December 2020.

In addition, Uzbek multilateral diplomacy has intensified significantly. In almost all international organisations and forums to which the Uzbek side is a participant, Tashkent has come forward with vigorous initiatives to develop cooperation. The number of events of

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<sup>1</sup> Ambassador, Director, Center for Analysis and Forecasting, Uzbekistan.

various multilateral structures held in Uzbekistan has sharply increased. In the coming years, it is also planned to hold CIS and SCO summits in Uzbekistan.

It should also be noted that a significant intensification of foreign economic activity and economic diplomacy of Uzbekistan has taken place. First of all, Tashkent declared its desire to accelerate WTO accession. Cooperation with multilateral development banks has intensified, including with the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Islamic Development Bank, and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Cooperation with the EBRD has been restored and is successfully advancing.

### **Central Asia as a hub in Eurasian cooperation**

The above-mentioned foreign policy and foreign economic priorities and shifts became the basis for Tashkent's active participation in the development of broad cooperation in Eurasia, for which Central Asia is a key geopolitical hub.

First of all, Uzbekistan, like other Central Asian states, is interested in the active development of Eurasian interconnectivity, which is not possible without a deeper involvement of Central Asia in existing and newly emerging transport and logistics links and corridors. Uzbekistan actively supports and is ready to participate in specific projects for the implementation of various international initiatives and strategies for the development of interconnectivity, including the Chinese "Belt and Road Initiative", the EU Strategy for Connecting Europe and Asia, the Korean "New Northern Policy", Japan's Quality Infrastructure Initiative, etc.

At the same time, the Uzbek side attaches great importance to the development of interconnectivity in all *azimuths*, both from East to West, and from North to South. Great prospects for improving the transport and transit potential of Uzbekistan and the entire region are associated with the creation and development of transport corridors in the direction of South Asia and the Persian Gulf. In this regard, Tashkent advocates the intensification of transportation in accordance with the Ashgabat agreement ("Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Oman" transport corridor) and the creation of trans-Afghan corridors, the construction of the "Mazar-i-Sharif-Herat" and "Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar" railways. The development of the North-South Transport Corridor, the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, and other projects contributing to the overall strengthening of the transit potential of the Central Asian region and Eurasia as a whole are also in the interest of Central Asian states.

Secondly, the multilateral formats of interaction of the countries of the region with a number of non-regional partners in the "Central Asia Plus" format (with the EU, Russia, the USA, Japan and South Korea), can contribute to enhancing the role of Uzbekistan and the entire Central Asian region in developing cooperation in Eurasia. At the beginning of this year, on the initiative of the Uzbek side, the first ministerial meeting of the India-Central Asia Dialogue with the participation of Afghanistan was held in Samarkand. The Uzbek side is also a supporter of a more active involvement of Afghanistan in regional trade and economic relations, in general, in peaceful interaction in the Eurasian space. The 8th Regional

Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA) is planned to be held in Uzbekistan next year.

Thirdly, the significant potential of the industrial development of Uzbekistan determined Tashkent's desire to more actively integrate into global and interregional supply chains, which may contribute to more productive involvement of other Central Asian countries in Eurasian production, cooperation, technological and commercial ties. In this regard, selective, targeted development of cooperation ties with the economic regions of Russia, China, India, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Turkey, Iran, etc., surrounding Uzbekistan and Central Asia may be of particular interest.

# **RUSTAM MAKHMUDOV<sup>44</sup> - EU-Central Asia cooperation after the adoption of the new EU regional strategy**

## **Introduction**

The EU's new Central Asia strategy addresses all the traditional key dimensions of its foreign policy: the measurement of economy, politics and security, as well as the measurement of soft power (values and education). In addition, new points were added to the 2019 strategy, such as the issue of connectivity, EU-Central Asia cooperation in the field of digitalisation of the economy and the use of the European satellite navigation system Galileo. Of course, as a text, the strategy is drawn up very professionally. However, if we consider it from a practical point of view, the question arises as to whether the new EU strategy on Central Asia will repeat the fate of the previous strategy of 2007, which many European and American experts working in Central Asia have called the "declaration of intent"?

So, what is the likelihood that the new strategy will overcome the level of the declaration of intent and become more productive? In this paper, I will not analyse the EU strategy by points, but I want to go the other way, namely, to propose certain basic criteria and parameters, and through them to determine how viable the new strategy will be.

## **Economic cooperation and (inter)dependence**

The proposed basic parameter is the influence of the strategy on the further quantitative and qualitative development of trade and economic cooperation. It should be noted that there is still a significant imbalance, which directly affects the dynamics of European-Central Asian relations. While for the Central Asian states the European Union is a very important factor in foreign trade and investment, for the European Union the role of Central Asia in the structure of foreign trade is very small. In figures, it looks like this: the EU accounts for 30% of the foreign trade of Central Asian countries and 62 billion euros of direct investment in the region. In turn, the share of Central Asia in EU foreign trade is less than 1%.

For comparison, of the total EU foreign trade, which amounted to almost 4 trillion euros in 2018, more than 673 billion fell to the United States, more than 604 billion euros to China, and trade with Switzerland constituted 265 billion euros<sup>45</sup>. Next comes Russia with 253 billion euros. Despite the imposition of mutual restrictive sanctions, in 2018 Russia

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<sup>44</sup> Independent researcher

<sup>45</sup> The European Union and its trade partners. Fact Sheets on the European Union European Parliament. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/160/the-european-union-and-its-trade-partners>

held the fourth place as the largest partner in the field of export of goods and the third place in the field of import<sup>46</sup>.

Naturally, the EU's attention to the development of economic cooperation with these countries will be much higher than to Central Asia. This is just an objective reality. However, I do not think this is a verdict. A statement that Central Asia is less important only raises another question about how the EU and Central Asian countries can increase the volume and quality of trade and economic ties and how.

### **Low versus high added value goods**

To answer this question about increased economic cooperation, it is necessary to assess two areas through which Central Asian countries can increase their exports to the EU. This is an assessment of the potential for increasing the export of raw materials and goods with low added value from Central Asia to the EU, as well as an assessment of the prospects for exporting goods with high added value.

If we talk about the potential of increasing the supply of raw materials and goods with low added value, then three countries with similar potential can be noted in the region, namely Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Kazakhstan may increase exports, primarily of oil and other types of mineral resources to the EU. Kazakhstan's export consists for 80% of oil and gas, and Nur-Sultan's plans include increasing oil exports to 90 million tons in 2020 and 100 million tons by 2024.

Uzbekistan, in turn, has great potential for increasing supplies of agricultural and textile products. By 2030, it is planned to increase agricultural exports to 20 billion dollars, and textiles to 7 billion dollars by 2025. An incentive for Uzbekistan to increase supplies to the EU may be the former's receipt of an EU Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP+) status.

As for Turkmenistan, it has the greatest potential for increasing its exports to the EU in the gas sector, but subject to the solution of the problem with transportation routes. The EU's New Central Asia Strategy states that the EU will continue its efforts to build the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline. But I believe that this project can so far be attributed to the sphere of geopolitical idealism. A more realistic project is cooperation with Gazprom or Iran on the development and implementation of schemes for the supply of Turkmen gas to the European market, but for this it is necessary to resolve the existing geopolitical contradictions between the West on the one hand and Russia and Iran on the other.

If we talk about the potential for increasing the export of goods and technologies with high added value from Central Asia to the EU, then the current potential of Central Asian

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<sup>46</sup> Russia-EU trade in goods: €83 billion deficit. 05.08.2019. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20190805-1>

countries is very low, since Europe itself is the largest world technological centre and exporter of goods with high added value, technologies and services.

### **The need for technology and innovation**

Thus, we can see a certain potential for increasing the volume of Central Asian exports to the EU so far only for raw materials and goods with low added value. There are both positive and negative points to this. The positive point is that in general, the volume and value of exports from Central Asia can grow, and under favourable conditions, increase the flow of necessary currency. The negative aspect is of a more long-term nature, and consists of further consolidating the Central Asian countries in the niche of suppliers of raw materials and goods with low added value. Due to a further increase in the share of raw materials in exports, Central Asian countries risk missing the moment to enter the fourth industrial revolution, which will leave them on the side-lines of another global redistribution of wealth and influence.

In Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, they have already begun to understand this, as attempts to launch innovative transition and catch-up development programmes in the field of high technologies show. These programmes include cooperation with China (G5, smart and safe cities), Russia (atomic station) and South Korea (smart cities). The innovation transition programmes of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan set, as it seems to me, two ambitious goals. First, they aim not just to import modern equipment, but to create their own scientific and technological base on the principles of the fourth industrial revolution. Second, relying on such scientific and technological base, they work to create their own relatively independent production base and start producing a new generation of high value-added goods.

Against this background, another question arises: Is the EU ready to participate in the creation of a new generation of scientific, technological and industrial bases in order to qualitatively and quantitatively change its trade and economic relations with Central Asia? Along with the transport and energy component, the EU's strategy also has a digital and technological component, *Digital4development*, which is associated with the European 'digital for development policy'. The fact that the new EU strategy spells out attention to cooperation in the field of digitalisation and support for start-ups and business accelerators can be regarded as a very positive step. However, how substantial will EU participation really be? I think that one of the answers to this question lies in the intention and readiness of the European Union to build its Eurasian and global technological zone. Here, I will consider this question from a strategic and conceptual point of view, without touching upon the financial dimension yet.

### **Other regional integration initiatives**

Today we can say that this EU strategy will intersect with the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative and the Eurasian Economic Union, which can be regarded as the Chinese and Russian strategies for building their technological zones. How will this intersection

develop? The EU strategy states that “Europe will work closely with third countries, regional organizations and international financial institutions to promote sustainability,” but it’s hard to say how the situation really will turn out. The scenario of rivalry with third countries cannot be ruled out. We see the rivalry of Europe and Russia in the space of countries of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. We also see increased technological rivalry between the US and China, accompanied by higher import tariffs, restrictions on technology transfer and the creation of blacklisted companies. Whether the European strategy will go along the path of conjugation or along the path of rivalry will become a crucial issue both for determining the nature and quality of future cooperation between Central Asia and the EU.

The success of such directions of the New EU Strategy for Central Asia as cooperation in the field of education, and environmental and water sustainability, will also largely depend on the change in the quality of the European technological and investment presence in Central Asia. The problem of the region is that the majority of environmental and water problems are generated and continue to be generated by economic models and energy-, resource- and water-inefficient technologies that are outdated. For instance, take cars with internal combustion engines that are currently responsible for urban air pollution, or obsolete types of thermal power plants, or obsolete irrigation models in agriculture, which lose 40 to 60% of the water used. Outdated urban governance models and erratic development also lead to environmental degradation in cities. A high-quality solution to these problems requires new, more modern development models, technologies, knowledge and the quality of human capital, and the EU could potentially become one of the external players that can provide all this and become one of the key beneficiaries.

## Conclusion

So, concluding, it should be noted that the success of the new EU strategy will largely depend on whether the EU can fully fit into the modernisation programmes of the countries of Central Asia and, first of all, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, and open its market for future high-tech products. The distinction of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan is explained by the fact that these are the largest economies in the region and their successful transition to a new type of economy can become a catalyst for the development of all of Central Asia. If the EU cannot write off these processes, or the Central Asian countries themselves cannot carry out accelerated modernisation, both of these factors will increase the likelihood that the new EU strategy, like its predecessor, will remain at the level of a declaration of intent.

# HAROUN MIR<sup>1</sup> – An outlook for a sustainable peace in Afghanistan

## Introduction

The utmost desire of Afghans is a lasting and sustainable peace, which has remained a distant dream in the past four decades. The collapse of the Taliban regime in 2001 followed by the re-engagement of the international community through the “Bonn Process”<sup>2</sup> in December 2001, led to a renewed hope and opportunity for Afghanistan to re-emerge from the ashes of the civil war and reintegrate into the world community. Despite the support of the international community and particularly generous financial and military assistance from the United States and its NATO allies, the resurgence of the Taliban in 2006 has seriously undermined the process of state building in the country.

Past peace attempts, which were first started by former president Hamid Karzai in 2010<sup>3</sup> and were continued by President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani after his election 2014,<sup>4</sup> have failed. In fact, President Ghani has developed a twofold peace strategy consisting of rapprochement with Pakistan and direct negotiations with the Taliban. He began his new initiative by visiting Beijing and Riyadh which are considered key allies of Pakistan in the region. He then made a number of concessions to the Pakistani authorities such as accepting an unprecedented trip to the Pakistan Army General Headquarter, sending Afghan cadets to their military academies, and allowing the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding for intelligence sharing between the two countries.

However, these unilateral concessions were not reciprocated by the Pakistani authorities. Despite a brief ceasefire for the Islamic holidays of Eid-ul-Fitr in 2018<sup>5</sup> and the release of some of the Taliban prisoners, the Taliban have refused to recognise the legitimacy of the National Unity Government and thus categorically rejected its olive branch.

Meanwhile, the recent direct negotiations between the United States and the Taliban have created a new momentum for the peace process, which has gained widespread support among Afghanistan’s major stakeholders.

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<sup>1</sup> Analyst, Centre for Research and Policy Studies, Afghanistan. Contact: HarounMir@yahoo.com

<sup>2</sup> *Afghanistan’s Constitutional Process, 2001-2004*. [https://sites.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/Classes/Rubin paper.pdf](https://sites.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/Classes/Rubin%20paper.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Borger, Julian. “Afghanistan Conference Sets out Plan for Two-Tier Peace Process.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 28 Jan. 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jan/28/afghanistan-london-conference-analysis>.

<sup>4</sup> Nordland, Rod, and Mujib Mashal. “Afghan President Receives Unexpected Welcome in Pakistan.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 9 Dec. 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/10/world/asia/afghanistan-pakistan-ashraf-ghani-visit.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Makoi, Akhtar Mohammad. “Taliban Leaders Declare Eid Ceasefire with Afghan Forces.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 9 June 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/09/taliban-ceasefire-eid-afghanistan>.

In addition, President Ghani has offered a new comprehensive seven point peace plan<sup>6</sup> centered on direct negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban; but which also emphasised the importance of a regional consensus.

Therefore, Afghanistan is in dire need of an honest and trustworthy regional mediator, which is capable of bringing together Afghanistan's neighbours and key regional powers in the context of this new peace initiative.

### **The past regional efforts in bringing stability in Afghanistan**

The Obama administration, through Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, adopted a regional approach for resolution of conflict in Afghanistan. In fact, by appointing late Richard Holbrooke as Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Obama administration wanted to galvanise regional dialogue in view of an ultimate political settlement between the Afghan government and the insurgents. The most important diplomatic initiative of the Obama Administration was the Istanbul Process,<sup>7</sup> also known as the "Heart of Asia," which has been perhaps the best approach for reaching an unequivocal consensus on regional cooperation for a secure and stable Afghanistan. However, since the inception of this dialogue among Afghanistan near and extended neighbours and supporting countries in 2011, so far nine annual meetings have been organised but the outcome of the meetings has yet to materialise in any significant way because the process has been undermined by growing tensions among key regional stakeholders.

Similarly, the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, (QGC)<sup>8</sup> composed of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, and United States, which held its first meeting in Islamabad in 2016, has also faded away.

In fact, unsuccessful attempts through the Istanbul Process and the QGC indicates that, despite continuous efforts, reaching a regional consensus on Afghanistan is a hugely challenging exercise.

### **In need of renewed regional dialogue**

As stated in President Ghani's new peace strategy for Afghanistan, the conflict in Afghanistan is multifaceted, which requires different approaches to its different components. The US-Taliban dialogue will continue and the intra-Afghan dialogue might soon start, there is thus imminent need for renewed regional dialogue.

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<sup>6</sup> "Ghani Proposes 7-Point 'Peace Plan'." *TOLONews*, <https://tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan/ghani-proposes-7-point-peace-plan>.

<sup>7</sup> "Home." *Heart of Asia – Istanbul process*, available at: <https://www.hoa.gov.af/>.

<sup>8</sup> Khan, Zahid. "Quadrilateral Coordination Group: Political Twist in Afghan Peace Process." *Foreign Policy News*, 10 June 2016, <https://foreignpolicynews.org/2016/06/10/quadrilateral-coordination-group-political-twist-afghan-peace-process/>.

We will not be able to achieve lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan without addressing all major components of the conflict in Afghanistan including the concerns of Afghanistan's neighbours. Therefore, in view of past failed attempts, it is necessary to bring Afghanistan's neighbours and regional powers back into a dialogue similar to the "Six Plus Two Group on Afghanistan."<sup>9</sup> In addition, India must be added in this group, which will make it Six Plus Three.

In order to reinitiate a regional dialogue on Afghanistan, there needs to be a trustworthy and an impartial mediator, who could enjoy the trust and respect of all regional stakeholders, including the Afghan government and the Taliban.

Among all regional stakeholders, Uzbekistan is perhaps the most desirable country to take the lead on regional dialogue on Afghanistan. Uzbekistan would serve as a comfortable and easily accessible place for all of Afghanistan's neighbours and thus would be best suited for an exercise like this. In addition, a Taliban delegation recently traveled to Samarkand and met with Uzbek officials, which has provided the Uzbek authorities a special mediation role in the current political context.

### How to address the challenge of Pakistan?

One of the important underlying sources of conflict in Afghanistan has been the tenuous relationship with Pakistan since the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. Pakistan's powerful military has supported and used armed opposition groups in Afghanistan in order to achieve strategic depth inside the country through a subservient government in Kabul. Their policy of destabilising Afghanistan and undermining the central government goes back to pre-1980s, and in the past 18 years they have been able to successfully withstand all kind of pressure from the US and NATO countries and never gave up on the Taliban. This is because they have heavily invested in them, and they are keen to extract advantages from the Afghan government before they could make any tangible concession towards peace and stability in Afghanistan.<sup>10</sup>

The demands of Pakistan are very clear and they have communicated them directly and indirectly to the Afghan authorities in the past few years. They are namely:

1. Recognition of the Durand Line as *de facto* international border between the two countries,
2. Pakistan's right over the Kunar River,
3. Reduced presence of India in Afghanistan,
4. Privileged access to Afghanistan's mineral resources,
5. And unrestricted access to Central Asian markets via Afghanistan.

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<sup>9</sup> "HIGH-LEVEL MEETING OF 'SIX PLUS TWO' GROUP ON AFGHANISTAN | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases." *United Nations*, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/press/en/1999/19990923.sgsm7144.doc.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Mir, Haroun. "When Will Pakistan's Military Leadership Gain Political Wisdom?: Opinion." *Asia Times*, 5 Sept. 2018, <https://www.asiatimes.com/2018/09/opinion/when-will-pakistans-military-leadership-gain-political-wisdom/>.

The Afghan political elite is fully aware of Pakistan's demands. However, embarking on serious negotiation with Pakistan on these highly politicised and controversial topics requires a strong political mandate and unequivocal support from the broad political spectrum in the country. In turn, this kind of broad internal consensus requires a strong government in Kabul with a solid mandate. Therefore, President Ghani has rightly said that before reaching out to the Taliban, he must find a common understanding with Pakistan.

### **The position of the Taliban and their internal issues**

The Taliban, despite their territorial gains, face deep crises. The absence of a charismatic leadership and lack of a clear message about their end-goal in the context of a potential dialogue with the Afghan government has created difficulties for them. In addition, the unexpected internal split and direct confrontation in the aftermath of the announcement of the death of Mullah Omar in 2015<sup>11</sup> has created deep scars inside the movement.

Meanwhile, the threat of vigorous competition from Islamic State (IS) in the country looms high, and they have risked losing the monopoly over religion to this new emerging movement.<sup>12</sup> Lately some of the foreign fighters in the country have shifted their allegiance from the Taliban to the Islamic State.

In addition, the Taliban have relied on new sources of funding and military support particularly from Iran and Russia,<sup>13</sup> which has further contributed to their internal split and fragmentation.

Furthermore, today's situation in Afghanistan is drastically different from that in the 1990s and it is not anymore an isolated and fragmented country. The Taliban must recognise that their return to power by force is impossible, and there is no viable alternative to the current democratic political process in the country.

Also, the Taliban movement's archaic message does not resonate with Afghanistan's young and growing urban population. The movement's top leadership is afraid that political compromise in a democratic system will marginalise them, and they might face the fate of the former Mujahideen leaders post-2001. In fact, during the Bonn Conference in 2001 more than 50% of top government positions went to various Mujahideen leaders but over the past decade most of them have either retired or become marginalised.

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<sup>11</sup> Goldstein, Joseph, and Taimoor Shah. "Death of Mullah Omar Exposes Divisions Within Taliban." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 30 July 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/31/world/asia/taliban-confirm-death-of-mullah-omar-and-weigh-successor.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Brennan, David. "ISIS Fighters in Afghanistan Have Killed at Least 15 Taliban Militants." *Newsweek*, Newsweek, 17 July 2018, <https://www.newsweek.com/isis-vs-taliban-dozens-killed-battle-afghanistan-continues-1028441>.

<sup>13</sup> Cunningham, Erin. "While the U.S. Wasn't Looking, Russia and Iran Began Carving out a Bigger Role in Afghanistan." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 13 Apr. 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/with-us-policy-in-flux-russia-and-iran-challenge-american-power-in-afghanistan/2017/04/12/f8c768bc-1eb8-11e7-bb59-a74ccaf1d02f\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/with-us-policy-in-flux-russia-and-iran-challenge-american-power-in-afghanistan/2017/04/12/f8c768bc-1eb8-11e7-bb59-a74ccaf1d02f_story.html).

## Divergence of Interest among Afghanistan's neighbours and regional powers?

Since 2012, the new political development in the Middle East; growing rivalries between Pakistan and India; and the United States' worsening relationship with Russia and China have negatively impacted regional cooperation on Afghanistan. Despite high stakes for regional security, Afghanistan's regional stakeholders continue to dwell over their divergent interests rather than cooperate in bringing peace and stability in this war-torn country. There have been ample analyses on regional approaches for peace and stability in Afghanistan and in the region. In an essay in 2010 for Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, titled "Is a Regional Policy Viable in Afghanistan?", I assessed the role of Afghanistan's neighbours and key regional stakeholders, and wrote:

*An ideal regional approach must explore common opportunities rather than dwell on differences. There will be some impediments to the process, however Some of the objectives of Afghanistan's neighbors and other regional countries conflict with one another, and have contributed to instability.*<sup>14</sup>

Recently, the proxy confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Iran in the Middle East has already spilled over in Afghanistan. The presence of a large number of Afghan Shiite fighters in support of Iran's effort in Syria, and the emergence of IS fighters in Afghanistan is a prelude for sectarian violence in the country.

In reaction to Saudi Arabia's persistence to enroll Afghanistan in its Sunni coalition against Iran, I wrote in an Op-ed for Al Jazeera English in April 2015:

*The future stability of Afghanistan rests on Ghani and the National Unity Government's decision. Taking part in the Yemen ground invasion would cause the unraveling of Afghanistan's unity government and a harsh reaction from Iran. Refusing to become a part of the wider Sunni coalition would cost Kabul the peace process and political isolation from the Saudi-led coalition.*<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, Pakistan's obsession about India's presence in Afghanistan hasn't changed, and therefore its military establishment considers radical militant groups such as the Haqani Network as a strategic asset against New Delhi's growing influence in Kabul.

In addition, China's recent direct engagement in Afghanistan and its support for the Afghan government is not in concertation with the US and NATO's efforts to stabilise the country, and instead it is viewed as part of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's efforts to counter NATO's influence in Eurasia.

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<sup>14</sup> Tellis, Ashley J., et al. "Is a Regional Strategy Viable in Afghanistan?" *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2010/05/06/is-regional-strategy-viable-in-afghanistan-pub-40760>.

<sup>15</sup> Mir, Haroun. "Afghanistan Stuck between Iran and Saudi Arabia." *Politics | Al Jazeera*, Al Jazeera, 6 Apr. 2015, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/04/afghanistan-yemen-iran-saudi-conflict-150406082938492.html>.

Similarly, Russia has recently adopted a hostile position vis-à-vis the US and NATO's military presence in Afghanistan by providing financial, military, and diplomatic support to the Taliban.

Therefore, for China and Russia the top priority is US and NATO's military exit from Afghanistan even at the cost of political stability in the country.

## Conclusion

There is a consensus and unanimity inside Afghanistan and among its key stakeholders that the only solution to achieve enduring peace in the country is through an ultimate political settlement, which will allow Afghanistan to live in peace with itself and with its neighbours.

Afghanistan has suffered from belligerent interferences from its neighbours, particularly Pakistan and Iran, and this must stop because a failed Afghan state is a liability for the entire region.

Perhaps, it is the last opportunity to achieve a peaceful resolution to the Afghan conflict while they still enjoy military and financial assistance from the US and its NATO allies. However, a hasty US military withdrawal from Afghanistan will create a vacuum of power, which might not be filled immediately and easily by any other regional power or even coalition of regional countries.

A majority of Afghans believe, while the intra-Afghan dialogue is necessary, a regional consensus among Afghanistan's neighbours and regional powers will be the only guarantee to preserve the eventual accords and create proper mechanisms to mend Afghanistan's relationship with its neighbours and particularly address historical differences with Pakistan.

Perhaps, Uzbekistan is best placed among Afghanistan's neighbours to lead a regional dialogue on Afghanistan as an important supplement to the intra-Afghan dialogue between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

# **IRINA PETROVA<sup>1</sup> - The European Union's evolving approach towards governance in Central Eurasia**

## **Introduction: European Union's policy towards Central Eurasia at a crossroads**

A series of internal and external crises has had a profound impact on the European Union's (EU) foreign policy in the past years. While after the Ukraine crisis and the launch of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) it has become obvious that the EU's foreign policy in its eastern neighbourhood required a new approach, what would be the new approach has been a much more debated issue. Interviews conducted with representatives of the European External Action Service, the European Commission and the European Parliament show different degrees of the EU bureaucracy's readiness and/or willingness for a paradigm shift in its foreign policy. This paper will argue that the direction in which the new EU approach is unfolding is inspired by complexity theory. Yet, whereas the new policy trends are inspired by complexity thinking, in practice the change has been very incremental. As a result, one wonders to what extent the EU's policy gets revised and is actually shaped by complexity thinking in practice, that is, beyond policy rhetoric?

## **Complexity thinking, resilience and International Relations**

Complexity theory emerged in natural sciences in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to make sense of complex systems and was adopted by public policy studies and broader social sciences scholars since the 1970s onwards. The theory presented a radical ontological and epistemological shift from the Enlightenment paradigm of thinking. Thus, whereas the Enlightenment way of thinking saw the world as consisting of simple and complicated systems, functioning based on linear causality, and developing progressively; the complexity thinking focused on complex systems (i.e. systems that cannot be studied as a sum of their parts) and non-linear causality.<sup>2</sup> It is important to highlight some foundations of complexity thinking in order to understand how the EU tries to employ it in practice.

First, it is argued that complex life is characterised by a multiplicity of actors. In International Relations this has been reflected by the rise of Transnationalism in the 1970s, which pointed out that international interactions are carried out not only by governments, but also by a whole constellation of various types of actors, such as parliaments, civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations, ethnic and religious groups, trans-national corporations etc. These actors might act on their own or as parts of larger networks. The phenomenon of interaction of multiple networks (quite often of different nature) has been labelled as 'multiplexity'.

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<sup>1</sup> Postdoctoral Research Associate, GCRF UKRI 'COMPASS' project, University of Kent. Contact: i.petrova-217@kent.ac.uk

<sup>2</sup> Koliba et. al. (2016) "Complexity Theory and Systems Analysis". In: Ansell, C. and Torfing, J. (eds.) *Handbook on Theories of Governance*, Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 364-379

Second, complex systems are characterised by iterative adaptations and non-linearity (a relationship that cannot be explicated as a linear combination of its inputs). That implies that although we can anticipate certain challenges, the realm of ‘unknown unknowns’ is rather broad, which means that often we are confronted with challenges that we could not foresee. In this respect, the only way to survive is to learn from the ongoing developments and adapt to them.

Third, an essential feature of complexity is emergence. Emergence can be defined as “the fact that the individual interaction level produces social effects at the macro level, which are not reducible to the aggregate alone”.<sup>3</sup> Hence, the central idea is that collective order may develop from below as a result of self-organisation requiring no central control.<sup>4</sup> This characteristic of systems coupled with uncertainty and our inability to predict potential challenges, resulted in conceptualising resilience as a new “postmodern form of governance...which asserts a flatter ontology of interactive emergence where the knowledge which needs to be acquired can only be gained through self-reflexive approaches”.<sup>5</sup>

Such understanding of resilience suggests that in the context of complex life and ‘unknown unknowns’, (external) governance should be about reliance of everyday practices, internal structures and interactions, which is expected to result in self-organisation and finding the responses most suitable and sustainable for the community in question. In view of external governance, this perspective of resilience-based governance would imply rejection of imposition and neoliberal governmentality.<sup>6</sup>

### **Complexity thinking in the EU’s evolving approach towards governance in Central Eurasia**

As follows from the discussion above, complex life implies an inability to predict potential challenges and developments. Hence, unpredictability also feeds in into uncontrollability. The 2016 European Union Global Strategy has indeed recognised that the EU might deal with a world that is unpredictable and uncontrollable.<sup>7</sup> Yet, what does it mean in terms of the EU’s governance in its eastern neighbourhood? 2016 saw some changes in the cornerstone foreign policy principles.

First and foremost, one of the major innovations is the embracement of the concept of resilience. While there are many sceptics seeing resilience as yet another European jargonism, there is also some evidence that the concept of resilience is taken seriously by a share of the EU foreign policy makers as a new governance paradigm. Secondly, adoption of complexity thinking and resilience

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<sup>3</sup> Schneider, Volker (2012) *Governance and complexity*. See also: Holland, John H. (1995) *Hidden Order: How adaptation builds complexity*. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley; Mitchell, Melanie (2009) *Complexity: A guided tour*. New York: Oxford University Press

<sup>4</sup> Kauffman, Stuart A. (1993) *The origins of order: Self-organization and selection in evolution*. New York: Oxford University Press

<sup>5</sup> Chandler, David (2014) Beyond neoliberalism: resilience, the new art of governing complexity, *Resilience*, 2:1, 47-63

<sup>6</sup> Joseph, Jonathan (2013) Resilience as embedded neoliberalism: a governmentality approach, *Resilience*, 1:1, 38-52

<sup>7</sup> European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. (2015). *SWD (2015) 500 final JOIN (2015) 50 final*.

as a mode of governance triggers a shift of responsibility from the EU to the partner states.<sup>8</sup> This, at least partially, implies a less top-down and a more bottom-up approach. Thirdly, adoption of resilience also implies increased focus on the local and, by extension, greater local ownership. Finally, complexity thinking entails the process of constant learning. While complex life means that there are many potential challenges which fall under the 'unknown unknowns' category, the only way to survive and prosper is iterative adaptation to the emerging challenges. The principle of iterative adaptations has been embraced by the European Union. In what follows, I will discuss in more detail how these principles have been applied by the EU in its foreign policy towards its eastern neighbourhood.

### **Iterative adaptations regarding the EU's Eastern neighbourhood**

In terms of iterative adaptations, the EU has demonstrated substantial reflexivity by initiating a wide-scale consultation process including broad audiences both in the European Union and partner countries. Launched after the Arab Spring, the mechanism of public consultations has been recalibrated through several iterations to ensure a wider participation.

Another important policy change reflecting the embracement of complexity and resilience thinking is the differentiation among the partners and rejection of the one-size-fit-all approach applied previously. This, for instance, resulted in various framework agreements including Association Agreements, Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement, Partnership Priorities with Belarus, EU-Kazakhstan Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, etc.

Furthermore, partnership priorities are now based on broader negotiations and consultations at the agenda-setting and policy formulation stages of the policy cycle. The European Union seems to be getting more conscious not to impose its own agenda onto its partners (to what extent it has succeeded so far is a different question, however).

Analysis of the partnership priorities shows that their language is getting less patronising as compared to the Action Plans that were adopted previously. Finally, it is important to note that the EU's policy evaluation has been revised to ensure greater differentiation. In particular, while previously the ENP country reports were prepared based on a single template for the same deadline, the current procedure ensures that the policy evaluation documents are only published when a certain policy cycle is completed and the evaluation criteria reflect partnership priorities, and hence vary from one state to another.

### **Conclusion**

This analysis of recent developments has shown that these changes signal a shift in the EU foreign policy towards resilience as a mode of governance in the eastern neighbourhood. Yet, these

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<sup>8</sup> Wagner, W., & Anholt, R. (2016). Resilience as the EU global strategy's new leitmotif: Pragmatic, problematic or promising? *Contemporary Security Policy*, 37, 414–430. doi:10.1080/13523260.2016.1228034

changes need to be developed further in order to show an in-depth policy change.<sup>9</sup> There is definitely a drive towards a new governance paradigm, yet a range of factors hinders resilience as self-governance. First, such understanding of resilience is only one of several ways to understand it. Another rather common approach is seeing resilience just as an ability to bounce back after crisis. Second, and connected to this, the EU's foreign policy in the neighbourhood is very path-dependant and changes are rather slow and incremental. Yet, as argued in the introduction, the change is inspired by complexity thinking and, in my view, a move in the right direction.

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<sup>9</sup> Petrova, Irina and Delcour, Laure (2019) From principle to practice? The resilience–local ownership nexus in the EU Eastern Partnership policy, *Contemporary Security Policy*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2019.1678280>

# **VICTOR SHADURSKI<sup>10</sup> – Belarusian-Uzbek relations: achievements and perspectives**

## **Introduction**

For a deeper understanding of the place and role of the post-Soviet space in global and regional politics, we need to study not only the potential of the Russian Federation and the interstate integration associations, created with its leadership (CIS, EAEU, CSTO, Union State of Belarus and Russia), but also the factor of bilateral relations of other young states that arose after the collapse of the USSR. One such significant interstate relationship in Eurasia is between Belarus (Eastern Europe) and Uzbekistan (Central Asia) with ever increasing mutual interests.

Despite the considerable distance (it takes 3365 kilometers to get from Minsk to Tashkent), different climatic conditions, cultural as well as religious background; the two countries and nations have much in common. First of all, we should remember that both nations were part of the Russian Empire and following that the Soviet Union. We jointly experienced achievements and tragedies: World War I, World War II, the earthquake in Tashkent (26 April, 1966); and the Chernobyl accident and its aftermath (26 April 1986), among other examples.

During World War II, the Uzbek SSR hosted tens of thousands of evacuated Belarusian people. Among them was an out-standing Belarusian poet and writer Yakub Kolas. In Tashkent, one of the central streets was named after him, and a monument was constructed to commemorate him. In Belarus the heroic son of the Uzbek nation, Gulyam Yakubov has been commemorated. As a tribute of respect to him, one of the streets of Minsk bears his name. Moreover, a bust of the prominent Uzbek poet Alisher Navoi (1441–1501) was built in the center of the Belarusian capital.

In Soviet times, a strong mutually beneficial inter-republic cooperation existed which was based on intensive deliveries of tractors, trucks, refrigerators and other products from Belarus to Uzbekistan. At the same time, large-scale deliveries of cotton and cotton products, fresh and dry fruits, etc. were exported from Uzbekistan into Belarus.

## **Belarus-Uzbek relations since independence**

However, in the first two and a half decades of independence of these ‘young’ states, bilateral relations did not have a positive dynamic, due to various reasons. The countries’ leaders met predominantly in multilateral formats (the UN, CIS and SCO). The Embassy of Uzbekistan in Minsk was opened only in April 2018 and a small embassy of Belarus in Uzbekistan had existed since February 1994. Shavkat Mirziyoyev’s election as President of Uzbekistan, in

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<sup>10</sup> Professor, Dean of the Faculty of International Relations, Belarusian State University. Contact: shadursky@bsu.by

December 2016, gave a serious impulse for the development of Belarusian-Uzbek relations. Mirziyoyev announced a policy of openness and expansion of international cooperation.

This positive signal from Tashkent was received with enthusiasm in Belarus. In 2017, two assembly plants of Belarusian machinery with the participation of the Belarusian capital were launched on the territory of the Republic of Uzbekistan, namely the joint ventures, 'Amkodor-Agrotexmash' and 'UzBelAgromash'. In 2018, shoe manufacturing company "UzShoes" opened a plant as well. During President Lukashenko's visit to Uzbekistan on 13-14 September 2018, 19 agreements were signed to create a solid legal basis for bilateral cooperation in the political, socio-economic and cultural-humanitarian spheres. The Presidents of Belarus and Uzbekistan opened a new factory for the assembly of machinery named 'Amkodor' in Tashkent. In total, over 50 joint ventures with Belarusian investments operate in Uzbekistan (Aripov 2019). On 2 November 2018, the Prime Ministers of the two states signed the 'Roadmap for the development of cooperation between the two countries for 2019–2020' in Astana (SBBY 2018).

Serious results were also achieved during President Mirziyoyev's visit to Belarus (31 July - 1 August 2019). Following negotiations, the Presidents of Belarus and Uzbekistan adopted 12 joint documents on the development of cooperation in various areas. The Heads of State personally signed a joint statement. At the Regions Forum on 29-30 July 2019 in Minsk, 26 agreements were adopted at the interregional level, as well as about 20 specific commercial contracts worth more than 300 million US dollars (Nazarov 2019).

Many politicians and experts note that the rapid development of Belarusian-Uzbek cooperation is largely favoured by good personal relations between the leaders of the two states, which is important for the domestic and foreign policies of both countries. In addition to President Lukashenko's statements on the topic of privileged cooperation with Uzbekistan, Mikhail Myasnikov (Chairman of the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly of Belarus and currently the Head of the Eurasian Economic Commission) repeatedly expressed the same vision. During a meeting with a delegation from Uzbekistan, in 2018, he said that "Uzbekistan is a key partner in Central Asia" (Council of the Republic of the National Assembly of Belarus 2018).

### **Priorities for future cooperation**

Assessing the high potential of bilateral cooperation, I would like to highlight four possible areas of interaction.

#### **1. Identify mutually beneficial areas of economic cooperation and cooperation with third parties.**

It is important to stress that Uzbekistan's choice of Belarus as a 'reference point' in Eastern Europe, and the use of Uzbekistan as the preferred platform for Belarus' presence in Central Asia does not mean that Minsk and Tashkent reject a multi-vector foreign policy and/or multilateral cooperation. However, bilateral agreements might prove most effective and predictable.

We should also be aware of the fact that the status of a 'reference point' requires not only constant attention, but also significant funding from both states. In this case, the center of gravity should be transferred to investments on the creation of joint ventures. As mentioned before, the President of Uzbekistan emphasized the complementary nature of the two economies, which forms an objective basis for trade expansion. The leadership of the countries set the task of increasing mutual trade up to 1 billion US dollars. However, bilateral trade and even the creation of joint industries will not solve the economic problems of the two countries without joint access to the markets of third countries.

For Belarus, it is essential to expand the supply of machinery products and other goods to the markets of the so-called "far arc" countries (India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and others). This requires a convenient and inexpensive transport infrastructure. Can Tashkent provide assistance here? Uzbekistan can build cross-border railways and highways leading to the Indian Ocean, which Belarus could take advantage of. In return, Belarus is the best logistics platform for Uzbek exports and jointly produced goods to enter the European Union market.

In bilateral cooperation, Belarus and Uzbekistan can make greater use of the opportunities arising from the implementation of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI offers prospects for a more efficient operation of transport corridors leading from the northeastern provinces of China to Central and Western Europe. Container trains, after unloading in the EU, return to the East almost without cargo. This circumstance can be used in the interests of Belarusian-Uzbek trade.

## **2. Joint efforts to create more favourable external (international) conditions for medium and small states.**

At the global and regional level, there are other activities in line with the foreign policy objectives of Belarus and Uzbekistan. Recognition of both countries on the global scale can be facilitated by mutual support in the world arena; joint initiatives in international organisations; and other common events. It would be ideal to implement the slogan "Much depends on our countries in the world" by uniting the group of medium and small states in one platform.

## **3. Promote human contacts between citizens of the two countries, especially young people.**

Obviously, the cultural and humanitarian sphere plays an important role in the interaction of the two countries. It also requires serious financial support. The problem is that establishing intensive public relations is a future investment, which often does not bring quick and tangible dividends. Festivals, summer schools, student exchanges, student construction brigades, and the development of mutual tourism are some such forms of possible cooperation.

A concrete example of student contacts is the joint Belarusian-Uzbek construction brigade "Dustlik" ("Friendship"). Young people worked on the beautification of Minsk from 22 July to 5 August 2019 (MinskNovosti 2019).

#### **4. Exchange experiences in creating an effective model of a transition society.**

It is obvious that both countries are striving to learn from the global experiences in setting up a competitive economy; in forming effective state institutions free from corruption; and in the nurturing of a constructive civil society. It is unlikely that Minsk and Tashkent could simply implement a model of development that was already prepared and tested elsewhere (e.g. in China, Russia, or Poland). They have to formulate their own, way of development, taking into account best practice, the previously reached progress of their countries, national cultural and religious traditions, and other factors.

It should be pointed out that the rapid transformation of Uzbekistan has become a great surprise not only in the region, but worldwide. More and more often, world media are reporting on an evolving Uzbekistan, and international contacts at the highest level are developing rapidly.

In my opinion, the experience of the Uzbek government in reforming state-owned companies, including support and profiling of inefficient enterprises and production capacities, should trigger great interest among Belarusian practitioners and experts.

It is important here to mention another successful experience of Uzbekistan, which was adopted by Belarusian representatives, namely the achievements of the southern country in the sphere of international tourism. The simplification of the visa regime and the rules of stay in Uzbekistan, along with the development of infrastructure and the promotion of the country's tourism potential abroad, led to a twofold increase in the number of foreigners visiting the republic - from 2.60 million in 2017 to 5.3 million in 2018 (UzNews 2019).

In addition to almost 70 countries for which Uzbekistan established a visa-free regime, from 1 February 2019, the possibility of obtaining an electronic entry visa was introduced for citizens of 76 other countries. This innovation provides a significant reduction in the time of issuance of visas.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus Vladimir Makei announced the possibility of introducing electronic entry visas in Belarus in July 2019, stating: "As you know, a 30-day visa-free regime has been introduced for citizens of almost 80 countries. We do not stop here and continue working on further steps. We have prepared the proposals for the government on the possible introduction of an electronic visa for third-country nationals". The Minister furthermore expressed hope that this project will be implemented within the next year (SBBY 2019).

#### **Conclusion**

It is obvious that neither Belarus nor Uzbekistan have their own investment funds to launch large mutually beneficial projects. In the current economic situation, they depend on the support of more powerful states; therefore, they are forced to take into account the approaches of the latter.

Moreover, the bilateral format of interaction of two small countries that do not have common borders can hardly compete with larger integration initiatives (particularly the Eurasian Economic Union), as well as with the political and economic influence of actors such as Russia, China and the United States.

Indeed, the period following the official visit of the Uzbek leader to Belarus showed a decline in the interest of the state structures of Minsk and Tashkent in bilateral cooperation. The potential for interaction between countries is mentioned less and less in the media of both partner countries.

At the same time, with the political will of the leadership of the two countries, and active support from society and business, noticeable progress in Belarusian-Uzbek relations can lead to positive economic results for both countries. This article has shown the scope of bilateral relations in an increasingly multilateral space. The relations between Uzbekistan and Belarus show the importance of a multi vector foreign policy which does not stop with forming partnerships with bigger, more powerful countries, but locates interests of mutual benefit with smaller, similar states as well.

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# MUNIRA SHAHIDI<sup>1</sup> – Personal contacts in Cultural Diplomacy of Central Asia

## Introduction

The idea of Cultural Diplomacy (CD) as building capacity in terms of peace and intercultural communication, regardless of religion, language or place of origin, has been developed in Central Asia (CA) on the annals of the historical Silk Road. Although the transformation of the idea into a global New Silk Road project was already announced by U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton in 2011, the initiative never got off the ground. One problem was that the capacity of CA for harmonization of cultures is still limited. Historically, the region was at the 'cross-roads' of cultures, and now it is trying to renew its own national/regional cultural capacity.

This paper argues that personal contacts including research integration are crucial for the development of CD in the region and beyond. I will start from a small historical observation of the modern history of CD in CA.

## The historical establishment of the Cultural Diplomacy concept

The modern concept of CD in CA as peaceful, creative inter-activity of two or more cultures, has been formed in the epoch of Timurids in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century and has been renewed twice during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first adaptation was in Bukhara in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where CD was applied through 'Bedil-khoni' or 'Bedil-readings', as non-official, all-regional, multilingual public gatherings. Connected with the name of the Persian-speaking poet of India, Abdulkadir Bedil (1642-1720), these gatherings were a cradle for the ideas of the leading figures of the reformatory movement of Bukhara such as Ahmadi Danish (1827-1897), Abdurauf Fitrat (1885-1938), and Sadriddin Ayni (1878-1954). Later, during the Soviet period, the Bedilian ideas of synthesizing and harmonizing diversity of religions and cultures, such as Islam and Hinduism, was widened to Christianity and Buddhism in their modern interpretations. The Badilian views were harshly suppressed by the Bolsheviks after the October Revolution and by the Soviets in the 1950s, but continued to develop through personal contacts and influenced the 'central' governments. In this way, it contributed to the creation of region-wide sustainable communities, gradually attracting academic researchers from neighbouring countries, such as Iran, Afghanistan, as well as academic schools of Eurasia, especially in Eastern Europe. This begs the question of why this 'holistic vision' of Central Asia, modernising Persian-speaking classical heritage, is still marginalized in contemporary academic discussions? A holistic vision of global peace (*sulh-i kull* in Tajik) can help to understand the unity of humanity in all its diversity of cultures. Although comparative literature/cultural studies have been evaluating what values CA has in common

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<sup>1</sup> Professor, Tajik National University, National Team-leader of GCRF COMPASS. Contact: Munira@ShahidiFoundation.com

with Asian cultures, on the one hand, and European cultures, on the other, the findings of collaborative research have been marginalized from the policy of international affairs g/locally. Still, these academic findings have impacted public consciousness through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, mostly via so-called 'rhythm and melodies', as will be shown later on in this paper.

Shared values of the region, such as '*adam va alam*' –'human and humanity', identified in their specific regional characteristics by academic research, have significantly impacted the process of forming and developing national theatres, dance, art, novels, new styles of songs and polyphonic music. This process has in turn also affected neighbouring countries, such as Afghanistan, Iran, India and Pakistan, through personal contacts between political, academic and creative people. As a matter of fact, globalization had already started in CA before the term turned up in academic discussions. The ideas of globalisation, formed within the Avicennian tradition (Ibn Sina/Avicenna) that was original and organic for the region, was gradually adopted by the academic community globally. These ideas are now coming back to the region in innovative forms. When thousands of scholars, engineers and actors of cultures, escaping from warring Europe and Russia, found a creative atmosphere in CA, especially before and during WW2, that diversity of minds and cultures awakened an interest in the original roots of the local/regional traditions. In the decades since independence, governmental and non-governmental organizations for peace and development are again cooperating successfully via different projects including GCRF COMPASS, which helped organise meetings in Tashkent.

### **Cultural Diplomacy and academic cooperation through COMPASS**

The conference on regional security held in Tashkent built on discussions that took place at a previous conference in Dushanbe (16-17 September 2019) and can be considered as a *renewal*, rather than the construction, of the region's tradition of collaborative research. Although the conference concentrated on Uzbekistan's responsibility regarding security and global change, the aims and targets of both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are closely connected. Relevant aspects to examine further are therefore related to the role of personal contacts as well as international cooperation projects in the strengthening of CD. The paper will now look at these two aspects in more detail.

### **The role of personal contacts in Cultural Diplomacy**

Personal contacts in the policy, sciences and arts were always the driving force for the peace-building and development of the CA region, even during the hard times of the civil war in Tajikistan (1992-1997). However, such personal contacts are not visible in the current political landscape of the region. While the governments of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan aim to work together, they are still keeping some distance from the scholarly/academic community for solving common problems for the region and the global world. It would therefore be helpful to evaluate the experiences of the near past in overcoming personal vulnerability by building a mutual space with the 'other'. By rethinking and revaluating experience of the previous generation, this practice can be encouraged. As an example, I want to highlight a code of personal contacts of four key figures of the near past. Developing a holistic vision of the

region, they contributed and continue to contribute significantly to the current aspiration to change the world order. The four figures of note are: Sharaf Rashidov (1917- 1983), Sadriddin Ayni (1878-1954), Emomali Rahmon and Shavkat Mirsiyev.

Uzbek politician and writer Sharaf Rashidov, was one of the most influential persons of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, a re-evaluation of Rashidov's behaviour in re-building trust and mutual respect between the people of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan after WW2, still waits in the wings. Most spectacular was his cracking of prejudices toward the prisoners of the Gulag, returning from the 'places not so distant'. The then leader of Uzbekistan took an active part in re-integration of the former exiles into the social and creative life of the two neighbouring countries. Due to the protection and support of Sharaf Rashidov, Gani Abdullo (famous drama-writer in Tajikistan in the 1950s-1980s) and Rahim Khoshim (literature critic) re-innovated their art of writers, when they were back from the Gulag. They were again active in the creation of the new theatre, novels and arts post-WW2. Most of them were graduates of the Samarkand State University. Among Rashidov's classmates and fellow countrymen, involved in the process of reinvigorating regional human values, including freedom of thought and communication with 'others', were poets, composers and academics, such as Habib Usufi, Sultan Umarov, Turakul Zehni, Ziyodullo Shahidi, Muhammad Osimi, Akobir Adhamov, and Eshonkul Numanov, to name but a few. Working in the rearward of WW2 or coming back from the frontiers, they were developing their world vision, based on the original interregional 'Bedilian readings' and anti-fascist and anti-military movement, common for the second part of the last century. Sharaf Rashidov, himself a philologist, was keen on Abdulkadir Bedil's philosophy as a cradle of reformatory's idea of releasing CA from the isolation of the Soviet times. He supported translations from the 'other' literatures and popularised them through theatre scenes and cinema productions. Later on, comparative literature/arts studies of China, CA, India, Turkey and South-East Europe were formed, targeted towards integration into the bigger world and nourished by the basic idea of classical Tajik-Persian literature: 'Art vs. Power'. Based on pre-Soviet literature and serving as a source of inspiration for the new ideas in literature and arts of 1950s-1980s, rethinking creativity became important as never before.

The second key figure I would like to discuss in this paper is the Tajik intellectual Sadriddin Ayni. A number of masterpieces in music, initiated by Ayni's interpretation of Bedilian poems and qazals-lyrical poems was developed by the first generation of modern composers of two neighbouring countries, among others: Mukhtar Ashrafi, Mutal Burkhanov, and Ziyodullo Shahidi. Due to a number of symphony pieces that integrated national tunes and rhythms into polyphonic soundings of the modern world, they were cooperating actively to leave a stable intellectual national/regional property for the current and future generations. Due to the personal and professional collaboration of Mukhtar Ashrafi and Ziyodullo Shahidi, an opera of the Uzbek composer, 'Timurmalik' had been staged at Opera House in Tajikistan in Tajik in the 1960s and Ziyodullo Shahidi's 'Komde va Madan' was staged at the Opera House of Uzbekistan, in Samarqand in Uzbek in the 1970s. Empowering those collaborations in innovating arts of their own time, Sharaf Rashidov encouraged Tajik Literature and Art in Tashkent for over several decades, as well as the construction of a museum for Sadriddin

Ayni in Samarqand and Bukhara. Rashidov used to say that the famous Tajik writer was a 'teacher of all of us'.

The scholarly activity of Sadriddin Ayni in Dushanbe (then Stalinabad) as the President of the newly established Academy of Sciences, started by opening a Department of Manuscripts, initiating collaborative research on common Muslim and non-Muslim sources of knowledge in Asia and Europe. Ayni's prophecy during Soviet times contributed to CA's resilience against marginalization from the external world. His concept has been developed by Abdulgani Mirzoev and the other academic schools of CA and Eastern Europe, where Yan Rypka, Irji Bechka, and Yana Kubichkova eagerly met his highly critical approach to the colonial concept of Western orientalism.<sup>2</sup> Sharp critics on the marginalization of the capacity for harmonization of cultures for peace and development, initiated by A. Mirsoev, has been met in the neighbouring countries of CA and beyond, including Afghanistan, Iran, India, and Pakistan, building the foundations for CD in nowadays, intensive world.

### **Current international cooperation projects on regional Cultural Diplomacy**

Though the project of the New Silk Road was born in the present West, the initial idea for the project came from Tajikistan, when archeological discoveries exposed the objects and pictures of Hellenistic, Iranian, Indian and Chinese images intermixed. That historical interpenetration was demonstrated at the Kushan conference in Dushanbe in 1968.<sup>3</sup> Greco-Buddhist-Bactrian-Sogdian arts represented one of the most vivid findings. The pictures of musicians, singers and dancers, serving as a symbol of connection of terrestrial and heavenly starts of the human being in their interconnection, were demonstrated once again during the international conference on the 'Music (opera) of the New Silk Road, dedicated to centenary of Ziyodullo Shahidi' in 2016. Financed by UNESCO, the conference was able to bring together academics, diplomats and actors of cultures of the countries of CA, China, Europe, Russia and USA.

At the start of the 2000s, the Z. Shahidi International Foundation initiated publication of the j. Fonus, as a common platform for the regional peace and development studies. Financed by the Swiss Cooperation Offices (SCOs) in Dushanbe, it has been targeted to be presented in each country of CA. These presentations, however, would not have been possible in Uzbekistan at the time without support of Uchkun Nazarov, a well-known writer in Uzbekistan, and Dilbar Rashidova, an expert in musical studies, since clerical and institutional cultures were still stacked in their boxes of stereotypes of the out-dated diplomacy.

European experts from the Gothenburg and Sorbonne universities<sup>4</sup> are also eager for collaborative research. Although diplomatic relations between Tajikistan and European

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<sup>2</sup> Yan Rypka (1964). History of Iranian Literature, Reidel Publishing.

<sup>3</sup> Tsentralnaya Azia v Kushanskuyu Epokhu. International Conference on History, Archeology and Culture of Central Asia in the Kushan Period. Dushanbe, 27 September – 6 October 1968. Published: 1974

<sup>4</sup> Where I was working through scholarships of the Swedish Institute (1995-1996) and the Maison des Sciences de L'Homme (2004-2005).

countries are developing through the last decades, interests for business and immediate economical income prevail over intercultural communication. According to Firdavs Sharipov from TNU, priorities of the French business in Tajikistan are hydro-energetics, the aluminium industry, large deposits of precious metals and stones, agriculture, restoration and development of tourism in the country.<sup>5</sup> Though the special institutions, like 'Baktrya' are functioning in Tajikistan, providing cultural activities, their main aim is to promote French culture in Tajikistan without any efforts for intercultural, Tajik-French intercultural communication. The same situation more or less characterises other European institutions that are present in Tajikistan. A similar situation can be seen in most embassies of Tajikistan in the EU. Paradoxically, studies on intercultural communication between former Soviet countries and especially between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have almost stopped now, despite the huge number of sources on this issue that were published in the 1950s-1980s, including translations from Uzbek into Tajik and vice versa. How to restore this activity? How to revive Tajik-Uzbek-Azerbaijani-Belarusian-British intercultural contacts now, in a quite chaotic and tense world? Projects such as Erasmus+ and GCRF COMPASS are contributing significantly to these challenges. Young researchers are getting experience through their trainings in Kent, Cambridge, Minsk, Baku, Tashkent, and Bukhara. But the mutual activity has to be sped up. Maybe a special programme should be created by the Consortium for intercultural communication in the region and beyond?

## Conclusion

The Eurasian space with all its interconnection and interpenetration of cultures is still not known in the university programmes g/locally. During the lectures, both at TNU and other universities of the world, I usually receive a number of questions. The common questions are: What are the priorities of Tajikistan and other countries of CA today? How are they responding to the changing world? What are the priorities of the young generation of researchers and how should universities cooperate? Though GCRF COMPASS is trying to answer these questions, these responses have to be heard globally.

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<sup>5</sup> Sharipov, F. The history of formation and development of interrelations of the Republic of Tajikistan with the Republic of France.

# JACOB L. SHAPIRO<sup>1</sup> – Uzbekistan as a Eurasian power: Opportunities and challenges

## Introduction

The decline of Russian power and the instability of U.S. foreign policy has combined with the expansion of Chinese, Indian, Turkish, and Iranian geostrategic ambitions to offer both new possibilities and dangerous challenges to Central Asian states. How Uzbekistan in particular takes advantage of and copes with these opportunities and dangers will play a major role in defining the future of Central Asia in the next decade. Eurasia is a fraught term, and in considering Uzbekistan's role in wider Eurasia, it is necessary first to understand what is at stake in this term, and second to understand in what ways Uzbekistan might be able to shape future definitions and considerations for Eurasian countries. Uzbekistan's role in Eurasia manifests in four key areas, namely: relations between Islam and state; as a model for other Central Asian countries; as a regional leader of Central Asia; and, as will be discussed in the conclusion, as a connector of wider Eurasia. How Uzbekistan emerges and what kinds of policies it pursues – and is successful at executing, will have a profound impact on Central Asia, and as a result, on all the countries with interests in and ambitions for Eurasia.

## Eurasia and its Discontents

It is difficult to interrogate Uzbekistan's role in wider Eurasia without first engaging with what the highly ambiguous term "Eurasia" actually means. In strictly geographic terms, "Eurasia" is a continent stretching from Lisbon to Seoul, from Helsinki to Basra. Defining Uzbekistan's role in this geography is relatively simple. Uzbekistan is the linchpin of the general region called Central Asia, which also includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Afghanistan if one is being generous. Uzbekistan is one of only two doubly-land locked states in the entire world (the other is Lichtenstein), and yet it is also the only country in Central Asia which borders all of the others. Uzbekistan is a geographic paradox from this point of view, as it is arguably more isolated than almost any other country in the entire Eurasian continent – and yet it is the vital connector of an entire region within this vast landmass.

There is very little agreement at all over what the word "Eurasia" actually means in practice. Saul Bernard Cohen – a famous American geographer and professor – loosely defines Eurasia as the states of the former Soviet Union minus the Eastern European ones, which he calls a "European convergence zone."<sup>2</sup> Abbott Gleason wrote an essay entitled "What is Eurasia" and in it he writes about a time he was invited to a seminar at Harvard University on "Eurasian Civilization" which included the combined continents of not just Asia and Europe

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<sup>1</sup> Perch Perspectives, LLC. Contact: jashap@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Cohen, Saul Bernard (2014). *Geopolitics: The Geography of International Relations*. (United States: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 245-249.)

– but Africa as well!<sup>3</sup> Even at the geographic level, there are very different ideas about what “Eurasia” really means so much so that the term itself seems endlessly malleable.

The difficulties go deeper still, however, because the disagreement is not just confined to the geographic sphere. It is ideological as well.<sup>4</sup> The British geopolitical thinker Halford Mackinder for example talks about Euro-Asia in his most famous work, “The Geographical Pivot of History.”<sup>5</sup> This however was not an objective description, but a way for Mackinder to justify his fear of a potential German-Russian alliance and the dangers such an alliance would pose to the British Empire. Mackinder invented his concept of Euro-Asia because he needed such a category to exist, so he could have a basis for recommending and arguing for British foreign policies.

This is equally true for other conceptions as well. There was a faction of anti-Bolsheviks in Russia in the 1920s and 1930s who articulated an idea of “Eurasianism” as opposed to that of Communism as an alternative basis for the organization of Russia’s sovereignty after the fall of the Tsar.<sup>6</sup> This “Eurasianism” was basically an argument for Russia to dominate all the former areas of the Russian Empire because they were Eurasian. For China, it is the absence of any concept of “Eurasia” in its strategic thinking that is most striking. The Qing Dynasty, like other incarnations of Chinese kingdoms, conceived of China as the Middle Kingdom, the center of the universe. There was China, and then everyone else was either a vassal or a barbarian.<sup>7</sup> China has only recently started talking and thinking about Eurasia – and never identifies itself as Eurasian.

In this sense, thinking about Uzbekistan’s role depends on whose definition of Eurasia one uses. China’s version of “Eurasia” is a series of countries connected by road, rail, and 5G networks to Beijing. China wants and needs to secure access to raw materials, like oil and natural gas, as well as to sell to new markets and lessen its dependency on maritime trade routes. Uzbekistan’s role in China’s Eurasia is as a source of gas and food, as a market to sell to, and as a connector to countries like Turkmenistan and Iran. Russia is worried about its security and its status as a great power – and so it views integrating Uzbekistan into institutions like the Eurasian Economic Union and the Collective Security Treaty Organization as a way of re-establishing Russian dominance in its former spheres of influence and guaranteeing its power.

These of course are only two of the powers that have different definitions of Eurasia – and therefore different ideas about what Uzbekistan’s role in Eurasia should be. The United States in the past viewed Uzbekistan’s role in Eurasia quite simply: as a blocking force against jihadists and radical Islamists and as a logistical conduit for the U.S. war in

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<sup>3</sup> Gleason, Abbott (January 2010). “Eurasia: What Is It? Is It?” *Journal of Eurasian Studies* (1, no. 1): 26.

<sup>4</sup> Kotkin, Stephen (2017). “What is Eurasia?” *Foreign Policy Research Institute*: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_ghn1X7sRFs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ghn1X7sRFs).

<sup>5</sup> Mackinder, Halford John (1904). *The Geographical Pivot of History*. (United Kingdom: Royal Geographical Society, 434.)

<sup>6</sup> Schlacks, Charles and Tchantouridze, Lasha (2001). “Eurasianism: In Search of Russia’s Political Identity: A Review Essay.” *Perspectives* (no. 16): 76.

<sup>7</sup> Spence, Jonathan D. (1990). *The Search for Modern China*. (United Kingdom: Norton, 119.)

Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup> As great power competition with China increases, the U.S. will change its viewpoint to an even simpler view: do not let Eurasia unite under the dominance or political control of any one power, especially China. The European Union has almost the inverse of the Chinese perspective: it too hopes to be the dominant political and economic force in Eurasia, and has pooled its sovereignty together however imperfectly in its attempt to do so. And this is to say nothing of Iran, Turkey, India, and others – all of which have their own ideas about what Eurasia is, what is strategic value is to them – and what Uzbekistan's role in it should be.

Uzbekistan does not have to accept these external definitions. The major difference between the present and the so-called “Great Game” of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries is that the Central Asian states are far more organized and far more powerful relative to the Central Asian states of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup> They can, to a certain extent, resist some of these external definitions and political goals.

Uzbekistan can play an important role in wider Eurasia in helping to redefine what “Eurasia” means in the first place, and specifically from a Central Asian perspective. Uzbekistan, for understandable reasons, closed itself off from much of the world and even from its neighbours after independence in 1991 because it wanted to protect its newfound sovereignty. But Uzbekistan is the most populous state in Central Asia – almost 45 percent of the region's population lives in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan is also a very young country. The working-age population has increased by about 3 million people in the last decade and is projected to increase even more in the coming years.<sup>10</sup> And Uzbekistan, because of its unique geographic position, is the only country that can truly connect the Central Asian states and help them become more than a collection of distrustful and immature states attempting to catch up from the Soviet disadvantage they started with.<sup>11</sup>

## Uzbekistan's Roles

There are three key roles Uzbekistan can play in this regard – roles that will affect not just Central Asia, but the entire Eurasian landmass. The first is Uzbekistan's approach to Islam. As Uzbekistanis are all too aware, the Muslim world is in a state of Civil War, a battle not unlike the religious wars of 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe, in which people fought and died over not just sectarian religious ideas but what the appropriate place should be between religion and state. The Muslim world is going through this battle now – and the spill over potential in Central Asia and Uzbekistan in particular is high because of the border with Afghanistan. Central Asia is the third largest source of foreign fighters in the Syrian Civil War and in the

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<sup>8</sup> Nichol, Jim (2013). *Uzbekistan: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests*. (United States: Congressional Research Service, 15.)

<sup>9</sup> Hopkirk, Peter (1990). *The Great Game: On Secret Service in High Asia*. (United Kingdom: John Murray Press.)

<sup>10</sup> *Republic of Uzbekistan 2019 Article IV Consultation* (2019). (Washington D.C.: International Monetary Fund, 55.)

<sup>11</sup> Hirsch, Francine (2000). "Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities." *The Russian Review* (59, no. 2): 201-26.

rise of the Islamic State.<sup>12</sup> This is because Central Asian states like Uzbekistan have historically not been able to provide sufficient jobs, and sufficient confidence that the future will be better than the present, to its young people, many of whom become migrant workers, and embrace poisonous ideologies only after they are separated from home, tradition, and family. The decision to become a jihadist is seldom an ideal choice – life has to be disappointing in a deep and profound way for jihadism to be attractive.

Uzbekistan is leading the way here in two key areas. The current government is undertaking very challenging and difficult economic and labour market reforms precisely because doing so will allow Uzbekistan to offer a more promising and inspirational future to its young people. The government is also combining this with support for a more moderate, uplifting, and inspirational vision of Islam as a religion of peace and compassion that is not in conflict with the secular governance of the state.<sup>13</sup> There are few if any other countries attempting this in the Muslim world to the extent that Uzbekistan is, as many secular governments in the Muslim world are afraid of attacking or isolating those who purport to speak for “tradition.” Uzbekistan could emerge as a key leader of the Muslim world if its approach is successful, and there is historic precedence for leadership of the Muslim world to emanate from Central Asia.<sup>14</sup>

The second is as a model for the other countries of Central Asia in general. The Central Asian states were designed to be part of a greater whole with Moscow at the centre. Everything from how the borders were drawn, to the quality of the transportation and manufacturing infrastructure, to where and who possesses control over natural resources, to the organization and power of the security forces in the role of everyday life – all of these were designed with the Soviet Union in mind. Each Central Asian state was a piece of a bigger puzzle that was designed to work together. Uzbekistan’s political and economic reforms can offer a blueprint and a model for other Central Asian states to follow as they attempt to exceed these limitations – a blueprint that has not been available because no state has felt secure enough to take major steps forward.

The third is as a regional leader. Take the issue of water scarcity. This is an existential problem for Uzbekistan.<sup>15</sup> It has also caused many problems in bilateral relations between Uzbekistan and neighbouring countries like Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.<sup>16</sup> In recent years Uzbekistan has changed its previous stance and is now attempting to resolve these problems diplomatically. For instance, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan are attempting to solve their border

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<sup>12</sup> Tucker, Noah (2015). *Central Asian Involvement in the Conflict in Syria and Iraq: Drivers and Responses*. (Arlington: United States Agency for International Development, iii.)

<sup>13</sup> Cornell, Svante and Zenn, Jacob (2018). *Religion and the Secular State in Uzbekistan*. (Lithuania: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, 22-23.)

<sup>14</sup> Khalid, Adeeb (2003). "A Secular Islam: Nation, State, and Religion in Uzbekistan." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (35, no. 4): (2003): 576-577.

<sup>15</sup> Central Asia Energy-Water Development Program Annual Report (2016). (Washington D.C.: The World Bank, 2017, 19.)

<sup>16</sup> Russell, Martin (2018). *Water in Central Asia: An Increasingly Scarce Resource*. (Brussels: European Parliamentary Research Service, 4.)

issues with minor land swaps and better communication.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are cooperating and coordinating on border issues more than ever before in their histories as independent countries.<sup>18</sup> Uzbekistan has withdrawn objections to projects like the Kambar Ata 1 and Roghun Dams because it knows that for Central Asia to tackle its water scarcity problems, the region is going to have to work together, and there needs to be trust and understanding of mutual benefit that can come from cooperation.<sup>19</sup>

Uzbekistan has the potential to be a regional power. How a regional power treats other countries in the region often defines how relations will be in those countries. If a regional power pursues zero-sum competition with its neighbours, its neighbours will be suspicious and hostile. If a regional power is strong and confident enough to pursue coordination and cooperation – to recognize that independence and sovereignty are not mutually exclusive with compromise and cooperation – then even a region as violent as Europe can and has become peaceful and prosperous. Uzbekistan has a previously unutilized reservoir of this kind of “soft power” that it can exercise and which it has only just begun to realize.

## Conclusion

Uzbekistan has a role to play as a connector of the entire Eurasian continent. Uzbekistan has essentially two different grand strategies it can pursue: it can close itself off from the world and jealously guard its independence and insularity – or it can be the connecting force for Eurasia.<sup>20</sup> This latter approach requires openness and cooperation, and an understanding that pursuing this strategy means that Uzbekistan benefits as the Central Asian region in general benefits and as the Eurasian region more generally benefits. Uzbekistan can use this position to encourage Central Asian states to pursue regional interests rather than having to *kowtow* to external interests or be forced by outside powers to behave or act in certain ways. Uzbekistan can for example insist that Central Asia is neutral ground for any who want to do business there. The Silk Road did not have a nationality. Uzbekistan can embody this by encouraging partnerships with other countries who have Eurasian prosperity – for all Eurasian countries – in mind, rather than for the political and strategic benefit of a few.

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<sup>19</sup> Russell 7-9.

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# **HUASHENG ZHAO<sup>97</sup> – Uzbekistan's important role in the Afghan issue**

## **Introduction**

The Afghan issue is entering a new phase. Although the battle is still going on and the military conflict is still fierce, from a macro perspective, the Afghan issue is facing a new situation, which is the beginning stage of political negotiations.

While promoting political reconciliation in Afghanistan has been the consensus of the international community for years, there has never been more urgency and more action to get the political peace process started.

## **New approach by the Taliban**

The Taliban, too, seems to have changed. While continuing to adhere to its usual negotiating terms, it has softened its approach by becoming more willing to engage with the international community, dropping its complete refusal to participate in all international events on the Afghanistan and beginning to appear at some international conferences. Representatives from the Taliban's Doha office have been to Moscow, Tashkent and China, and all but reach the United States. That is why there is a glimmer of hope in the political negotiations.

It is not clear whether the Taliban's change is substantial, whether it is truly prepared to compromise and enter the structure of the Afghan state machinery through reconciliation, or whether it is simply a strategy aimed at seizing power.

## **Position of the USA, Russia and China**

The United States remains the most critical external player in Afghanistan, but the United States intends to reduce its military presence, reduce political, financial and security burdens. The United States wants to negotiate a political arrangement that will allow it to disengage in a dignified and smooth way, in part, without major disruption in Afghanistan.

The United States, Russia and China are all trying to promote political negotiations in Afghanistan, and each has its own platform. There have been nine rounds of negotiations between the US and the Taliban in Doha. Russia held two international conferences on Afghanistan in 2017 and 2018, and China invited the Taliban to Beijing. In this context, Uzbekistan seems to have an important role to play.

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<sup>97</sup> Professor, Institute for International Studies, Fudan University. Contact: zhs845@hotmail.com

## **Uzbekistan's role in conflict mediation**

The war in Afghanistan has been going on for more than 40 years, since the 1979 Soviet war in Afghanistan. It is the strong desire of the international community, especially countries in the region, to put an end to civil strife and embark on the path of peaceful development in Afghanistan. However, given the complexity of the Afghan issue and the difficulties in Afghanistan's reconstruction, no country can do it alone.

Uzbekistan is a neighbour of Afghanistan. Although the common border between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan is not very long, only 144 kilometers, it exercises great impact on the security of Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan has been paying close attention to the Afghan issue and has the idea of playing a unique role in the settlement of the Afghan issue. Uzbekistan, which has a deep understanding of Afghanistan, has always advocated political negotiations and national reconciliation in Afghanistan, believing that military means cannot solve the Afghan problem.

In the period before the outbreak of the Afghan war in 2001, Uzbekistan actively worked on the Afghanistan issue by relying on the "6+2" framework. The so-called "6+2" refers to the "group of neighbours and friends of Afghanistan", which is composed of the six neighbouring countries of Afghanistan, namely Pakistan, China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, plus Russia and the United States. In July 1999, the "6+2" deputy foreign ministers' meeting was held in Tashkent. Uzbekistan hosted the meeting. The highlight of the meeting was the participation of Afghanistan's warring parties, including the Taliban and the Northern Alliance. Another success of the "6+2" conference in Tashkent was the issuance of the Tashkent declaration, in which the parties affirmed the principle of settling the Afghan issue through peaceful negotiations.

The Taliban were overthrown in 2001. In March 2002, the "6+2" convened an informal meeting in Kabul to reaffirm support for the Afghan peace process and for the interim Afghan government led by President Hamid Karzai. After that, "6+2" basically stopped its activities. In 2008, Uzbek President Islam Karimov proposed the resumption of "6+2" activities and proposed to change it to "6+3", namely by bringing NATO into the talks.

Since president Mirziyoyev took office in 2016, there have been significant adjustments in Uzbekistan's internal and foreign affairs. Uzbekistan has a broader vision of diplomacy, more balanced relations with major countries, and more friendly relations with neighbouring countries. Its diplomatic goals are more pragmatic and its style is more active and flexible. At the same time, Uzbekistan is more aware of regional leadership and intends to play a bigger role in regional and international affairs.

## **The Tashkent Conference**

In September 2017, President Mirziyoyev expounded his thoughts on regional security at the UN general assembly. Subsequently, in November 2017, Uzbekistan hosted the conference "Central Asia: Common Past and Future, Cooperation for Stable Development and Common Prosperity" in Samarkand. At the meeting, President Mirziyoyev put forward a comprehensive programme for maintaining peace and stability in central Asia and Afghanistan. In January 2018, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan organized a press conference for the Tashkent conference at the United Nations. Uzbekistan organized the "5+1" foreign ministers' meeting between Central Asian countries and Afghanistan. The culmination of Uzbekistan's serial efforts was the international conference on the Afghan peace process, security cooperation and regional coordination, which was held in Tashkent in March 2018.

Uzbekistan is not using the Tashkent conference as a one-time event, but as a means to build an internationally recognised mechanism that will organise more bilateral and multilateral activities within its framework to have an impact on Afghanistan. Uzbekistan believes that although there are many international mechanisms on the Afghan issue, the international community needs a unified programme, a unified understanding, a common mechanism and a common roadmap.

The Tashkent conference was a great success, as can be seen from the number of participants. The number of participating countries was not only large, but also very representative. It covered all the countries concerned, including all the big countries, all the Central Asian countries, the major countries of the European Union, the major countries of West Asia and South Asia, and the major Arab countries.

The Tashkent conference issued the Tashkent declaration, which elaborated on the basic principles and positions for the settlement of the Afghan question. The core of the declaration is to promote direct negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban without preconditions. Uzbekistan has spoken highly of the declaration, calling it a "road map" for resolving the Afghan issue.

## **Conclusion**

To summarise, Uzbekistan has a very important role to play in the common efforts of the international society to promote political reconciliation of Afghanistan. It will not replace the roles and functions of other countries, such as the US, China, Russia, and Pakistan, however, its role will be unique and irreplaceable.

At the same time, it should not be neglected that Uzbekistan could make significant contributions in the field of Afghanistan's reconstruction, in connecting Afghanistan into regional transportation networks, and in integrating Afghanistan into regional economic cooperation.

Historically, Uzbekistan has not pursued geopolitical interests and does not join geopolitical games of great powers in Afghanistan, which makes all the major countries willing to support it. Russia and the United States are great powers that cooperate on Afghanistan, but at the same time engage in infighting and mutual restraint, which limits their respective capabilities. The international conference on Afghanistan in Moscow made that clear.

Although Uzbekistan does not have the status of a world power, Tashkent showed that Uzbekistan has unique advantages in solving the Afghanistan issue. Uzbekistan believes that it can play an important role in the peace process in Afghanistan, because Uzbekistan and Afghanistan have a common history and culture, and millions of Afghan Uzbeks live in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, it has had relations with the Taliban since the beginning of the Afghan civil war. Uzbekistan has long advocated reconciliation between Afghan factions and political tolerance for the Taliban, which makes it easy to deal with the Taliban. Although the Taliban did not attend the international conference on Afghanistan in Tashkent, a delegation from the Taliban Doha representative office visited Uzbekistan in August 2018. According to sources, the foreign minister of Uzbekistan and the special representative for Afghanistan held talks with the Taliban delegation.

Uzbekistan is an Islamic country. It has easy communication with Iran, Turkey and countries in the Middle East, and it is easier to get their understanding and support. Uzbekistan also seems to gain recognition and support of the Central Asian countries through the "5+1" mechanism.

Uzbekistan furthermore is a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The SCO member states and observer states include five of the six neighbouring countries of Afghanistan, as well as some other neighbouring countries with important influence on Afghanistan, such as Russia, Kazakhstan and India. Afghanistan is also an observer state of the Shanghai cooperation organization. SCO support is of great significance to Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan additionally maintains good relations with the European Union. The EU also discussed its security policy at the Tashkent conference. Moreover, Uzbekistan has always wisely placed its activities under the guidance of the United Nations, which makes it more internationally recognised.

