

The Scope and Character of International Relations in the Central Asia

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As a result of the collapse of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, the newly-formed countries had to face the necessity of defining their role and place in the contemporary world. On the other hand, political and economic decisions made by particular countries in the post-soviet area influence the contemporary international relations. The Russian Federation is the country which creates the image of integration processes here, but the decisions of other countries from this area concerning the directions of political and economic development are also very important. The Central Asian countries are the object of interest of several countries (the USA, China, Russia, Turkey, Muslim countries, partly European Union), not only because of their geostrategic location but mainly due to their enormous resources of crude oil, natural gas, gold and uranium. The region is important for the fast developing Chinese economy. Moreover, the shortest land route from Europe to China runs through Central Asia (Czerewacz, Konopelko 2006). We cannot forget, however, that the region of Central Asia is characterized with big ethnic and cultural diversity resulting in many tensions and conflicts. One of serious dangers is the Islamic fundamentalism; among the others one can indicate questions of boundaries protection and security. On the break of the 20th and 21st century, the Russian Federation created the Eurasian Economic Community and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization offering these countries a coherent concept of development dependent on and strongly connected to Russia, which considered this territory to be crucial for its development as an empire and to protect its position as one of the key exporters of crude oil and natural gas during the next several tens of years. The objective of this article is to analyse the internal and external determinants of particular Central Asian countries in order to define the direction of their foreign economic policy. This issue is particularly important because it answers the question whether it is really possible to create crude oil and natural gas transport channels from this territory to the European Union, China and other countries, with the exclusion of Russia, or else, whether the policy of raw materials exports from this region will be determined by integration ties with the Russian Federation.

Field of Research: Regional Integration and Globalization, Asian Economy:
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1. Introduction

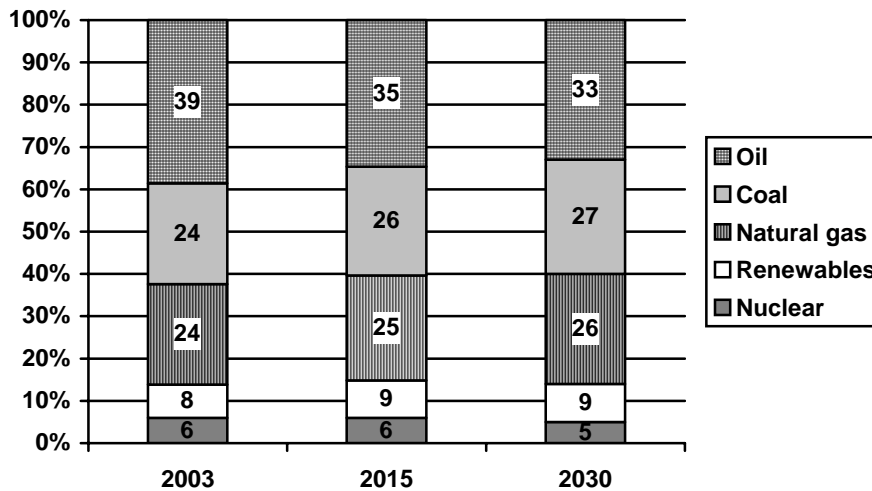
Due to globalisation processes, the events occurring in one country or region influence the whole world economy. It must be noticed that political and economic decisions which take place in particular countries influence contemporary international relations in many different ways and depend on the potential and specificity of these countries.

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Central Asia is a region which plays a very important role in contemporary international relations and during the next several years its importance will still be growing. It is connected with the fact that there are significant resources of crude oil and natural gas here, i.e. the two strategic energetic raw materials. According to the forecast of the International Energy Outlook until 2030 each of these two fuels will constitute about 30% of world energy consumption.

Figure 1 Fuel Shares of World Market Energy Use, 2003, 2015, and 2030



Note: Fuel shares may not add to 100 percent due to independent rounding.

Sources: The International Energy Outlook 2006 p. 2 after: 2003: Energy Information Administration (EIA), *International Energy Annual 2003* (May-July 2005), web site www.eia.doe.gov/iea/. 2015 and 2030: EIA, *System for the Analysis of Global Energy Markets* (2006)

On the other hand, these resources are not renewable and it is known even today that the resources of many countries which now export crude oil are finishing. That is why the connections in the area of political and economic relations and crude oil and natural gas transport channels from Central Asia, which are now being created, are so important from the point of view of contemporary international relations. The objective of this article is to analyse the crucial directions of political and economic development of particular Central Asian countries and to present the consequences of integration processes which are now happening in this region. The term "Central Asia," in its current geopolitical sense, refers to the southern areas of the former Union of Socialist Soviet Republics and covers five independent countries: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. The region borders Russia, China, Afghanistan and Iran, and only a small stretch of land separates it from Pakistan. Due to its location, the region has a quite diversified relief and is very rich in natural resources. It must be pointed out that the geographical size of the region is disproportionate to the size of its population – the overall area of the region covers 4,081,000 km², which makes it similar in size to the whole Western

Europe or India while the population is about 60 million people (Dowling M., Wignaraja G., 2006).

Due to its geoeconomic and geostrategic significance, its location between Europe and Southern Asia, between the Middle East and Western Siberia, Central Asia for several centuries attracted invaders, which has made it a melting pot of cultures, languages and religions (Rumer B, 2003). One of the most important factors determining the necessity of regional cooperation between post-Soviet countries are their infrastructural interconnections concerning mining and processing energetic raw materials. This factor constitutes the main cement of the Commonwealth of Independent Countries (CIS), still functioning but presenting low economic and political efficiency, as well as, made later, the Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC) and the Common Economic Space (CES). The transit infrastructure and cooperation bindings which had emerged within the USSR, connect strongly and make the Central Asian countries dependent on Russia, despite the fact that the raw material potential of such countries as Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan provide them with an opportunity of a development independent from their powerful neighbour. Turkmenistan may be an example, for whom Russia is a main transit route in the export of natural gas from the Caspian Sea basin. A similar situation occurs in the case of the Republic of Kazakhstan where the problem is the infrastructure connected with the location of the deposits and local markets resulting from the location of production and consumption demand.

Another important factor which generates the need for regional cooperation is the question of security. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is to be a tool for the realization of this goal. The genesis of this organization, which now includes China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, goes back to an organization formed in 1996 in order to solve borderline conflicts – the, so-called, “Shanghai five”. The main statutory objectives of this organization include: strengthening mutual trust, promoting an effective neighbourly cooperation in the areas of politics, economy, trade, technology and science, culture, education, in the energetic industry, transport, environmental protection. Moreover, what is of great importance here is the question of security and keeping peace in the region, the protection and promotion of democracy and, what is clearly stressed on the forum of the organization, the creation of a new international economic and political order (Shanghai Cooperation Organization Charter). Apart from the SCO, another organization which is particularly interesting due to its dynamics and the scope of regulations, is the Eurasian Economic Community. The EAEC came into existence on October 10, 2000 from the transformation of the custom union between Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan, which had existed since 1995. Because during the five years of its existence, tariff and quantity restrictions between the partners were lifted in their mutual trade, the aim of the EAEC is the creation of a homogeneous economic space, the application of common trade rules, the unification of tax systems and securing people’s migration without having to exchange the currency. In January 2006, Uzbekistan became the sixth member of the EAEC (Czerewacz 2006). Considering the fact that as many as four

Central Asian countries are member states of these both organizations and analysing the scope of regulations of SCO and EAEC, it is evident that the

foreign policy of Central Asian countries is oriented on the Russian Federation as a strategic political and economic partner.

2. Political Determinants. Discussion.

The countries of Central Asia differ a lot from each other and it is difficult to treat this region as a separate whole. The most significant here are internal political circumstances, i.e. the political system and the way authority is exercised by subsequent cabinets. The political factor, which originates from the times of the USSR, is extremely strong in Central Asian countries and so are clannish, national and religious conditionings. It creates a situation in which the Asian way to democracy has a very different character in particular countries.

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is the most politically stable country in Central Asia. What is more, it is the only one without ethnic problems. It can be noticed that since the beginning of its independence, Kazakhstan's foreign policy is rather cautious and aims at balancing the influences of Russia, the USA and China. Nevertheless, the economic development of this country, especially for the last few years, has been dominated by the pro-Russian approach. There is no doubt that it must have been a deliberate decision influenced by the so-far good economic relations with Moscow and the fact that most of crude oil is transported through the territory of the Russian Federation. Also political and military connections between the two countries are significant. Kazakhstan belongs to regional organizations of military cooperation and is a Russia-loyal member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization. At present Kazakhstan belongs to the following organizations initiated by Russia: the Eurasian Economic Community, the Common Economic Space and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Despite such close contacts with Russia, Kazakhstan is still able to tighten the relations with Western countries, mainly with the USA, which is one of the biggest investors in crude oil and gas industry in Kazakhstan. The outcome of the cooperation with China is the already working pipeline transporting the Kazakh oil to this country. This initiative is also important to other countries of Central Asia, which could use it to transport their own crude oil and natural gas to China, whose demand for these raw materials is constantly rising.

Uzbekistan

The foreign policy of Uzbekistan is to a great extent dominated by internal ethnic and religious conflicts. The internal battle for influence and power goes on between small interest groups, which results in an increased support for the Islamic-fundamentalist ideology. Government repressions against the opposition lead to the radicalisation of the society (Zasada, 2004). Uzbekistan attaches great importance to foreign policy, which focuses mainly on contacts with its

immediate neighbours. It is conditioned mostly by the fear of losing the stability of Karimov's regime, which results more from internal – Asian threats than external ones. The regional situation has an impact on the situation inside the country. Each revolution and war in Central Asia becomes a potential revolution and war in Uzbekistan. Because of that, Uzbekistan got involved in the civil war in Tajikistan and reacted to the events connected with the "Tulip Revolution" in Kyrgyzstan. The next step was the introduction of visas for all republics in the region, which resulted in the limitation of trade. Thanks to such activities, the policy of I. Karmov was considered to guarantee stability in the region. China, Russia and the USA, all, for different reasons, fearing the Islamic radicalism, appreciated this battle and want to support the Uzbek regime providing it will fight against Islamic extremists. This is also why Russia has signed a security agreement with Uzbekistan. A little earlier, Uzbekistan, with a view of making its foreign policy pro-Russian, withdrew from GUUAM and decided to join such groups as the EAEC and the SCO where Russia plays the key role. The improvement of relations with its northern neighbour worsened Uzbekistan's contacts with the United States (e.g. as a result American soldiers left the military base in Kharshi-Khanabad) (Simonov, 2005).

Tajikistan

When Tajikistan proclaimed its independence, it was perceived as a weak, unstable Russia-dependent country. The stronger Russia took advantage of this situation and tried to limit any foreign activity of Tajikistan to its presence in the structures acting under its patronage (EAEC, SCO etc.) The treaty signed in 2004 by the presidents of these countries has regulated the contentious political, military (the presence of Russian military units on the territory of Tajikistan, the control of the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan) and economic questions, and confirmed the key role of Russia in the actions undertaken by the Tajik government (Strachota, 2004). It is obvious that in this case, not only the foreign policy, but also good relations with Russia are prerequisite to strengthening Tajikistan's economy. The internal and international security of Tajikistan depends to a great extent on its neighbours, with Russia and Uzbekistan in particular (Simonov, 2005).

11 September 2001 brought a certain change in the foreign policy of Tajikistan. The government declared their support for the anti-terrorist campaign, but, at the same time, criticised American offensive plans. The strategic location of the country (the border with Afghanistan) resulted in an attempt to tighten the relations with the European Union countries and the USA and increased the importance of Tajikistan on the international arena. Being a strategic point on the East-West-North-South axis, Tajikistan offers an opportunity of further development of the network of international connections. The already existing border crossing point with China (Kulma-Karasu) gives Tajikistan access to the road joining China with Pakistan (Karakorum Highway) and improves its access to the Indian Ocean (Strachota, 2004).

Kyrgyz Republic

The characteristic feature of Kyrgyz society is that it is composed of clans. This feature also relates to the authorities, plays an important role there and is accepted in the same way as the division of the country into the North and the South. This division is connected with the existence of two independent economic centres: Bishkek in the north and Osh in the south. Among many different reasons of the country's division, we can first of all point to social and cultural, industrial and economic factors, as well as national and ethnic conditions. The North is more modern and industrialized, which goes together with a significant russification of this part of the country and its aspiration to achieve economic standards of Kazakhstan. The South, on the other hand, is an agricultural territory, influenced mainly by Muslims.

Since the 'Tulip Revolution' in March 2005, when the government was overthrown and a new elite was introduced into the political arena, Kyrgyzstan has been playing a more important role in Central Asia. The current government tries to maintain such a foreign policy which would balance the interests of the USA and Russia so as not to give up the cooperation with any of these countries and achieve the maximum of benefits. The United States want, first of all, after the forced departure of their soldiers from Uzbekistan, to continue their presence in the region, weakening at the same time the position of Russia. From the political and military point of view, what matters for the USA is the territorial background, which is needed in relation with the ongoing (Afghanistan) and potential (Iran) military offensives in the Middle East. It is important that the United States pay for their military bases on the territory of Kyrgyzstan and, at the same time, invest in national economy and reforms (Simonov, 2005).

Kyrgyzstan has always been considered to be the most "liberal" country of Central Asia. However, it is also the poorest one in this region. The collapse of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics and the emigration of Russians brought about a dramatic fall in the country's industrialization. About 40% of domestic production comes from gold mining; this sector is one of the few which are developing dynamically. Having in mind, first of all, the mineral resources of Kyrgyzstan, but also fearing Islam and its influence on the southern Muslim regions of the Russian Federation, Russia efficiently strengthens its influences in this country. The presence of Kyrgyzstan both in the EAEC and in the SCO clearly defines the pro-Russian direction of its economic and political development.

Turkmenistan

The political system of Turkmenistan is more totalitarian than autocratic. All political and economic processes as well as the activity of public institutions and all economic and social relations were formed by one person. In 1999, Saparmurat Niyazov was declared President for Life, which practically transformed the republican system into a type of monarchy eliminating the need for any legitimisation of power granted by the society. The system which was created in Turkmenistan destroyed completely the opposition and increased the

emigration. Some opponents, when the emigration was still possible, moved to Russia, most artists and scientists as well as the educated professionals joined the exodus.

Turkmenistan continued and even increased the forms of country's isolationism on the international arena. All contacts with foreign organizations or institutions were limited to the minimum. Turkmenistan's attitude to relations with Russia and Uzbekistan was particularly disrespectful. The activity in CIS was selective and any statements concerning this activity were extremely arrogant. Such behaviour and the lack of any chances for improving the situation aggravated the dispute over the transportation of Turkmen gas through Russia. In 2005, Turkmenistan ceased to be a member of CIS. The strategic issue in the international relations of this country are the transportation routes of crude oil and natural gas. Turkmenistan has signed agreements with Russia, Ukraine, China and Iran in this respect. However, the limited capacity of gas pipelines and the lack of any alternative export routes for natural gas restricted the trade in this fuel and made it more prone to disorganization (World Bank). The country had to verify its foreign policy and get closer both to Ukraine and the Russian Federation, which is undoubtedly supported by the new authorities. At present, the gas infrastructure and the signed contracts connect Turkmenistan to Russia and Iran (since 1 January 2006 Russia and Iran are the sole importers of Turkmen gas³). There are also plans to build a gas pipeline to China (to be completed in 2009).

3. Conclusions

The recent years have brought a new quality in the area of regional integration processes on the territory of the former USSR. The countries participating in the Eurasian Economic Community and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization have decided about the integration processes in a fully conscious way, assuming full responsibility as regards both to the advantages and the consequences connected with the dominating position of Russia in both of these organizations. In both cases, we can expect tangible effects: economic ones in the case of EAEC and political and security-related ones in the case of SCO. The policy of participation in various cooperation mechanisms as an element of building one's economic and political position on the international arena used to be neglected in the early 90s. Now it is used more and more efficiently. The regional integration policy appears now to be a vital factor of building the power of the Russian Federation and other countries such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan.

Integration processes taking place in the region of Central Asia are an attempt of these countries to self-define their new role and place in the contemporary world economy. Their directions and scope indicate the changes happening both inside the economies of these countries and in their foreign economic policy. The most important factors influencing the international relations of Central Asian countries include: their geographical location, the USSR heritage, the possessed resources of crude oil, natural gas and other raw materials, ethnic diversity and the resulting ethnic conflicts as well as the fact that they attract the attention of many countries. This geographically strategic region is in the very heart of Asia and

since the time when the former USSR republics gained independence, it has once again become the political and economic scene of a game played by the strongest countries of the contemporary world. The United States tried to create here a pro-Western area of influence, China is interested in raw materials and the Russian Federation is constantly trying to remain the most important political and economic partner. The European Union, on the other hand, is trying to gain access to oil and natural gas resources and to create new transport channels, preferably with the exclusion of Russia. The integration decisions of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan have recently intensified their ties with the Russian Federation. The direction of the development of Turkmenistan's policy is still unknown. After the death of the dictator Saparmurat Niyazov the new authorities have to define and set new development priorities. Recent events suggest that it is possible that the scenario will resemble those of the other Central Asian countries.

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