



# LOGISTICS & DIPLOMACY II

## IN THE EXTENDED CENTRAL ASIA

edited by  
**Pierre CHABAL**  
**Parviz MULLOJONOV**  
**Adrien FAUVE**

with the collaboration of  
**Eva TAUZIET**



*Avec le partenariat exceptionnel de :*



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# FOREWORD

*Elsa PIGNOL*

Ambassadrice de France au Tadjikistan

Confronter les observations des diplomates, les analyses du monde académique, l'expertise des acteurs de l'économie et les témoignages des représentants des organisations internationales pour comprendre les évolutions en cours est toujours fructueux. Sur un sujet comme l'Eurasie du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle, région façonnée par son héritage politique et administratif soviétique, théâtre, aujourd'hui, des enjeux d'influence directement liés à l'accès et à la maîtrise des couloirs commerciaux, l'exercice revêt un intérêt encore plus grand.

Dès 2018, le réseau de recherche mis en place en Asie centrale en 2014 par la Fondation SEFACIL et le laboratoire havrais LEXFEIM ont organisé à Bichkek un colloque sur le thème « Les échanges transfrontaliers entre l'Europe et l'Asie ». Entre 2021 et 2023, cinq autres séminaires se sont tenus à Tachkent, Almaty, Bichkek et Douchanbé. Les deux derniers sont le fruit d'une collaboration étroite avec l'IFEAC et les Ambassades de France sur place. La publication des interventions et des échanges auxquels ces séminaires ont donné lieu permettra au grand public, je l'espère, de saisir l'importance des enjeux logistiques, et donc les luttes d'influence politique et économique, qui se rejouent aujourd'hui en Asie centrale, carrefour millénaire des échanges entre l'Asie et le Caucase.

A Douchanbé, le séminaire tenu en janvier 2023 a rassemblé des orateurs d'une dizaine de pays situés le long du corridor sud qui rallie l'Inde à la Méditerranée (Inde, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tadjikistan, Kirghizstan, Kazakhstan, Iran, Azerbaïdjan, France). Cet ouvrage rassemble non seulement des informations actualisées sur les constructions de voies de transports et de communication et les projets en cours, mais également des analyses relevant de sensibilités différentes et d'approches académiques aussi diverses que complémentaires.

L'Ambassade de France à Douchanbé est heureuse d'avoir contribué au succès de cet événement et espérons-le, au succès tout aussi grand de cette publication. J'adresse mes chaleureux remerciements à ses organisateurs et à ses participants, et forme le vœu que ce séminaire inédit à Douchanbé marque le début d'une série de rencontres sur cet enjeu essentiel, non seulement pour l'Asie centrale, mais pour le monde de demain.

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# PRÉFACE

## **Les Partenariats Publics-Privés (PPP) : outils stratégiques au service du développement logistique de l'Asie Centrale**

*Laurent THORRANCE*

CEO – Axelcium – France, Dubaï – Côte d'Ivoire

L'Asie Centrale demeure un formidable terrain pour expérimenter des innovations qui ont pour objectif d'améliorer la connectivité entre les Nations et les Peuples. Dans un monde marchand globalisé et nomade, la destinée des territoires enclavés consiste à trouver des voies qui permettent d'améliorer leur inclusion, d'attirer les investisseurs privés, de développer leur économie dans ce monde en compétition. Routes, voies ferroviaires, corridors logistiques, zones économiques industrielles : les infrastructures sont les substrats indispensables pour que se développent des services et des valeurs ajoutées.

Les conférences internationales *Logistics & Diplomacy* organisées depuis 2014 par la Fondation SEFACIL, constituent de formidables tribunes où des points de vue différents se confrontent en vue de co-construire ces solutions pragmatiques d'intégration et de coopération.

Des élites intellectuelles et universitaires de pays de l'Asie Centrale y apportent leurs visions pour qu'une cohérence d'ensemble se dégage afin que les décideurs politiques opèrent des choix géostratégiques décisifs. Le premier tome de *Logistics & Diplomacy* avait croisé des approches en provenance majoritairement d'Ouzbékistan, du Kazakhstan et du Kirghizstan. Avec ce nouvel opus, le Tadjikistan est à l'honneur dans une perspective élargie puisque des contributions des pays voisins comme le Pakistan et l'Afghanistan mais aussi de l'Iran ou encore de l'Inde alimentent une dimension « élargie » des impératifs d'interconnexions en Asie Centrale.

Le cabinet de conseil en transaction AXELCIUM est partenaire de la Fondation SEFACIL dans ces travaux du groupe de recherche *Logistics & Diplomacy* car nous croyons aux bienfaits des passerelles créées entre les mondes académiques, professionnels et politiques. Dans le contexte des échanges de Douchanbé tenus en janvier 2022, nous avons débattu du rôle clé des Partenariats Publics Privés (PPP) en vue de construire toujours plus de connectivité et d'efficacité à l'échelle d'une Asie Centrale élargie.

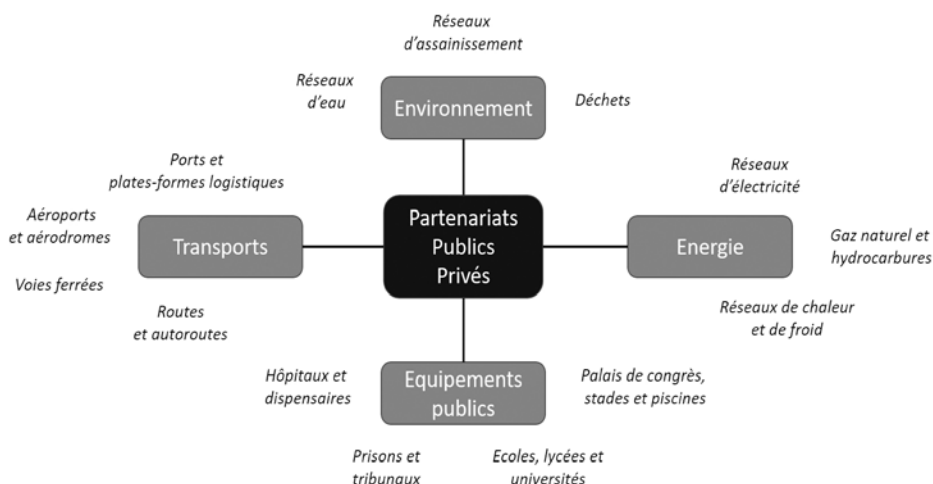
Dans un souci de transmission, nous avons proposé de définir les PPP dans une approche volontairement générale comme suit :



*« Un contrat de long terme entre une partie privée et une entité publique, relatif à la fourniture d'un actif public ou d'un service public, dans lequel la partie privée supporte un risque significatif et des responsabilités de gestion et dont la rémunération est liée à la performance. »*

Au-delà des technicités juridiques et financières, l'important à retenir est que les PPP constituent des véhicules de facilitation et d'accélération des collaborations entre les acteurs publics et les investisseurs/opérateurs privés. Or, il a été maintes fois démontré dans les interventions des experts à Douchanbé que les Etats ne pouvaient être les seuls financeurs de tous les grands travaux infrastructurels indispensables pour moderniser le fonctionnement du pays et de toute l'Asie Centrale. Les PPP s'adressent avant tout aux infrastructures, comme le démontre la figure ci-après, mais ils peuvent aussi concerner les services comme dans les secteurs de la santé, de l'information ou de l'enseignement.

**Figure 1 : Principaux secteurs d'activités visés par les PPP**



Source : Laurent Thorrance 2023 en partenariat avec la Fondation SEFACIL 2023

Surtout, il est impératif d'insister sur le fait qu'un usage approprié des PPP permettrait aux Etats d'Asie Centrale de :

- augmenter les ressources disponibles pour le financement des infrastructures en mobilisant l'investissement privé ;
- associer le secteur public, garant de l'intérêt général et régulateur des fonctions publiques, au secteur privé, dont la priorité est avant tout la rentabilité et l'efficacité commerciales ;
- accélérer la réalisation du programme public de mise en place d'infrastructures nécessaires au développement économique et social ;
- optimiser la dépense publique (« Value for Money ») dans les projets d'infrastructure par (i) l'amélioration de l'évaluation des projets et de l'équilibre entre les intérêts des différents acteurs, (ii) la mise en place d'incitations aux meilleures pratiques, au respect des délais d'achèvement et à une exploitation efficace et (iii) le partage du risque projet avec le secteur privé ;

- faire jouer la concurrence pour encourager l'innovation et améliorer l'optimisation des ressources ;
- améliorer le caractère durable des infrastructures ;
- améliorer la transparence de la dépense publique.

Cette liste non-exhaustive suppose cependant que chaque Etat, à son échelle, mette en œuvre préalablement un **Dialogue Public-Privé** en cohérence avec un principe général de gouvernance économique : « **Le Privé autant que possible, l'Etat autant que nécessaire** », qui pourra alors se décliner en termes de politique économique, au niveau de chaque Etat, selon les principes directeurs du recours aux PPP que l'on peut synthétiser en huit points essentiels :

- 1. Cohérence avec la politique nationale de développement** : le recours à un PPP ne devrait porter que sur des projets d'investissement ayant un effet d'accélération du développement durable économique et social en cohérence avec les lignes directrices des réformes sectorielles définies par l'Etat.
- 2. Optimisation des ressources publiques et des investissements directs étrangers** : la participation du secteur privé doit être conçue comme un accélérateur de développement permettant l'utilisation optimale des ressources publiques, encore limitées, et favorisant les investissements directs étrangers.
- 3. Amélioration des performances et de la qualité de service** : les PPP ne doivent pas être réduits à un mécanisme de financement privé pour la réalisation d'infrastructures publiques. L'implication du secteur privé doit être accompagnée d'une amélioration des performances et de la qualité de service pour les usagers.
- 4. Allocation optimale des risques** : une répartition optimale des rôles entre le secteur public et le secteur privé implique l'identification, la réduction (mitigation) et l'allocation des risques du projet visant à ce que chacun des risques soit supporté par la partie qui le contrôle ou qui est la plus à même de le gérer au moindre coût.
- 5. Capacité des usagers à payer le service** : le principe de l'utilisateur-payeur est à rechercher systématiquement dans la structuration des projets PPP, dans la limite de la capacité des usagers finaux à payer le service (notion d'acceptabilité des tarifs et d'« acceptabilité sociale » pour les biens et services essentiels).
- 6. « Bancabilité » et juste rémunération des capitaux investis pour le partenaire privé** : la structuration d'un projet PPP doit, selon le schéma d'allocation des risques entre les parties, permettre à la fois de satisfaire aux exigences (i) d'équilibre financier du Projet (en particulier la couverture du service de la dette en cas de participation de prêteurs) et (ii) de juste rémunération des capitaux investis telle que mesurée par des méthodologies d'évaluation du coût du capital.
- 7. « Value for money » et soutenabilité budgétaire pour l'autorité contractante** : avant d'opter pour un PPP, l'autorité contractante doit apprécier le niveau d'engagement financier et de risques qu'elle supporte au regard du schéma d'allocation des risques entre les parties, du niveau de capacité de paiement des usagers et des exigences de « bancabilité ».
- 8. Economie locale et transfert de technologie** : les PPP doivent être structurés de manière à encourager au maximum l'usage des biens et services locaux, ainsi que le transfert de technologie et la promotion des industries locales et du secteur privé.

L'identification et la priorisation des projets susceptibles d'être réalisés en PPP devraient être un objectif politique vital pour chaque Etat. Les processus d'inscription, d'évaluation et de validation desdits projets supposent une grande préparation des élites publiques chargées de défendre les intérêts nationaux.

Mais, comme démontrés dans les travaux de *Logistics & Diplomacy*, la bonne focale doit combiner les enjeux souverains et nationaux avec les intérêts communs et collaboratifs à l'échelle sous-régionale. L'exemple des corridors de transport susceptibles d'améliorer la connectivité socio-économique des populations enclavées d'Asie Centrale en est une illustration probante. Comment construire des artères routières et ferroviaires transnationales sans promouvoir des solutions en PPP qui transcendent les seuls intérêts d'un Etat partenaire ou pis, d'une seule région ou province ?

Les PPP ne sont pas des objets magiques qui apportent toutes les solutions clés en main au secteur public des Etats de l'Asie Centrale. Ils déclinent des méthodologies et des boîtes à outils qui permettent de jalonner des processus transparents et efficaces qui rassurent les investisseurs et par conséquent attirent des opérateurs privés sérieux et fiables. La figure 2 séquence les principaux outils indispensables que les Etats d'Asie Centrale devraient mobiliser de manière coordonnée afin que les opportunités des PPP se calculent à la bonne échelle.

**Figure 2 : Outillage méthodologique fondamental des PPP – les 5 premières phases**



Source : Laurent Thorrance 2023 en partenariat avec la Fondation SEFACIL 2023

Le présent ouvrage reprend des cas d'usage autour du potentiel hydrographique, du secteur des transports et de la logistique ou encore, dans une tout autre mesure, la problématique des migrations et leur gestion régionale. Les PPP peuvent apporter les mécanismes au service d'une gestion priorisée des deniers publics. Les PPP peuvent aussi orchestrer des cohérences et des cohésions territoriales à travers des aménagements qui dépassent les frontières des seuls Etats d'Asie Centrale. La politique étrangère de Beijing a fait de la *Belt & Road Initiative* (BRI) un puissant outil d'expansion internationale sous la forme principalement de négociations bilatérales construites sur les fondements techniques de montages sur financement public de type EPC+F (financement public et réalisation des infrastructures *via* les agences de développement de la Chine).

Les accords bipartites signés aux plus hauts sommets politiques permettent de décliner des projets de financements publics-privés avec l'intervention d'opérateurs/investisseurs privés (très majoritairement chinois aujourd'hui, mais demain venant du monde entier), intégrant non seulement le financement et la construction d'infrastructures en maximisant la participation du secteur privé mais prenant aussi en compte la question essentielle de leur *maintenance* et de leur exploitation sur le long terme en vue d'une amélioration de la qualité de service offerte aux usagers.

Ces modèles de PPP, de type co-financement public-privé, met en perspective combien il est essentiel pour un Etat d'être bien préparé au moment d'entamer leur mise en oeuvre. On pourrait ainsi que le sigle PPP signifie également **Préparation, Préparation, Préparation.**

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L'équilibre des engagements, des responsabilités et des risques sont les principes directeurs qui permettent aux PPP d'être des outils qui servent les intérêts de toutes les parties prenantes dans un souci d'équité dès lors que l'utilisation de ces outils sont parfaitement maîtrisés par les Etats. Les Etats d'Asie Centrale doivent se doter des moyens pour former les élites publiques afin qu'elles soient en maîtrise de toutes les composantes des PPP et tout au long du cycle de vie de ces montages s'inscrivant dans le long terme (10, 20, 30 ans, voir plus dans certains cas). Car le plus important au final dans de telles démarches, c'est bien de conserver les moyens du contrôle du partenariat.

La capacité des autorités contractantes à suivre, entériner, corriger, contrôler et sanctionner, en d'autres termes réguler ces PPP, n'est que trop rarement prise en compte lors de la structuration des PPP. Par conséquent, le manque de préparation et de connaissance de la part des élites publiques constitue l'un des facteurs clés des déséquilibres, de risque de ne pas boucler les montages financiers (environ 70% des PPP étudiés ne sont jamais mis en œuvre, les 30% restants pouvant nécessiter jusqu'à 7 ou 10 ans pour atteindre la phase de bouclage financier) et finalement de mécontentements entre les partenaires d'un PPP pouvant conduire à des arbitrages internationaux longs et coûteux pour les parties.

Ce renforcement des connaissances des élites publiques, doublé du nécessaire accompagnement de cabinets de conseil en transaction - en appui des Etats - qui soient expérimentés, indépendants et reconnus internationalement dans leur placement sur le marché international, s'avère absolument déterminant pour que la bonne préparation technique, juridique, économique, sociale, financière, managériale et stratégique soit garante du succès des PPP dans toute l'Asie Centrale.

C'est dans cet objectif qu'AXELCIUM et l'UWED (*University of World Economy & Diplomacy*) ont décidé d'unir leurs compétences et savoir-faire pour ouvrir la première **PPP Academy** en 2023 à Tachkent en Ouzbékistan. Cette initiative concrétise près de deux années de travail pour co-construire un programme Executive à destination des élites publiques ouzbèkes et de toute l'Asie Centrale. Basée sur une pédagogie immersive et participative, la *PPP Academy* mutualise les savoirs académiques des professeurs de l'UWED avec les savoir-faire des experts nationaux ouzbèkes et internationaux.

Les partages et retours d'expériences seront au cœur d'un dispositif qui vise à certifier les candidats aux plus hauts standards internationaux (notamment par la certification officielle de la Banque Mondiale). Le but à terme est de disposer de hauts fonctionnaires partout en Asie Centrale capables de construire et de démultiplier des PPP au service de la modernisation infrastructurelle de toute la région, et qui pourront intervenir aux côtés d'acteurs privés nationaux/régionaux, qu'ils soient investisseurs ou qu'ils viennent du secteur bancaire national.

*In fine*, l'objectif pour les Etats consistera en la création d'un **pool de champions nationaux** (après des réalisations réussies de PPP au côté d'acteurs internationaux), sur lequel les Etats pourront alors recourir plus largement et facilement pour développer les PPP à dimension davantage nationale/régionale.

# INTRODUCTION

*Adrien FAUVE*

Regional director of IFEAC

(French Institute for Central Asian Studies, Bishkek)

This volume stands out as another brilliant output of a transnational expert network. For many years, Yann ALIX (SEFACIL Foundation), Kuralay BAIZAKOVA (KazNU, Almaty) and Pierre CHABAL (Lexfeim) have gathered academics, diplomats, decision makers, representatives of NGOs and international organizations, in order to analyse current developments of logistical matters in connection with geopolitical issues in Eurasia.

This time, they teamed up with a new set of local partners, namely Parviz Mullojonov from International Alert, people from IFEAC and officials at the French Embassy in Tajikistan, so as to change the focal point on the articulation between diplomacy, transportation, culture and logistics. After doing it in the past from Tashkent, Almaty and Bishkek, they decided it was necessary to complete their regional tour by hosting a similar intellectual event in Dushanbe. Hence, among the fourteen chapters in this collective book, five were written by authors who originate from Tajikistan.

Of course, given the importance of local viewpoints on regional affairs, colleagues from neighbouring post-soviet countries were also invited to join (Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan), in addition to experts from close-by countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan. Bringing the latter into this network very much contributes to the novelty of this particular publication. Having experts from India, Iran and Azerbaijan as well on board made the geographical scope of our analysis and debates even broader.

As a result, readers will find here an exquisite balance between countries, fields of study, levels of analysis and theoretical or practical concerns. In this regard, this volume is very informative.

A second really strong asset of this book lies in the gendered composition of its table of content: among all authors, including for chapters and every other kind of texts (such as forewords and afterwords), one can count many ladies, which definitely proves that the expert community has moved away from the very masculine circles typical of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The self-assertion of Central Asian polities as autonomous actors, the continuing rise of China, the tricky stance of Russia since the war in Ukraine, the effects of the Taliban regime on troubling water management problems, but also unstable prices on energy resources, notwithstanding export corridors, in other words, rapid change in the international environment, all this justifies the need of such regular workshops and publications.

World politics is increasingly fragmented, new multilateral formats emerge, and in reaction to that, we must keep on supporting critical assessments.

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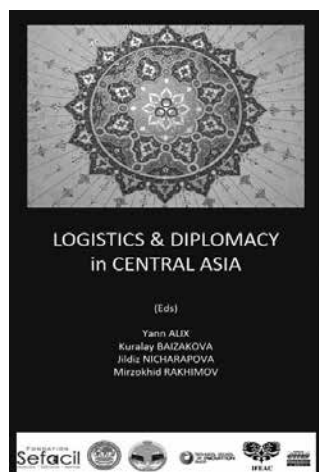
# QUAND LA ROUTE PRÉCÈDE LE DÉVELOPPEMENT, LA DIPLOMATIE FACILITE LA LOGISTIQUE

Yann ALIX

Délégué général, SEFACIL

Le présent ouvrage constitue un nouveau jalon dans la prolifique littérature générée par une décennie de collaborations de communautés scientifiques et professionnelles distribuées dans toute l'Asie Centrale, l'Europe de l'Ouest, le sous-continent indien et l'Extrême-Orient. Avec l'organisation régulière de conférences, ateliers et autres séminaires, un groupe pluridisciplinaire s'est cristallisé autour du couple « Logistique et Diplomatie ». Intellectuels et scientifiques, décideurs publics et représentants politiques, opérateurs privés et investisseurs, étudiants et observateurs de la société civile, la répétition de manifestations orchestrées par la Fondation SEFACIL consolide une densité intellectuelle plurielle et pluridisciplinaire. Elle assemble des savoirs et des savoir-faire au gré des pays traversés et des visites partagées avec divers groupes de recherche, des centres universitaires, des institutions publiques nationales et internationales, des mécènes privés et des observateurs aguerris.

J'en veux pour preuve le premier volume de *Logistics & Diplomacy in Central Asia* qui résulte des séminaires éponymes organisés à Tachkent en juillet 2021, à Almaty en octobre 2021 et à Bichkek' en janvier 2022. Autre manifestation tangible de l'excellence des réflexions et des productions, l'invitation à prononcer une conférence par la Fondation SEFACIL lors du Forum Economique de Davos en janvier 2023 ou encore les écrits du séminaire de Douchanbé tenu quelques jours après Davos et dont le présent livre est issu.



L'Asie Centrale est loin des rivages. Elle se caractérise même, géographiquement, par son enclavement physique. Elle a attiré les experts de la Fondation SEFACIL dès 2013 pour ses fonctions de transit et de facilitation entre les grands blocs économiques et politiques de la Russie, de la Chine et de l'Union Européenne. Nous étions alors à l'aube des premiers jalons géopolitiques de *One Belt One Road* (OBOR) quand se réunit un groupe d'experts et d'observateurs Kazakh sous la houlette experte de Kuralay Baizakova et Pierre Chabal dans les locaux d'Al-Farabi National University à Almaty. Cette première rencontre effleure les ambitions logistiques d'une politique chinoise encore très floue, notamment vis-à-vis de la puissance russe toujours très ancrée sur le plus grand des cinq pays en « stan ». Elle évoque le pouvoir que pourrait procurer le futur nouveau port commercial de Gwadar dans le Balouchistan pakistanais via un corridor plein de promesses en matière de connectivités routières et ferroviaires. Elle nourrit des réflexions qui vont très vite « décliner » la logistique comme un terme polysémique qui se niche autant dans :

- Les relations internationales ; *et logistiques* ;
- Les dynamiques régionales ; *et logistiques* ;
- Les modalités de coopération... *logistiques* ;
- Les réseaux de transport ; *et logistiques* ;
- Les échanges d'informations ; *et les flux logistiques* ;
- Etc.

Même des sujets comme la gestion des passages transfrontaliers, la libre circulation des personnes (en plus de celle des biens), les problématiques liées aux héritages historiques, identitaires ou même idéologiques ou encore les dimensions culturelles pour ne pas dire ethniques : tout peut être « lue, interprétée et analysée » sous un angle *logistique*.

Depuis 2013 et Almaty, un même fil rouge questionne toujours comment et pourquoi la logistique peut relier les peuples et les territoires, les valeurs communes et celles qui diffèrent les infrastructures et les services, les politiques publiques et les opérateurs privés, les décideurs et les investisseurs, l'héritage culturel et l'accélération de l'Histoire. Le couple *Logistics & Diplomacy* a fini par s'imposer non pas comme une évidence mais bien comme un défi car la logistique demeure encore trop souvent un « mot-valise » dans les discours vertueux d'élites qui « transportent » des ambitions politiques, économiques et stratégiques au-delà des seules échelles d'une région ou d'un Etat.

Ce couple s'appréhende d'abord et avant tout par le prisme suprême de la création de valeur. La logistique facilitée par la diplomatie doit servir les échanges, annihiler les barrières, simplifier les procédures, harmoniser les règles, augmenter les trafics, générer des emplois, etc. La diplomatie facilitée par la logistique doit pacifier/sécuriser des régions, connecter/unifier des peuples, structurer/orchestrer des ensembles sous-régionaux plus puissants et plus solidaires ensembles, etc.

On ne compte plus les organisations régionales, les accords de coopération, les ententes commerciales, les négociations bi et multilatérales ; toutes traduisant combien l'Asie Centrale doit être *land-linked* et non plus *land-locked*. Pour ne citer qu'une donnée révélatrice du chemin qui reste à parcourir : l'Organisation de Coopération Economique (OCE) réunie en novembre 2023 dernier à Tachkent rappelait que les 550 millions d'habitants (10 pays membres) n'ont échangé que 76 milliards US\$ entre eux en 2022. Et ce au moment même où les sanctions internationales envers la Russie ont comme double effet de renforcer les liens commerciaux et politiques de la plupart des membres de l'OCE avec le pouvoir de Moscou. Même constat avec la puissance chinoise qui semble autant



cultiver les doutes qu'attiser les convoitises auprès des Etats de l'Asie Centrale. Là aussi, une seule donnée qui ne veut pas dire grand-chose dans l'absolu mais qui manifeste une réalité du couple *Logistics & Diplomacy* : les échanges de marchandises entre les seuls Etats de l'Asie Centrale et la Chine ont été multiplié par 150 en 30 ans.

Au moment d'écrire ces lignes, les desseins géopolitiques régionaux se calquent sur les dessins logistiques des principales routes et de quelques corridors de transport. Le contournement logistique du territoire russe sous embargo international entraîne une reconsidération des options de transport du corridor dit « du milieu ». La logistique a horreur du vide... et des ruptures de charge. Aussi, il est intéressant de constater les efforts diplomatiques de la Turquie, de l'Azerbaïdjan et de la Géorgie pour convaincre du bien-fondé d'itinéraires multimodaux complexes qui empruntent notamment les ports de Aktau, Bakou, Batoumi ou encore Istanbul. Le renforcement des coopérations géopolitiques et des échanges énergétiques entre la Russie et la Chine depuis le déclenchement du conflit ukrainien n'empêche pas la persistance de concurrences exacerbées sur l'Asie Centrale, l'Afghanistan ou encore le Pakistan en 2024. Le corridor CPEC (*China Pakistan Economic Corridor*) qui assure une connectivité toute relative entre la région chinoise du Xinjiang et le port de Gwadar n'est pas nécessairement du goût des intérêts russes qui cherchent à promouvoir l'hypothétique corridor international Sud-Nord qui relierait un jour Saint-Petersbourg à Mumbai.

Dans le couple *Logistics & Diplomacy*, les déclarations diplomatiques dépassent allègrement les temporalités logistiques. Un corridor n'est surtout pas qu'une infrastructure. C'est un produit complexe d'accords et surtout de compromis politiques qui permettent de poser des routes, des rails, des pipelines qui elles-mêmes véhiculent des services afin de fluidifier des mobilités de biens. Les échanges commerciaux constituent le produit tangible d'ambitions diplomatiques et logistiques qui ont convergé pour initier (en amont) ou amplifier (en aval) des potentiels économiques. Pour preuve : la Russie est devenue en une année (entre mai 2021 et mai 2022) le premier fournisseur de pétrole de la Chine avec une augmentation de 55% des volumes. Et pour que cela s'inscrive dans une durée qui dépasse l'opportunisme géopolitique et géostratégique déclenchée par le conflit ukrainien, un nouveau gazoduc (Force de Sibérie 2) est annoncé en septembre 2022 à Samarkand (!) en marge du sommet de l'Organisation de coopération de Shanghai. Cela illustre combien la diplomatie logistique permet d'aboutir à la construction d'une nouvelle infrastructure énergétique qui vise à transporter 50 milliards de mètres cubes de gaz russe vers la Chine dès 2030.

Quand les intérêts indiens rencontrent ceux de l'Iran, cela permet l'émergence du port commercial et stratégique de Chabahar, véritable fenêtre iranienne en dehors du Golfe. Rappelons qu'à la fin des années 2010, Chabahar devait être la seule infrastructure portuaire iranienne à échapper aux sanctions unilatérales américaines selon le double argument d'accompagner le désenclavement de l'Afghanistan et développer la province iranienne du Sistan-Baloutchistan en proie à des déstabilisations récurrentes de la part des séparatistes baloutches et de divers groupuscules djihadistes. Chabahar est un pur produit du couple *Logistics & Diplomacy* puisque la concession d'exploitation pour la première décennie est confiée au groupe indien *India Ports Global* qui lui-même revendique l'opportunité de concurrencer directement le tout jeune voisin portuaire pakistanais de Gwadar, financé et construit par les Chinois. Dans l'esprit de l'époque, Chabahar n'est que la terminaison portuaire indispensable d'une nouvelle artère logistique qui ouvrirait un nouveau corridor ferroviaire vers les territoires enclavés de l'Asie Centrale et de l'Afghanistan. Ce « *Couloir Nord-Sud* » vu depuis l'Inde assure

l'évitement du Pakistan tout en garantissant à long terme une connectivité qui viendrait concurrencer un axe logistique comme celui de Termez-Peshawar-Karachi.

Sur un autre continent et dans une autre époque, le premier président de la République de Côte d'Ivoire, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, déclarait dans un de ses premiers discours « *La route précède le développement* ». La dynamique *Logistics & Diplomacy* telle qu'initiée il y a une décennie, s'inscrit aussi modestement que généreusement dans cette perspective de créer du développement en pavant la route d'une logistique facilitée par la diplomatie et d'une diplomatie toujours plus sensibilisée et conscientisée aux vertus durables du développement logistique.

Quand le Pakistanais Ikram SEHGAL invite la fondation SEFACIL, sous égide de la Fondation de France, au Forum Economique de Davos en janvier 2023, c'est parce qu'il croit au pouvoir de la coopération académique et scientifique au service de la politique, de l'économie et de la société civile. Quand des universitaires indiens s'engagent dans l'organisation des événements 2024 du couple *Logistics & Diplomacy*, c'est parce qu'ils estiment que les réflexions ouvertes et prospectives de la fondation SEFACIL servent le débat d'idées pour dépasser les raccourcis du conservatisme.

*Rédigé par Yann ALIX – le 25 janvier 2024*

*Le Havre – Almaty – Tachkent – Bichkek – Douchanbé – Davos*

# PART 1

## DIPLOMACY AND CULTURE

# Labour migration and its impact on the mental health of Tajik migrants

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International migrations affect, directly or indirectly, each nation. Global numbers of international migrants have increased steadily, from 128 million in 1990 to 281 million in 2020, or 3.6% of the global world population. For most population, staying at home remains the norm. Only a minor part of humanity migrates on this for various reasons.<sup>1</sup>

As for Tajikistan, international labour migration is a choice of many citizens: nearly 43% of Tajik households reported at least one international migrant.<sup>2,3</sup> Working abroad, mostly in Russia, is the only opportunity to secure an income for family support and to cover basic needs. The remittances from labour migrants to Tajikistan during the last decade vary from 27% to 44% in the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – in 2020, the figure is 33,4% of the GDP.<sup>4</sup>

While studies show significant Tajik migrants' contribution to economics of the countries of origin and destination,<sup>5</sup> the well-being and health of the Tajik migrants is not well recognized by the decision makers. This chapter explores the impact of the migration experience upon the mental health of Tajik migrants through the review of the literature mostly over the last five years available in the Internet and in hard copies.

## Labour migration from Tajikistan

According to Tajik, about 470 791 migrant workers left Tajikistan for 8 months during 2022, more than the same period in 2021 (271 976 migrants). Russian migration authorities mention a figure for 2022 of about 755 029 “patents”<sup>6</sup> issued to citizens of Tajikistan.<sup>7</sup> Large cities and economic centres of Russia, such as the Central Federal District (primarily including Moscow and the Moscow Region), the Northwestern Federal District (Saint Petersburg and the Leningrad Region), the Far Eastern and the Volga Federal Districts are the main places of destination for migrants workers from Tajikistan.<sup>8</sup> The approximate portrait of the Tajik labour migrant (Table 1) is : reproductive age married men from

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1 McAuliffe, M. and A. Triandafyllidou (eds.), 2021. World Migration Report 2022. International Organisation for Migration (IOM), Geneva.

2 “Migration, living conditions and skills: Panel Study-Tajikistan 2018”, JICA Research Institute, Dushanbe, 2019. Available from [https://www.jica.go.jp/jica-ri/ja/publication/booksandreports/l75nbg000019cex3-att/report\\_20200604.pdf](https://www.jica.go.jp/jica-ri/ja/publication/booksandreports/l75nbg000019cex3-att/report_20200604.pdf) (retrieved on 22 March 2023)

3 Shimizutani, S., & Yamada, E. (2023). Transformation of international migrants in head wind: Evidence from Tajikistan in the 2010s. *Review of Development Economics*, 27( 1), 525– 549. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rode.12933>

4 Available from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?locations=TJ> (retrieved on 22 March 2023)

5 Abubakr Kh. Rakhmonov, Roman V. Manshin. “Impact of labor migrants from Tajikistan on the economic security of Russia”, *RUDN Journal of Economics*, 2020 Vol. 28 No. 4 778–786. Available from <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/impact-of-labor-migrants-from-tajikistan-on-the-economic-security-of-the-russian-federation> (retrieved on 30 March 2023)

6 “Patent” is a special form of work permit

7 “Selected Indicators of the migration situation in Russia for January-December 2022 (distribution by countries)”, Main Division of the Ministry of the Interior Affairs of Russia

8 “Study of Labour Migration Dynamics in the Central Asia-Russian Federation Migration Corridor”. Consolidated Report. SDC, IDF, IOM 2021. Available from [https://kazakhstan.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1586/files/documents/study-of-labor-migration-dynamics\\_ryazantsev\\_consolidated\\_2021\\_en.pdf](https://kazakhstan.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1586/files/documents/study-of-labor-migration-dynamics_ryazantsev_consolidated_2021_en.pdf) (retrieved on 22 March 2023)

the rural area with a strong sense of responsibility as the bread-earners for their family household.<sup>9</sup> Not surprisingly, 90% of Tajik migrants send money home to cover basic needs of their families.<sup>10</sup>

**Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of Tajik migrants<sup>11</sup>**

Individual characteristics (ages from 16+)	Current migrants
Male	91.9%
Married or nikoh	70.5%
Household Head	21.5%
Respondent is less than 30 years old	45.7%
Respondent is 30-65 years old	54.2%
Respondent is older than 65 years old	0.1%
Rural	71.3%
Less than Secondary	16.0%
Secondary	57.2%
Vocational	13.8%
Tertiary	12.9%

The current demographic situation of Russia affects negatively the number and structure of the labour resources, increasing the burden on the able-bodied part of the population and leading to the need to attract foreign labour force.<sup>12</sup> The Concept of the State Migration Policy of the Russian Federation for 2019-2025 indicated in its paragraph 15 that migration policy is an auxiliary tool for solving demographic and economic issues of the country.<sup>13</sup> The Russian's need in labour force is a pool-factor for foreign labour migrants who are part of a visa-free regime, a common history and a common language.

Socio-economic situations and demographic pressure are named by experts as key push-factors of the labour migration from Tajikistan. According to the World Bank, Tajikistan remains the poorest country in the European/Central Asia region. The Gross National Income per capita in Tajikistan is 1 030 US\$ which is less than average of 8 036 US\$ for low-and middle-income countries of the European/Central Asian (ECA) region.<sup>14</sup>

9 Donaldson, Mike and Howson, R., Men, migration and hegemonic masculinity 2009. <https://ro.uow.edu.au/artspapers/191>

10 Поletaев Д. Отчёт о результатах исследования социально-экономических последствий пандемии COVID-19 для мигрантов из Центральной Азии, пребывающих на территории Российской Федерации //MOM. 2021. 166 с., (Poletaev D., "Report on results of the research of the social economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrants from Central Asia located in the territory of Russia". IOM.2021, 166 pages) page 25 URL: [https://russia.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1036/files/documents/survey\\_rf\\_covid\\_2021\\_small\\_0.pdf](https://russia.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1036/files/documents/survey_rf_covid_2021_small_0.pdf)

11 "Migration, living conditions and skills: Panel Study-Tajikistan 2018", JICA Research Institute, Dushanbe, 2019. Available from [https://www.jica.go.jp/jica-ri/ja/publication/booksandreports/l75nbg000019cex3-att/report\\_20200604.pdf](https://www.jica.go.jp/jica-ri/ja/publication/booksandreports/l75nbg000019cex3-att/report_20200604.pdf) (retrieved on 22 March 2023)

12 Рязанцев С.В., Богданов И.Я., Храмова М.Н. Прогнозирование миграции в контексте формирования внешней миграционной политики России // Научное обозрение. Серия 1: Экономика и право. – 2017. – № 1. – с. 5-12.

13 Указ «О Концепции Государственной миграционной политики Российской Федерации на 2019-2025 годы» (Decree "On Concept of the State migration policy of Russia), Available from <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58986> (retrieved on 26 March 2023)

14 World Bank. *Tajikistan - Public Expenditure Review : Strategic Issues for the Medium-Term Reform Agenda (English)*. Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099205106242240623/P172237055d557050b3d502de92e8761c2>

In addition, the country has the highest birth rate in the ECA region: 28 births per 1 000 people.<sup>15</sup> The proportion of the young and reproductive-age people in Tajikistan is significant: 15-64 years olds are 59%<sup>16</sup> that comprise labour force population. The domestic labour market is not able to provide decent jobs to all Tajiks. Although the average salary increased,<sup>17</sup> still, the suggested wage of 1 647.3 somoni (nearly 160 US\$)<sup>18</sup> is not enough and numerous Tajiks decide to go abroad. Dependence on remittances came out during the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19): income dropped in 67% of the households due to travel restrictions and inability of returned migrants to go back to Russia.<sup>19</sup>

Only 1,7% of Tajik migrants approach recruiting agencies.<sup>20</sup> Social networks are the main source of information about job opportunities abroad and key channel to arrange travel to the country of destination. To cover the transport and documentation fees, migrants spend on average 292 US\$.<sup>21</sup> Upon arrival to Russia migrants should pay for the required exams, documents and a *patent*. In Moscow and other major destinations of labour migrants, these combined expenses are high. In 2022, total costs and fees necessary to obtain a *patent* for six months was approximately 700 US\$.<sup>22</sup> Most Tajiks cannot afford this amount and nearly 78% of migrants who plan go abroad take a short-term loan before they leave.<sup>23</sup>

Prospective Tajik migrants thus experience stress even at the pre-departure phase of the migration, due to a lack of job opportunities in their motherland and a subsequent need to find a job outside of their native country in order to return loan incurred to migrate and send money home for their families.

## Hardships abroad

Upon reaching the country of destination Tajik migrants face a new round of difficulties associating with the bureaucracy in processing documents for obtaining regular status (housing, registration, getting patent, etc). Experts estimate the presence in Russia (2021) of at least 750 000 undocumented migrants from Central Asian countries, including 247 000 people from Tajikistan.<sup>24</sup> A combination of factors, such as the interest of the employers in labour force from Central Asia, procedures to enter the Russian labour

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15 Available from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.CBRT.IN?locations=TJ> (retrieved on 22 March 2023)

16 Available from <https://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population/TJ> (retrieved on 22 March 2023)

17 Address by the President of Tajikistan, H.E. Emomali Rahmon "On Major Dimensions of Tajikistan's Foreign and Domestic Policy", 23 December 2022. Available from <https://mfa.tj/en/main/view/11820/address-by-the-president-of-the-republic-of-tajikistan-he-emomali-rahmon-on-major-dimensions-of-tajikistans-foreign-and-domestic-policy> (retrieved on 22 March 2023)

18 «Средний размер зарплаты в Таджикистане за год повысился на 10,4%» ("Average rate of the salary in Tajikistan increased for one year for 10,4%"), 26 July 2022. Avesta.tj Available from <https://avesta.tj/2022/07/26/srednij-razmer-zarplaty-v-tadjikistane-za-god-povyisilsya-na-10-4/> (retrieved on 22 March 2023)

19 "Tajikistan. Public Expenditure Review. Strategic Issues for the Medium-Term Reform Agenda (P172237). World Bank Group. December 2021, page 22

20 "Migration, living conditions and skills: Panel Study-Tajikistan 2018", JICA Research Institute, Dushanbe, 2019. Available from [https://www.jica.go.jp/jica-ri/ja/publication/booksandreports/l75nbg000019cex3-att/report\\_20200604.pdf](https://www.jica.go.jp/jica-ri/ja/publication/booksandreports/l75nbg000019cex3-att/report_20200604.pdf) (retrieved on 22 March 2023)

21 "Migration, living conditions and skills: Panel Study-Tajikistan 2018", JICA Research Institute, Dushanbe, 2019. Available from [https://www.jica.go.jp/jica-ri/ja/publication/booksandreports/l75nbg000019cex3-att/report\\_20200604.pdf](https://www.jica.go.jp/jica-ri/ja/publication/booksandreports/l75nbg000019cex3-att/report_20200604.pdf) (retrieved on 22 March 2023)

22 International Organisation for Migration (IOM), 2023. *Mental Health Problems of Returned Tajik Labour Migrants and their Experiences Seeking Mental Health Care and Psychosocial Support*. IOM, Geneva.

23 "Migration, living conditions and skills: Panel Study-Tajikistan 2018", JICA Research Institute, Dushanbe, 2019. Available from [https://www.jica.go.jp/jica-ri/ja/publication/booksandreports/l75nbg000019cex3-att/report\\_20200604.pdf](https://www.jica.go.jp/jica-ri/ja/publication/booksandreports/l75nbg000019cex3-att/report_20200604.pdf) (retrieved on 22 March 2023)

24 "Labour migrants in Russia. Will illegal immigrants return to Uzbekistan?"// DW News. 24 April 2021. URL: <https://www.dw.com/ru/trudovye-migranty-v-rossii-vernutsja-li-nelegaly-vuzbekistan/a-57316327>

market, employment quotas by sectors of the economy, the price of a patent, etc., cause migrants to opt for an irregular status.

Usually, competitive advantages of the migrants from Central Asia including Tajikistan are their readiness to accept working conditions and salaries below those demanded by the local labour force.<sup>25</sup> Most Tajik labour migrants in Russia work at low-skilled jobs with tough working conditions. Almost half of labour migrants from Tajikistan (46%) rent a shared apartment with other people (fellow countrymen, friends, etc.), every tenth lives in a hostel (9%) and 7% of labour migrants from Tajikistan live at the workplace.<sup>26</sup> Tajiks occupied construction (47%), trade (12%), transport and communication (5%), and utilities (5%) sectors, keeping lower positions. Migrant women mostly work in the service sphere. Some experts report that place of work and position not necessarily depend on the qualifications and skills of migrant workers. Migrants confide that their job positions depend on their citizenship in a country of destination.<sup>27</sup>

During the COVID-19 pandemic, epidemiological restrictions caused the number of undocumented workers to increase, which contributed to migrant workers' vulnerability to human trafficking.<sup>28</sup> In 2022, experts reported that many migrant workers in Russia experienced exploitative labour conditions, characteristic of trafficking cases, such as non-payment for services rendered, physical abuse, lack of safety measures, withholding of identity documents, or extremely poor living conditions.<sup>29</sup>

For example, increased demands for food delivery and transport services during the COVID-19 pandemic, led to overexploitation of the labour migrants. Contrary to prevailing stereotypes on obedient migrants from Central Asia, migrants demonstrated change in their behavioural pattern by raising their voice and fighting for their labour rights.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to institutional barriers, Tajik migrants often experience loneliness and social isolation<sup>31</sup> due to a poor knowledge of the Russian language, a lack of communication with the host communities and limited network. Tajik migrants as other foreign nationals report cases of discrimination when renting housing or interacting with local residents or government officials.<sup>32</sup> According to the 2022 survey "Xenophobia and migrants" conducted by the Levada Centre in Russia, respondents consider that the number of migrants in their city is *"excessive" and that the government should prevent the flow of migrants. Over the last five years, the number of such opinion has grown from 58% to 68-73%. Almost half of the respondents disagree that the work performed by migrants is*

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25 "Study of Labour Migration Dynamics in the Central Asia-Russian Federation Migration Corridor". Consolidated Report. SDC, IDF, IOM 2021. Available from [https://kazakhstan.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1586/files/documents/study-of-labor-migration-dynamics\\_ryazantsev\\_consolidated\\_2021\\_en.pdf](https://kazakhstan.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1586/files/documents/study-of-labor-migration-dynamics_ryazantsev_consolidated_2021_en.pdf) (retrieved on 22 March 2023)

26 Poletaev DV (2022) Life and health of labor migrants from Central Asia in Russia in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Population and Economics 6(4): 83-106. <https://doi.org/10.3897/popecon.6.e90370>

27 "Migration, living conditions and skills: Panel Study-Tajikistan 2018", JICA Research Institute, Dushanbe, 2019. Available from [https://www.jica.go.jp/jica-ri/ja/publication/booksandreports/l75nbg000019cex3-att/report\\_20200604.pdf](https://www.jica.go.jp/jica-ri/ja/publication/booksandreports/l75nbg000019cex3-att/report_20200604.pdf) (retrieved on 22 March 2023)

28 D.Poletaev, A. Korobkov "The Social Problems of International Migrants", Valday Discussion Club, November 2022

29 "2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Russia". US Department of State. Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. Available from <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-trafficking-in-persons-report/russia/> (retrieved on 23 March 2023)

30 «Курьерам надоело молчать. Возмущение обманутых работников Delivery Club вызвало одну из крупнейших забастовок» ("Curriers are tired of being silent. The outrage of the deceived workers of the Delivery Club caused one of the largest strikes"). Available from <https://360tv.ru/tekst/obschestvo/kureram-nadoelo-molchat/> (retrieved on 24 March 2023)

31 Gurieva S, Kõiv K, Tararukhina O. Migration and Adaptation as Indicators of Social Mobility Migrants. Behav Sci (Basel). 2020 Jan 9;10(1):30. doi: 10.3390/bs10010030. PMID: 31936568; PMCID: PMC7016587.

32 D.Poletaev, A. Korobkov "The Social Problems of International Migrants", Valday Discussion Club, November 2022

*useful for the country and society. The authors of the report consider that the attitude of the respondents towards migrant workers is antipathy and anxiety.*<sup>33</sup>

The Organisation “Strong Cities Network” (SCN) confirm such conclusion by providing results of the online research on the scale and scope of Russian-language stigmatisation and abuse of Central Asian labour migrants. The study was conducted between 1 March 2019 and 15 March 2021. SCN found 117 314 public Russian-language posts containing intolerant rhetoric and/or stigmatisation of Central Asian migrants on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.<sup>34</sup>

Apart from “traditional” barriers and issues described above and reported by many scholars in the last two decades, Tajik migrants became hostage of the recent political situation when Russian authorities actively involve migrants in hostilities between Russia and Ukraine. A military recruitment office opened directly at the main migration centre “Sakharovo” where migrants should legalize their stay in Moscow.<sup>35</sup> In December 2022, advertisements in Uzbek, Kyrgyz and Tajik targeting migrants to join the Russian military were placed in buses that usually run between metro station and the Sakharovo migration centre. After mobilisation announcement on 21 September 2022,<sup>36</sup> the recruitment of migrants became more aggressive and turned to strategies of deception and psychological pressure.<sup>37</sup> The Embassy of Tajikistan in Russia approached migrants to refrain from participating in hostilities on the territory of the foreign states, since this act is criminalized in accordance with the Criminal Code of Tajikistan.<sup>38</sup>

Tajik migrants continue feeling “unprotected” and affected by direct and indirect trauma.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, new challenges have further complicate the situation of Tajik migrants. Arriving in the country of destination, Tajiks face conditions when political, economic, and social structures affect the migration outcomes in terms of their integrated well-being, mental health and human development.

## **Mental health status, coping strategies and access to services**

Returned Tajik migrants appreciate the positive effect of migration for the ability to earn money and support their families, a new experience, having gained knowledge and skills. At the same time migrants acknowledge that difficulties they faced in the country of destination caused psychological issues, depression, stresses, and other negative affects to their mental health.<sup>40</sup>

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33 <https://www.levada.ru/en/2022/01/28/xenophobia-and-migrants/> (retrieved on 23 March 2023)

34 “Russian-Language Hate and Discrimination Against Central Asian Migrants. Challenges and Way Forward”, SCN, 2021. Available from <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Central-Asia-Online-Extremism-Report.pdf> (retrieved on 23 March 2023)

35 C. Schenk “Post-Soviet Labor Migrants in Russia Face New Questions amid War in Ukraine”, 7 February 2023. Available from <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/labor-migrants-russia-ukraine-war-central-asia> (retrieved on 23 March 2023)

36 Указ “Об объявлении частичной мобилизации в Российской Федерации”, 21 сентября 2022 года. (Decree “On the announcement of partial mobilisation in the Russian Federation”, 21 September 2022). Available from: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69391> (retrieved on 25 March 2023)

37 U. Hashimova. “Russia Continues to Target Central Asian Migrants for War Effort”, Publication: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 20 Issue: 29, 16 February 2023. Available from <https://jamestown.org/program/russia-continues-to-target-central-asian-migrants-for-war-effort/> (retrieved on 23 March 2023)

38 “Внимание, уважаемые граждане Республики Таджикистан!” Посольство Республики Таджикистан в Российской Федерации. 22 сентября 2022 года. (“Attention, dear citizens of the Republic of Tajikistan!”, The Embassy of Tajikistan in Russia. 22 September 2022). Available from: <https://mfa.tj/ru/moscow/view/11102/vnimanie-uvazhaemye-grazhdane-respubliki-tadzhikistan> (retrieved on 25 March 2023)

39 Weine S, Bahromov M, Loue S, Owens L. Trauma exposure, PTSD, and HIV sexual risk behaviors among labor migrants from Tajikistan. *AIDS Behav.* 2012 Aug;16(6):1659-69. doi: 10.1007/s10461-011-0122-9. PMID: 22261829; PMCID: PMC3740944

40 International Organisation for Migration (IOM), 2023. *Mental Health Problems of Returned Tajik Labour Migrants and their Experiences Seeking Mental Health Care and Psychosocial Support*. IOM, Geneva.



Comparing health before and after migration, 16% of returned Tajik migrants noted that it had worsened, of which 50% admitted that migration was the cause of their health deterioration. One fifth of returned migrants (18%) reported they have a chronic disease or disability: back pain, hypertension, arthrosis, and so on.<sup>41</sup> Psychological stress was also a common problem mentioned by Tajik migrants. Men migrants less likely talk about experienced psychological stress (21% of Tajik migrants) rather than Tajik women migrants (38%).<sup>42</sup>

The proportion of the feminine migrant workers from Tajikistan is much less than numbers of women migrants from other Central Asian countries.<sup>43</sup> Traditionally Tajik women travel in a company with their husband or male family member (brother, uncle etc).<sup>44</sup> But those Tajik women who go abroad alone face a number of hardships. Women migrants report about gender and sexual violence, xenophobia that together enhance women's psychological distress. Irregular status aggravated the psychological distress among women and made them feel helplessness: "How can we stand for ourselves? We are nobody in Russia without documents". Female migrants try to balance concerns over safety and maintain self-esteem when they are subjected to hostility and discrimination.<sup>45</sup>

Recent (2022) qualitative study on mental health among returned Tajik migrants conducted by the IOM-Tajikistan found 186 symptoms and complaints mentioned by respondents to describe distress.<sup>46</sup> Most of all migrants mentioned somatic symptoms: 103 times (55% of all mentions), while symptoms such as "headache", "sleep problems", "irritability" were repeated 15 times. All named symptoms were classified into four areas: somatic, affective, cognitive and behavioural (Table 2).

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41 "Migration, living conditions and skills: Panel Study-Tajikistan 2018", JICA Research Institute, Dushanbe, 2019. Available from [https://www.jica.go.jp/jica-ri/ja/publication/booksandreports/l75nbg000019cex3-att/report\\_20200604.pdf](https://www.jica.go.jp/jica-ri/ja/publication/booksandreports/l75nbg000019cex3-att/report_20200604.pdf) (retrieved on 22 March 2023)

42 Poletaev DV (2022) Life and health of labor migrants from Central Asia in Russia in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Population and Economics* 6(4): 83-106. <https://doi.org/10.3897/popecon.6.e90370>

43 Poletaev DV (2022) Life and health of labor migrants from Central Asia in Russia in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Population and Economics* 6(4): 83-106. <https://doi.org/10.3897/popecon.6.e90370>

44 T. Shokirova "Familial Tensions: Morphing Gender Relations of Power Among Tajik Migrant Workers in Russia", *Feminist Inquiry in Social Work* 1-20, 2022 DOI: 10.1177/08861099221096453 [journals.sagepub.com/home/aff](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/aff)

45 N. Zotova, V.Agadjanian, J.Isaeva, T.Kalandarov."Worry, work, discrimination: Socioecological model of psychological distress among Central Asian immigrant women in Russia". *SSM - Mental Health* 1 (2021) 100011

46 International Organisation for Migration (IOM), 2023. *Mental Health Problems of Returned Tajik Labour Migrants and their Experiences Seeking Mental Health Care and Psychosocial Support*. IOM, Geneva.

**Table 2. Symptoms of distress and possible mental health problems among returned Tajik migrants<sup>47</sup>**

Domains of symptoms	Symptoms	N	Percent
<b>Somatic</b>	Headache	30	16.1
	Fatigue, no energy	15	8.5
	Aches (all body, muscles, stomach, etc.)	14	7.5
	Sleep problems (insomnia or sleeping too much)	11	5.9
	Blood pressure	9	4.8
	Problems with appetite (no appetite or eating too much)	9	4.8
	“Shaking”	8	4.3
	Spasm and numbness (mostly of hands)	7	3.8
	<b>Somatic, total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>55.4</b>
<b>Affective</b>	Nervousness (“nerves”)	24	12.9
	Irritability, aggression, loss of control	21	11.3
	No interest or pleasure	8	4.3
	Depressed, low mood	4	2.2
	<b>Affective, total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>30.6</b>
<b>Cognitive</b>	Thinking a lot	13	7
	Memory loss, hard to concentrate	4	2.2
	<b>Cognitive, total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>9.1</b>
<b>Behavioural</b>	Withdrawal	7	3.8
	Suicidal thoughts	2	1.1
	<b>Behavioural, total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4.8</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>186</b>	<b>100</b>

Prevailing somatic symptoms among returned Tajik migrants usually hide mental health issues. Typically, migrants with somatisation have more psychological distress, and need to use more healthcare service, report more living difficulties and post-traumatic stress disorders than migrants without somatisation.<sup>48,49</sup> According to Russian scholars, migrants who had higher levels of anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder, and those who stayed in the receiving country 5 years or more had a higher level of somatic pathology than those whose stay was less than 5 years.<sup>50</sup> Trauma experienced by Tajik migrants in the host country may add to labour migrants’ sense of strain and insecurity, which some of them attempt to relieve through risky behaviour, such as alcohol consumption, drug using and sexual activity, etc.<sup>51,52,53</sup>

47 International Organisation for Migration (IOM), 2023. *Mental Health Problems of Returned Tajik Labour Migrants and their Experiences Seeking Mental Health Care and Psychosocial Support*. IOM, Geneva.

48 Tylee, A. and P. Gandhi The importance of somatic symptoms in depression in primary care. *Primary Care Companion to the Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 2005, 7(4):167–176.

49 Lanzara R, Scipioni M and Conti C (2019) A Clinical-Psychological Perspective on Somatisation Among Immigrants: A Systematic Review. *Front. Psychol.* 9:2792. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02792

50 Bakunina, N., Gil, A., Polushkin, V. *et al.* Health of refugees and migrants from former Soviet Union countries in Russia: a narrative review. *Int J Equity Health* 19, 180 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-020-01279-0>

51 Weine S, Bahromov M, Loue S, Owens L. Trauma exposure, PTSD, and HIV sexual risk behaviors among labor migrants from Tajikistan. *AIDS Behav.* 2012 Aug;16(6):1659-69. doi: 10.1007/s10461-011-0122-9. PMID: 22261829; PMCID: PMC374094

52 Mackesy-Amity ME, Levy JA, Bahromov M, Jonbekov J, Luc CM. HIV and hepatitis C risk among Tajik migrant workers who inject drugs in Moscow. *Res Sq [Preprint]*. 2023 Feb 27;rs.3.rs-2622346. doi: 10.21203/rs.3.rs-2622346/v1. PMID: 36909589; PMCID: PMC10002823.

53 Wood, E.A., K.E. Wilson and K.D. Jacobs 2021 Exploring the differences between men’s and women’s perceptions of gender- -based violence in rural Tajikistan: a qualitative study. *BMC Women’s Health*, 21:91.

Upon their return, Tajik migrants approach family doctors, general practitioners at primary health-care facilities. Apart from medical aid, coping through religious practices is also common. Being around their family and friends helps migrants to improve their emotional condition. None of the migrants seeks care among mental health specialists, due to high stigma toward mental health diseases in their society.<sup>54</sup>

Presently, Tajik migrant workers have limited access to mental health care for trauma related problems both in Russia and in Tajikistan.<sup>55</sup> As a rule, in the host country migrants seek healthcare mostly in extreme cases. Obtaining health insurance does not guarantee access to health services.<sup>56,57</sup> Typically, migrants approach private clinics or health professionals also from the diaspora. According to studies, payments for the medical examinations (24%) ranks third in migrant's spending after housing fees (45%) and work permit (27%).<sup>58</sup> Working abroad, Tajik migrants practice self-treatment and in cases of stresses apply symptomatic therapy using analgesics to relieve headache or sedative medicine such as valerian roots and corvalol.<sup>59</sup>

In Tajikistan, mental health care remains on in-patient and out-patient specialized psychiatric care. Primary health care providers who have completed special training have the right to diagnose common mental disorders and treat depression. However, in practice, primary care providers faced with the lack of knowledge and skills for the provision of mental health support and refer patients to neurologists or psychiatric specialists. According to health authorities, psychiatry is not an attractive specialty for young medical students and mental health system facing a shortage of human resources.<sup>60</sup> Some public organisations (non-governmental - NGO) train social workers for providing psycho-social support to people living with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and tuberculosis (TB) for treatment adherence support. There are also specialists on mental health who work among the people with disabilities. But monitoring system on quality of the provided services is not established, non-regular advanced trainings and professional development within the NGO community set up.

The Ministry of health and social protection of Tajikistan needs technical and financial support to improve the capacity of the mental health services applying to best international practices and World Health Organisation's requirements.

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In conclusion, Tajik labour migrants are affected by social inequality and experience several difficulties and barriers on the way to cover basic needs for themselves and their family

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54 International Organisation for Migration (IOM), 2023. *Mental Health Problems of Returned Tajik Labour Migrants and their Experiences Seeking Mental Health Care and Psychosocial Support*. IOM, Geneva.

55 Weine S, Bahromov M, Loue S, Owens L. Trauma exposure, PTSD, and HIV sexual risk behaviors among labor migrants from Tajikistan. *AIDS Behav*. 2012 Aug;16(6):1659-69. doi: 10.1007/s10461-011-0122-9. PMID: 22261829; PMCID: PMC3740944

56 Bakunina, N., Gil, A., Polushkin, V. et al. Health of refugees and migrants from former Soviet Union countries in Russia: a narrative review. *Int J Equity Health* 19, 180 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-020-01279-0>

57 И.Б.Кузнецова, Л.М.Мухарямова, Г.Г.Вафина. «ЗДОРОВЬЕ МИГРАНТОВ КАК СОЦИАЛЬНАЯ ПРОБЛЕМА», Казанский медицинский журнал, 2013 г., том 94, №3 ("Health of migrants as a social issue", Kazan Medical journal, 2013, issue 94, #3)

58 "Migration, living conditions and skills: Panel Study-Tajikistan 2018", JICA Research Institute, Dushanbe, 2019. Available from [https://www.jica.go.jp/jica-ri/ja/publication/booksandreports/l75nbg000019cex3-att/report\\_20200604.pdf](https://www.jica.go.jp/jica-ri/ja/publication/booksandreports/l75nbg000019cex3-att/report_20200604.pdf) (retrieved on 22 March 2023)

59 International Organisation for Migration (IOM), 2023. *Mental Health Problems of Returned Tajik Labour Migrants and their Experiences Seeking Mental Health Care and Psychosocial Support*. IOM, Geneva.

60 International Organisation for Migration (IOM), 2023. *Mental Health Problems of Returned Tajik Labour Migrants and their Experiences Seeking Mental Health Care and Psychosocial Support*. IOM, Geneva.

members. According to the World Health Organisation, the most important factor threatening the health of migrants is their social exclusion, as well as their disadvantaged social status.<sup>61</sup>

Social exclusion can start from birth: growing in a poor family and having low-skilled parents can significantly influence future life chances. Tajik migrants rarely approach state services and manage their employment abroad themselves, not always understanding the risks and barriers they can face. Thus, social exclusion happens when Tajik migrants experience several difficulties such as low income, poor housing, high crime, ill health, unemployment, discrimination, poor skills and family breakdown. When such issues come together, they create a vicious cycle.<sup>62</sup>

Arriving to the host country, migrants bring with them a strong belief of their manhood and consider earning money for their families as their main purpose. Thus, health needs are neglected and migrants approach health services abroad only in emergency case. Having diseases can cause deportation or undocumented status that prevent migrants to approach health facilities. At the same time almost 50% of migrants consider that migration was the cause of their health deterioration. Health issues caused 12% to later remain home and not participate in further migration.<sup>63</sup> Prevailing somatic symptoms hide psychological stresses that can be missed out by the migrants and health professionals. Besides, mental health issues are heavily stigmatized both in Tajikistan and in Russian society<sup>64</sup>. Migrants' sensitive health services are not promoted in the host country as suggested by WHO and IOM.<sup>65,66</sup>

Returning home, Tajik migrants bring home drinking and other risky behaviours that cause gender-based violence within their households.<sup>67</sup> Unfortunately, medical documents of the mental health patients in Tajikistan do not include information on migration experience, no statistic available on mental health among Tajik migrants. Lack of the monitoring of the health of migrants complicate understanding of the real situation on their health and challenge developing evidence-based health policy and management.

Migration experience of Tajiks confirmed the concept on labour migration as a social determinant of the mental health. Reducing source of the stresses such as creating job opportunities, providing access to health services, etc., is the most effectiveness approach in prevention mental health issues among returned Tajik migrants. Addressing structural barriers requires multisectoral and cross-border approaches and linked with the poverty-reduction strategy. While Tajik migrants contribute to economic development of the country of origin and destination and support their families, governments should pay more attention to better services for migrants through increasing job opportunities at home, strengthening the management of the safe migration, extending cross-border cooperation between countries of origin and destination, building migrant friendly mental health services available at the level of primary health care.

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61 Poletaev DV (2022) Life and health of labor migrants from Central Asia in Russia in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Population and Economics* 6(4): 83-106. <https://doi.org/10.3897/popecon.6.e90370>

62 M.Shaw, B. Galobardes, Debbie A. Lawlor, John Lynch, Ben wheeler, George Davery Smith "The handbook of inequality and socioeconomic position. Concept and measures", 2007

63 Poletaev DV (2022) Life and health of labor migrants from Central Asia in Russia in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Population and Economics* 6(4): 83-106. <https://doi.org/10.3897/popecon.6.e90370>

64 Sulchan, C. *Roles and Perspectives of Key Stakeholders on Access to Health Services for Labour Migrants from Central Asia to Russia*. A qualitative study. Internship report. Athena Institute, Amsterdam, 2020

65 World Health Assembly Resolution 61.17 "Health of migrants" (2008). Available from [https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf\\_files/WHA61-REC1/A61\\_Rec1-part2-en.pdf](https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA61-REC1/A61_Rec1-part2-en.pdf)

66 World Health Assembly Resolution 70.15 "Promoting the health of refugees and migrants" (2017). Available from: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHA70.15>

67 Wood, E.A., K.E. Wilson and K.D. Jacobs 2021 Exploring the differences between men's and women's perceptions of gender- -based violence in rural Tajikistan: a qualitative study. *BMC Women's Health*, 21:91.

# **Interregional migration cooperation potential of Central Asia in the framework of the Almaty process: current trends, challenges and opportunities**

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The Central Asian region plays an increasing role in contemporary interregional migration processes. In this chapter, the region will be considered as represented by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The ongoing transformation of the region over the last thirty years has accelerated, and diversified, migration in Central Asia and beyond. The effects of migration have a significant impact on the development and security in the whole region. The mixed and very complex nature of migration processes, the constant growth in the number of international migrants, the need for an integrated approach that does not leave anyone behind, actualize the need to strengthen the negotiation processes, develop and improve the efficiency of existing multilateral platforms.

In this context, the Almaty process covering all five CA states and beyond is seen as an important and promising platform for migration interaction in this area. To define the prospects for cooperation within the framework of the Almaty Process, it is necessary to consider the current situation and assess the challenges and prospects. In this chapter, this will be done through the prism of contractual cooperation between the Central Asian countries and other participants of the Almaty process. This research is based on the IOM project (*Contribution of existing bilateral and regional migration agreements to migration cooperation in the framework of the Almaty Process, International Organization for Migration (IOM) / UN Migration Agency, Subregional Coordination Office for Central Asia in the Republic of Kazakhstan: Astana, 2022.*) and was funded by the Science Committee of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Grant N BR18574168).

Migration processes in Central Asia have been an important part of the socio-economic development of the region for more than a third of a century. They thus include various mobility trends. Central Asia is involved in diversified migration flows due to a constant turbulence that manifests itself along the perimeter of the region and to interregional migration challenges. The main trend in the region is labour migration, but the flows of educational, return migrations and mixed migration are also increasing.

Along with the fact that Russia, despite the new geo-economic and geopolitical realities, is still the main center of attraction for migrants, the region also has its own migration system. Its main center of gravity is Kazakhstan, which is a country of primary destination, alternative destination and a major transit corridor. The effects of the pandemic and of the new geo-economic and geopolitical realities have further enhanced mobility in the region and the role of Kazakhstan as a migration and transit hub. In 2022, according to

the Ministry of Interior Affairs in Astana, about 5 610 000 foreigners entered Kazakhstan. Most were coming from the Commonwealth of Independent States. In the first place are immigrants from the Russian Federation – 2 900 000. In second place are citizens of Uzbekistan – 2 300 000. Then 730 000 citizens of Kyrgyzstan. Over 330 000 from Tajikistan. And almost 90 000 Turkish citizens. Now 650 000 foreigners are temporarily staying in Kazakhstan. 90% from these countries. Almost 6 000 000 foreigners left the country.<sup>68</sup>

Despite such an intense migration exchange between the countries of Central Asia, there is not a single specialized mechanism for migration-coordination in the region that covers all the countries of the region. All migration aspects in the region are regulated at the national level and mostly on a bilateral basis.

The most promising interregional platform covering all countries of the Central Asia region is the Almaty process. The Almaty Process (AP) for the Protection of Refugees and International Migration is a regional consultative and advisory body established to protect refugees and migrants in Central Asia at the initiative of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The AP was conceived in 2010 and put into effect on 5 June 2013. The platform members are Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan. Observer states are Iran, Pakistan. And Uzbekistan is an invited party.<sup>69</sup>

The AP is a platform for discussing mixed migration processes and has great potential for cooperation. In order to assess the potential of migration cooperation in Central Asia and more widely through the prism, it is necessary to consider the existing mechanisms of bilateral migration cooperation among the countries of the region and further the participants of the AP. It is very important to review existing agreements in the field of migration and related areas.

## **Bilateral cooperation of Central Asian countries and other participants of the Almaty Process in the sphere of migration. Kazakhstan with the countries of Central Asia**

Kazakhstan at the present stage has a diversified migration status and is a country of main, alternative and transit destination in the Central Asia region. Recent years have seen a certain outflow of young and able-bodied population abroad.<sup>70</sup> Within the regional migration sub-system, the country receives labour migrants from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and there is a migration exchange with Turkmenistan. Cooperation in the field of migration is first dealt with at national level and then at the bilateral level. Bilateral agreements among Central Asian countries are currently the key mechanism for regulating migration. There is a visa-free regime between all countries of the region, except for Turkmenistan. Kazakhstan has basic agreements with each of the states in the region regulating migration issues. The foundations for multilateral cooperation were laid in the 1990s within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

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68 The Ministry of Internal Affairs spoke about the migration situation in the country [В МВД рассказали о миграционной ситуации в стране] // <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/qriim/press/news/details/479277?lang=ru>

69 Almaty Process [Алматинском процессе] // <https://www.unhcr.org/centralasia/about-almaty-process>

70 Kazakhstan: Extended Migration Profile 2019. - Almaty: International Organization for Migration (IOM) Mission to Kazakhstan - Sub-regional Coordination Office for Central Asia, 2020 - 146 p.

Agreements on cooperation in the field of migration have been signed between Kazakhstan and Tajikistan<sup>71</sup> (2018) and between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan<sup>72</sup> (2019). These agreements have a well-established framework and the potential to further develop cooperation both bilaterally and multilaterally. The agreements have similar contents and aim at the exchange of statistical, legal and scientific-methodological information, exchange of information on citizens staying on the territories of states, protection of their rights and members of their families (Article 3 of both agreements). The documents also aim at cooperation in the field of combating irregular migration (Article 4 of both agreements), clarification of legal status, establishment of joint expert groups, participation in scientific and practical events and international projects, as well as suppression of the facts of dual citizenship.

These agreements are of a framework nature, but the very content of the articles and their similar approach contribute to the regulation of migration processes, the harmonization of legislation and approaches based on the migration profile of the states.

Uzbekistan is the largest exporter of labour in the region and beyond; and has a high investment appeal. As such, agreements covering various aspects of migration exchange activities with Kazakhstan and more widely are of key importance. The intensification of cooperation with Uzbekistan since 2017 can be seen as a significant advancement in migration cooperation issues.

In 2018, a modernization of migration policy has been implemented with the aim of achieving more effective inter-state cooperation. The Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan of 5 July 2018 outlined the intensification of cooperation with the authorized state bodies of foreign countries on external labour migration and the consideration of proposals for the accession of the Republic of Uzbekistan to international treaties on the protection of the rights and legitimate interests of labour migrants<sup>73</sup>.

With the adoption of this document, Uzbekistan concluded a series of agreements with recipient countries of migrant workers, as well as agreements on the development of trade and economic cooperation.

Two agreements signed in 2019 with Kazakhstan should be noted. The Agreement on Cooperation in Combating Illegal Migration<sup>74</sup>, as well as the Agreement on Labour Activities and Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers who are Citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the Republic of Kazakhstan and Migrant Workers who are Citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the Republic of Uzbekistan<sup>75</sup>.

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71 Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan on cooperation in the field of migration. Decree of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 112 of 7 March 2018 // <http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/P1800000112>

72 Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic on cooperation in the field of migration. Decree of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 878 dated 26 November 2019 // <http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/P1900000878>

73 Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, dated 05.07.2018, No. PP-3839 <https://lex.uz/docs/3811333>

74 Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Cooperation in Combating Illegal Migration. Decree of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 196 of 12 April 2019, <https://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/P1900000196>

75 Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Labour Activities and Protection of Rights of Migrant Workers who are Citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the Republic of Kazakhstan and Migrant Workers who are Citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the Republic of Uzbekistan of 2019. Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 17 April 2020 No 314-VI SPK // <https://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/Z2000000314>



The Agreement on Cooperation in Combating Illegal Migration aims to strengthen cooperation in preventing irregular migration and cooperation in this area is seen as one of the key areas of legal regulation of migration processes and to create a legal basis for bilateral cooperation in the field of external migration.

In general, this document is designed to develop good-neighbourly, partnership relations in the field of migration, to protect the rights of the state's citizens, and is also aimed at information interaction between law enforcement agencies in accordance with the legislation and international obligations of their states<sup>76</sup>.

The Agreement on Labour Activities and Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers covers important aspects of the stay of citizens of both countries during labour activities with a focus on the protection of labour rights of migrants. According to the document migrant workers will be compensated for damages due to injury, occupational disease or other health damage related to the performance of work duties, and migrant workers are also guaranteed free medical care<sup>77</sup>. The document covers labour relations in the fields of teaching, medicine and pharmaceuticals. In these fields migrants have to go through the procedure of recognition of educational documents. An important aspect covered in the agreement is the guarantee of pension and social security, as well as measures aimed at the prevention of illegal work activities. The remuneration and other working conditions of migrant workers, according to the agreement, are.

One of the progressive results is the agreement on organized recruitment of migrant workers in 2019 and the agreement to open a representative office of the External Labour Migration Agency in 2020-2021 in Nur-Sultan<sup>78</sup>.

In 2019, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan signed a joint action plan (roadmap) at the reporting ministry level to protect the rights of migrant workers from 2019 to 2020, including in certain cases the right to free health care<sup>79</sup>. These agreements and activities to promote migration cooperation, improvement in the field of migrants' rights are not only a contribution at bilateral level, but also a potential for multilateral cooperation.

The Memorandum of Intent on cooperation between the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the social and labour sphere, signed in December 2021, should also be noted<sup>80</sup>. The conclusion of the Memorandum confirms and strengthens the potential of the two countries to promote cooperation in the field of labour migration, covering important social aspects.

The document covers the area of labour migration relations with direct involvement of accountable agencies, which in turn will facilitate more organized labour migration, with priority given to respecting the labour and social rights of migrants in the course of activities.

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76 Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to cooperate in the fight against illegal migration // <https://kazpravda.kz/n/kazakhstan-i-uzbekistan-budut-sotrudnichat-v-borbe-s-nezakonnnoy-migratsiey/>

77 Uzbekistan approves agreement with Kazakhstan on migrant workers [https://migranews.ru/articles/news/uzbekistan\\_utverdil\\_soglashenie\\_s\\_kazakhstanom\\_o\\_trudovykh\\_migrantakh\\_regulated\\_by\\_the\\_employment\\_contract\\_with\\_the\\_employer\\_in\\_accordance\\_with\\_the\\_legislation\\_of\\_the\\_host\\_state](https://migranews.ru/articles/news/uzbekistan_utverdil_soglashenie_s_kazakhstanom_o_trudovykh_migrantakh_regulated_by_the_employment_contract_with_the_employer_in_accordance_with_the_legislation_of_the_host_state).

78 Labour Migration Agency to open offices in Turkey, Kazakhstan and UAE Labour Migration Agency to open offices in Turkey, Kazakhstan and UAE <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2019/08/27/agency-migration/>

79 The rights of migrant workers from Uzbekistan in Kazakhstan will be expanded <https://kapital.kz/gosudarstvo/78285/prava-trudovykh-migrantov-iz-uzbekistana-v-kazakhstane-rasshiryatsya.html>

80 Memorandum of Intent on cooperation between the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations of the Republic of Uzbekistan, dated 6 December 2021 <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/enbek/documents/details/245464?lang=ru>



All the above-mentioned agreements are a major advance in migration cooperation between the countries.

Turkmenistan is a country that declared permanent neutrality in 1995. The country actively cooperates with countries in the region on key issues. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan concluded a Strategic Partnership Agreement<sup>81</sup> in 2018. The countries have an Agreement on Mutual Travel of Citizens<sup>82</sup> of 2002, which regulates the migration exchange between the countries and defines the basis for cooperation in this area. The Memorandum of Intent on cooperation between the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Turkmenistan in the social and labour sphere<sup>83</sup> should also be noted. This document expresses the intention of inter-agency cooperation, including the exchange of legislation and experience in the field of labour, employment and social protection, as well as any open information that would be of mutual interest and contribute to the development of cooperation in this area.

Alongside Kazakhstan's already stable position in the CA region as an alternative, main and transit destination country, as well as a donor country, other migration directions are being observed - from one-two directional - (mainly to Russia, and then to Kazakhstan) to diversified: multi-vector and multi-level. This process includes an increase in bilateral frontier migration along the perimeter of joint borders (Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan-Kazakhstan, Tajikistan- Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan), the formation of local (regional and sectoral) employment areas attractive for labour migrants from the whole region. The potential of such cooperation in the field of migration is also very important. Here we can mention the development of cooperation between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, which has been observed since 2018, when 26 documents were signed, including Strategic Partnership Agreements<sup>84</sup>.

A decisive document in migration cooperation was the Agreement on Mutual Travel of Tajik and Uzbek nationals signed in March 2018<sup>85</sup>, which facilitated the development of trade and economic relations between the countries. In the same month, there were approved amendments to allow citizens of both countries to stay in the countries for 10 days without registration instead of 2 and stay without a visa for up to 30 days<sup>86</sup>. In 2022 four documents on cooperation in the field of labour, migration and employment were signed between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan<sup>87</sup>, contributing to the establishment of migration regulation and the development of cooperation between the countries with the involvement of accountable agencies.

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81 Treaty on Strategic Partnership between the Republic of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 11 January 2018 No. 137-VI 3PK // <http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/Z1800000137>

82 Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Government of Turkmenistan on mutual travel of citizens. Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 15 January 2002 No. 283 // [https://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/Z020000283\\_](https://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/Z020000283_)

83 Memorandum of Intent on Cooperation between the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Turkmenistan in the Social and Labour Sphere, 21 December 2021 // <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/enbek/documents/details/245463?lang=ru>

84 Signing of new cooperation documents between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan // <https://www.mfa.tj/index.php/ru/main/view/3477/podpisanie-novykh-dokumentov-o-sotrudnichestve-mezhdu-tadzhikistanom-i-uzbekistanom>

85 Protocol between the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan on amendments to the agreement between the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan on mutual travels of citizens of 9 March 2018 // <https://lex.uz/docs/5995744>

86 Parliament approved: Tajiks and Uzbeks can stay with each other for up to 10 days without registration // [https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/power/20220330/parlament-odobril-tadzhikistantsi-i-uzbekistantsi-mogut-nahoditsya-drug-u-drugado-10-dnei-bez-registratsii?tg\\_rhash=dad9b8f651f186](https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/power/20220330/parlament-odobril-tadzhikistantsi-i-uzbekistantsi-mogut-nahoditsya-drug-u-drugado-10-dnei-bez-registratsii?tg_rhash=dad9b8f651f186)

87 Tajikistan and Uzbekistan sign four documents on cooperation in the field of labour, migration and employment // <https://khovar.tj/rus/2022/02/tadzhikistan-i-uzbekistan-podpisali-chetyre-dokumenta-o-sotrudnichestve-v-sfere-truda-migratsii-i-zanyatosti-naseleniya/>

A review of bilateral agreements between Kazakhstan and other countries of the region shows that solid foundations for migration cooperation have already been laid, covering the main areas – work on the prevention of irregular migration, enhanced information and inter-institutional cooperation as well as deeper cooperation on migrants' rights, with a focus on labour and social aspects. This content and approach strengthen the capacities of the countries not only within the region, but also more broadly within the Almaty Process.

## **Some aspects of Central Asian migration cooperation with other countries of the Almaty process at the bilateral level**

Developing Cooperation in the Field of Migration between Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan Migration cooperation between Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan is determined by the Agreement on cooperation in the Field of Migration<sup>88</sup> of 2019, which has a framework nature. There is still huge untapped potential for cooperation between the countries in the transport, transit and logistics and trade and economic spheres. The Caspian Sea is a factor that will enhance migration exchange and strengthen cooperation.

In August 2022 a new stage of co-operation between Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan began, with meetings in Kazakhstan at governmental level and an official visit by the President of Kazakhstan K. Toktayev, the President of Kazakhstan, made an official visit to Baku. As a result of negotiations 10 documents were signed<sup>89</sup>, including the Declaration on strengthening of strategic relations and deepening of allied cooperation between the countries and the Comprehensive Programme on development of cooperation between Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan for 2022-2026. Also noteworthy are the Memoranda on cooperation in transport and transit freight transport at the level of reporting ministries and agencies.

The development of cooperation among the countries would strengthen the capacities between them in the field of migration and transport-logistics cooperation on the Caspian Sea, where agreements already exist<sup>90</sup>, this would also involve other participants in the Almaty process such as Iran and Turkmenistan.

In conclusion, the intensification of cooperation between the countries of the region and the Almaty Process is seen after 2015 in 2018-2019, with ratification occurring mostly in 2021 and later, with a new phase of cooperation in 2022. The year 2020 and most of 2021 was a difficult period for the whole world due to the COVID 19 pandemic. International migrants experienced a lot of difficulties due to lockdowns, job losses and health complications.

Assessing the potential of migration cooperation, trends and challenges of mixed migration in Central Asia and beyond in the current geopolitical and geo-economic realities and interregional turbulence, it is important to strengthen the potential of the Almaty process as an effective interregional migration platform.

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<sup>88</sup> Decree of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 702 of September 25, 2019. On Signing the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Cooperation in the Field of Migration <https://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/P1900000702>

<sup>89</sup> Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and Ilham Aliyev hold talks in an extended format [https://www.inform.kz/ru/kasym-zhomart-tokayev-i-il-ham-aliev-proveli-peregovory-v-rasshirennom-formate\\_a3970708](https://www.inform.kz/ru/kasym-zhomart-tokayev-i-il-ham-aliev-proveli-peregovory-v-rasshirennom-formate_a3970708)

<sup>90</sup> Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea. Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan of February 8, 2019, No. 222-VI 3PK. <https://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/Z1900000222>

# Iranian perspectives towards Central Asian connectivity

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Central Asian countries had always looked at Iran with the great level of expectation in terms of providing the much-needed connectivity to the landlocked region. Since the early 1990s, while constructing their foreign policy preferences, Central Asian countries have been regarding Iran as one of the potential candidates to serve as geopolitical bridge between the two regions – Central Asia and Middle East.

From his part, Tehran had long considered Central Asian republics as steady and reliable partners and attempted to find its own unique place in the Eurasian complex geopolitical landscape. On the other hand, Iranian leadership knew that such powers as Russia, China, the United States, Turkey and others had long managed to establish their political, economic and cultural influence in line with their geopolitical interests in the region.

Central Asian diplomatic flexibility and capabilities to accommodate to the ever-changing geopolitical landscape had been widely acknowledged by the great powers for a long period of time.

Iran is connected to Central Asia via Turkmenistan by land borders and to Kazakhstan via the Caspian Sea. Three countries share the Caspian Sea: its waters, resources with the clear division of the maritime borders according to the Convention.<sup>91</sup>

Iran's population today (86 million) exceeds the total population of Central Asian republics (76 million). Currently, Iran has the second largest gas reserves in the world. The country occupies the third place after Venezuela and Saudi Arabia by proven oil reserves and exports up to 70% of its oil, with the other 20% consisting of petrochemical products.<sup>92</sup>

At the same time Iran remains one of the most heavily sanctioned countries worldwide: over 4000 UN, EU and the US sanctions are currently imposed against Iran. Today it is only outmatched by Russian Federation, who now has over 14000 sanctions in place.

Traditionally Iran has been competing against Saudi Arabia for both political and religious influence in the Middle East while heavily assisting its proxy Shia forces in places like Lebanon, Yemen, Syria and Iraq. However, with the recent rapprochement between the two countries, brokered by China, there might be new opportunities emerging in terms of reconstructing new geopolitical and geo-economic reality between Iran and Central Asian countries.<sup>93</sup>

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91 Karataeva, E. (2020). The Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea: The Final Answer or an Interim Solution to the Caspian Question?, *The International Journal of Marine and Coastal Law*, 35(2), 232-263. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718085-23521089>

92 Michaël Levystone, "Connectivity in Central Asia at the Crossroads of International Crises: Transport, Energy and Water from Interdependence to New Cooperation Ways", *Russie.Nei.Reports*, No. 41, Ifri, November 2022.

93 Emil Avdaliani, *Russia & Iran converge in attempt to build a new Eurasian order*, April 11, 2023, <https://www.stimson.org/2023/russia-iran-converge-in-attempt-to-build-a-new-eurasian-order/>

This chapter examines the existing transportation routes between Iran and CA with an attempt to figure out the extent of the connectivity developed, along with the geopolitical factors both contributing and standing in the way of such connectivity.

## Central Asian key connection points with Iran

Currently relations between Central Asia and Iran are being transformed through the prism of the West-East confrontation. In other words, the closer Iran relates to Russia and China, the broader the perspectives for CA appear in terms of conducting business with Tehran.

At the same time, considering long-term international sanctions, Iran practically lacks any tangible instruments to deal with its eastern neighbours. Apart from the small number of Tajik Shiites, the rest of the Central Asian population is composed of Sunni Muslims. Therefore, Tehran cannot rely or take advantage of the Shiite forces unlike in certain Middle Eastern countries where Iran is running undercover operations to promote its national interests. The so-called idea of 'exporting' Iranian revolution had always been regarded with a great deal of scepticism in Central Asian capitals.<sup>94</sup> Similarly, Central Asian countries demonstrated clear concerns regarding the development of an Iranian nuclear programme.<sup>95</sup> For example, Kazakhstan had consistently called for Iran to follow international law.

The 2006 Central Asian Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (CANWFZ) treaty legally binds Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan "not to manufacture, acquire, test, or possess nuclear weapons, their components or other nuclear explosive devices."<sup>96</sup> It was signed on 8 September 2006 and entered into force in 2009 after unanimous ratification by all five participants. The CANWFZ is the only nuclear free region located in the North and the only one that is surrounded by nuclear powers. In fact, there are four of them in the close neighbourhood: Russia, China, Pakistan and India. In case Iran might succeed in developing its own nuclear capabilities, Central Asian region would find itself at the epicentre of five nuclear states, a scenario that no political analyst would like to imagine.

Today, Iran represents a booming market with over 86 million population, though long-term international sanctions had prevented the expansion of the trade further.<sup>97</sup> Iran tends to trade more with Russia, China and India, less so with CA region.<sup>98</sup> Partially that can be explained by the similarity of their national economies with the focus on agricultural goods, manual labour and heavy dependence upon the import.

Trade between Iran and CA republics remains somewhat limited to raw materials and agricultural production. For example, Turkmenistan imports fruits, vegetables, construction materials and other from Iran, and in return supplies oil products and

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94 Лидия Пархомчик, Модификация внешнеполитических ориентиров Ирана в Центральной Азии, CABAR.asia, 22.08.2016, <https://cabar.asia/ru/lidiya-parhomchik-modifikatsiya-vneshnepoliticheskikh-orientirov-irana-v-tsentranoj-azii>

95 The Limits of Breakout Estimates in Assessing Iran's Nuclear Program, Arms Control Association, Issue Briefs, Volume 12, Issue 6, August 4, 2020, <https://www.armscontrol.org/issue-briefs/2020-08/limits-breakout-estimates-assessing-irans-nuclear-program>

96 Treaty on a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Central Asia (CANWFZ), <https://treaties.unoda.org/t/canwfz>

97 Erin Blakemore, U.S.-Iran Tensions: From Political Coup to Hostage Crisis to Drone Strikes, <https://www.history.com/news/iran-nuclear-deal-sanctions-facts-hostage-crisis>, date Accessed May 28, 2023

98 Ghazal Vaisi, Shanghai To Bandar-Abbas, China's Growing Foothold In The Persian Gulf, 01/14/2022, <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202201148932>

textile. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan export the grain, flour, metals - Iran delivers dried fruits, plastic, etc.<sup>99</sup>

In August 2022, during an International conference of the land-locked developing countries, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Iran agreed to arrange the freight shipments via road from Chabahar port to Uzbekistan through Turkmenistan. All three countries decided to reduce the road tariffs and transit taxes, as well as to simplify the visa procedures required for the truck drivers to facilitate crossing the borders.<sup>100</sup>

In another conference on transport cooperation in October 2022, the Iranian deputy Foreign Minister on economic issues, Mahdi Safari, claimed that his country plans to achieve up to 20 million-ton transit per year with Central Asian countries.<sup>101</sup> Also, the Iranian leadership repeatedly claimed their readiness to provide an access to the Persian Gulf for the landlocked Central Asians.

So far, no great power in Eurasia, including China, India, Iran, Turkey or Russia view land transportation corridors as strongly dependable and prefer exploiting maritime routes. Among key reasons, one can mention the lack of a comprehensive system of processing transportation documents and digital tools to simplify international transit and transport operations. Another important point is the factor of uncertainty for the investors to advance potentially volatile projects.<sup>102</sup> Rapid changes in the payment system and new settlement schemes against the backdrop of the ongoing anti-Russian, anti-Iranian sanctions should also be taken into account.

The crucial land corridor between Iran and CA today is the Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railway launched in 2014. It covers roughly 917 km and connects Central Asia with Iran's ports in the south.<sup>103</sup> However, this route is hardly being used due to its limited capacity and multi-modal way of transportation. This railroad is widely regarded as the Eastern route of the International North–South Transport Corridor or INSTC.

The North-South corridor discussion initially appeared in late the 1990-s. In 2002, it was officially opened by Russia, Iran and India with the purpose of seeking an alternative to other traditional maritime routes, chiefly the Suez Canal. The INSTC links Russian ports with the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean and has two routes linking Iran.<sup>104</sup> The first is called the “western” route that runs along the Caspian Sea and connects Russia, Azerbaijan and Iran. The second route or the “eastern” one is that same Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railway. Once in Iran the goods from Central Asia are then transported by road to Bandar Abbas and other Iranian ports on the Persian Gulf.

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99 Александр Князев, Тегеран формирует новые парадигмы и для Центральной Азии, 02.02.2020, [https://www.ng.ru/dipkurer/2020-02-02/11\\_7783\\_iran.html](https://www.ng.ru/dipkurer/2020-02-02/11_7783_iran.html)

100 Uzbekistan to launch cargo transportation through Turkmenistan to Türkiye, 18/08/2022, <https://www.newscentralasia.net/2022/08/18/uzbekistan-to-launch-cargo-transportation-through-turkmenistan-to-turkiye/>

101 Иран и страны Центральной Азии приняли совместное заявление по транспортному сотрудничеству, 10.10.2022, <https://www.newscentralasia.net/2022/10/10/iran-i-strany-tsentralnoy-azii-prinyali-sovmestnoye-zayavleniye-po-transportnomu-sotrudnichestvu/>

102 Michaël Levystone, “Connectivity in Central Asia at the Crossroads of International Crises: Transport, Energy and Water from Interdependence to New Cooperation Ways”, *Russie.Nei.Reports*, No. 41, Ifri, November 2022.

103 Кирилл Соков, Иран вынашивает планы единой сети железных дорог со странами Центральной Азии, Мир перемен, 12.01.2017, <http://mirperemen.net/2017/01/iran-vynashivaet-plany-edinoj-seti-zheleznykh-dorog-so-stranami-centralnoj-azii/>

104 Ibid.

No doubt, it was the war in Ukraine that provided much needed impetus for promoting the INSTC; during the last visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin to Tehran in July 2022, the parties reached an agreement to launch the route by 2025.

Russia is currently working on facilitating the passage of Iranian ships along the inland waterways on the Volga and Don rivers. The ports on Volga are planned to be reconstructed and modernised. To survive and prosper Russian companies have been relentlessly pursuing new export as well as import routes since the severity of sanctions hit the national economy.

Diverse economic and geopolitical setbacks had been preventing INSTC from becoming fully operational. The key disadvantages of the “Western” route include the massive amount of investments, long-term cost recovery, and most importantly the geopolitical uncertainty of the project. It is also imperative to note, that Iran had been failing to connect its ports in the Caspian Sea (Amirabad, Anzali, Nowshahr) to the Persian Gulf ports (Bandar Abbas, Chabahar, Imam Khomeini Port) by the railway system.<sup>105</sup> And the Iranian leadership never talks about this “small nuance” when discussing the further development of the INSTC with its partners or accepting generous assistance from both Delhi and Moscow.

Neither Russia, nor India are interested in trading fruits, vegetables, or plastic dishes with Iran. Road transportation volumes from Russia via the INSTC towards Iran and through the territory of Iran are rather limited; it has low competitiveness in terms of the delivery of goods over long distances. Goods such as fertilizers, metals, chemical and steel production require a different and bulkier mode of transportation.

For the Western land route of the INSTC to function, Rasht-Astara railway link is missing between Azerbaijan and Iran. As of May 2023, the agreement was signed between Tehran and Moscow to complete the remaining part worth 1.6 bln. USD by the end of 2027.<sup>106</sup> Three countries, Russia, Iran and Azerbaijan have no other choice but to complete the construction of the remaining link to be able to trade fast on both qualitative and quantitative scale.

Once the Rasht-Astara railroad is to be completed and becomes operational, it is feasible to assume that the Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railway becomes rather redundant. According to some experts, the Eastern route (the Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railroad) is calculated as the least efficient one, since the transportation costs climb higher, taking into account the time and efforts required to change from one mode of transport to the other one. But then again, Central Asia also has access to the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, that runs from China through Kazakhstan, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, Georgia and further towards Europe.<sup>107</sup>

As Henry Rome (Washington Institute for Near East Policy) claims, using INSTC may not even bring long-term benefits for Iran, as the cost for the construction is swelling.

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105 Rishab Joshi, 6 Major Ports in Iran, Marine Insight, May 13, 2022, <https://www.marineinsight.com/know-more/6-major-ports-in-iran/>

106 Iran's INSTC Rasht-Astara Railway Bottleneck Problem To Finally Be Resolved, posted by Silk Road Briefing, May 03, 2023, <https://www.silkroadbriefing.com/news/2023/05/03/irans-instc-rasht-astara-railway-bottleneck-problem-to-finally-be-resolved/>

107 Kenderdine, T. and P. Bucky. 2021. Middle Corridor—Policy Development and Trade Potential of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route. ADBI Working Paper 1268. Tokyo: Asian Development Bank Institute. Available: <https://www.adb.org/publications/middle-corridor-policy-development-trade-potential>

Additionally, Iranian economy had been struggling for years, with high inflation and unemployment rates exacerbating situation more.<sup>108</sup> Unlike technical financial issues, geopolitics does play an increasingly critical role here.

Depending on how the relations between the states involved play out and evolve, the future of the Eurasian logistics might be determined. If international sanctions against Moscow and Tehran stay in place for another decade, that also means Central Asian countries would have to readjust their policies to deal with potentially hazardous partners.

## Geopolitical aspects of the connectivity

For the last 30 years, none of the great powers, including Russia, China, US, Turkey and others envisaged Iran as a real rival in the Central Asian region. Partly this was due to the fact that Iran was heavily preoccupied with the Middle Eastern affairs, and the pursuit to establish itself as regional hegemon. Competition with Saudi Arabia was exhausting both politically and economically, bearing in mind Tehran's regular support for the distantly located Yemeni opposition groups, Hezbollah in Lebanon and pro-Shiite forces in Syria. In other words, Iran perceives the Middle East as the key strategic environment to proceed.

Another reason was about long-term sanctions that prevented Tehran to freely trade, communicate and in fact offer any tangible alternatives for Central Asian states. Even now, each and every Central Asian state faces credible risks when dealing with Iran, whose leadership perfectly understands it and sometimes stalls endorsing bilateral ties. Both Tehran and CA countries ought to be cautious when planning short and middle-term cooperation, let alone long-term perspectives. With the modern Eurasian geopolitics appearing as extremely volatile, it is hard to forecast the state of affairs even one year from the present.

The international community today practically closed maritime shipping lanes in the European space for Russian Federation due to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Russia simply has no vessels to exploit as they belong to companies from the "unfriendly" countries. The European Union also banned the lorries holding Russian and Belorussian license plates to enter into the EU territory apart from very few exceptions.

Following this, Moscow emerged as number one in the waiting list to diversify its transport routes and re-direct the national export towards the East. The interest in bypassing substantial anti-Russian sanctions and heavy dependence on certain imported goods forces Moscow to seek out new alternatives. The Russian trade with China, Iran and India has grown vividly over the last year.<sup>109</sup> All three countries maintained proper business relations with Moscow, in effect assisting the war economy.

Trade between Russia and Iran reached close to 5 bln. USD in 2022, surpassing the previous year by 20%. Iran's role in the global trade and value chain matters. And Iranian leadership never faltered in its political will to overcome sanctions regime to carry on trading.<sup>110</sup> With Russia, India and China among its best customers, Tehran appears more

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108 Iran & Russia: New Land & Sea Networks, United States Institute of Peace, May 18, 2023, <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2023/may/18/iran-russia-new-network-land-sea-routes>

109 Faezeh Foroutan, Suspicious bind: Iran's relationship with Russia, European Council on Foreign Relations, 2 September 2022, <https://ecfr.eu/article/suspicious-bind-irans-relationship-with-russia/>

110 Ирина Рябова, Иран: жизнь под санкциями, Эконс, 4 марта 2022, <https://econs.online/articles/ekonomika/iran-zhizn-pod-sanktsiyami/>



than interested in acquiring solid, stable and efficient routes to connect. The situation is slightly different for Iran's Central Asian neighbours.

With US presence and influence dwindling in the Middle East, Central Asia, South Caucasus and South Asia, Iranian options in the first three regions remain open for new opportunities and dealings. Iran already joined agreements on preferential trade with the Eurasian Economic Union and showed interest in establishing a free trade zone with the EAEU countries. During the last visit by Iranian Foreign Minister to Moscow on 29 March 2023, it was decided to advance the negotiations on establishing a full-fledged free trade agreement between Iran and the EAEU: it would allow trade liberalisation between Iran and EAEU member countries. In 2022, Iran had been admitted to join SCO as a full member; the formal process is ought to take place in 2023 further promoting regional ties with CA republics.<sup>111</sup>

Still, Tehran is obviously attempting to exploit currently blossoming relations with both Russia and China in his own favour; Russo-Chinese confrontation with the West appears to be escalating and Iran continues to closely monitor it. Tehran's ties with China were enhanced further after Beijing managed to broker the deal between Tehran and Riyadh in the Middle East.

Nevertheless, there are growing concerns among the expert community about the future rivalry between these three states for Central Asian markets, access to their natural resources and geopolitical influence. Similarly, Iran's swift rapprochement with Moscow and Beijing continues producing doubts and high level of concern in both Washington and European capitals involved in the nuclear deal. Tehran's credibility level is dropping fast which makes reaching final agreement almost an unattainable task.

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In conclusion, the war in Ukraine helps reconfiguring the role and place of the great powers; many experts openly talk about the possibility of the imminent nuclear war between Russia and the West. For Central Asian republics located in the immediate neighbourhood of the Russian Federation, this clearly presents an existential threat. If and when Iran completes its own nuclear program, also remains to be observed.

If we look through the perspective of regionalism, Iran plans to adopt the theory to address its own national interests. On the one hand, new geopolitical reality might provide certain opportunities, namely in trade and transport areas. Also facilitating international transport corridors via its own territory would favourably impact upon Iran's regional image and standing in the world trade hierarchy.

The Iranian government is definitely contemplating the idea of their own version of the "Asia pivot" abandoning hopes for the revival of JCPOA deal and shifting their political, economic and trade interests towards the East: Russia, China, India, Central Asia.

The Central Asian region continues to maintain hope to access Southern Seas one day through Iran: now that all interested parties decided to finally accelerate the process of completing the INSTC, it suggests that the region may have a real chance. In this regard, the countries of the region should further pursue their pragmatic and consistent way of advancing constructive relations both with each other and with all

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111 Niranjan Marjani, Can Iran Counter Its Rivals in Central Asia Through Connectivity Push?, November 19, 2022, <https://thegeopolitics.com/can-iran-counter-its-rivals-in-central-asia-through-connectivity-push/>



their immediate neighbours. Only a steady, cohesive and united policy in this direction can bear fruit and deliver long-awaited results. In addition, it is necessary to develop our own competitiveness, invest in the development of local markets and enterprises to produce cost-effective and competitive products to offer when the new routes become operational.

Central Asia should stop being a place where only raw materials are taken from. In order to interest key powers to invest in the new or ongoing transportation and logistical projects, Central Asian republics ought to focus primarily on their internal economic progress to break the dependency upon the world market prices for commodities.

Also, Central Asian countries had been struggling to reach full-fledged regional integration, despite numerous attempts undertaken to achieve that. In other words, CA countries lack the cohesion in actions, diplomacy, both soft and hard power when it comes to promoting the regional interests, particularly in the connectivity sphere. So, the region should devise its own strategy to achieve that in line with the changing geopolitics around.

# Logistics and diplomacy of the Taliban government in Afghanistan: political pragmatism versus ideological principles

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Every new government or political movement that comes to power makes significant efforts to ensure its international recognition and legitimacy both in the international arena and within the country. As a rule, legitimacy is a key issue for the new political regime, since it is the main precondition for international investment, humanitarian assistance, and comprehensive economic development. Conversely, the lack of international recognition leads to the geopolitical and economic isolation of the country it governs. To avoid this, the new political regimes implement various strategies and approaches, such as changing propaganda and ideological formulations, slogans, and narratives, improving their international image, searching for potential allies, promoting a split between the main geopolitical opponents and critics, and so on.

For instance, the 1917 Bolshevik government in Russia remained in complete geopolitical isolation for almost seven years (to 1924). Only in 1933 did Roosevelt end almost 16 years of American non-recognition of the Soviet Union. To get international recognition, the Bolshevik regime had to radically improve its international image by changing its expansionist slogans (from 'Global Proletarian Revolution' to 'Socialism in one country'), introducing NEP - a new economic policy (allowing the free market and capitalism elements in Soviet economy) and actively involving Western companies and business structures in its large-scale economic and infrastructural projects.<sup>112</sup> In the conditions of large-scale famine in the Russian Near Volga regions (1921), a post-war economic boom in the West followed by the 'Great Depression', a range of Western governments, business groups, philanthropes, and humanitarian organisations actively and successfully lobbied for international recognition of the Bolshevik regime.

This chapter studies the diplomatic strategy and approaches implemented by the new government of Afghanistan "Taliban" to ensure its official international recognition. In this regard, the main research questions are the following: What are the specifics of the Taliban's current diplomatic strategy? How does the Taliban regime use the factor of economic incentives (such as interest in the implementation of large-scale infrastructure/communication projects in the region) to influence various geopolitical players and expand the circle of its geopolitical allies to lobby for its legitimisation in the international arena? In addition, how do these diplomatic efforts of the new Afghan government correlate with the necessity to avoid a split between various Taliban factions and ensure the legitimacy of the regime inside the country?

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112 See: Golotik S. I. "Sovetskiyay Rossiya v 20s: NEP, vlast Bolshevikov i obshchestvo" NEP (Soviet Russia in 20's: NEP, Bolsheviks' power and society) <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/sovetskaya-rossiya-v-20-e-gg-nep-vlast-bolshevikov-i-obshchestvo/viewer>

## Facing a challenging dilemma

Since incoming to power, the new Taliban government faces a complicated and challenging but inevitable dilemma between *political pragmatism* and *ideological principles and values* shared by most of the Taliban leaders. On one hand, the political pragmatism dictates the new Afghan government to ensure, as soon as possible, international recognition for the sake of its economic and political survival. Indeed, Afghanistan's economy and social sectors are in a severe crisis: according to a UN report, the number of Afghans living in poverty has increased by 15 million people – from 19 million in 2020 to 34 million in 2023.<sup>113</sup> In general, since August 2021, Afghanistan's economy lost 5 billion dollars and the country is reversing "in 12 months what had taken 10 years to accumulate."<sup>114</sup> It severely affected the living standards of the population, as food basket cost increased to 35%, every third business temporarily ceased its activities and by mid-2022, about 700,000 jobs were lost. The UNDP report notes that the main factor that caused the crisis was the arrival of the Taliban to power in the summer of 2021.<sup>115</sup> As a result, most donor countries refused to deal with the Taliban government in Kabul, which led to a cutting down of many aid programs. International recognition would certainly return investments to the country and create conditions for the implementation of large-scale investment and infrastructure projects.

The Taliban government clearly understands that its long-term survival depends on two interrelated issues: i/ international recognition, ii/ the resumption of international aid and investments. This implies the necessity to improve the regime's international image and establish better relations with the international society and major geopolitical players. The UN Security Council clearly stated in Resolution 2513 (2020) that it does not welcome the recognition of the government of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and does not recognize it. That implies that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan will not be recognized by the international community until it proves its pledge to fight against terrorist groups and observe democratic norms such as the protection of human and women's rights and the formation of an inclusive government.<sup>116</sup> In this situation, political pragmatism urges the Taliban leadership to demonstrate some progress in this direction, maximum flexibility, and pragmatism in its foreign relations, and restrain some of the most radical postulates and statements to improve its international image.

On the other hand, the political pragmatism of the Taliban leadership is essentially limited due to the steady resistance of a significant part of the movement's leaders, activists, and supporters. Many of them refuse to accept any concessions and compromises, demanding a complete and urgent introduction of Islamic order in the country. Consequently, in the current situation, the Taliban government is simply unable to fulfill the conditions put forward by the international community as the main precondition for the official recognition of the new regime. Thus, due to the resistance of the radical majority, the Taliban government - even if it wanted to - would hardly be able to create an inclusive government, ensure human/gender rights and cut off relations

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113 Afghanistan socio-economic outlook 2023, UNDP, April 18, 2023 <https://www.undp.org/afghanistan/publications/afghanistan-socio-economic-outlook-2023>

114 One Year in Review-Afghanistan since August 2021, October 5, 2022 <https://www.undp.org/afghanistan/publications/one-year-review-afghanistan-august-2021>

115 Ibid

116 Sattar Azizi, 'The Recognition of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Taliban) from the Perspective of International Law', International Studies Journal, [https://www.isjq.ir/article\\_138991.html?lang=en](https://www.isjq.ir/article_138991.html?lang=en)

with international terrorist organisations such as Al-Qaeda. In other words, the Taliban government cannot sacrifice for pragmatic purposes a range of basic elements of its ideology and must remain and act within the traditional ideological framework.

Therefore, in these difficult conditions, the Taliban government is forced to look for new approaches to solve the problem of international recognition of its political regime.

## The Taliban's logistic diplomacy approach

To deal with the above-described dilemma, the Talibans pursue a strategy aimed at finding common ground and joint economic interests with a group of neighbouring countries, and regional and world superpowers, to use them as facilitators and means of breaking the isolation.

The geopolitical situation is favorable for this approach – Russia's invasion of Ukraine has created a conducive environment for implementing a set of long-standing and large-scale infrastructure projects, many of which were developed years ago but had remained unimplemented due to instability in Afghanistan. This set of mega-projects is officially referred to as the Trans-Afghan Corridor (TAC) intended to connect the countries of post-Soviet Central Asia with the South-Asian region through the territory of Afghanistan. The Taliban's rise to power has inspired hope in some most interested countries of the region – first of all, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan – that the new Afghan government will end the instability in the country, establish a strong centralized government and thus create conditions for the implementation of these mega-projects. Moreover, as stated by Vice Chair of Uzbek Railways, Akmal Kamalov: "In the light of the current developments in Ukraine, a Transcaspian road to South Asia is in high demand".<sup>117</sup>

*The main infrastructure projects within the Trans-Afghan Corridor initiative are the following:*

- 1. Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India (TAPI) Pipeline**, also known as **Trans-Afghanistan Pipeline**, is a natural gas pipeline project being developed by the Galkynysh – TAPI Pipeline Company Limited with the participation of the Asian Development Bank. The TAPI project aims to export up to 33 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year through a proposed approximately 1,800-kilometer (km) pipeline from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. It is expected that the transit revenue from the pipeline would make up around 80 to 85% of Afghanistan's annual budget,<sup>118</sup> which makes the Taliban extremely interested in the project's completion. Originally, the cost of the pipeline project was reportedly estimated at US\$7.6 billion, but by 2014 it estimated already at \$10 billion.<sup>119</sup> The main project promoter is Turkmenistan while the leading partner of the project is the Türkmengaz state company.
- 2. Railway transit through Afghanistan–Termez–Mazar-i-Sharif–Kabul–Peshawar**; the project proponents describe it as an "economic springboard", because the route will pass along mineral deposits – copper, tin, granite, zinc, iron ore. The

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117 Charles Szumski, "Trans-Afghanistan railway to further link Central Asia with South Asia", EURACTIV.com <https://www.euractiv.com/section/central-asia/news/trans-afghanistan-railway-to-further-link-central-asia-with-south-asia/>

118 Pakistan to Move Forward with TAPI Gas Pipeline Project Even Without India, PTJ, <https://www.pipeline-journal.net/news/pakistan-move-forward-tapi-gas-pipeline-project-even-without-india>

119 Kazakhstan keen on TAPI gas pipeline, IPI, <https://www.upi.com/Energy-News/2014/12/03/Kazakhstan-keen-on-TAPI-gas-pipeline/1741417604335/>

project design envisages to transport up to 20 million tons of cargo per year, with the transportation costs decreased by 30-35%. According to preliminary calculations of the officials in Tashkent (the project's main proponent), the length of the railway will be 750 km, the estimated cost is 4.6 -5 billion US dollars, and the construction period is five years. The participating countries will have to build more than 1,200 artificial structures, including three tunnels, more than 100 crossings, and 336 bridges, which, they hope, will create thousands of jobs, solve many socio-economic problems in Afghanistan and thereby contribute to ensuring stability in this country.<sup>120</sup>

**3. CASA-1000** – the Central Asia-South Asia power project, commonly known by the acronym CASA-1000, is a \$1.16 billion project intended to export of surplus hydroelectricity from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Afghanistan and finally to Pakistan.

4. Project and power supply line **“Surkhan – Puli Khumri”**; the construction of the Surkhan-Puli-Khumri transmission line will increase the supply of electricity from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan by 70%, up to 6 billion kWh per year. The power line will connect the energy system of Afghanistan to the unified energy system of Uzbekistan and Central Asia and may become part of CASA-1000. Its total length will be about 260 km, of which 45 km fall for the territory of Uzbekistan and 215 km for Afghanistan. The total cost of the project is \$ 150 million, of which \$ 118 million is supposed to be invested by the Afghan side, and \$ 32 million by the Uzbek side. The Asian Development Bank has pledged \$ 70 million for the project. The payback period of the project is 12 years. The capacity of the new transmission line is estimated at 1,000 MW, which will allow exporting 24 million kWh per day, about 6 billion kWh per year.<sup>121</sup>

## Interested partners

As we can see from the list of infrastructural mega-projects, besides Afghanistan, a range of other countries are directly engaged or interested in their implementation. The construction of some of the mega-projects has already been underway for several years – such as CASA-1000 or the railway transit project. For instance, currently, a network of new transmission lines was already completed in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan within the framework of the CARA project.<sup>122</sup> As a result, by today, several countries express a steady and continuing interest in building the transborder Afghan corridor, among them:

*Central Asian countries* – their main interest is to get direct access to South Asia markets through Afghanistan considering it as an alternative route to the Bandar Abbas port of Iran. In the current geopolitical conditions, it is also an alternative route to the North, notably to Europe and the Baltic Sea ports through the territory of Russia. Proponents of this project claim that the route to Karachi is much shorter and cheaper than any alternative option. Thus, according to calculations of Uzbek experts, the transportation of a container from the city of Tashkent to the Pakistani port of Karachi will cost about

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120 Pochemu stranam Tsentralnoi Azii ne stoit speshit s transportnim koridorom (Why the Central Asian countries should not rush with the «Trans-Afghan Corridor») Stan Radar, <https://stanradar.com/news/full/50389-pochemu-stranam-tsa-ne-stoit-speshit-s-transafganskim-koridorom.html>

121 Surkhan-Pul-e-Khumri Power Line, Uzenergy. <https://uzenergyweek.com/surkhan-pul-e-khumri-power-line/>

122 CASA-1000. <https://www.casa-1000.org/ru/home-ru>

\$ 1,400-1,600. This is about twice cheaper than transportation from Tashkent to the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas (2600-3000 dollars).<sup>123</sup>

Using its favorable geographic location, Tashkent would like to place itself in the middle of transportation and energy supply routes of the entire Central Asian region. The successful implementation of the Trans-Afghan corridor projects could considerably contribute to the achievement of this strategic goal. The creation of short – and cheap – transport corridors has been a priority for the Uzbek government over the years. Therefore, nowadays, Uzbekistan is at the forefront of countries that push forward and lobby for the recognition of the Taliban-led government. According to the CSRS, a think-tank institution from Kabul: “contrary to other countries in the region and the world, Uzbekistan adopted a distinct, rational, and balanced policy towards Afghanistan following the collapse of the previous regime and the re-establishment of the Taliban.”<sup>124</sup>

Indeed, over the past two years, Tashkent has been the initiator and main organizer of several international conferences and diplomatic events devoted to Afghanistan. Thus, on 6-7 December 2021, trilateral (Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan) and multilateral (Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan) negotiations were held in Tashkent with the participation of responsible leaders and responsible representatives of ministries and departments for the design and construction of the railway line “Termez – Mazar-i-Sharif – Kabul – Peshawar”. On 26 July 2022, the Tashkent government hosted a high-level international conference “Afghanistan: Security and Economic Development”, with the participation of special representatives on Afghanistan from the UK, the EU, Iran, Italy, Spain, Kazakhstan, Qatar, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, China, Norway Pakistan, Russia, the USA, Turkey, Japan, and some other countries.<sup>125</sup> Addressing the conference, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev stated: ‘We are convinced that today the world community can and should avoid repeating the mistakes of the 1990s. It is important to prevent the international isolation of Afghanistan, which will inevitably lead to further deterioration of the humanitarian situation’. He also called on the Taliban regime to cut off relations with international jihadist movements and organisations. During the SCO-CSTO summit on 17 July 2021, Mirziyoyev reiterated the necessity to ensure a gradual transition to the recognition of the new Afghan authorities, for which the SCO and the CSTO had to develop a common strategy, mechanisms, and criteria for international recognition of the Interim government of Afghanistan.<sup>126</sup>

Another set of interests is related to the gas and oil resources of the region that could be transported through the territory of Afghanistan to Karachi as well. Correspondingly, Turkmenistan as the main gas producer in the region is the main proponent and pusher of the above-mentioned TAPI project. Tashkent and Astana are seemingly less interested in joining the TAPI project as both countries, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, produce gas not much more than they consume themselves.<sup>127</sup> Kazakhstan also expresses interest

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123 Uzbekistan seeks cheap and safe transport corridors to find its way to overseas, Uzreport, <https://uzreport.news/economy/uzbekistan-seeks-cheap-and-safe-transport-corridors-to-find-its-way-to-overseas>

124 Tashkent Conference on Afghanistan; and a Look at the Interaction of the International Community with The Islamic Emirate, CSRS <https://csrskabul.com/en/?p=4920>

125 Taliban hope that the meeting in Tashkent will strengthen their ties with the international community. Asia-Plus <https://www.asiaplustj.info/en/news/world/20220725/taliban-hope-that-the-meeting-in-tashkent-will-strengthen-their-ties-with-international-community>

126 A.A. Knyazev “Afghanskaya politika Uzbekistana -2023” (Afghan politics of Uzbekistan -2023), Post-Soviet Studies edition, volume 6, T.6. № 3 (2023) pages 266-280

127 Soorudim na troikh: zachem nuzhen soyuz nhyekh stran – proizvoditelei gaza (Let’s establish for three of us: why the Union of three countries-gas producers is needed) <https://vm.ru/politics/1017220-soorudim-na-troih-zachem-nuzhen-soyuz-stran-proizvoditelei-gaza>

and support for building the Trans-Afghan corridor but, apparently, with less enthusiasm and energy than Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan. Perhaps the reason is that Kazakhstan's main trade partners, Russia and China, are located to the north and northeast of the country. Therefore, the existing trade routes (including access to the Trans-Caspian Corridor) already ensure Kazakhstan's entry into the main world markets.

*Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan* are more interested in the implementation of the CASA-1000 project. In particular, Dushanbe has practically put the CASA-1000 initiative at the forefront of its strategy for the development of not only the energy sector but the entire Tajik economy as a whole. The government of Tajikistan believes that by gaining access to a large electricity market in South Asia, the country will become the region's leading exporter of environmentally friendly electricity, increasing exports to 10 billion kWh by 2030. According to the Tajik authorities' plan, it will enable the country to receive a substantial increase in the budget and push forward the development of other sectors of the economy, promoting the population's living standards, and employment level.<sup>128</sup>

*Russia*, for many years, negatively reacted to the idea of opening new trade routes through Afghanistan to the South, worrying that they will constitute significant competition for the transit of goods through the Russian territory. However, with the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the situation has changed dramatically. European markets are now closed to the export of Russian energy resources. Therefore, Moscow is actively looking for new markets for its gas amid Western sanctions and after the shutdown of the Nord Stream gas pipeline. In this situation, the most obvious option for Moscow would be to increase gas supplies to its Central Asian neighbours, and further to Pakistan and India. According to Russian experts, the potential of the South Asian market exceeds the European market by several times.<sup>129</sup> Therefore, Moscow today is increasingly interested in joining the TAPI and Trans-Afghan railway projects. To achieve this set of strategic goals, the Russian leadership has recently put forward the idea of creating a "gas union" with the participation of Russia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan to coordinate supplies between the three countries and other energy buyers, including China and, in the future, South Asian countries.<sup>130</sup>

*China* is another main geological player that supports the idea of construction Trans-border corridor, which allegedly would provide it with direct access to the exploitation of Afghan mineral resources and transporting them to China. In addition, this would open an additional trade route for Chinese industry and will ensure entry into markets and mineral resources of South Asia. In this regard, Beijing's long-term task is to make Afghanistan a part of its *One Belt and Road* strategic initiative.

Today, one of the main channels of Beijing-Taliban relations is the 'Afghanistan-China Business Association', an organisation whose mission is assisting Chinese companies to engage in Afghanistan - mainly, in mining, infrastructure, oil, and gas extraction sectors. Chinese companies are already engaged in developing an industrial park in eastern Nangarhar province and extracting oil from the Qashqari site in northern Sar-e-Pol province.<sup>131</sup> Beijing can ensure access to the Trans-Afghan corridor via China-Kyrgyzstan-

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128 CASA-1000, Tajikistan, <https://www.casa-1000.org/tajikistan/>

129 Soorudim na troikh: zachem nuzhen soyuz nhyekh stran – proizvoditelei gaza (Let's establish for three of us: why the Union of three countries-gas producers is needed) <https://vm.ru/politics/1017220-soorudim-na-troi-h-zachem-nuzhen-soyuz-stran-proizvoditelej-gaza>

130 Ibid

131 Aaron Y. Zelin is the Richard Borow 'Looking for legitimacy',

Uzbekistan railway, the construction of which should begin in the coming years. The involved countries signed the trilateral agreement on the project during the last year's SCO summit in Samarkand.

## **Taliban diplomacy: arguments for official recognition**

This group of 'interested countries' (plus international stakeholders and donor countries that for many years promoted and sponsored the idea of a Trans-Afghan corridor) are the main targets of the Taliban diplomatic efforts. The main idea is to convince the governments that seem to be most interested in the implementation of TAC, to promote in the international arena the idea of the necessity and inevitability of official recognition of the Taliban government. This group of 'allied' countries is supposed to become the main driving force in promoting the so-referred 'pro-Taliban diplomacy' and lobbying for the international recognition of the new Afghan government.

As was described above, one of the most important motivations for this group of 'interested countries' remains the formation of conditions in Afghanistan that enable it to start implementing infrastructure, transport, and energy projects aimed at getting access to South Asia and the Middle East. From this point of view, it does not matter for them who is in power in Afghanistan – the Taliban or their adversaries. The new Afghan government must be able to ensure political stability and maintain control over the entire territory of Afghanistan – and the Taliban seems capable of performing this task. Therefore, we can observe today how Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan at the forefront, while China and Russia at the background, exert considerable efforts to convince the international community of the necessity to negotiate and find a common ground with the Taliban.

To achieve this goal, while addressing international society the Taliban government – as well as proponents of the idea of its official recognition – use the following set of arguments:

First, they reiterate that in Afghanistan's current political and military situation, the Taliban government is the only power able to take responsibility and ensure stability in the country, which is the main precondition for its successful socio-economic recovery and the implementation of the larger infrastructure and transit projects. Thus, Sergey Lavrov, Russia's Minister of Foreign Affairs described the Taliban leaders as 'reasonable persons'; Zamir Kabulov, Special Representative of the Russian President for Afghanistan, stated that 'the leadership of the Taliban movement has long shown itself to be more capable of negotiation than the puppet government of Afghanistan'.<sup>132</sup>

The second frequently used argument is that the international boycott promotes a humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, which is certainly the case. However, this argument is often used to urge the international society to remove, at least partially, the boycott and *de facto* unconditionally cooperate with the Taliban in the implementation of infrastructural and economic projects. According to Anvar Kamalov, Chair of the Uzbek Railways state company, the new transborder railway project will help the local population by creating 5 million *de facto* jobs and benefit approximately 15 million people along the

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132 Kabulov: nlibi bolle dogorosposobni chem marionetochnoe pravitlestvo Apfganistana (Kabulov: the leadership of the Taliban movement has long shown itself to be more capable of negotiation than the puppet government of Afghanistan' <https://tass.ru/politika/12141099>



route. In his opinion, “Without massive projects of this scale and magnitude, rebuilding Afghanistan will not be possible given the full degradation of the Afghan economy”.<sup>133</sup>

Afghanistan has a large potential in terms of natural deposits, as well as of rare metals such as lithium and cobalt, and earth elements such as neodymium, the demand for which is steadily soaring as countries try to switch to electric cars and other clean technologies. Therefore, the most frequent argument used by all Afghan governments, from the Karzai administration to the Taliban, is that the development of mineral resources will solve all problems of the country. Back in 2010, Said Mirzad, former head of the Afghanistan Geological Survey, stated in this regard: “If Afghanistan has a few years of calm, allowing the development of its mineral resources, it could become one of the richest countries in the area within a decade.”<sup>134</sup> The same argument, in a slightly different format, can often be found in the publications of politicians and experts advocating for a “constructive dialogue” with the Taliban government.

The third argument is that the implementation of the ‘Trans-Afghan’ corridor project would promote peace and stability in the country and help the new government to withstand ISIS and other militants as well as the radical factions within the movement. According to Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the “Trans-Afghan” corridor would assign Afghanistan a central place in the system of interregional ties and will return to the Afghan side its lost historical role as a key link in ensuring the integration of the two regions.<sup>135</sup> As a result, many project proponents believe that if the Taliban government starts making money and gets benefits from transit, it may make it more predictable and more prone to compromises.<sup>136</sup>

In general, we can see that all the above arguments look rather reasonable and convincing. The problem is that the Taliban leadership does not want or cannot fulfill most of its promises and commitments made to the international community and interested countries. Meanwhile, fulfilling these commitments – such as forming an inclusive government or respecting human rights – is essential for international recognition.

However, the Taliban leadership still fails to establish an inclusive government. All members of the current Afghan government belong or are loyal to the Taliban movement and predominantly represent the Pashtun ethnic group.<sup>137</sup> Since they took control of the country in August 2021, the situation with human and women’s rights steadily deteriorated. The Taliban have intimidated journalists and restricted press freedoms, ordered judges to enforce their interpretation of sharia, and resumed public floggings and executions.<sup>138</sup> The new government has violated women’s and girls’ rights to education, work, and free movement; decimated the system of protection and support for those fleeing domestic violence; detained women and girls for minor violations of discriminatory rules; and contributed to a surge in the rates of childbirth, early and forced marriage in Afghanistan.<sup>139</sup>

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133 Charles Szumski, “Trans-Afghanistan railway to further link Central Asia with South Asia”, EURACTIV.com <https://www.euractiv.com/section/central-asia/news/trans-afghanistan-railway-to-further-link-central-asia-with-south-asia/>

134 Julia Horowitz “The Taliban are sitting on \$1 trillion worth of minerals the world desperately needs”, CNN Business, <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/08/18/business/afghanistan-lithium-rare-earths-mining/index.html>

135 “Uzbekistan’s strategy to build greater trans-regional connectivity”, Uzdaily, <http://www.uzdaily.uz/en/post/66356>

136 “One Year of Taliban Rule in Afghanistan: A Predictable Disaster” ISCT, <https://www.icct.nl/publication/one-year-taliban-rule-afghanistan-predictable-disaster>

137 Lindsay Maizland The Taliban in Afghanistan, <https://www.cfr.org/background/taliban-afghanistan#chapter-title-0-2>

138 Ibid

139 “Afghanistan: UN Human Rights Council must address Taliban’s ongoing ‘relentless abuses’”, Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/03/afghanistan-un-human-rights-council-must-address-talibans-ongoing-relentless-abuses/#:~:text=Since%20they%20took%20control%20of,rules%3B%20and%20contributed%20to%20a>

The Taliban government pledges to its international partners not to support radicals but the jihadist groups ranging from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) to Ansarullah still own military bases, training camps, and madrasas on the territory of Afghanistan. Therefore, the UN Council experts (Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team) have concluded in their recent report that “Afghanistan remains the primary source of terrorist threat for Central and South Asia”.<sup>140</sup> According to the report, the international jihadist groups “enjoy greater freedom of movement in Afghanistan owing to the absence of an effective Taliban security strategy.”<sup>141</sup>

Such intransigence and stubbornness of the Taliban leadership *de facto* undermine the efforts of the third ‘interested’ countries in lobbying for the new Afghan regime’s official recognition and implementation of the Trans-Afghan Corridor. Accordingly, this causes a sense of discontent and irritation, frequently expressed by a range of Central Asian and Russian officials and diplomats. Thus, Zamir Kabulov, Russia’s Special Representative to Afghanistan recently stated: “We are doing everything possible to alleviate pressure on the Afghan people by developing business with Afghanistan and sending humanitarian aid, and we will continue to do so. But the Taliban must take institutional steps to improve the situation or at least open the way to such an improvement, which we do not see at the moment.” Later he added: “Life will force the Taliban to change. But to do this, they will have to start suffering themselves – not the Afghan people. The Taliban will have to understand that they will lose what they have.”<sup>142</sup>

It seems that the Taliban’s economic partners fail to understand the reasons for such stubbornness but still hope to convince the Taliban leadership to change its tactics. Thus, in February 2023, Zamir Kabulov stated: “The last step of the Taliban authorities to deprive women of access to higher education is meaningless. I can’t understand it. I want to talk to the leadership of the Taliban movement to share our anxiety and disappointment”.<sup>143</sup>

Similar criticism and appeals to cut off relations with radicals and observe human rights are constantly addressed to the Taliban leadership during international and diplomatic meetings and conferences – for instance, during the July 2022 summit in Tashkent described above. At the same time, despite this criticism, the involved governments, donors, and international organisations continue active cooperation with the unrecognized Taliban regime on the implementation of Trans-Afghan Corridor projects – first of all, CASA-1000 and the transit railway.

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In conclusion, it seems that the Taliban’s diplomacy can be called “pragmatic” only to a certain extent; it is strongly limited by ideological norms and beliefs, ideas about the social structure shared by the majority of the movement’s activists. In other words, the Taliban leadership is pragmatic only within a rigid ideological framework, which makes

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140 Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, Security Council, February, 13, 2023, page 14.

141 Ibid

142 Afgantsi mogut smestit Talibov (Afghans may overthrow the Taliban), Asia-plus, <https://asiaplus.tj.info/ru/news/world/20230213/zamir-kabulov-afgantsi-mogut-smestit-talibov>

143 Kabulov khochet obsudit s talibami zapret zhenshinam uchitsya (Kabulov wants to discuss with the Taliban the ban on the women education), Ria Novosti, <https://ria.ru/20230212/afghanistan-1851543911.html>

the prospects for concessions and compromises extremely doubtful. This means that the Taliban government is unlikely to agree to form an inclusive government, share power with the opposition, or allow women to study and work – since such measures would contradict the ideological beliefs and values that form the basis and essence of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan - at least from the point of view of the main part of the movement.

In these circumstances, the strategy of the Taliban government is to ensure the implementation of several infrastructure megaprojects, supposed to strengthen the financial independence and political stability of the regime and, consequently ensure its international and domestic legitimacy. The calculation is based on the fact that if the Taliban regime remains the only undisputed force in Afghanistan, then sooner or later its official recognition will occur – within the framework of the Realpolitik approach. Moreover, the Taliban's economic partners (namely, countries and donor organisations participating in or sponsoring TAC projects) interested in the implementation of the Trans-Afghan Corridor can successfully lobby for the earliest official and international recognition of the regime.

*From here we can draw the following two main conclusions.* First, in its quest for international and domestic legitimacy, the Taliban government does not rely on improving good governance practices, strengthening the rule of law, or ensuring equal access to resources. The focus is on diplomatic and organisational efforts to accelerate the implementation of infrastructure megaprojects, ranging from Trans-Afghan Corridor projects to the Kosh Tepa mega-water canal in northern Afghanistan. Such gigantomania is a distinctive feature of all totalitarian states, which, as a rule, prefer to implement so-called “miracle projects” instead of carrying out genuine reforms and changing the existing ideological basis and political order.

Secondly, the paradox is that the more successful the implementation of infrastructure/communication projects is, the less the Taliban regime will be inclined to compromise with the international community. Financial viability and a full State budget will certainly allow the Taliban to act regardless of the opinion of the international community or surrounding countries. Recall that, having come to power in the summer of 2021, the Taliban leadership was generous with promises and broke most of them after consolidating its power throughout the country.

There is no doubt that if the Taliban's power persists for a few more years, the realpolitik approach will eventually prevail in relation to Afghanistan. This does not mean that the international community and most developed countries officially recognize the power of the Taliban. However, even in the absence of international recognition, the government of the Taliban movement will continue to expand its international relations, receive a certain amount of financial assistance and investments, and cooperate with a group of interested stakeholders of countries on the implementation of infrastructure projects.

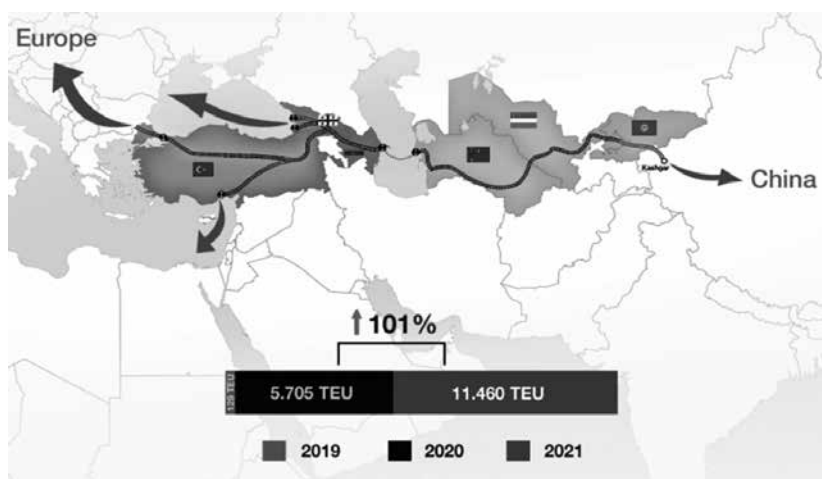
# The Middle corridor of Turkic States and the “India-Iran-Russia Consortium”

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The “tectonic tremors” observed in world politics over the past thirty years<sup>144</sup> have begun to directly affect the policies pursued by certain countries, primarily regional leaders. This ultimately transforms not only the architecture of economic management, but also the world order.

The Chinese leadership was the first to simulate the consequences of the “tectonic tremors” by launching an unprecedented “One Belt, One Road” initiative in 2013. Later, when the conflict in Ukraine started to grow and when Western countries began imposing sanctions against Russia in 2014, the fact of a boycott of Russian transport and logistics companies by the European Union in the medium term became obvious. For this reason, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Kazakhstan began to explore the possibilities of an international transport corridor running through Kazakhstan, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, Georgia and further into Turkey and the European countries; in other words, a route that bypasses the Russian territory.



The idea of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route was transformed into a concrete project after six years of the official launch of the Marmara tunnel<sup>145</sup>, which connects the European and Asian parts of Turkey, was opened for rail freight traffic.<sup>146</sup> Therefore, new opportunities have opened up for shippers to send goods from Central Asia and the Caucasus to Europe, since previously two ferry crossings, on the Caspian and Marmara Seas, were components of the corridor.

<sup>144</sup> Fall of the Soviet Union (1991), September 11, 2001, Invasion of Iraq (2003), Libya (2011), events in Ukraine (2014), the Islamic State (not only in the Middle East, but also on the African continent 2014-2019), the 2007-2008 financial crisis, etc.

<sup>145</sup> <http://www.allaboutistanbul.com/marmaray.html>, (Date of Accession: 25.03.2023).

<sup>146</sup> <https://www.railway-technology.com/projects/marmaray/>, (Date of Accession: 25.03.2023).

The initiative received a new impetus after Uzbekistan joined this international structure in the fall of 2019.<sup>147</sup> If in 2019, only 129 TEU were transported along this route, in 2020 the number increased to 5705, and in 2021 it doubled.<sup>148</sup> It is simple to explain this phenomenon: Tashkent's membership in the Organisation of Turkic States (OTS) is of crucial importance for this structure, since Uzbekistan has a favorable geostrategic position in Central Asia as the country shares borders with all the countries of the region, and most of the transport routes pass through its territory.

Uzbekistan's accession to the Organisation OTS has had a significant influence on its agenda: while the 7<sup>th</sup> was devoted to "Supporting the Small and Medium-sized Enterprises"<sup>149</sup>, and the 8<sup>th</sup> Summit to "Green Technologies and Smart Cities in the Digital Age"<sup>150</sup>, the 9<sup>th</sup> Summit, held in Samarkand, was dedicated to the of "New Era for Turkic Civilisation: Towards Common Development and Prosperity". The most important event following the results of the Samarkand summit was the implementation of the "OTS Strategy for 2022-2026". Thus, the OTS received the first roadmap for the "Vision of the Turkic World 2040" adopted during the Summit.<sup>151</sup>

The OTS Heads of States adopted the Samarkand Declaration<sup>152</sup> highlighting two main issues:

- Maintaining a regional environment of peace and security and ensuring stability;
- Activating economic and energy cooperation.

The most important aspect of the Samarkand Declaration is security. Therefore, the declaration stresses the need for a peaceful solution of border problems between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as well as it demonstrates that the OTS highly appreciates good relations with Tajikistan.

Highlighting the activation of economic and energy cooperation, the declaration emphasizes the significance of the signed agreement on the "Simplified Customs Corridor". Therefore, we can see the presence of a strong desire for economic integration, which is one of the main goals of the summit. Moreover, the "Agreement on International Combined Transport of Goods" also demonstrated the will of the Turkic states, which has concentrated corridors, to become a link between Asia and Europe.

The OTS Leaders highlighted the importance of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route. Moreover, they discussed the OTS Program on Energy Cooperation for 2023-2027, which was adopted at the Summit. Therefore, the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route is not only important as a transit corridor, but also as an energy corridor.

As mentioned above, the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), or the "Middle Corridor", running from China to Europe, is being developed as part of the Chinese "One Belt, One Road" initiative. Its importance is increasing due to the Russian

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147 [https://turkicstates.org/en/haberler/7th-summit-of-the-turkic-council-was-held-in-baku\\_1907](https://turkicstates.org/en/haberler/7th-summit-of-the-turkic-council-was-held-in-baku_1907), (Date of Accession: 25.03.2023).

148 <https://www.silkroadbriefing.com/news/2022/02/06/chinese-companies-to-invest-in-turkmenistans-growth-development-transit-cargo-industry/>, (Date of Accession: 25.03.2023).

149 <https://president.az/en/articles/view/34442>, (Date of Accession: 25.03.2023).

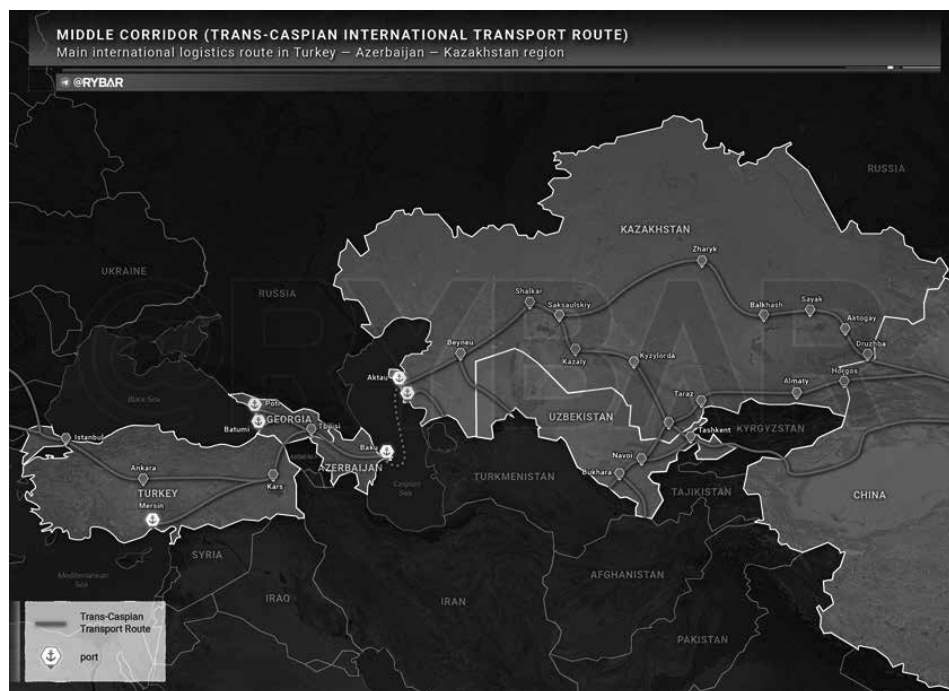
150 [https://turkicstates.org/en/haberler/eighth-summit-of-the-organization-of-turkic-states-was-held-in-istanbul\\_2394](https://turkicstates.org/en/haberler/eighth-summit-of-the-organization-of-turkic-states-was-held-in-istanbul_2394), (Date of Accession: 25.03.2023).

151 [https://turkicstates.org/en/haberler/ninth-summit-of-the-organization-of-turkic-states-was-held-in-samarkand\\_2678#:~:text=Shavkat%20Mirziyoyev%2C%20the%20Ninth%20Summit,the%20Republic%20of%20Kazakhstan%20H.E.,\(Date%20of%20Accession%3A25.03.2023\).](https://turkicstates.org/en/haberler/ninth-summit-of-the-organization-of-turkic-states-was-held-in-samarkand_2678#:~:text=Shavkat%20Mirziyoyev%2C%20the%20Ninth%20Summit,the%20Republic%20of%20Kazakhstan%20H.E.,(Date%20of%20Accession%3A25.03.2023).)

152 <https://www.turkicstates.org/assets/pdf/haberler/samarkand-declaration-2679-165.pdf>, (Date of Accession: 25.03.2023).

invasion of Ukraine and European sanctions on Russia, and after the Ever Given (one of the largest container ships in the world) ran aground in the Suez Canal in March 2021 and halted traffic on the Canal for a week.<sup>153</sup>

The significance of the corridor, launched in 2017, increased dramatically after the outbreak of hostilities in Ukraine. For European companies that previously worked with Russia it became necessary to find alternate routes to continue cargo transportation, bypassing the territory of the Russian Federation. On 27 June 2017, meetings of the ministers of foreign affairs and transport of Turkey, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan were held in Baku. The parties stressed the importance of investing in the infrastructure of this route.<sup>154</sup>



The Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, or “Middle Corridor”,<sup>155</sup> has demonstrated new opportunities: cargo can be delivered along a more convenient and shorter route than through the Suez Canal. If the cargo from China to Europe takes 30-40 days by sea, then the delivery time is reduced to only 15-25 days by train through this route. Although the “Middle Corridor” does not yet play a significant role in the transportation of goods between Europe and Asia, in the face of new realities, the demand for this project is growing. The EU leadership promoted the “Middle Corridor” as an alternative to the “Northern Route”. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development has already announced its readiness to invest billions of euros in the development of cargo routes between Europe and Asia, bypassing Russia.

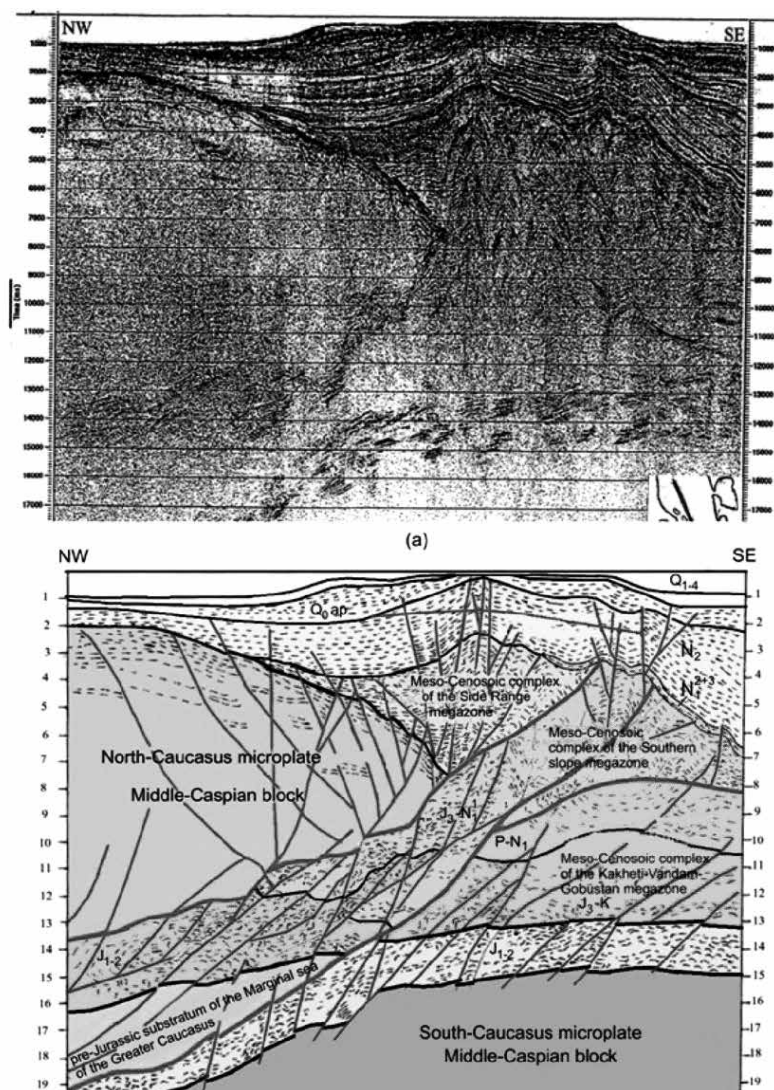
153 <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/17/world/middleeast/suez-canal-stuck-ship-ever-given.html>, (Date of Accession: 25.03.2023).

154 <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/azerbaijan-turkiye-kazakhstan-sign-declaration-on-new-transport-corridors-2022-6-28-0/>, (Date of Accession: 25.03.2023).

155 Picture borrowed from <https://rybar.ru/piwigo/upload/2022/12/22/20221222165953-49ed80ea.jpg>, (Date of Accession: 25.03.2023).



Turkish companies are rapidly gaining weight in the region and are also seeking to expand their logistics capabilities. If the entire flow of goods is going to come from Turkey, the throughput of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles may simply not be enough. Then it will be possible to revive the Istanbul Canal project and attract strategic investments for decades to come on favorable terms. Under such conditions, the Turkish authorities will retain control over the entire flow of goods from China. The growth of traffic always gives impetus to the development of the region.



Uzbekistan sent a container train to Europe along the Middle Corridor for the first time:

*On December 16, the first container block train departed from Uzbekistan with cargoes from the Almalyk Mining and Metallurgical Plant to the port of Burgos (Bulgaria). This freight train consists of 46 wagons and 91 units of 20-foot containers loaded with copper concentrate. The container train will move along the "Uzbekistan – Turkmenistan –*

*Azerbaijan – Georgia – Bulgaria” route with a length of more than 4000 km.*<sup>156</sup> Turkmen, Azerbaijani and Georgian logistic companies took part in sending the train from Uzbekistan. The train is transported twice by ferries. Along the Caspian Sea – from Turkmenbashi in Turkmenistan to Baku Azerbaijan, and along the Black Sea – from Georgian Poti to Bulgarian Burgos.

Obviously, this route did not pass through Turkey due to the possible high costs. Furthermore, transfer of containers from railways to ferry and back as well as transition from different sizes of railway tracks slows down the process and increases the cost.

Of note is that large sums must be invested into the “Middle Corridor” infrastructure, or else this route will not be attractive for international business. The main challenge for this project is the construction of a pipeline under the Caspian Sea. It is obvious that Russia and Iran may resist the construction of such a pipeline, raising the issue of an independent environmental review, as stated in the Caspian Sea Convention, signed in August 2018.<sup>157</sup>

Until recently, Kazakhstan denied the possibility of an underwater Aktau-Baku pipeline in the near future. Kaigeldy Kabyldin, one of the top managers of Kazkh national company, KazMunayGaz, noted that the issue of constructing a transcaspian Aktau-Baku oil pipeline is not being considered. According to him, this is due to “political, environmental and technical issues”. He stressed that “speaking about constructing an oil pipeline under the Caspian Sea prior to settling the issues regarding the legal status of the sea is premature. We do not insist on this project also because we understand the importance of protecting the ecology of the Caspian Sea.”<sup>158</sup>

Kazakh oil manufacturers fear that the construction of a pipeline on the bottom of the Caspian Sea may become a direct path to the death of the ecology of the Caspian region. Such doubts are based on the fact that there are seven zones of high seismicity in the Caspian Sea. The most seismically dangerous zone of the Caspian Sea is the Apsheron threshold, a mountain range of tectonic origin that separates the Middle and the South Caspian. No pipeline from Kazakhstan or Turkmenistan leading to the western coast (Baku) can bypass the Apsheron threshold.<sup>159</sup>

During the 5<sup>th</sup> Caspian Energy Forum “Caspian Energy – Peace Energy”, which was held in April 2012 который состоялся в апреле 2012 г., V. Putans, Researcher at the P.P. Shirshov Institute of Oceanology of the Russian Academy of Sciences presented a report entitled, “Engineering and Geological Hazards of the Absheron Threshold for the Trans-Caspian Pipeline.” His scientific conclusion was the following: “The main danger on the Absheron threshold: an instantaneous rupture of the pipeline due to catastrophic unpredictable events.”

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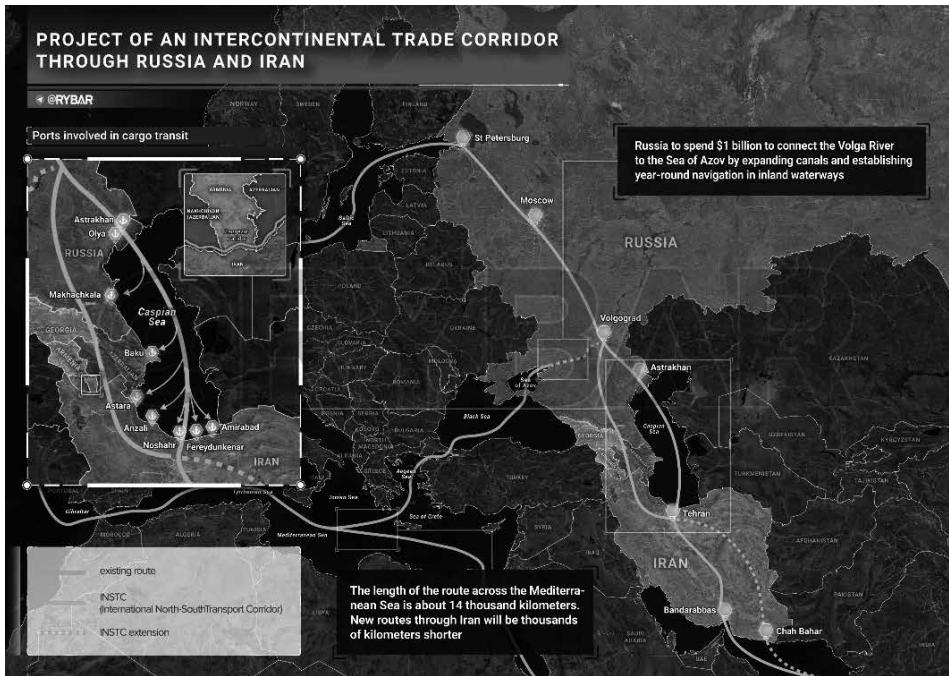
<sup>156</sup> [https://forbes.kz/news/2022/12/19/newsid\\_291196](https://forbes.kz/news/2022/12/19/newsid_291196), (Date of Accession: 25.03.2023).

<sup>157</sup> <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/561355353>, (Date of Accession: 25.03.2023). Apparently, Russia’s opposition to the construction of pipelines along the bottom of the Caspian Sea was the reason for the very cold reception of V. Putin at the VI Summit of the Heads of State of the Caspian countries, which took place at the end of June 2022. Thus, Putin was not honored at the Ashgabat Airport ([https://www.1tv.ru/news/2022-06-29/432229-vladimir\\_putin\\_pribyl\\_v\\_ashhabad\\_dlya\\_uchastiya\\_v\\_kaspiyskom\\_sammite](https://www.1tv.ru/news/2022-06-29/432229-vladimir_putin_pribyl_v_ashhabad_dlya_uchastiya_v_kaspiyskom_sammite), Date of Accession: 25.03.2023). President Aliyev was met at the Ashgabat International Airport by the Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers – Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan Rashid Meredov and other officials. In addition, a guard of honor was lined up in his honor. ([https://azertag.az/ru/xeber/Prezident\\_Ilham\\_Aliyev\\_pribyl\\_s\\_vizitom\\_v\\_Turkmenistan\\_VIDEO-2196872](https://azertag.az/ru/xeber/Prezident_Ilham_Aliyev_pribyl_s_vizitom_v_Turkmenistan_VIDEO-2196872)), (Date of Accession: 25.03.2023).

<sup>158</sup> <https://oilcapital.ru/news/2002-12-09/nefteprovod-iz-kazhastana-v-azerbaydzhan-po-dnu-kaspiyskogo-morya-budet-postroen-prezident-gnkar-1004732>, (Date of Accession: 25.03.2023).

<sup>159</sup> <https://naukarus.com/o-tektonicheskoy-prirode-apsheronskogo-poroga-kaspiyskogo-morya>, (Date of Accession: 25.03.2023).





Picture borrowed from: <https://sibkrai.ru/news/2127/965996/>

It appears that today, after a most powerful earthquake struck Turkey in February 2023, environmental risk assessments will be of paramount importance. For this reason, the decision to build this pipeline will most likely be postponed indefinitely.

Transportation of goods from the port of Aktau to Baku by oil tankers and ferries seems to be more realistic, although it too will face a number of problems. Tankers with a displacement of only no more than 10,000 tons of oil can navigate the Caspian Sea (restrictions on the draft of the vessel — 5.1 meters). If 100 million tons of Kazakh oil is divided by 10 thousand, then a flotilla of thousands of tankers will be needed. (Building such a fleet of even small tankers is unrealistic; there are only 3,400 of them all over the world). The port of Aktau is the “bottleneck” of Kazakhstan’s oil exports. Years are needed to create an oil-loading terminal necessary for reloading into tankers of large volume.

Presently, a permanent ferry service is established between the ports of Aktau and Baku (capacity – 2 million tons). Rail ferries and Ro-Ro ships<sup>160</sup> transport oil products, consumer goods, grain and mineral fertilizers, covering 253 nautical miles or 469 km in 18-20 hours (8-10 hours are spent on handling ships).<sup>161</sup> Ferries can accommodate up to 54 rail cars and 35 heavyweight automobiles.<sup>162</sup>

160 Roll-on/Roll-off (RO-RO) carriers are specifically designed ships for carrying wheeled cargo - automobiles, trucks, trailers and static cargo that is stowed on a wheeled platform, that are driven on/off the ship either under their own power or by the help of a towing vehicle. RO-RO vessels are equipped with built-in ramps on which the wheeled cargo is transported on and off the ship.

161 In thirty hours, a freight train covers a distance of at least 1,500 km (average speed of a freight train is 50 km/h).

162 <https://www.portaktau.kz/ru/infrastruktura/paromnyj-kompleks/>, (Date of Accession: 25.03.2023).

The idea of another international transport corridor,<sup>163</sup> designed to provide a transport link between Russia and India through Iran, arose in the late 1990s, when a group of Indian, Iranian and Russian transport companies signed a general agreement on the export-import transportation of containers along the Sri Lanka International Transport Corridor. Sri Lanka – India – Iran – Caspian Sea – Russia. Although this corridor was originally conceived as a route connecting South-North, over time its philosophy has undergone significant changes, and it began to transform into a transcontinental project that provides access not only for Russia, but also for Central Asian countries to the Indian Ocean along the shortest route.

## Iran's Expanding Rail Network

Russia is sending grain to India via Iran's port in Bandar Abbas

— Existing railroad    - - - Railroad extension



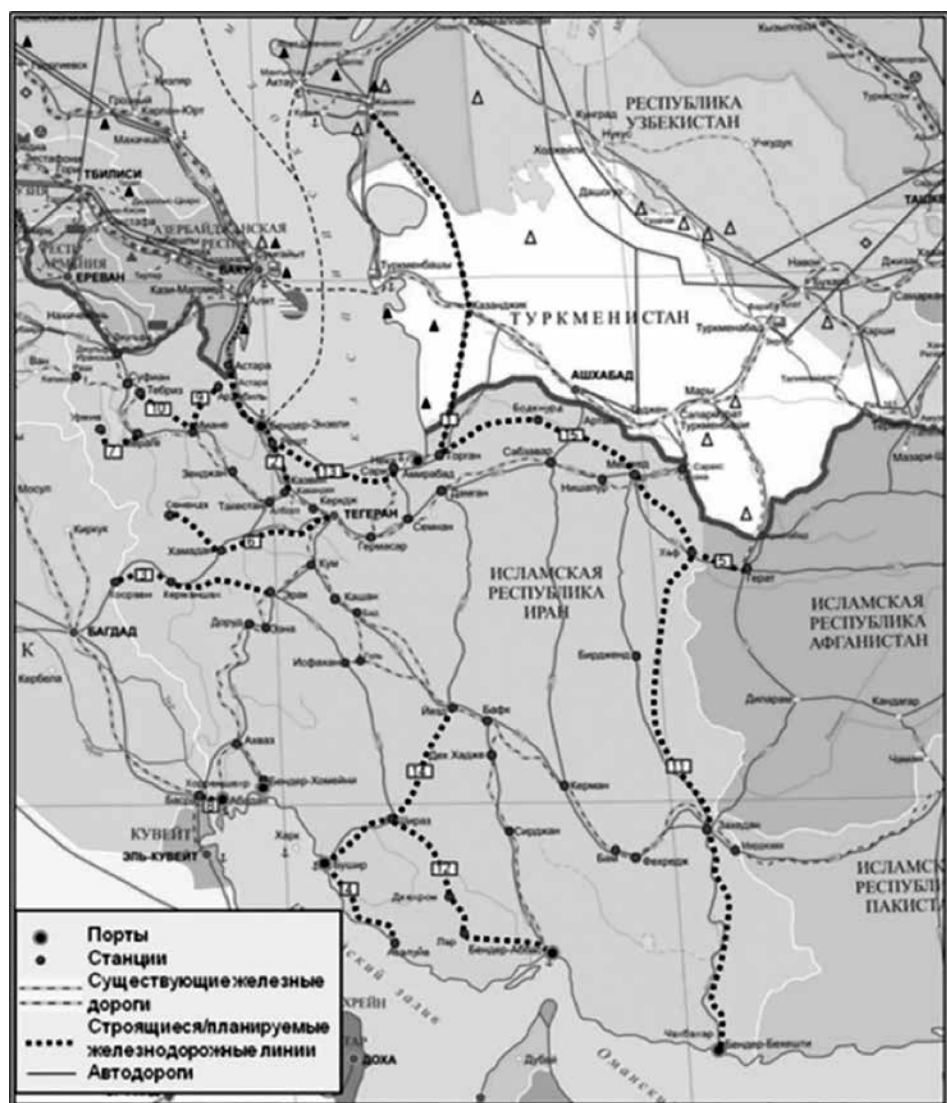
Picture borrowed from: <https://sibkray.ru/news/2127/965996/>

In the medium term, the countries of Central Asia (primarily Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan) will be able to export not only raw materials and energy resources, but also industrial goods to the countries of South Asia, the Middle East and Africa along this route. For example, it is extremely problematic for the Uzbek car industry to find its niche in the car

163 Picture borrowed from: <https://rybar.ru/piwigo/upload/2023/01/08/20230108192712-88fbb2fa.jpg>, (Date of Accession: 25.03.2023).

market of the EU countries, and the chance of a certain level of demand for inexpensive Uzbek cars in the less wealthy countries of the Middle East and Africa is quite high.

Naturally, Western countries do not welcome cooperation of the Central Asian countries with Iran. However, we believe that the countries of the region should be guided by their own interests (firstly, economic ones) and not play along with the political games of the third countries. History teaches that the political vectors of regional powers often change, which is why countries that follow their policies suffer. Henry Kissinger once quipped that “it may be dangerous to be America’s enemy, but to be America’s friend is fatal.”<sup>164</sup>



164 <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704828104576021823816289798>

The possibilities of this trade corridor route are unlimited. The corridor was originally conceived to significantly facilitate the delivery of Russian goods to world markets, primarily to Asia, because the transcontinental route running from Eastern Europe to the Indian Ocean, has a length of 3,000 km and is protected from external influences. The goal of developing a new transcontinental transport corridor is to protect trade links from Western interference and develop profitable relationships with rapidly developing Asian giants. This transport corridor that is currently being developed will enable Russia, India and Iran to cut thousands of kilometers from existing routes, as well as enable the Russian Federation to compensate for the decrease in trade with the EU.

Already at a very early stage of elaborating the route, Azerbaijan joined the project, and then, in order to reduce the costs of goods' double transshipment while moving along the Caspian Sea, it was proposed to make either a western (via Azerbaijan) or eastern (Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan) railway bypasses. The Iran – Turkmenistan – Kazakhstan railway project section was created sooner.<sup>165</sup>

The total length of the railway (the eastern bypass), which passes through the territory of three countries – Iran, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, is 960 km. It originates in Iranian Gorgan, passes through Inche-Barun on the border with Turkmenistan and ends in the Kazakh Uzen.

Freight traffic by rail is planned at the level of about 10 million tons of annual trade.<sup>166</sup> Primarily, it is grain, which will be supplied to Iranian and other Middle Eastern consumers. Iran is one of the largest consumers of Kazakh grain. In the Iranian port of Amirabad, there is a grain terminal of the KazAgro company. With the commissioning of the railway, Astana plans to increase the volume of annual grain supplies to the Iranian market to 2-2.5 million tons. The construction of the railway will ensure the output of Kazakh grain to the Arab states of the Persian Gulf.

**Table. Analysis of goods transported through the corridor Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran (2018)<sup>167</sup>**

Destination country	Grain and Flour	Cakes	Chark	Machinery and equipment	Total
Kazakhstan	0,0%	0,0%	18,9%	45,8%	100%
Iran	60,7%	22,7%	4,1%	0,3%	100%

Destination country	Grain and Flour (tons)	Cakes (tons)	Chark (tons)	Machinery and equipment (tons)	Total (tons)
Kazakhstan	0	0	58 895	142 926	311 840
Iran	129 634	48 457	8 757	672	213 407

<sup>165</sup> [https://unece.org/DAM/trans/doc/2015/wp5-eatl/3\\_WP5\\_GE2\\_12th\\_session\\_Mr\\_Timochkin-Russian\\_Federation.pdf](https://unece.org/DAM/trans/doc/2015/wp5-eatl/3_WP5_GE2_12th_session_Mr_Timochkin-Russian_Federation.pdf), (Date of Accession: 25.03.2023).

<sup>166</sup> Five times the capacity of the Baku-Aktau-Baku ferry service.

<sup>167</sup> [https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/8\\_KTI\\_Turkmenistan.pdf](https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/8_KTI_Turkmenistan.pdf), (Date of Accession: 25.03.2023).

This is not to say that the eastern route of the South-North corridor has no problems. They exist and hinder the implementation of regular flights of container trains. Specialists have pointed out mainly two challenges:

- High cost of renting and/or operating freight wagons (the reason for the shortage of wagons for this route);
- Delay of freight wagons at their destination pending customs and other procedures (increased costs for wagon owners and/or shippers).

Evidently, in the medium term, these problems will be solved and, moreover, cargo from Russia (the Urals and Eastern Siberia) will be transported along this route in both directions:

Transportation of blast-furnace coke (wagon rate 45-50 tons) in the direction of Iran with an annual supply of 1-3 million tons per year from the metallurgical plants of Chelyabinsk, Magnitogorsk and Novotroitsk and the Altaykoks enterprise (Rubtsovsk city). Supply of coking coal concentrate from the enterprises of the Southern Kuzbass (Mezhdurechensk railway station).

- And also, to improve the efficiency of this project in the opposite direction. It is possible to supply 120-300 thousand tons of chromite ore, oxidized copper fluxes to the Ural copper smelters in the amount of 600 thousand tons, as well as rich lumpy marlite ores of blast-furnace quality to Magnitogorsk in the amount of 1 to 6 million tons per year.<sup>168</sup>

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In conclusion, a brief review of the two logistics routes showed their advantages and disadvantages. It seems that the advantages of these routes will increase manyfold, and the risks will be significantly reduced if these cargo corridors are not put in competition with each other but unite and function for the benefit of the countries of the region. In this case, Turkmen and Kazakh ships will have access to the Azov and Black Seas through the Volga-Don Canal<sup>169</sup>, while Turkish trade ships will be able to unload in ports located on the Caspian coast.

In addition, these corridors may become a factor in strengthening cooperation among countries of the region. An example is the recent trip of Ararat Mirzoyan to India. During this visit, the North-South, Persian Gulf-Black Sea project was discussed.<sup>170</sup> It is quite possible that common interests between the conflicting states (Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan, Azerbaijan-Armenia<sup>171</sup>) can significantly lower the heated frictions and lead to a path of settling all problems.

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168 [https://unece.org/DAM/trans/doc/2015/wp5-eatl/3\\_WP5\\_GE2\\_12th\\_session\\_Mr\\_Timochkin\\_Russian\\_Federation.pdf](https://unece.org/DAM/trans/doc/2015/wp5-eatl/3_WP5_GE2_12th_session_Mr_Timochkin_Russian_Federation.pdf), (Date of Accession: 25.03.2023).

169 Russia plans to complete a large-scale reconstruction of the Volga-Don Canal by 2030. According to various estimates, cargo traffic on the route may increase up to 9 million tons per year. <http://casp-geo.ru/volgo-donskomu-sudohodnomu-kanalu-im-v-i-lenina-ispolnilos-70-let/>, (Date of Accession: 25.03.2023).

170 <https://www.panorama.am/ru/news/2021/10/13/%D0%90%D1%80%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%98%D0%BD%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%BA%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%B4%D0%BE%D1%80/2580599>, (Date of Accession: 25.03.2023).

171 There will be a real opportunity to revive the Zangezur corridor, directly connecting Turkey with Azerbaijan, or the exit of Tajikistan (Rasht region) to the borders of China through the territory of Kyrgyzstan.



# Connecting Europe from South Asia and India : the International North–South Transport Corridor

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The International North South (Transport) Corridor (INSTC), as an essential component of the network of latitudinal and meridian trade routes, is primarily geared toward the establishment of an integrated Eurasian transport backbone that will form the basis for regional trade and investment. As INSTC is beginning to catch the attention of the international community. What is being witnessed is a growing caravan of partners willing to tune in to the corridor's potential. All major economic power of the Eurasian landmass — China, Russia, India, South Korea and the EU — will gain substantially from developing such a Eurasian transport network that, when fully operationalised, would help improve the economic growth prospects in the entire Eurasian region in a sustainable manner.

The present chapter highlights the key recent developments relating to the INSTC, the opportunities it offers, the challenges it encounters and its commercial and strategic implications for India's Eurasia policy, as a national policy set within the broader multilateral context.

The uniqueness of the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC)<sup>172</sup> as a land- and sea-based multi-nodal transport network lies in the fact it will connect the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf with the Caspian Sea and then onwards to Russia and even northern Europe. Initiated in the year 2000 and ratified in 2002, this 7200 km long multi-nodal connectivity project (ship, rail and road) was the joint initiative of India, Iran and Russia. Azerbaijan joined the agreement in 2005, to be followed by 10 more countries namely Armenia, Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Syria, and Oman. Bulgaria is an observer member.

The objective of this initiative was to establish the shortest possible transport connectivity among member countries. For India, such an INSTC was to serve as a gateway to enhance trade and investment links with landlocked Central Asian Republics (CAR) and the region beyond. Furthermore, recently, the progress of the corridor has picked up pace motivated by several geopolitical and geo-economic developments. The Suez Canal blockage in 2021 which cost about 12 percent of global trade<sup>173</sup> (held-up trade valued at US\$ 9 billion per day), has amplified the optimistic outlook towards the INSTC as a cheaper and faster alternative multimodal transit corridor.

What is significant is that actors around the world have shown interest in this trade and transport network, for instance countries, such as Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Pakistan.

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172 *International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)*, [http://www.instc-org.ir/pages/Home\\_Page.aspx](http://www.instc-org.ir/pages/Home_Page.aspx)

173 *The Cost of the Suez canal blockage*, 29 March 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-56559073>

Moreover, Turkmenistan, though not a formal member, may like to be associated with it. Other countries such as Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam would get linked with India through the India- Myanmar-Thailand Highway Project (IMTHP) and the East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC). Thus, opening up the possibility of the future expansion of the INSTC to Southeast Asia. Few others like the US and Japan have also endorsed this project.<sup>174</sup>

## Geopolitics of connectivity projects: decoding the INSTC strategic advantage for India

The end of the Cold War triggered in the 1990s an explosion of ideas for projects to integrate European and Asian trade and transport systems. However, the viability of these projects remained and remains intimately connected to the geopolitics of the regions and the countries involved. Consequently, these visions have had varied outcomes. Some have succeeded, others have achieved partial success, while some others continue to remain on paper. Besides the constantly evolving nature of geopolitics, there are other important factors that have impacted the viability of some of the connectivity projects. It goes without saying that the vision, resources and capacity to implement the grandiose strategic vision underlying inter-continental connectivity projects is beyond the capacity of most states. China clearly is an exception.

The significance of revitalising connectivity projects has acquired a new sense of urgency particularly in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic period. The quest for alternative supply chains to avoid over dependence on a single supply source is pushing states to be associated with trans-regional connectivity initiatives that would be cost-effective both in terms of time and resources. The war brought to Ukraine and the disruptions in the existing supply chains has further driven home the importance of these connectivity projects that would aid in the diversification of supply chains. Consequently, there is a renewed thrust in revitalising existing projects while simultaneously searching for new ones. The significance of the INSTC, as a multi-stakeholder project lies in its potential to connect disparate regions through multilateral integration initiatives in pursuit of intra-regional development goals.

Three distinct routes and modes defines the architecture of the INSTC: (i) the **Central Corridor**: Starting from Jawaharlal Nehru Port in India's western state of Maharashtra to Bandar Abbas port on the Strait of Hormuz, this corridor passes through the Iranian territory and runs through the Caspian sea to reach the Astrakhan port in Russia; (ii) the **Western Corridor**: This corridor connects the railway network of Azerbaijan to that of Iran via the cross-border nodal points of Astara (Azerbaijan) and Astara (Iran) and further to Jawaharlal Nehru Port in India via the sea route ; and (iii) the **Eastern Corridor**: This corridor connects Russia to India through the Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. India has proposed the inclusion of the India-invested Chabahar Port<sup>175</sup> in Iran within the scope of the INSTC. India has also backed the extension of membership to Afghanistan and Uzbekistan and has envisaged an "eastern

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174 The hardening of the US posture against Iran and Western posture against Russia are factors that may have some bearing on the trajectory of the project.

175 Situated on the Makran coast, the Chabahar Port is the only Iranian port on Indian Ocean. India, Afghanistan and Iran stand to gain immensely from the port. Chabahar opens untapped opportunities for India by becoming a conduit to overland trade corridors linking India to resource rich Central Asia and European markets. *7 Reasons Why Iran's Chabahar Port is Crucial to India*, <https://www.indiatoday.in/fyi/story/chabahar-port-iran-importance-to-india-pakistan-afghanistan-1028342-2017-08-07>

corridor” comprising land route between Kabul and Tashkent. It is noteworthy that in July 2022, the operations via the INSTC’s Eastern Corridor began — from Russia through Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Iran to India.<sup>176</sup> It is estimated that by 2030, the INSTC will have the capacity to handle 70 per cent of all contained traffic between Eurasia, the Gulf region and South Asia. This would amount to anything between 14.6 to 24.7 million tonnes of freight annually.<sup>177</sup>

Though the INSTC predates China’s Belt Road Initiative (BRI), in certain quarters, it is being understood as India’s international strategy, originating from South Asia, to counter the BRI. In this regard it needs to be noted that in its inception, the INSTC is a decade older to the BRI. Unlike the BRI which involves creation of fresh corridors, the INSTC is more about connecting existing transport facilities by stitching alliances. Even in terms of overall outlays, the INSTC pales in comparison to the BRI.<sup>178</sup> However, unlike the BRI, the INSTC has an equality-based approach of providing the same level playing field to all its members. There are no embedded or hidden conditions for the member states and it is this aspect of INSTC that makes the project different and unique. India has accorded priority to economic integration with member nations and has accordingly concluded *Double Taxation Avoidance Agreements* (DTAA) and also *Bilateral Investment Protection Agreements* (BIPA) with some member states. The potential transport and logistics gains for members from the INSTC is very promising and includes: (i) short distances and faster deliveries leading to cost reduction<sup>179</sup>; (ii) a growing volume of trade among member states; (iii) an increased market access along with creation of new markets;<sup>180</sup> (v) the development of regional transit and logistics hubs along the routes; and (vi) the creation of backward and forward linkages and regional supply chains across Eurasia.

For India, the INSTC provides a shorter trade route with Iran, Russia<sup>181</sup> and beyond to Europe – it has the potential to expand up to the Baltic, Nordic and Arctic region. In fact, it is believed that the INSTC could be the key to India’s “Connect Central Asia” policy with trade and connectivity being central to the endeavour.<sup>182</sup> The largest gain for India is that the corridor enables India to bypass Pakistan in realising direct and seamless access to Afghanistan and the Central Asian states. Significantly, the 2014 INSTC dry run report of the government of India points to the “doubled speed” of this route in comparison to the traditional Suez Canal route besides also being 30 per cent cheaper<sup>183</sup>. Reduced costs would enable India to fulfil its energy requirements considering that India

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176 Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury “Russia launches trade with India via Eastern branch of INSTC involving Central Asian states”, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/russia-launches-trade-with-india-via-eastern-branch-of-instc-involving-asian-states/articleshow/92715733.cms?from=mdr>

177 Evgeny Y. Vinokurov Arman Ahunbaev and Alexander I. Zaboiev, “International North-South Transport Corridor: Boosting Russia’s ‘Pivot to the South’ and Trans-Eurasian Connectivity”, *Russian Journal of Economics* 8, 2022: 159-173

178 The BRI is envisaged at an overall outlay of approximately \$1trillion. None of the participants of INSTC can rival the scale of the BRI.

179 The INSTC is 30 percent cheaper and 40 percent shorter than the traditional Suez route. Dry runs conducted in 2014 showed that the cost of transportation and also travel time between India and Russia fell substantially.

180 The INSTC would increase trade connectivity between key cities such as Mumbai, Moscow, Tehran, Baku, Bandar Abbas, Astrakhan, Bandar-r Anzali and others along the route.

181 It is aimed at reducing the carriage cost between India and Russia by about 30 percent and bringing down transit time by more than half. Access to the EAEU alone will open India to a market of 173 million people. With the linking of the Chabahar Port with INSTC, India’s trade with the Eurasian region has the potential to grow to a staggering \$ 170 billion.

182 In January 2022, the first India-Central Asia Summit was hosted in New Delhi to mark 30 yrs of diplomatic ties. Attended by the 5 presidents of the Central Asian states, the Summit deliberated upon connectivity and trade collaboration, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1793068>

183 Federation of Freight Forwarders’ Association in India, International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC): *Dry Run Report 2014* (Government of India, 2014)



is the third largest energy consumer in the world.<sup>184</sup> Oil pipeline development along the INSTC, therefore is very much in the realm of possibility. Similarly, synchronisation of the INSTC with the Ashgabat Agreement<sup>185</sup> and Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)<sup>186</sup> holds immense promise for the countries involved in terms of trade and commerce. And, alongside the North Sea-Baltic Corridor<sup>187</sup>, the INSTC can also synchronise with the Scandinavian Mediterranean Corridor<sup>188</sup> and the planned Arctic Corridor in the future<sup>189</sup>.

## Challenges and potential obstacles of the project

There are several potentially serious obstacles to the INSTC that must be acknowledged and overcome, for the project to succeed or it will remain more in the realm of ideas than in that of a real project. There is need for mechanisms that can address operational issues on the ground - such as funding and custom procedure disputes. It is still not clear who would finance these large-scale investments required for upgrading the road transport and port infrastructures. Paucity of financing could prove to be a real obstacle considering that neither India, nor Russia nor Iran have the funds needed to sustain the large investments that are needed to build mega infrastructural projects. Russia is under crippling sanctions and the other countries involved in this project are themselves looking for foreign investments.

Stakeholders, especially major actors, will have to be willing to subsidise the entities that may sustain losses in this project. China's example here is instructive. Absence of common border crossing rules, multiple rail and transit points will generate their own set of challenges. These can prove to be serious obstacles to the INSTC's realisation. Most importantly, parties will have to address shared regional threats — such as terrorism emanating from Afghanistan, drug trafficking, interstate tensions and other lingering issues that could lead to political instability and conflict.

This clearly is not going to be easy, given the divergence in perspectives on many of the contentious issues. The ongoing war in Ukraine involving two member states (Russia and Ukraine) has presented its own set of challenges.

Apart from these, there are three serious strategic challenges to the INSTC staring on the face. Given the crippling sanctions imposed upon Russia, its capacity for actually implementing large-scale projects is highly questionable. Iran, another founding member of the project, is currently experiencing enormous domestic turmoil that is likely to linger on. Its economy is also under great stress. On the nuclear issue, there is a formidable international coalition against Iran. This certainly has immense economic and political

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184 According to the *India Energy Outlook 2021 Report*, energy use has doubled in India since 2000 and today India is the third largest energy consuming country in the world <https://www.iea.org/reports/india-energy-outlook-2021>

185 India formally joined the Ashgabat Agreement in February 2018. The objective of the agreement is to boost connectivity within the Eurasian region in coordination with other transport corridors within the region, including INSTC. One of the objectives is to develop the shortest trade route between Central Asian states and the ports of Iran and Oman, [https://idsa.in/idsacomments/significance-of-india-joining-the-ashgabat-agreement\\_p-stobdan-120218](https://idsa.in/idsacomments/significance-of-india-joining-the-ashgabat-agreement_p-stobdan-120218)

186 The member states of the BSEC (a regional international organisation formed in 1992) are: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine.

187 The member countries of the North Sea-Baltic Transport Corridor are: Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Germany, Netherlands, Belgium. It is at number 2 in the ten priority axes of the Trans-European Transport Network.

188 The Scandinavian-Mediterranean Corridor runs between Norway and Sweden in the north to Italy in the south, passing through Denmark, Germany and Austria. It covers nearly 40% of the total EU area and is thus a crucial axis for the European economy, <https://www.rfi.it/en/In-Europe/Freight-Corridors/Scandinavian---Mediterranean-Freight-Corridor.html>

189 Hariday Ch Sarma and Dwayne R Menezes, "The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC): India's Grand Plan for Northern Connectivity", *Polar Connection*, 6 June 2018, <https://polarconnection.org/india-instc-nordic-artic/>

implications. For India, it is the China factor that has to be addressed. Competing with China for trade, transport and connectivity in Central Asia as well as in the Middle East will be challenging for India. China will not refrain from blocking Indian ambitions in Eurasia and elsewhere.

In the context of the Middle East, there are several regional trends that provide a foundation for India's "Look West" endeavour.<sup>190</sup> India's deepening ties with Israel is driven by long standing armed deals and shared security concerns besides growing trade and technological cooperation between the two countries. India-UAE relationship is equally strong<sup>191</sup>. India's relationship with Iran has both security and economic dimensions. Iran has not only been a key energy supplier but has also contributed to India's security interests in Central and South Asia by containing Pakistan and also offering counterweight to China's rising regional presence. India's special ties with Iran is central to its Middle Eastern projects, including the INSTC.

An India's Arab-Mediterranean Corridor<sup>192</sup> defines India's new strategic map that aims to reconfigure connectivity between the Indian Ocean Region, the Gulf Region and Europe. Another major project in the Middle East is the I2U2 project<sup>193</sup> comprising of Israel, India, the UAE and the US. This project aims to tie these four states more closely together and thus bring India more fully into the Middle East to counter China. Its declared objective is to promote multilateral cooperation in energy, climate, trade, food security and regional security.

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In conclusion, as the INSTC plays out, it is increasingly evident that India and the other member states of the INSTC will present themselves as independent actors and not as pawns of any great power. However, the sustainability and success of this connectivity project mainly rests on its economic viability as well as the commercial gains that is likely to be accrued by the participating countries. The INSTC is central to India's geopolitical vision for the future and provides a road map for India's expansive infrastructural vision. This project is much more than a connectivity project for the countries involved. It exemplifies the linkages between geopolitics, strategic vision, state capacity and economics for the member states. Its realisation has the potential to open massive opportunities for all the stake holders. However, this requires political will, strategic planning and a dedicated source of planned funding.

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190 "India's 'Look West' Policy in the Middle East", 6 August 2019, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/indias-look-west-policy-middle-east-under-modi>

191 India is UAE's second largest trading partner. India is the first country with which the UAE signed a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). *India-UAE: A bilateral relation with multilateral dimensions*, 14 July 2023, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/india-uae-a-bilateral-relation-with-multilateral-dimensions/articleshow/101763985.cms>

192 It is an emerging multi-modal, commercial corridor that could radically reconfigure trade patterns between the Indian Ocean Region, the Middle East and Europe, <https://diplomacybeyond.com/importance-of-india-arab-mediterranean-corridor/>

193 <https://www.ibef.org/news/first-i2u2-projects-to-promote-agriculture-food-green-energy-in-india>

# China and Central Asian countries under the Belt and Road Initiative: enlargement of projects

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Geopolitical uncertainty and turbulence are causes enough for the development and the search of new forms and projects designed to strengthen economic cooperation between China and the countries of Central Asia. The start of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013 has already resulted in a powerful impetus toward the development of trade and economic cooperation between China and Central Asia. There are, however, still, a number of obstacles that need to be gradually eliminated and handled to improve the quality of interaction.

The problem of “debt trap diplomacy” in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, ensuring the safety of Chinese enterprises, the profitability of certain projects (relevant for Kazakhstan) and the predictability of the political regimes of the countries of the region, and others, are still unresolved. Yet, they are paramount obstacles.

The Central Asian countries are of economic interest to the People’s Republic of China for several key reasons. First, they are additional sources of raw materials for the Chinese economy, primarily oil, gas and metals, accounted for more than half of China’s imports. Secondly, in the context of BRI launch, the Central Asian region is turning into one of the key transport and transit hubs through which goods from China reach Western markets. Thirdly, the stimulation of mutual trade and the activity of Chinese entrepreneurs in Central Asia have a positive impact on the economic development of the regions of Western China.

Besides, the strengthening of economic cooperation is associated with the development of infrastructure projects, financial, investment projects, and other forms of cooperation. In this regard, it seems appropriate to consider a number of these areas in a whole.

## Diversification and construction of new transport and logistics routes

As fairly noted in the report of the Eurasian Development Bank (EDB) “The Economy of Central Asia: a Fresh Perspective”, the Central Asian region will expect economic growth “with the development of the existing routes (International Transport Route “North-South”, “Europe-Western China”, Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, CAREC corridors, etc.) and with the creation of new railway corridors (China – Kyrgyzstan – Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan – Uzbekistan – Afghanistan – Pakistan, Tajikistan – Afghanistan – Turkmenistan)<sup>194</sup>.

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194 [https://eabr.org/upload/iblock/1fe/EDB\\_2022\\_Report-3\\_The-Economy-of-CA\\_eng.pdf](https://eabr.org/upload/iblock/1fe/EDB_2022_Report-3_The-Economy-of-CA_eng.pdf)

Kazakhstan plays one of the most important roles in strengthening the connectivity between Western China and the countries of Central Asia.

According to the Kazakhstan Railways data, from January to October 2022, “China remains one of the priority destinations for exports and imports of products. For 10 months in 2022, the volume of cargo transportation on the border of China with Kazakhstan increased by 12%. 19.4 million tons of cargo was transported through the Dostyk-Alashankou and the Altynkol-Khorgos railway crossings. Transit from China increased by 16%, export of Kazakhstani goods – by 12%<sup>195</sup>.

However, the infrastructure of Central Asia cannot cope with the growing flow of goods since the beginning of the war between Russia and Ukraine in March 2022. Despite the positive dynamics regarding the Kazakh-Chinese logistics cooperation, it is important to note that both China and the countries of Central Asia need to develop new directions, as the existing routes are clogged and do not meet modern requirements, which leads to delays in the delivery of goods. Because of this, Kazakhstan has started the construction of an additional railway lines on the border with China.

The second track on the Dostyk-Moiynty line, which is adjacent to the Alashankou border crossing on the border with China, “should increase the capacity of the crucial line by five times; from 12 pairs of trains to 60 pairs per day.”<sup>196</sup> At the same time, “the construction of a new railway line within the framework of the National Project “Strong Regions – Driver of the Country’s Development” started in November 2022<sup>197</sup>. According to the estimates of the Kazakh authorities, the cumulative effect of the project implementation will additionally increase budget revenues of about 8.6 billion euros over 20 years. In addition, the main hopes are associated with this project to solve the transport problems of Kazakhstani exporters in this direction.

Besides, Kazakhstan “is considering the issue of opening a third railway crossing between Kazakhstan (Bakhty) and China with the further construction of the Ayagoz-Bakhty railway line with a border crossing terminal<sup>198</sup>.” As a result, the volume of shipments to China may grow to 20 million tons.

During the summit of the leaders of the Organisation of Turkic States (OTG) in Samarkand, President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev said that “until 2025 it is planned to attract \$20 billion in investments<sup>199</sup>” for the development of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TCITR), which facilitates the delivery of products from China to Europe through the territories of Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey.

The crisis in January 2022 in Kazakhstan showed certain shortcomings in the logistics routes connecting Western China and the countries of Central Asia in terms of excessive dependence on Kazakhstan. In this regard, special attention and focus should be given to such a route as China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan, a memorandum on the construction of which was signed during the SCO summit in Samarkand in 2022. Judging by the latest reports, the start of construction of the railway is scheduled in 2023. Furthermore,

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195 [https://railways.kz/articles/company/news/\\_ktj\\_demonstriruet\\_polojitelnuu\\_dinamiku\\_gruzovyh\\_perevozok](https://railways.kz/articles/company/news/_ktj_demonstriruet_polojitelnuu_dinamiku_gruzovyh_perevozok)

196 Kazakhstan lays second track on railway line to China | RailFreight.com

197 <https://trans.info/ru/ukreplenie-novogo-shelkovogo-puti-stroitelstvo-ocherednoy-linii-iz-kazhastana-v-kitay-314524>

198 Казахстан планирует открыть третий ж/д переход на границе с Китаем - 28.11.2022, Sputnik Казахстан

199 <https://www.akorda.kz/ru/prezident-kasym-zhomart-tokayev-prinyal-uchastie-v-sammite-organizacii-tyurkskih-gosudarstv-11104851>

Kyrgyzstan and China agreed to establish a third checkpoint, Bedel, which will enhance trade flow by improving goods throughput. Plans are also underway for the construction of an additional road that will connect the Kyrgyz village of Barskoon with Uchturfan county in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China<sup>200</sup>.

The implementation of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan transport corridor project will make it possible in the future to connect Uzbekistan and China with a single railway - from the western borders of China to the eastern borders of Uzbekistan through the territory of Kyrgyzstan, to create the shortest and most efficient transport route for China to enter Central Asia, to connect Xinjiang – the Uighur Autonomous Region of China – with the countries of the Persian Gulf and Transcaucasia with access to the Mediterranean Sea.

For Uzbekistan, as well as for Kyrgyzstan, this project is of great importance as an opportunity to include the country in the global network of logistics routes passing through China (seaports). The construction of this route will contribute to the diversification of trade and logistics ties between Western China and the region, and will contribute to the cumulative effect of strengthening ties, expanding both the dynamics and quality of trade and services.

Another promising infrastructure project is related to the opening of the multimodal corridor “Tajikistan – Uzbekistan – Turkmenistan – Iran – Turkey”, the transportation of goods through which will take place by water, air and land. “The advantage of this corridor is in connecting the territory of Tajikistan with the People’s Republic of China through the road, which contributes to the revival of the Great Silk Road and regional economic integration<sup>201</sup>.”

## For an increase of trade and investment

There is a steady increase with all the countries of Central Asia in mutual trade in 2022. The most important trading partner in the Central Asian Region, judging by the volume of trade for objective reasons, is Kazakhstan.

According to the latest data, the trade turnover between the Kazakhstan and the PRC “in the nine months of 2022 grew by an annualized rate of 22.5%, reaching \$23.2 billion<sup>202</sup>.” According to the PRC Ambassador to Kazakhstan, with this dynamic, a new record will be fixed in 2022 - \$ 30 billion, which, perhaps, “will be the highest figure in the past 30 years<sup>203</sup>.”

The volume of trade between Kyrgyzstan and China by the end of 2022 may reach \$9 billion, which also shows an increase compared to the previous figure of \$7.5 billion<sup>204</sup>. At the same time, the problematic point in the economic interaction between the two countries is that the commodity structure of exports and imports has not changed for many years. Kyrgyzstan supplies China with raw materials, wool, ores and concentrates of precious metals, scrap and waste of ferrous and non-ferrous metals, etc. In exchange,

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200 <https://cabar.asia/en/china-central-asia-summit-intra-regional-assessments>

201 <https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/economic/20221020/v-dushanbe-predstavili-marshrut-kitai-turtsiya-cherez-territoriyu-tadzhikistana>

202 [https://www.inform.kz/ru/tovarooborot-mezhdu-kazahstanom-i-kitaem-za-devyat-mesyacev-vyros-na-22-5\\_a3995538](https://www.inform.kz/ru/tovarooborot-mezhdu-kazahstanom-i-kitaem-za-devyat-mesyacev-vyros-na-22-5_a3995538)

203 Подробнее на Kursiv Media: <https://kz.kursiv.media/2022-11-09/tovarooborot-kazahstana-i-kitaya-mozhet-dostignut-v-etom-godu-30-mlrd/>

204 <https://kabar.kg/news/tovarooborot-kyrgyzstana-s-kitaem-do-kontca-goda-mozhet-dostignut-9-mlrd/>

fabrics, clothing, footwear, engineering products, plastics, chemical organics and inorganics, foodstuffs, vehicles, etc. are usually imported from China.

As statistics show, there is yet a disproportion in trade cooperation between countries in favour of China. As a result, there is a growing negative balance of the Kyrgyz Republic and the predominance of raw materials in its exports against finished products in China's exports. It is important to highlight the most priority areas of cooperation: transport communications infrastructure, fuel and energy complex, mining, agriculture, construction, border trade with the Xinjiang Uigur Autonomous Province, as well as with tourism. While Bishkek is interested in expanding this list of cooperation.

According to the Ministry of Investment and Foreign Trade of Uzbekistan, the trade turnover between China and Uzbekistan in the first nine months of 2023 year reached \$6.8 billion, while for the whole of 2021 it amounted to \$7.4 billion. Uzbekistan is also a supplier of natural gas to China: in the first nine months of 2022, Uzbekistan received \$768 million for gas supplies to China, which is 60% more than in the same period last year<sup>205</sup>. It is noteworthy that China ranked first in the import of cars to Uzbekistan in the first nine months of this year. According to the agency, from January to September 2022, 8,682 cars were imported from China to Uzbekistan<sup>206</sup>. The second place is occupied by South Korea (7,117 cars), the third - by Kazakhstan (4,431 cars). The ministry also clarified that since the beginning of the year, about 1,629 electric cars have been imported to Uzbekistan, 1,422 of which came to the country from China.

In addition to the supply of cars, China is the leader in Uzbekistan in the export of its phones: out of a total volume of 2.4 million devices worth \$162.1 million, China imported 1.8 million mobile phones to Uzbekistan<sup>207</sup>.

According to the Center for Strategic Studies of Tajikistan, "the volume of foreign trade turnover of the Republic of Tajikistan with the People's Republic of China for 7 months of 2022 was 766.1 million US dollars, which is 313.9 million US dollars or 69.4% more, compared to the same period of 2021. The share of China in the foreign trade turnover of Tajikistan amounted to 18.5 percent and ranked third<sup>208</sup>." Almost a third of the inflow of foreign investment in Tajikistan in 2007-2021 came from China (29.5%)<sup>209</sup>. Already by 2017, China was able to catch up and overtake Russia, which has been a constant leader and investor throughout the recent history of Tajikistan.

In January-September 2022, the mutual trade turnover between Turkmenistan and China amounted to 7 billion 993 million dollars. Over the past period, the mutual trade turnover between the two countries increased by 51.7 percent, China's exports to Turkmenistan increased by 65.3 percent, and imports from Turkmenistan - by 50.6 percent<sup>210</sup>. Turkmenistan continues to hold the position of the largest supplier of natural gas to China in the first eight months of 2022. According to the latest data, in August it provided over 20% of China's total imports of blue fuel (2.9 out of 13.2 billion cubic

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205 <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/16136707>

206 [https://t.me/statistika\\_rasmiy/2785](https://t.me/statistika_rasmiy/2785)

207 [https://t.me/statistika\\_rasmiy/2887](https://t.me/statistika_rasmiy/2887)

208 <https://mts.tj/ru/4187/news/>

209 <https://asiaplustj.info/news/tajikistan/economic/20220630/investitsii-kak-kitai-dognal-i-peregnal-rossiyu-v-tadzhikistane>

210 <https://salamnews.tm/ru/section/ykdysadyyet/sowda/turkmenistanyn-we-hytayyn-sowda-dolanyasygy-9-ayda-8-milliard-dollar-golaylady-cf0640>

meters). In January-October 2022, Turkmenistan earned \$8.23 billion from gas supplies to China, which is 53% more than in the same period of 2021<sup>211</sup>.

Total Chinese investment in Central Asia approached \$40 billion at the end of 2020, of which \$21.4 billion went to Kazakhstan, People's Daily reported; 7,700 Chinese firms were operating in Central Asia at the end of 2021<sup>212</sup>.

It is important to note that the key areas for allocating investments to the Central Asian republics are the development of the energy sector and the provision of oil and gas supplies to China, as well as the development of infrastructure in the context of the BRI project. In addition, Beijing provides funds for the creation and reconstruction of infrastructure facilities (railways, highways, logistics centers, border checkpoints, etc.) that provide a strong connection between Central Asia and the western regions of the PRC.

## **Agriculture as a ground for mutual interest**

All Central Asian countries are interested in increasing and diversifying export deliveries to China. It can be noted that the agro-industrial direction is actively developing between Kazakhstan and China, for example, more than 1,100 enterprises of Kazakhstan have the right to export their products to China.

In 2022, Kazakhstan achieved an opportunity to supply oilseed meal and oilcake from oilseeds, camel milk and other organic products. Kazakhstan has significantly increased the production and export of vegetable oils over the past year: the volume of processing of sunflower seeds increased by 40% from October 2021 to September 2022. Along with production volumes, exports also increased - for sunflower oil twice and for rapeseed by 38%<sup>213</sup>. At the same time, China is the main consumer of Kazakhstani rapeseed oil: it received 24,000 tons of this product over the specified period. And for the export of sunflower oil, China ranks second after Uzbekistan with an indicator of 59 thousand tons. In addition, Kazakh producers want to increase fish exports to China.

Kazakh millers have also been trying for several years to enter the markets of China, but many problems remain in this direction related to Chinese duties on flour imports.

As for Kyrgyz producers, they are interested in the supply of such food products as fruits and nuts, honey, water, meat, fish. In November 2022, China lifted the ban on the supply of Kyrgyz honey, introduced in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic. At the same time, deliveries will be carried out by companies included in the register of the veterinary service under the Ministry of Agriculture of Kyrgyzstan and China, as well as having a 5G veterinary and sanitary passport.

## **Energy cooperation**

China is already playing a significant role in the energy industry, which Kyrgyzstan, as well as Tajikistan, badly needs to modernize. China has contributed to the construction and modernisation of combined heat and power plants in both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Additionally, during the summit C5+China, an investment agreement was reached for

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211 [https://tass.ru/ekonomika/16378737?utm\\_source=yxnews&utm\\_medium=desktop](https://tass.ru/ekonomika/16378737?utm_source=yxnews&utm_medium=desktop)

212 <https://eurasianet.org/china-promises-more-investment-at-central-asia-summit>

213 <https://www.oilworld.ru/news/335408>

the construction of a solar power plant in the Issyk-Kul region, amounting to 800 million Euro. Another noteworthy aspect pertains to the intentions of the Kyrgyz authorities to export electricity to China. However, the feasibility of such plans is contingent upon addressing the current limitations of power production capacity within Kyrgyzstan itself<sup>214</sup>.

In 2013, the oil and gas cooperation between China and the Kyrgyz Republic received a new breath. Beijing announced plans to build the fourth line of the gas pipeline (line D) “Turkmenistan - China” through the territories of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which is an integral part of the gas pipeline “Central Asia-China”, with aim to increase its total capacity to 85 billion cubic meters<sup>215</sup>.

The agreement between the governments of China and Kyrgyzstan on the construction of the main gas pipeline was signed in September 2013 in Bishkek during the summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Construction on the territory of Kyrgyzstan was supposed to begin as early as 2016, but due to the delay in the construction of the line in Tajikistan, the construction of the Kyrgyz part of the gas pipeline lags behind the announced work schedules. This project line is one of the most difficult engineering projects in the world history of pipeline construction.

## Other projects

Kazakhstan is showing interest in using China’s experience in oil storage. Currently, Kazakh oil is immediately sent for export, as this is required by technology and it is unacceptable to stop production. In China, very large oil storage facilities have been built, which enable meeting internal needs for 3-4 months without additional supplies. For these reasons, the Kazakh authorities have instructed KazMunayGas to consider a project to build a large oil storage facility in the Atyrau region, and the Ministry of Energy to negotiate with major mining companies on the construction of other storage facilities.

Given China’s leading role in the construction of complex facilities, this sulfur is also promising. In particular, the Chinese company CAMC Engineering received a \$289 million contract from the Uzbek authorities for the construction of the Olympic Village near Tashkent for the IV Summer Asian and V Para-Asian Youth Games, which Uzbekistan plans to host in 2025. This is not the first major contract of this company in Uzbekistan: in 2019, it launched a chemical plant in Navoi, for which it received \$440 million, and in September 2023 it also won a contract for the construction of a cable car near the Charvak reservoir.

The Chinese economic miracle model has been attracting the countries of Central Asia for many years. Therefore, China can share its experience in combating poverty, especially in countries such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. At the meeting, the head of the Ministry of Labour of the Kyrgyz Republic, Kudaibergen Bazarbayev, and the Permanent Representative of the PRC to FAO in Rome, Guang Defu, discussed the possibilities of developing the “social contracts” program<sup>216</sup>. According to the plan, concluding social contracts with a low-income family, the state provides 100,000 kyrgyz soms (about

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214 <https://cabar.asia/en/china-central-asia-summit-intra-regional-assessments>

215 Первый объект газопровода «Центральная Азия - Китай» в Таджикистане практически готов, 16 июля 2019 // <https://www.ritreurasia.org/news--2019-07-16--pervyj-obekt-gazoprovoda-centralnaja-azija-kitaj-v-tadzhikistane-prakticheski-gotov-43829>

216 <https://mlsp.gov.kg/2022/11/15/ministr-truda-obsudil-podderzhku-kitaya-novoj-programme-preodoleniya-bednosti/>



1200 USD) free of charge for opening a small business. In this regard, the countries of the region are attempting to apply the reform experience of Deng Xiaoping, who implemented loan repayment programs for poor families. A possible collaboration with the Chinese Academy of Agriculture and Science is also being considered.

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In conclusion, the transformation of China into the largest trade and economic partner of the countries of the region of Central Asia has become obvious. The trade turnover between the PRC and the states of Central Asia demonstrates a steady growth dynamics.

Furthermore, the Central Asian region no longer plays a supporting role, but has become an object of strategic importance in Beijing's energy policy. In recent years, the share of oil and gas supplied from Central Asia to China has increased significantly. Because of this, all the CA countries are interested in the BRI contributing to the increase in the production of national industrial products, in order to reduce raw material dependence. However, this scenario is possible only with a combination of such components as the development of relevant industries, investment in science and personnel, as well as wide access to a powerful market, in particular, China.

Speaking about the problems of economic cooperation, it is worth highlighting the remaining issue in the difference in the data on trade between the CA countries and China, which is partly due to different methods for calculating imports and exports, but also to the existence of gray areas for smuggling. In this aspect, the acceleration of digitalisation, especially of border check -points, will harmonize trade flows and contribute to the transparency of tax revenues to the budgets of the Central Asian countries. Of particular interest is China's experience in the expansion of non-cash trade operations, which in the conditions of the Central Asian countries can lead to an increase in income and a reduction in the shadow economy.

Special attention should be paid to issues of cooperation in the field of high technologies and digitalisation, in particular the creation of platforms for e-commerce, the digitalisation of trade operations, which will contribute to its transparency and tax deductions.



# **PART 2**

## **LOGISTICS AND TRANSPORTATION**

# Multipolar Europe, Asia and Pakistan

## Gateways Eurasia

*Ikram SEHGAL<sup>217</sup>*

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Trade routes have determined the economic strength of a country or empire for centuries. In the distant past, the main trade routes crossed Eurasia on land (Silk Road) – the share of sea trade was less. Starting with the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the trade shifted clearly in favour of trading through the oceans. Naval dominance secured the global economic dominance of Europe by creating a colonial empire.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially after World War 2, a bipolar world was created during the Cold war, and a unipolar one after the fall of the Soviet Union. By the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, due to the exceptional economic development of China that turned into a challenge to western hegemony, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was launched by China aiming to engage more than 100 countries in Eurasia, the Near East and Africa.

The West for the time being is continuing to control the international order, but the beginnings of change towards a multipolar order are already visible. Planning to rebuild the ancient Silk Road since its independence China has taken concrete measures since the 1960s, starting for instance with the Karakoram Highway (KKH), Beijing has referred to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as ‘the fastest and most efficient’ of the BRI projects which gives Pakistan special importance. The goal of Beijing and Islamabad is that the infrastructure investment will deepen the political and economic ties between the two nations.

### A global power shift from West to East

The current reshaping of the world is evident with the emergence of new centers of smaller powers in Asia, Africa and Latin America, which are often neglected in Europe and the West. Eurocentrism is dominating the world view; it takes western values as a triangulation point for analyzing worldwide developments. This approach accepts European and Anglo-American supremacy without question and tries to carry this supremacy to future generations. It is contested by multipolar Eurasianism, an approach open to both western and Asian values and serving as a nexus facilitating their healthy interaction (Tulun, 2022).

Europe connects with the rest of Eurasia, forms its western-most edge, and became a continent when the Ural Mountains were arbitrarily named the dividing line. Geopolitically, the importance of Europe and Asia is evident, as it has remained the center (or heart) of power for centuries. Today the world is reshaping with a power transition led by Asian nations including China, Japan, the Association of Southeast Asia (ASEAN), both Koreas, India, and some others. The last two decades have been a period of evolution and rise for many Asian countries, especially China. The economic, political,

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217 The author acknowledges research assistance of Dr. Bettina Robotka, Col (Retd) Hassan Raza, Sehrish Mustafa.

and military strength of China has made her an emerging superpower, undergoing structural adjustments in the global system with the declining powers of the U.S. The intellectual, cultural, and economic landscape coloured by Asian culture is reemerging; we are sighting the emblems of the world's center of gravity shifting back to where it lay for millennia. For centuries, Asia has been the fountain of philosophical thought, ground of mighty empires, and home to rich resources and technology and has fed the imagination of the rest of the world.

The regional development of Eurasia and the BRI countries depends on the multilateral institutions that have been founded recently and have been continuously extending their membership and influence. They are working to boost economic, political and security-related cooperation. Russia's realisation of not being able to defeat the US on its own has changed its political and military scenario in the last two decades. Russia has increasingly looked east and brought its relationship with China to a level never seen before. The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the Association for Southeast Asia Nations plus China, Japan and South Korea (ASEAN+3), and the Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa bloc (BRICS). These institutions are key to the growing influence of Russia in not only the region but also the world. As an emerging superpower, China has enormous trade with both Russia and India and asserts the power concentration in different spheres within Eurasia.

China promotes the diversification of industrial production centers and accumulation with economic integration on a regional basis. It has also invested in new relationships of interdependence between nations, widening common interests, and opening avenues for cooperation. It believes that economic globalisation is a major driver of political multipolarity. China continues to participate in international politics; its diplomatic policy shows commitment to both multilateralism and cooperative partnerships with major powers including the US. This cooperation is not contesting China's self-reliance as Clegg (2009) discussed that China's successful operation within international networks of interdependence, to initiate win-win agreements and to bargain over the rules of the global economy depends on its own self-reliance.

## **Pakistan and the West – the future aspect**

Pakistan's relationship with the West has increasingly become frosty for some time – be it the United States or Europe. This is neither new nor surprising, the West has been using Asia's services and socio-economic infrastructure (ports, roads, railways, trucks, etc.) as well as Asia's military potential on a transactional basis mainly because Asian leaders failed to secure Asia's national interest and exploit her geopolitical positioning on a long-term basis. Once Asia have served western aims and objectives, Asia went back to being treated unfairly.

The intensification of competition of the West with the rising China and a resurging Russia gives opportunity for new coalitions and alignments. While establishing its intra-regional relations Pakistan must not overlook the importance of the West, which is still an economic hegemon, with 50% share in global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) with \$94 trillion World Economy (Neufeld, 2021). Pakistan's economic development must be the only focus of the government as it has no rational reason to compromise any of its relations (with the West or East) when its economy is in dire need of investments.

## Pakistan and the United States

Pakistan and the US bilateral relations have seen many vicissitudes since 1947 and currently, the U.S. has again opened the debate on the role of Pakistan in the fight against terrorism.

The US demand actions against United Nations (UN) designated terrorist organisations; the demand has been fulfilled by Pakistan in the form of National Action Plan (NAP) for countering terrorism. Concerns in the U.S. have been raised on Pakistan's commitment and some officials want Washington to revisit its engagement with Islamabad (Mir, 2021). Whoever won in Afghanistan, Pakistan was always going to be the loser; the surprise is that this time it has taken so very little time for the Afghan brethren to target us, their main support during these last twenty years. However, there are signs that the US is looking to Pakistan as a deterrent for terrorists sponsored by, or given bases to operate, by the Taliban.

Still both countries are closely working in the areas of energy, trade and investment, health, climate change, and counterterrorism. The US has remained a market for Pakistani exports – \$5 billion export in the year 2021. It has remained a leading investor in Pakistan for the last 20 years.

With the CPEC, as a flagship project of BRI, Pakistan's focus must be on its geo-economic situation. The country lies in geo-economics through increasing ties within the region whilst strengthening existing relationships with the US and Europe. The relationship between Pakistan and the US will flourish only with a common vision of peace in South Asia and close economic cooperation.

## Pakistan and Europe

*“The modern world, for better or worse, springs from Europe”* (Marshall, 2016). This may change in the face of Europe's faltering economy and de facto de-industrialisation resulting from the backlash of sanctions that are meant to hit Russia are found to be also hitting Europe equally. In the long run, the nexus of Europe and Asia becomes more important as a safe trade route from Europe to the East.

Pakistan with its geographic location has land route access to Central Asia and sea routes to Europe, makes it a perfect country to channel trade routes and promote strong economic ties with Central Asia as well as Europe. In the year 2020 alone, Pakistan's export in textile products to France was worth \$639 million. Pakistan's trade with the European Union (EU) and United Kingdom (UK) is large, with the GPS+ giving Pakistan preferential access to European markets. 76% of Pakistan's exports, including textiles and clothing, enter the EU duty and quota free. This represents almost 20% of Pakistan's exports globally (EU, 2021). Pakistan needs to strengthen and diversify bilateral trade and economic relations (other than textiles) with Europe in future as it has potential to develop strategically.

The UK has launched the Developing Countries Trading Scheme (DCTS) that provides tariff reductions and simpler terms of trade to 65 countries, including Pakistan (Zafar, 2022). It is recognized by both countries that the UK-Pakistan relationship matters. It is time to cement strong ties and increase bilateral trade.

Pakistan needs to not only improve transit facilities but encourage investment in exports' industry to produce internationally competitive products. The geographical position of Pakistan is a blessing but geo-economics is the playbook, which can bring prosperity in Pakistan.

## **The Pakistan – Russia nexus**

Relations between Russia and Pakistan in the past have been rather cool in every sphere i.e. politically, militarily and economically. The way forward for Russia and Pakistan in the present geopolitical circumstances is to develop strong economic ties with Asian countries for regional development. The region is re-shaping itself and Pakistan is in a position to play an important role as it has a geographic advantage over others. Russia, after the Ukraine invasion, is looking towards the southeast to increase sales to China and other Asian countries. Despite increasingly leaning to the US for trade, particularly military procurement, India is openly purchasing Russian oil. Pakistan could also benefit from oil, petrol, and diesel purchases at discounted prices with Russia. In any case, Pakistan's only option is to diversify its energy sources procurement for sustainable growth. For a 5-6% growth rate the energy requirement will increase from 8-10% every year, which is not possible with uncertain and expensive fuel supply (Abbas, 2022). Poverty alleviation and creation of jobs is possible only with economic growth, which requires uninterrupted energy supply. Pakistan can import fuel from Russia as the US has already removed sanctions on Moscow to sell petroleum products to low- and middle-income countries. Pakistan is also in agreement to purchase wheat from Russia this 2023, the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet accepted import of 9,50,000 tons of wheat – 450,000 from Russia (Kiani, 2022).

Pakistan can shield itself from global price shocks and disruptions, by relying more on the Asian countries including Russia for development. In the last few years, diplomatic and military relations have also been improved and Russia can see the potential of Pakistan's economy. Russia's dream of land access to a warm water port had military connotations and it failed. This Czarist desire can come true with economic connotations with Pakistan, similarly, access to central Asian markets and purchase of fuel from Russia can change the destiny of Pakistan. Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is a platform where Russia and China are developing consensus on the future of the region. Now it is up to Russia to decide about future relationships with South Asian countries.

New Delhi shifting of military procurement to the US has made Russia build up its trade, military and political ties with Pakistan – as China's lucrative CPEC project is moving Pakistan towards development. India and Pakistan have been fighting over Kashmir for decades; it has been damaging Pakistan's trade and economic cooperation. It is time to resolve the matter according to the United Nations (UN) resolutions. This could be beneficial for all stakeholders in the region.

## **Strategic partners: Pakistan and China**

Pakistan and China are strategic partners and the relationship has been strengthening with the CPEC as an essential segment of the BRI. The relationship has been developed in the "1+4" cooperation mode: the CPEC is prioritizing Gwadar, energy, transport, infrastructure, and industrial cooperation in Pakistan. In the 11th meeting of the Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC), both countries approved the completion of energy



projects and infrastructure including: 2x660 Mega Watt (MW) Port Qasim Power Plants, 2x660 MW Sahiwal Power Plant, 2x330 MW Engro Thar Power Plants; 50 MW Hydro China Dawood Wind Farm Thatta; 1000 MW Quaid e Azam Solar Park, Bahawalpur, Karakoram Highway (KKH) Phase II (Havelian - Thakot Section), Peshawar-Karachi Motorway (Multan-Sukkur Section), Hakla - D.I Khan Motorway and Orange Line Metro Train – Lahore.

These projects are significant for providing a number of opportunities for socio-economic development in Pakistan. It was also decided to start the ML-1 project that includes up-gradation and doubling of Main Line-1 (ML-1) from Karachi to Peshawar and Taxila to Havelian (1733 km). It is also proposed to initiate cooperation and China's investment in the post disaster reconstruction, global development initiatives, strengthening of digital investment in the economy, 1+5 arrangements for SEZs, agreement between geological survey institutions of the two countries, and support to increase export potential of Pakistan(JCC, 2022).

Both countries, as members of multilateral organisations are determined to work for peace and stability in the region. In the last five years, the volume of bilateral trade has increased with the annual growth rate of 18.8% on average, bilateral investment has been high and China has become one of the biggest sources of foreign capital.

## **Pakistan: a significant player on the Eurasia chessboard**

With its geographic position the geopolitical and geostrategic position of Pakistan has made it a key player in the development of the region. As an emerging superpower, China continuously emphasizes the CPEC as its connection to the world. This is time for Pakistan to start working on emergency footing to solve its internal issues – law and order, security, political stability, current account deficit, favorable environment for investment – and concentrate on economic revival, especially by focusing on underprivileged Baluchistan for maximum development and engaging media and other stakeholders to promote and protect interest of Pakistani people in the CPEC project.

This is also inevitable for regional development as Pakistan is situated in the heart of Asia where it is bordering with China, Afghanistan, India, and Iran while Tajikistan is separated by a thin Wakhan Corridor only. It was part of the ancient silk route and the tribes on the border of China, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan used to trade with each other till the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The route between Wakhan and Hunza survived due to trails like Irshad Pass (elevation c. 5000 m, a part of the ancient Silk Road trade network). It will be useful to utilize more of the Tajikistan route because they share the same culture, language and kinship – an additional advantage (Dawn, 2018).

For Pakistan, it is time to connect more within the region for development as the power dynamics is shifting from West to East. The development of Pakistan and contribution in the region's stability are through Sino-Pakistani strong trade and economic cooperation. Transportation of Iranian and Caspian Sea oil up through Pakistan to China is another source of income (Marshall, 2016). The regional geopolitical scenario is complex and Pakistan is in a good bargaining position with China for the following reasons: the Ukraine-Russian war and its outfall, the future of Turkey after the lapse of the Treaty of Lausanne in 2023, the Malacca Straits dilemma and Sino-Indian rivalry.

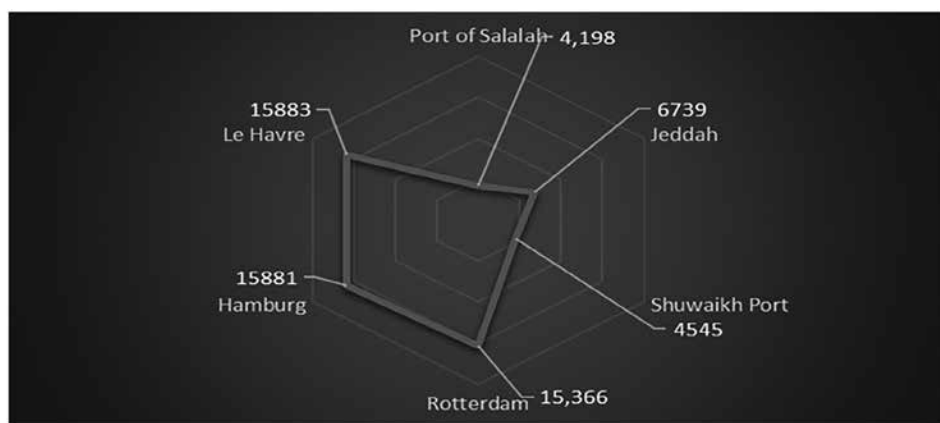
## Gateway Asia (Karachi and Gwadar) to Gateway Europe (Le Havre)

India's continued attempt toward the diplomatic isolation of Pakistan has had enormous repercussions. Denying that Pakistan's land access to South Asia and Southeast Asia cuts both ways, it also has negative connotations for India, which in turn means India is deprived of access to Central Asia, the Middle East and Europe as well as southwestern China through Pakistan. This is the right time to refocus on the BRI's Central Asia-West Asia corridor. The cheapest and easiest way is the maritime route, as South Asian trade through the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is both west and east bound: west to the economies of the Middle East, Africa and Europe, and east to ASEAN and the economies of the Asia-Pacific. The importance of the CPEC and ports of Pakistan has increased now as China is facing troubles in the BRI projects, which have been extended to almost 70 countries.

China is relying on the CPEC connecting Kashghar to Karachi and Gwadar through a road and railway network and the maritime route to Europe. This gives China direct land access to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean as the port of Gwadar has been developed into South Asia's largest port, avoiding the Malacca Strait chokepoint, through which the majority of China's imports of crude oil currently travel. With the help of this corridor, China will also find it simpler to market its products to Pakistan's expanding middle class and beyond.

The maritime Silk Road runs with its links from the Chinese coast to the south via Hanoi to Jakarta, Singapore and Kuala-Lumpur through the Strait of Malacca via the Sri Lankan Colombo opposite the southern tip of India via Malé, the capital of the Maldives, to the East African Mombasa, from there to Djibouti, then through the Red Sea over the Suez Canal into the Mediterranean, there via Haifa, Istanbul and Athens to the Upper Adriatic and to the northern Italian junction of Trieste with its international free port and its rail connections to Central Europe and the North Sea. The most feasible route available to China is through ports of Pakistan to Africa, and Europe (see figure 1).

**Figure 1: Distance from Kashgar-Gwadar to different ports in kilometers**

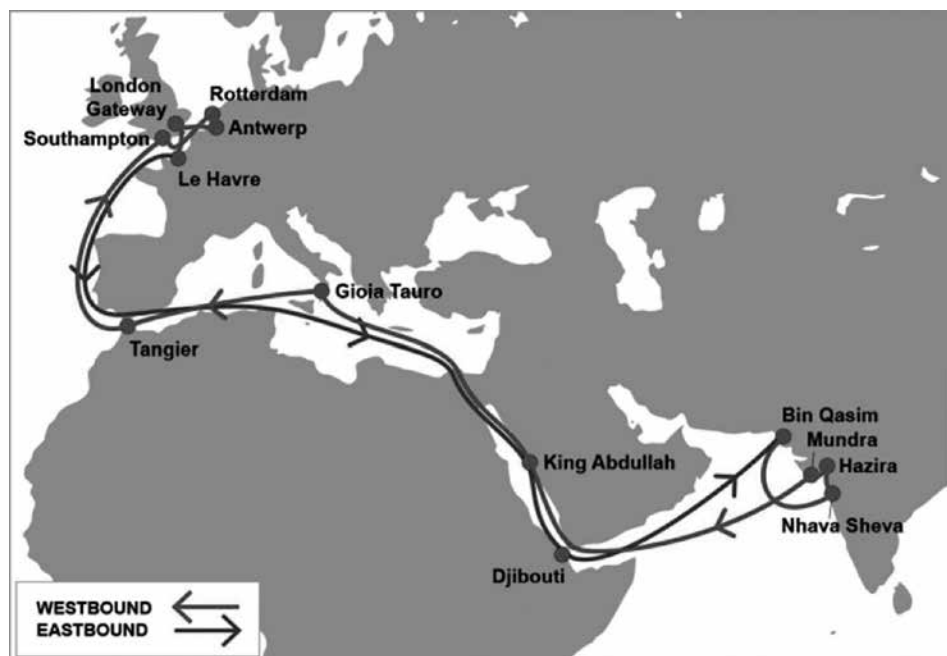


*Source: Author's contribution*

Due to the Malacca dilemma, Turkey's uncertain future, the Sino-India rivalry and the Russian invasion in Ukraine, it is problematic for China to use these routes and continue related projects. The sustainable and feasible option is the CPEC land route from central Asia to Bin Qasim port, Karachi port and Gwadar port. The sea route from Gwadar to Le Havre port is the shortest as the land distance from Kashghar (China) to Gwadar (Pakistan) is 2800 km and the total distance Kashghar-Le Havre is 15,883 km. The sea route is accessible for China due to its rising presence in the Indian Ocean (See Figure 2).

China is building military control in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) to project its maritime power. It includes docking rights and operational rights at ports, multi-year leasing of ports and establishment of foreign bases (military). China is present in the following ports – mainly declared to be used for economic and commercial purposes: Kyaukpyu in Myanmar, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Feydhoo Finolhu in the Maldives, Gwadar in Pakistan and Obock in Djibouti. In 2017, Beijing set up its first overseas military facility in Djibouti (Africa) on the Indian Ocean coast whereas France, Japan, and the United States also have facilities in Djibouti.

**Figure 2: Bin Qasim Port to Le Havre Port**



*Source: Ocean Network Express (ONE).*

Central IOR–South Asia trade through the IOR reaches all the way from Chinese ports to the Mediterranean Sea, but sea-lanes have also been affected by serious delays. Pakistan with the CPEC and maritime sea route provides a unique opportunity for China to connect to the Middle East, Africa and Europe. The railway and road network between landlocked Central Asia and Pakistan can be a significant change for these Central Asian countries. Pakistan – Tehran – Istanbul railway network is another option which can connect China to Europe. Security issues of Turkiye after the end of treaty of the Treat of Lausanne in 2023 will change the role of China. Pakistan, having ties with Turkiye and

China both, can play a bridging role between the two countries. Economic and strategic relations between China and Türkiye will bring prosperity in the region.

## **Pakistan and Central Asia**

Central Asian land-locked countries can utilize Pakistani seaports to reach Europe, Africa, the Middle East – the most economic and efficient route. Currently, central Asian countries rely on sea ports in China, Turkey, Iran, Russia and the Baltic States. Regional development can also enhance trade and economic ties between Pakistan and Central Asian countries including Tajikistan. There were two declarations made in 2017-2018, between Tajikistan and Pakistan: one is, ‘Road to strategic partnership for regional solidarity’ and the other ‘Strengthening the road to strategic partnership for regional integration’. Pakistan has been supporting a membership of Tajikistan in the Quadrilateral Traffic in Transit Agreement (QTTA), also reiterating to increase the cooperation in future for global and regional peace and development (APP, 2021).

QTTA provides Pakistan a gateway to Central Asia by using the Karakoram Highway – which links Gilgit-Baltistan to China’s Xinjiang region – as a transit corridor. If Afghanistan fails to provide a safe trade route to Pakistan then this road network with Tajikistan, China, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan will serve the purpose of connecting to Central Asia. The route is as follows: Karachi-Rawalpindi-Hassanabdal-Gilgit-Khunjerab, (Pakistan-China Border)-Kashgar-Torugart (China and Kyrgyzstan Border)-Bishkek-Akjol-Kordai (Kyrgyzstan/ Kazakhstan Border)-Almaty (Kazakhstan) = Length - 3710 Km (Shoaib, 2016). It is an alternative route if Afghanistan insist on India’s inclusion in the Afghan-Pakistan road network, Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) is a successor to the Afghanistan Transit Trade Agreement (ATTA) signed in 1965 between Pakistan and Afghanistan to facilitate the transit of goods exported from and imported to Afghanistan using the Pakistani port of Karachi.

The current agreement permits the use of more ports and more carriers – including Afghan trucks – and increases the number of border crossing points. It also provides for Afghan exports to India using the land border between Pakistan and India. The pact also envisages the use of Afghan territory for trade between Pakistan and Central Asian countries (UNCTAD, 2011).

The route bypassing Afghanistan will be helpful, as China will have to deal with just one country (Pakistan) to access other regions (See Figure 3).

Figure 3: Transit Route under QTTA



Source: Ministry of Communication, Government of Pakistan.

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In conclusion, regional development after the global power shift lies in the core of Asia. The importance of the CPEC and China's connectivity to the world through Karachi, Bin Qasim, and Gwadar ports have been manifold during the last year in the face of the Russia-Ukraine war. Pakistan must look forward to regional partners for economic and social development. Spillover of the CPEC will bring prosperity to underprivileged areas. The future lies in regional development. Road and railway networks under the CPEC including ML1, ML2, and ML3 must be upgraded. A railway track parallel to KKH will decrease the travel time and increase trade benefit.

The future of Pakistan is the blue economy. Pakistan has about 990 km of a long coastline, an exclusive economic zone of 240 000 km<sup>2</sup>, and an additional continental shelf area of about 50,000 km<sup>2</sup>, making Pakistan an important coastal state. The exclusive geostrategic position of Pakistan provides its ports with a unique importance for maritime trade. Furthermore, the construction of Gwadar as a transit and transshipment port under the CPEC has further enhanced Pakistan's potential to play a significant role in the Indian Ocean Region.

Pakistan has enormous potential in a blue economy as it can serve as a viable and most effective economic transit route to land-locked Central Asia and neighbouring countries. The Karachi Port Trust (KPT) and the Port Qasim Authority contribute more than Rs. 20 billion per year. The maritime economy is an important pillar of economic structure, which can bring good economic return if the port capacities are enhanced, if ease of doing business, good governance, and secure investment and trade environment, transshipment, ship maintenance, ship building and digitalisation of ports are developed.

The CPEC is an opportunity to increase Pakistan's economic activity and build a working relationship with neighbouring countries. It is suggested to devise a regulatory mechanism for the CPEC and it should be completely in favour of the government of Pakistan – inclusive growth with special attention to the people of Baluchistan. Connectivity

through roads and railway networks within the region and ports at the Arabian Sea for global trade are present, both land and sea routes are available. India and Pakistan must build a better working relationship – within intact sovereignty for both countries – for their prosperity. There is a dire need to minimize conflicts and security concerns with India, Afghanistan and Iran for the greater regional interest. India will not be able to contest the massive blue water navy, which China is planning.

# Interconnecting the Air Network of Central Asia – developing civil aviation in Tajikistan

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Plunging into the history of the formation of air navigation in Tajikistan we find ourselves on a fascinating journey in a time machine that takes us back in time. Opening for us the veil of history, it takes us to the time when the first airplane showed up in Tajikistan in 1921, when aviation of the country had just begun its long journey, and air traffic control was just beginning to emerge.

1) We begin our journey from far back from the early 20th century, notably 1921, as the formation of air navigation in Tajikistan takes its roots precisely from 17 January of that year, the date of publication, signed by VI Lenin's decree of the CPC of the RSFSR "On the air movements in the airspace over the territory of the RSFSR and over its territorial waters." This decree was the first piece of legislation to regulate the organisation of air traffic in the young Soviet state.

On 15 July 1923, in the Soviet Union, the first regular airline for the route Moscow-Nizhny Novgorod was opened. The next country for opening air transport was Tajikistan, and it is not surprising as Tajikistan is a mountainous country and it is rather difficult to imagine its full development without aviation.

Since 93% of the republic's territory is mountainous, the construction of highways, and especially railways, was extremely difficult. It required quite an effort and a large expenditure of time. Because of this reason, the quickest way to solve the problem was only with the help of aviation. Another interesting fact is that regular air service between Dushanbe and many settlements was established much earlier than road and railway links. At the beginning of 1924, the arrangements for the airline Dushanbe-Bukhara had been started. Difficulties pursued at every turn: a shortage of people, there were no roads to shuttle building materials and tools, and also badly-rugged terrain put in obstacles, complicating the selection of equipment and airfields.

Yet, despite all the obstacles encountered, intrincating the arrangement of the airline, soon enough there were the first flights, which was the beginning of the development of civil aviation in Tajikistan : from Bukhara to Dushanbe on 3 September 1924. Such a significant flight for the country was carried out on the aircraft SE-13, piloted by Rashid-Beck Ahriev and Peter Komarov. Aircraft SE-13 was the first plane on the lines of Tajikistan. It was an all-metal cantilever monoplane passenger.

The opening of the Bukhara-Dushanbe airline had been associated with such an important event as the formation of the Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. On one of the first aircraft arrived in Dushanbe members of the leadership of the first Government of Tajikistan. From that day on, civil aviation of Tajikistan beg its difficult but interesting historical path. It was then that the Stalinabad airfield complex started to operate new routes passing through the Pamir mountain range. The first air-bridge



linking Dushanbe with Bukhara was of great importance for the young republic, where lack of roads was the major problem, because of which state plans and tasks could not be accomplished.

Only five years later, the construction of the railroad that connected Dushanbe and Termez was completed and the first train arrived in our country only in 1929.

In the early days of civil aviation, flights were made visually, since the intensity of air traffic was not high. At that time, crews managed the en-route operation independently. As long as the number of aircraft was small there was no need to create a special service of Centralized air traffic control from the ground but as soon as the number of flights increased, there was a need for a similar service and the establishment of certain rules in the air traffic management and flight ensuring with the radio-technical equipment for controlling the movement of aircraft, navigation, landing, and communication.

Under these conditions, the crew, despite his skilfulness was unable to take off and land safely. Only a special aviation service could correctly determine the sequence and timeslots of the aircraft's take-off, providing the aircraft with safe separation. Such a similar service was created on 20 May 1945, immediately after World War II, by order of the Head of the Tajik Civil Air Fleet Management under # 129 of 15 May 1945. It was called Air traffic Control Service. It was immediately joined by the demobilized military aces who had returned home from the front. Also in 1945, the Tajik Civil Air Fleet Management received new aircraft U-52, Li-2. Li – 2 crew's first flight was from Stalinabad to Moscow.

There was a need for new vacancies, and thus the position of flight operation officer in the Civil Air Fleet was introduced in 1950. It was introduced for the management of air traffic on roads and airfields in the area, especially during landing. Only experienced pilots with special training were appointed to this position. At that time documents were adopted, which were of great importance for improving the level of safety in terms of their growing intensity such as "General flight Rules over the territory of the USSR for aircraft of all departments " and "Procedure for separation of aircraft at all altitudes of Civil Air Fleet airlines."

Beginning in 1953, Aeroflot started receiving surveillance radars, which made the manager able to "hear" and also "see" This happened thanks to the widespread adoption of ultrasonic communication in the second half of the 1950s, which at times increased the efficiency and quality of the radio communication. Significant traffic growth of jets by 1958 required radical reorganisation of traffic service. Subsidiary control points were created, and there were organized as head area control centers, which were responsible for the management and control of the movement of transport aircraft of all departments on the airways of the USSR at altitudes above 4,500 meters.

Aviation in Tajikistan began developing quite rapidly, one of the displays was the renewal of the aircraft fleet of the country. Air transport had become the most important sector of the national economy. Aviation of Tajikistan provided regular traffic connection between the capital of the Republic with all highland villages in remote valleys such as Vanj, Rushan, Shugnan, Bartang Yagnob, and others that reduced hundreds of times the travel time of passengers of the mountainous region of Pamirs, Karategin, valleys of Vakhsh and Hissar. In the years 1950-1960, aviation in Tajikistan was one of the most developed sectors of the national economy.

In 1958, the purposeful work on the application and use of means of objective monitoring of flight and air traffic control instructions have been started, including “Instructions for Use for photo recording for objective monitoring of the quality of landing performance”, and a little later - “Instruction on organisation and traffic management of aircraft on the airways of the USSR “, which defined more perfect organisational structure of air traffic service in the vicinity of airports, and its functions expanded.

2) As we mentioned above, Tajikistan aviators have always been at the forefront of the development of the socio-economic potential of the country. The structure of the Management of the Tajik Civil Air Fleet was expanding and developing. In 1959, the Leninabad air company and after a year Kulob Airport were organized. This sharply began increasing the volume of air traffic. On 28 February 1960, the history of civil aviation opened an entirely new page, which was marked by the first arrival at the airport of the Dushanbe turboprop airliner Il-18. New aircraft such as the turbojet Yak-40 (1969) and turboprop Lee-24 (1968) enabled a significant increase in the manner of service on domestic routes.

On 3 March 1960, the airport terminal and runway were put in commission. After 4 years, the Tajik Civil Aviation Department moved to the new conditions of management and planning. Yak-40 and An-28 won the 1st place in Aeroflot USSR according to their efficiency. In 1990-1991, the aircraft fleet of the enterprise was replenished with aircraft IL-76, TU-154, and Mi-8 MTV-1. A new first retransmitter “Zardak” was opened in Central Asia, and air traffic Dushanbe – Urumqi also opened.

3) Because of the upheaval in the 1990s many highly skilled persons left Tajikistan, affecting the ATC service with a shortage of personnel. To solve the situation, the SUE “Tajikistan” organized a study of air traffic controllers at the Academy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz aviation college, and in other countries.

After the USSR disintegration, the only international air corridor #13 “Termez” that passed through the Dushanbe area centre control of ATC came under the competence of Samarkand ACC. Consequently, there arose a question of creating transit international air routes passing through the airspace of the Republic of Tajikistan. Thanks to the efforts of the ATC administration during 1994 -1996 four new international air corridors on the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan, connecting Europe with Southeast Asia were opened.

For further development, ATC service cooperated with colleges from other countries, such as Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and the Baltic countries. Being one of the founders of the Coordinating Council of the “Eurasia” ATC service has actively participated in international meetings.

Following Government Resolution No. 491 of 1 October 2008, the State Unitary Enterprise “Tajikairnavigation” was created by separation from the State Unitary Aviation Enterprise “Tajik Air”. As of this time, a new chapter in the history of the air navigation of the Republic of Tajikistan has begun.

4) Today, the responsibility of our company is to provide air navigation services to users of the airspace of the Republic of Tajikistan, to ensure flight safety by preventing aircraft from colliding with each other and other material objects.

After the signing of the 1993 International Convention on Civil Aviation, Tajikistan has decided to develop and modernize its civil aviation sector following international

standards. Since then, sector reforms have been carried out by World Bank research, and more recently, the ADB's Master Plans in the transport sector.

Under the Air Code of the Republic of Tajikistan, the State Unitary Enterprise "Tajikairnavigation" acts as a provider of air navigation services of the country (ANSP) and is the controlling link of the entire airspace within the Republic of Tajikistan. Among its complex responsibilities, as per the provisions of the Air Code and its obligations to the international community, the main ones are air traffic services, radio-engineering support for flights and aviation telecommunications, as well as meteorological support for international air navigation. To achieve the tasks, set for the enterprise, many events were held and a large number of projects were implemented.

Since 2009, the company has faced the main task of equipping and updating the main air navigation facilities. Therefore, for full radar coverage of the Tajikistan airspace in 2013, the MLAT radar surveillance system was installed and commissioned by the Spanish company INDRA. In addition, to ensure the range and reliability of aviation ground-to-air telecommunications was installed a new repeater of Shar-Shar existed.

5) One of the international cooperation projects is "Capacity development in air traffic services". Thus, in 2016-2017, with the support and funding of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) based on a grant, more than 30 specialists were trained in various countries of the world (Malaysia, Luxembourg, Japan, etc.).

In addition, for the financing of JICA, a new control simulator "Tower" was installed and put into operation, which meets all requirements and complies with international norms and standards.

The airspace of Tajikistan is referred to as the Dushanbe Flight Information Region (FIR). The Dushanbe FIR is divided into three sectors extending from ground level to an altitude of c. 15 000 m: The Northern Sector, the Southern Sector, and the Eastern Sector. Geodetic data of the airspace is still tied to the old Soviet standards Krasovsky SK 42 (from 1940).

However, to achieve one of the goals, TAN is currently working with JICA on the transition to the updated database of the World Geodetic System (WGS 84). It is expected that the project will be fully completed and the transition from SK-42 to WGS-84 will be carried out before the end of this year.

Another project on the implementation of performance-based navigation (PBN) is one of the most important projects of the State Unitary Enterprise of "Tajikairnavigation", the implementation of which is carried out with the support of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and JICA, with the involvement of International Air Transport Association (IATA) experts.

The beginning of this project fell on hard times due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, but despite this, the project was started online and is currently continuing in Tajikairnavigation with the participation of a JICA consultant. The "Performance-Based Navigation (PBN) Implementation Capacity Enhancement Project" is an important project to improve the safety and efficiency of the use of the airspace of the Republic of Tajikistan. The introduction of PBN is the priority of ICAO and TAN pays special attention to activities related to this. Without a doubt, the implementation of this project will contribute to increasing the safety of flights in the airspace of the Republic of Tajikistan and compliance with international standards and procedures of civil aviation.

Thus, over the last 5 years, more than 15 international air routes have been opened, connecting European countries with South-Asian countries. The main purpose of opening new air routes is to increase the number of overflight aircraft in the airspace of Tajikistan, which in turn contributes to the improvement of the social status of the company's employees, and in general to the development of the country.

It is also worth noting that, in 2019, a new air traffic control tower of the State Unitary Enterprise "Tajikairnavigation" was completed and commissioned at the Dushanbe airport, at the expense of grant funds from the French Government, totalling 5 million 982 thousand 125 Euros.

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In conclusion, one of Tajikistan's main goals today is the expansion of the networks of international air routes. As is well known, the Republic of Tajikistan bordering with the Republic of Uzbekistan, China, Afghanistan, and the Republic of Kyrgyzstan. All these countries are connected by both ground and air corridors, which plays an important role in the exit of Central Asia to distant foreign countries by the shortest air routes. Unfortunately, today the Republic of Tajikistan does not have an air corridor connecting the country with China.

However, Tajikairnavigation, without stopping at great achievements, continues to cooperate with the Air Traffic Management Bureau of China, to open a new air route in the eastern part of the country. Therefore, to achieve this task, several productive meetings and an online meeting were held with the aviation sector of the Republic of China. Currently, many features of flight operations in this region have been discussed and all technical issues have already been resolved. SUE "Tajikairnavigation" is actively engaged in equipping the site corresponding the Technical equipment.

After the opening of this air route with China, it is expected to increase the number of overflight aircraft flying from the American continent and Europe to the big cities of China, Japan, and South Korea. The implementation of the project is also beneficial to air companies. Flight time and fuel consumption will decrease significantly, respectively, this will have a positive impact on the environment, as the emission of harmful gases into the atmosphere will decrease significantly.

# **Water and energy connectivity: the green pathway for the sustainable future of Central Asia**

*Sulton RAHIMZODA*

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Special Envoy of the President of Tajikistan to the Water and Climate Coalition

Central Asia is located in the center of the Eurasian continent, at the turn of Europe and Asia. It occupies a space of about 4 million км<sup>2</sup>. The region covers the territory of five countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Therein live almost 70 million people. Central Asia shares borders with Afghanistan and Iran in the South, with China in the East, and with Russia in the West and the North. Its nature is presented by the highest chain of Pamirs and Tien Shan, broad deserts and steppes, the long Asian rivers the Amu-Darya and Syr-Darya, and drainless water inland bodies – the largest of which are the Caspian and Aral Seas.

The region is rich with natural resources, which are allocated non-uniformly. Some countries, occupying the vast arid deserts and broad steppes, have considerable energy resources, and some with the least territory have high mountains and abundant water resources.

Although the countries of the region differ according to the area, population, power resources and economic potential, there are some shared problems and challenges in the region which can be overcome only together. They are lacking access to the sea, difficulties in access to the world markets, environmental problems, vulnerability to the natural disasters and manmade threats, an aggravating system of social security, climate change, international terrorism and extremism, human and narcotics traffic, etc.

These factors, and also commonality of history, culture and religion and most importantly interconnected water and energy infrastructure, road and transport system and industrial complex created during the Soviet period, are the primary prerequisites for the integration in Central Asia.

The region annually suffers the heavy losses which are a result of the insufficient cooperation. After all, development of cooperation among the Central Asian countries can provide considerable benefits for the region population and especially for the poorest population. Leading an open trade and realisation of investments, shared use of interconnected infrastructure, common advantages from water and power resources use, solution of environmental problems and disasters risk reduction, free exchange of experience and knowledge can be the fruits of the well-developed regional cooperation.

The water and energy connectivity in this context deserves special attention, since their integrated development can bring vast economic benefits to all countries in the region.

## **Water and energy connectivity**

Water and energy are inextricably connected in Central Asia. If water is needed for generating electricity in hydropower plants and steam turbines of thermal power plants,

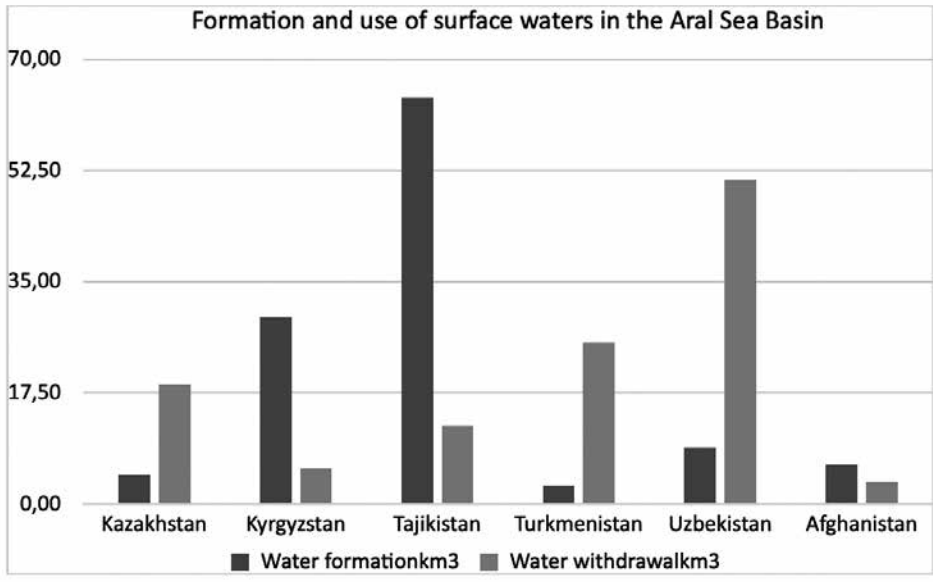
as well as for use in the cooling systems of power plants, then electricity is needed to pump water from underground sources, to pump water to high buildings for drinking needs, to high-altitude fields for irrigation, as well as for water treatment systems.

The share of pumped irrigation in Central Asia makes around 35% of total irrigated areas. Taking into account the importance of irrigated agriculture in ensuring the food security as well as job creation, especially in rural areas, the value of energy for water supply becomes much higher.

Central Asian countries hold vast resources in water and energy. Of paramount importance is their capacity to reach an equilibrium in order for them to ensure development. Furthermore, this concerns both their individual, national development, and their common capacity to prosper. Clearly, the fact that the major rivers of the region run cross-border means that the usage of the water by one nation does affect the others. Also, as to energy, resources are unequally distributed, hence the shared management by CA nations is necessary is collective energy needs are to be met.

Most water riches in Central Asia originate in the mountainous geography of two nations, that is Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (to the level of above 80%) and also in part Afghanistan. Yet, the major consumers of that water are nations situated in lower terrains, namely Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan (in excess of, again, 80%).

**Figure 1 : Formation and use of surface waters in the Aral Sea Basin**

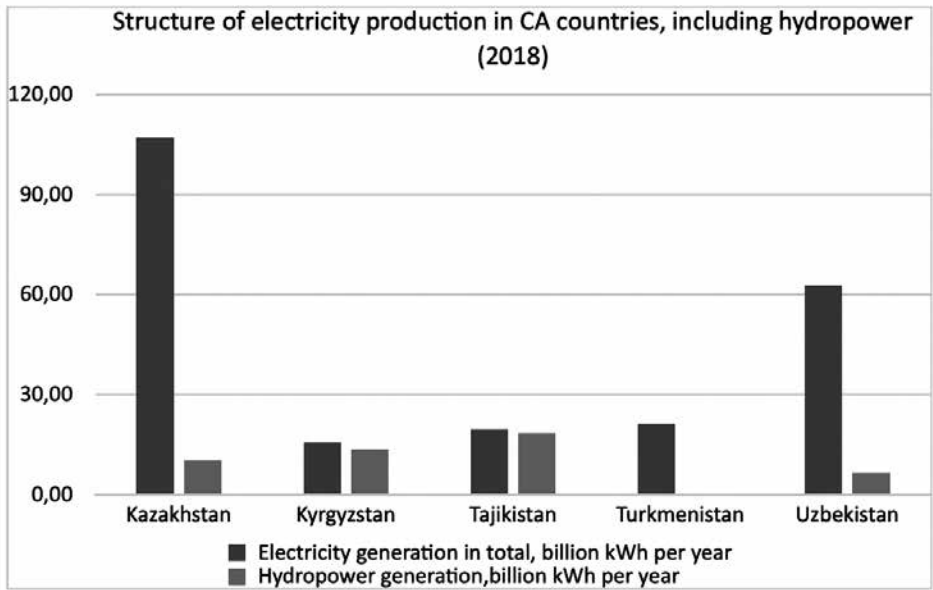


*Source: SIC ICWC 1996, SIC ICWC 2019*

At the same time, the regional assets as to fossil materials are unequal in their spread-out. Dushanbe and Bishkek are lacking substantial assets in petroleum and natural gas. As for coal, their resources are situated in high-altitude zones and hard and dear to reach. And all along, abundant water assets situated in geographically favourable locations offer these two nations the real possibility to produce from water direct hydroelectric power. While neighbour nations, situated in lower altitudes, possess other resources,

essentially oil and gas in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. As a result, the repartition of energy from hydropower as part of the total production of electricity in the latter three nations is weak (Figure 2).

**Figure 2 : Structure of electricity production in CA countries, including hydropower (2018)**



Source: SIC ICWC 2019

To be sure, the needs of local inhabitants and economies in water and energy can be satisfied by the resources available, and it seems the problems are quite manageable. Yet, the difficulty pertains to the opposite priorities of nations located upstream and those situated downstream. Dushanbe and Bishkek, due to their needs in energy other than oil and gas, need to store up water and release it in the Fall and Winter to produce more hydroelectric energy. While Astana, Ashgabat and Tashkent are focused on the availability of water essentially in the Summer in order to attend to irrigation.

Before the 1991 historic transition, all these nations were part of the same USSR and the system was such that Republics located in low altitude offered energy to their high-altitude neighbours during the Winter season, and the latter stocked and released water in the hot season to satisfy the required irrigation in the plains. But this system collapsed with the end of the USSR, when all these Republics became separated from one another and launched novel priorities based on national priorities. These policies had as their essence the concept of autonomous needs and separation from neighbour's nations. This as a result disrupted the equilibrium of hydraulics resources and energy resources.

### **Losses and gains from water-energy cooperation**

The consequence is for nations involved to have to undergo negative trends. The shortages in 2006 for Central Asia resulting from bad coordination in managing water assets represented US\$ 1,75 billion in lost agriculture outputs, the equivalent of a loss



of 3,6% in GDP (source: UNDP 2005); and in 2017 the loss went up to about US\$ 4,59 billion each year (source: Pohl *et al.* 2017). According to World Bank estimates, with the current trends by 2050 the economic losses of the region could amount to 60 billion USD or more than 20% of GDP.

The region of CA has hitherto been putting to use a mere 11% of its available cost-effective potential in hydropower, and the part of the latter in its total production of electricity is only past 21%. At the same time, Dushanbe's potential hydropower is, alone, about 527 billion kWh, that is 2,3 more than the estimated present needs of the nations of Central Asia. Nowadays, this potential is only used for about 4 to 5%, meaning that the potential for future enhancement is immense, and thus a possible contribution to comprehensively solving a number of present and future difficulties in Central Asia.

i/ To begin with, producing an electric power that is comparatively cheap and globally unaggressive for the environment, that would meet the increasing needs not just of Dushanbe, the latter suffering from dire lacks of energy in the winter, but also of neighbours. ii/ Also, building dams for water reservoirs makes it possible to monitor more effectively the volumes of water in rivers both over time and according to seasons, which paves the way for hydro-security and hydro-supplies for irrigating the crops in the whole region, come dry spells. iii/ The provision of reasonably-priced energy derived from water resources leads to savings in oil, gas and coal supplies, all used in large amounts by some regional nations in order to produce electric power. In effect, power made from hydraulic resources reduces markedly the emission of CO<sub>2</sub> in Central Asia. Developing energy-production from water meets the requirement of a transition to energy sources that are renewable, the aim of any Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), to "ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all". Finally, and still importantly, the reservoirs of hydropower dams help preventing occurrences of extreme fits of drought, floods and mudflows, that all each year are the origin of vast economic losses in virtually every nation of Central Asia.

In effect, common work at the proper time would make it possible for Central Asian nations to fight against the stakes of toady and undercover solutions to current difficulties in energy questions. Tackling regionally the usage of hydro-energy reserves in the region would enhance as well more efficacy in water and economic development, improving living conditions of the people and reaching a development that is lastingly adequate.

## **Rogun HPP as an example of green pathway for sustainable future of Central Asia**

For instance, the relevance for Central Asia of water and energy points to the building of the Rogun hydropower plant (HPP) in Tajikistan. Estimated returns from it are in the level of US\$ 1.48 billion (Pohl *et al.* 2017). After its building is completed, this HPP will be the largest one in the whole region, with a full capacity of 3,600 MW. The mean *per annum* production of electricity is probable at over 17.0 billion kWh annually. The dam only of the Rogun HPP is planned to represent with a height of 335 meters the highest rock-fill dam on the planet earth. It will seal the Rogun water-reserve, with a full capacity of 13.3 km<sup>3</sup> and a usable volume of 10.3 km<sup>3</sup>.

This HPP being built at Rogun will represent the largest clean-energy production in the whole region and even the subcontinent around it. The relatively cheap energy, renewable and unpolluting will meet Dushanbe's needs in electricity and will augment

the nation's exporting capacity of that energy to nations around that rely essentially on fossil resources to produce their own electric power and meet the needs of their people and their economic needs. The production of comparable energy levels as the Rogun HPP, the coal units would release 13.67 million tons in CO<sub>2</sub> annually, whereas oil units would cause 9.95 million tons, and gas units 6.71 tons (OSHPC Barki Tojik 2014).

To be sure, the Rogun HPP, having been conceived to produce electricity and regulate hydro-resources, shall see as well to mitigating changes in climate and several issues hereto-pertaining, namely floods and draughts. The HPP shall help in the adaptation and reduction and provide welcome aids to reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, in accordance with the Paris Agreement of 2015.

On top of this, the Rogun HPP, because it will yield relatively cheap energy, shall offer a possibility to start-up innovating industries, enhanced employment and assistance to economic and social condition. Thus, it will provide Dushanbe and its neighbours with substantial progress towards realising several of the SDGs.

In all, analysing the fate of nations in the Central Asian region clarifies the extent to which hydro-resources and the production of energy are linked together as well as the benefits to be expected from the equilibrium in their usage. Also, the illustrations given earlier demonstrate further that international cooperation, when it is balanced for all, is a determinant of the balanced production of water-uses and energy-production, which is indispensable on account of the cross-border essence of the very flows of rivers, and on that of the sub-continental nature of several energy markets

## Combating the new challenges in the region

Yet, other issues bear upon both the present circumstance and the developments to come, some of these being, predominantly, the changes in climatic trends, and demographic increases. If i/ changes in climate point *inter alia* to raises in temperature, alteration of hydrological patterns, enhanced droughts and related phenomena in hydro-meteorology, a drop in river water-levels, and also, given the latitudes involved, a surge in electric needs, ii/ increased demographic numbers will cause higher demands in water, alimentation, energy and further essential needs, as well as in employment. Further, Central Asian nations are viewed as very vulnerable to changes in the climate and have recently above-average demographic increases.

### Population growth

Up until the end the 20<sup>th</sup> century, demographic increases in the region were more, still. An instance of this is the fact, in the USSR, of yearly demographic increases in the region of Central Asia of over 3%, levelling off at around 2% at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Such increases are deemed to go on in the years to come, the Central Asian populations levels being estimated in the region of 83.8 millions around 2030 and even over 100 million by 2050.

### Climate change

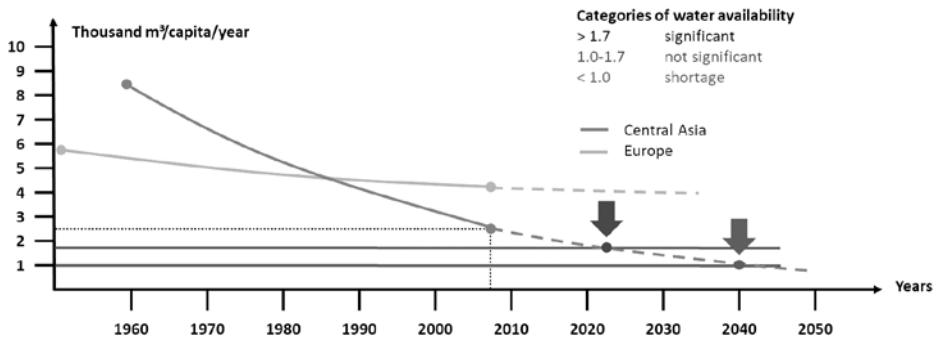
As to the consequence of the alteration in climate, the temperature of the air in Central Asia has on average risen by 0.5°C and, come 2030-2050, will be higher still by 1.6-2.6 °C over the decade (World Bank 2009). Clearly, this will worsen the meltdown of glaciers as principal providers of water for rivers in Central Asia. In the course of the recent 50-60

years, the glaciers of the Tien Shan and Pamirs chains have been diminished by 6 to 40%, both in volume and surface area (UNEP 2017, 16).

During about 1950-2000, Central Asia’s resources in glaciers diminished over three-fold. This has been going on with an annual diminution on average of 0.6-0.8% in area as well as about 0.1% in volume (Seversky and Tokmagambetov 2004). Up until now, this tendency has not caused substantial alteration in the flows of the rivers. Information over the 2001-2018 time-stretch indicate that the Amu Darya basin flows dropped by 0.51 km<sup>3</sup> and the Syr Darya basin by 0.9 km<sup>3</sup>. Globally, the Aral Sea basin has experienced reductions of 1.41 km<sup>3</sup>, that is 1.2% (SIC ICWC 2019). Yet, the estimations that are provided suggest that “dire” climatic evolutions, for instance twice the air-concentration of carbon dioxide, the Syr Darya flow can be decreased by 15-30%, and that of the Amu Darya by 21-40% (Chub 2000; Chub 2007; Sorokin 2016; SIC ICWC 2019). The less harsh predictions estimate drops in river flows, by 2050, at around 6-10% for the Syr Darya and 10-15% for the Amu Darys (EDB 2009).

Taking into account these predictions, river flows will drop in the middle and long terms. According to recent demographic growth, the accessibility to water, the offered irrigation for the land and hydropower per capita will progressively be diminished. Obviously, this is the case for the Central Asian region: the last 40 years have witnessed an annual drop in water resources per capita from 8400 m<sup>3</sup> to less than 2500 m<sup>3</sup>. Taking into effect present demographic increases, one can predict that the critical threshold of 1700 m<sup>3</sup> could be reached as early as 2025. Come 2040, Central Asia will undergo full water-scarcity, with only 1000 m<sup>3</sup> per capita (figure 3). On top of this, the necessity will still linger on of providing 500-700 million m<sup>3</sup> of water in order to maintain the region’s populations even if these experience still low consumptions (World Bank 2016c).

**Figure 3: Change of water availability in Central Asia<sup>218</sup>**



Population growth will lead to an increase in the demand for food, one of the main suppliers of which is agriculture, including irrigated agriculture. Accordingly, the irrigated area per capita will also play an important role in this context. In the 1960s, this indicator in Central Asia was 0.32 ha/person, while today it has dropped to 0.14 hectare per capita, that is 2.3 times lower<sup>219</sup>. The number shall be further reduced due to high demographic

<sup>218</sup> Redrawn from World Bank 2016c (data: EC IFAS).  
<sup>219</sup> Data: ICWC.

dynamics as well as to the necessity of vast resources in cash for cultures of the land and, is necessary, irrigation of new territories.

### *Qush-teppa canal in Afghanistan*

Another major challenge in the region is the construction of the Qush-teppa canal in Afghanistan. According to available data, the length of the canal is 281 km, and the command zone and expected irrigation capacity of the canal is 585,000 ha. The expected water withdrawal from the Amudarya river is 13 km<sup>3</sup> per year or 45% of the water from the average long-term flow of the Amudarya at the Qush-Teppa site (28.94 km<sup>3</sup>/year, project data) or 19.4% of the average long-term flow of the Amudarya, which does not take into account the Zeravshan and other drainless rivers is 66.9 km<sup>3</sup>/year (data from the Amu Darya Master Plan, 1987). The total cost of the project is 554 million USD.

The construction of the Qush-teppa canal began in March 2022, and satellite images show that by February 2023, 100 km of the canal had been dug. According to available information, about 300 companies, 6.5 thousand workers and 4,100 equipment/machinery of different types have been involved in the project. According to media resources, the current leadership of Afghanistan (Taliban Administration) intends to complete the construction of the canal by 2028.

Obviously, the implementation of this project will have a huge impact on the Central Asian riparian countries, and mainly Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. In particular, these countries may lose from 12% to 17% of irrigation water with an economic impact of 0.7 % to 6% of GDP in Turkmenistan and 0.5% to 4.0 % of GDP in Uzbekistan. In dry years, these figures can increase 2-3fold, since even now the water supply to water users in the lower reaches of the Amu Darya in dry years is no more than 80%.

In addition, it is expected that due to the implementation of this project and the decrease in water supply downstream, the power output of the Tuyamuyun HPP will also be reduced by 150 MW, thereby affecting the energy supply of the local population of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan who receive electricity from this station.

This may worsen the already difficult situation with water distribution in the region, negatively affect water, energy and environmental security, as well as the socio-economic situation in Central Asia. The cumulative impact of the project will be the fact that the water sector in the middle and lower reaches of the Amu Darya is the main source of employment. In particular, agriculture provides jobs directly and indirectly for about 40 % of the population of Uzbekistan and is almost completely dependent on agricultural irrigation. Water scarcity can also cause forced internal migration in the lower reaches of the Amu Darya.

Yet, enhanced technologies designed to save water and energy resources, innovative methods in irrigation, and further progress in agriculture, made possible by the gradual development of science and technology, notably the emergence of novel, adaptive, resistant species that provide high-yields, all point to the possibility of reaching production goals with lowered uses of energy, of water and land resources. To be sure, nations are to dwell on the efficient usage of these three resources, and also increase the yielded crops based on their innovative technologies and new techniques.

And therefore, the analyses thus far point to making sure that the equilibrium between water and energy in CA nations, given the present impact of these trends, notably the higher demand for water, energy and food, represents one of the priority-tasks towards

a development pattern that be sustainable. The way out of this conundrum, given the cross-border nature of several of the rivers concerned, and given the necessity of cross-border trade of electricity, the transport of the required equipment for the development of infrastructure, and also the mitigation of the impact on the environment and on the populations, all this clearly suggest a better form of cooperation among neighbours within CA, if these are to move together in the direction of mutually-assured progress.

## **Political will as a main factor of success**

It is gratifying that the dynamics of recent years shows a clear understanding of this issue and the desire of Central Asian countries for integration and for a coordinated solution of existing challenges in this area. Undoubtedly, regional approaches in development of water and energy resources in Central Asia will also contribute to their more efficient management to ensure water security, economic growth, welfare of the population and generally sustainable development.

In recent years, a platform for a regular dialogue between the Heads of Central Asia States with annual meetings has been formed, state and official bilateral visits at the highest level are periodically organized, and expert meetings are held. An important point of these meetings is the adoption of decisions on the most pressing issues on the regional agenda.

This is evidenced by the Joint Statement of the Heads of States of Central Asia following the Consultative Meeting in the city of Cholpon-Ata, where “The Parties, noting the importance of existing and under construction hydropower facilities to help resolve water and energy issues in Central Asia, advocated for strengthening mutually beneficial multilateral cooperation between the countries of Central Asia on the integrated and rational use of water and energy resources in the region, taking into account the interests of all countries of the region”.

Other examples are: Tajikistan and Uzbekistan decided to jointly build two hydro power plants with a total capacity of 320 MW on the Zeravshan River, the Tajik side resumed the export of electricity to Uzbekistan after almost a 10-year break, the Uzbek and Kazakh sides also expressed their willingness to participate in the implementation of hydropower projects in the Kyrgyz Republic. All this demonstrates the readiness and political will of Heads of State and Government of the Central Asian countries to take decisive action, which will lay a good foundation for both integration processes and economic benefits.

For example, good relations between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan served as the basis for increasing trade between them – over the past four years, trade between the countries has increased 56 times from 12 million US dollars in 2015 to 674 million US dollars in 2022. And this is not the limit, the parties agreed to bring the trade turnover to 1 billion US dollars in the coming years.

And the implementation of joint projects, especially in the water and energy sector, will multiply the successes achieved over the past few years and bring great benefits to all parties. Indeed, an important point in the implementation of these joint projects will be the creation of trust and the opportunity to jointly manage these projects for the benefit of the parties, both in terms of providing electricity and water supply. Another important component of such projects is the interest of investors - international development banks and other investors are always willing to invest in such projects.

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In conclusion, the development of hydropower resources fits well into the mainstream of the steps taken at the global level to switch to the use of renewable energy sources, which is now considered as the main priority on the path to improving the ecology of our planet and developing a “green” economy.

Of course, a good impetus to this process can be given by the reform of the International Fund for saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) on which a lot of work is being done today. We believe that well-coordinated work in this direction will give good results in order to create effective institutions and an appropriate legal framework that meets the requirements of today’s realities and challenges.

It is expected that the IFAS Summit in Dushanbe will give an additional impetus to the soonest completion of IFAS reform in order to create a more effective regional institutions capable to respond to new challenges and threats, including those related to climate change, population growth and other potentially increasing pressures on water resources in Central Asia.

# The role of the Gwadar and Chabahar ports in connecting South Asia to Central Asia and Europe

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The Gwadar port of Pakistan and the Chabahar port of Iran both have geo-strategic, geo-economic, and geo-political significance in connecting vast regions. Gwadar and Chabahar ports are the dominant trading route and energy chokepoints of the world contributing to their prominence in the regional framework. Gwadar and Chabahar ports will turn the host countries into regional corridors due to their strategic locations in relation to the enormous supply and consumer markets economies of these regions.

This chapter explains and qualitatively highlights the geo-strategic, geo-economics and geo-political significance of Gwadar and Chabahar ports and their role in connecting south-Asian to Central-Asian countries and Europe. It concludes that the operationalisation of these ports will substantially enhance the economy of Iran and Pakistan, boost regional trade and transit and connect South Asia to Central Asian countries and beyond.

Seaports have been the means of trade and connectivity since distant times. Traders used the seasonal winds to do trade and commercial activities through the sea. Modern commercial activities have further strengthened the need for naval and riverine trade routes<sup>220</sup>. In today's world, as the transformation has occurred in international affairs, strategic partnership and economic integration have become the matter of the day and each state is trying to showcase its presence by joining hands with other nations to have a say in the region. maritime trade is assumed to be economically and strategically significant for developing countries<sup>221</sup>. The bridging between land and sea in a country's economic activities can be possible only through its ports. Some countries such as China and India have moved beyond their borders to invest in developing ports within and outside the Asian region, which highlights the strategic significance of ports for monitoring naval trade routes and maritime activities<sup>222</sup>.

China and India have their own strategies and economic policy and desires in the region. Both invested in Gwadar and Chabahar ports respectively to expand their trade and commercial activities toward the region and beyond. China's \$ 62 billion announcement

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220 Hasan Yaser Malik, *Strategic importance of Gwadar Port* - *pu.edu.pk* (no date). Available at: <http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/pols/pdf-files/gwadar%20article-winter2012.pdf> (Accessed: January 3, 2023).

221 Muhammad Azhar\* and Ayaz Muhammad\* (no date) "South Asia -Central Asia interregional connectivity: the future perspective" *Central Asia Journal No. 77, Winter 2015* [Preprint].

222 A comparative analysis on Chabahar & Gwadar port by Dr Mansoor Kiani Moqadam, (Persian version) Hamid Reza Tahmak & Sobhan Rezashahi V# 4004 18 April 2012 <http://www.rosd.ir/padafand/makran/3038.pdf>



as part of its CPEC project to develop Gwadar port in the Sistan Balochistan state of Pakistan to reach western Asia, Africa and Europe.

Likewise India's desire to boost its trade and commercial activities, redrawing the geopolitics and geo-strategic of the region and emerging connectivity with Afghanistan and Central Asian countries through Iran bypassing Pakistan and secure its energy requirement invested in the Chabahar port of Iran, around 120 km away from Gwadar port under its "Connect Central Asia Policy" (2012). India constructed a the 240 km road of Zaranj-Delaram in the Afghan provinces of Helmand and Farah to connect the Chabahar port to Afghanistan and central Asia<sup>223</sup>. India also invested to build a rail line in the Zahedan province of Iran amounting to about \$1.6 billion, which will eventually provide access to Turkmenistan as well as northern Afghanistan through the Bafq-Mashad route.

At the same time, Iran, being side-lined by the USA and imposed sanctions by many countries led by the USA, needs a reliable partner such as India to overcome its problems<sup>224</sup>. PM Narendra Modi in his visit to Tehran in May 2016, highlighted that the Chabahar port will be the gateway to a transit and transport Corridor between India, Iran and Afghanistan, enabling multi-modal transport of goods and passengers<sup>225</sup>.

The development of Gwadar port by China and Chabahar port by India resulted not only in open rivalry and competition between the two countries in the region but also raised contention for the economic and natural resources of Central Asia.

This chapter evaluates the policies and strategies of China and India in Gwadar and Chabahar ports for regional connectivity, analyses the economic implications of Gwadar and Chabahar Ports for the region. It highlights challenges ahead of Gwadar and Chabahar ports and provides recommendations for better use of Gwadar and Chabahar ports. In this context, it answers the following questions: i/ whether or not the Gwadar and Chabahar Ports can play a dynamic and productive role in the regional connectivity between South Asia and Central Asiaand ? ii/ what will be the geostrategic and economic implications of Gwadar and Chabahar for the region ?

## India's trade and transit policy toward Central Asia

The quest for energy sufficiency and markets in Asia urges policymakers in the Indian government to pay attention to the East, Central Asia, the Middle East and Iran seriously and try to influence the trends in the region. The biggest hurdle in India's economic interaction with Central Asia is the lack of direct access through roads. Understanding the importance of these facts, India urgently acted and the issue of using the transit corridor facilities of Iran for India's trade with Central Asian Republics was brought up for discussion at the Indo-Iranian Joint Ministerial Commission in New Delhi meeting<sup>226</sup>. India's government assigned two expert delegations to conduct studies on the available transport infrastructure and transit facilities in Iran and Central Asian Republics<sup>227</sup>.

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223 Ibid

224 Ibid

225 Panda, A. (2019) A First: *Afghan shipment heads to India via Iran's Chabahar Port*, – *The Diplomat*. for The diplomat. Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2019/02/a-first-afghan-shipment-heads-to-india-via-irans-chabahar-port/> (Accessed: January 4, 2023).

226 Iranian Joint Ministerial Commission 10-11 November 1992. Available at <https://mealib.nic.in/?2521?000>

227 Ibid

Having thoroughly studied the possible trade and transit routes, the most practical, feasible and cost-effective option was found to be the transit route through Iran firstly due to the availability of suitable conditions for the movement of both container and break-bulk cargo, secondly the stability of the law-and-order situation<sup>228</sup>. The investigation concluded that transit trade through Chabahar of Iran to Central Asia and the middle east is not only logistically sound and commercially profitable but also fast, smooth and safe. The extensive Iranian network of well-maintained roadways which permits heavy haul to traffic to ply at around 80 to 100 km per hour makes for faster and cheaper transportation, given the abundance of cheap fuel and other low costs.

This is complemented by a reasonably efficient railway system capable of taking the load of bulk and heavy cargo<sup>229</sup>. following the above studies, India, Iran, and Turkmenistan signed a trilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 18 April 1995, to provide road and rail access for Indian goods to Central Asia through Iran and vice versa<sup>230</sup>.

The then Indian Prime Minister, I. K. Gujral in his speech in In 1997 outlined a vision of regional economic development including Central Asia which he called “our near abroad”.

Earlier in 2003, India, Iran and Afghanistan decided to open a new sea and road corridor through Chahbahar port and costructed Zaranj and Delaram road in Afghanistan as part o fteh said policy<sup>231</sup>. In May 2016, India signed a progression of twelve notices of understanding which focused on the Port of Chabahar<sup>232</sup>. The Troika marked by India, Iran and Afghanistan enables Indian merchandise to reach Afghanistan and central Asian through Iran Chabahar port.

## **The strategic significance of Chabahar port for India, Iran and Afghanistan**

India has a long history of trade with both Iran and Afghanistan. After 1947, connection with Afghanistan became very difficult, Pakistan tightened its border, used its geographic position to its advantage and thus gave limited access for Afghanistan products to India and vice versa.

The trilateral transit agreement in Chabahar port provided an essential route for trade between the three countries which is an important step in doing business independently, bypassing Pakistan altogether. To unlock the untapped energy and mineral riches of Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia for export to India one of the world’s largest economies in the world, Chabahar port development is significant. India’s fast-growing economy presents a constant and growing need for energy and raw materials. the country’s economic isolation from Central Asia will end through the Chabahar port deal, opening access that an unfriendly Pakistan has choked since the 1947 partition.

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228 Ministry of Commerce and Industry of India, <https://commerce.gov.in/?s=India+Turkmenistan+1995>

229 Strategic analysis of Chabahar Port available at [https://www.aiss.af/assets/aiss\\_publication/10cec76bf1b795d8a9629f9c233e157e.pdf](https://www.aiss.af/assets/aiss_publication/10cec76bf1b795d8a9629f9c233e157e.pdf) accessed on august 2018

230 Ibid

231 Ibid

232 Chabahar Port is a Win-Win for All, *Afghanistan Times*, 26 December 2018, available at <http://www.afghanistantimes.af/chabahar-port-is-a-win-win-for-all/>, accessed on 25 June 2019

India's connectivity could also expand to Russia and Europe in the long run, adding further economic vitality to Afghanistan, India and Iran's cooperation<sup>233</sup>.

Iran one of the leading energy suppliers is also emerging as the gateway between Central Asia and India, also an Indian manufacturing hub by creating a junction of cheap energy and Afghanistan raw materials for Indian markets<sup>234</sup>.

Though Afghanistan is currently penurious, it is a mineral-rich country. Based on a survey by the U.S. geological department, Afghanistan holds around 60 million tons of copper, 2.2 billion tons of iron ore, and 1.4 million tons of rare earth elements such as lanthanum, cerium and neodymium, in addition to aluminium, gold, silver, zinc, mercury, and lithium<sup>235</sup>. Among other factors, such mineral deposits have remained untapped due to the lack of connectivity to a major economy.

Such constraints will be addressed through this new transit corridor to India. also, a successful corridor further enforces Afghanistan as a transit route for oil and natural gas exports from Central Asia to the Arabian Sea. the resources produced from mining, the export of raw and semi-raw materials and later finished commodities like iron and aluminium could have a transformational impact on Afghanistan's economy and society<sup>236</sup>.

## China policy of Gwadar Port Development

China's involvement in Gwadar port development is due to its geopolitical, geo-economic and geo-strategic interests. Considering the geo-economic aspects of Gwadar port, according to China policymakers it will pave the way for a strategic solution that will resolve China's-Malaccan conundrum as it provides an alternative trade route to China<sup>237</sup>. If the project is completed, it will shorten the transit time and distance for China's products to reach West Asia and Africa to three days from currently almost two weeks in which to reduce the transport cost per container and will make it economically cost-effective<sup>238</sup>.

The operationalisation of Gwadar port and its linkage to the CPEC corridor would also help the development of China's backward province of Xinjiang. In the geo-political area, China's policy of Gwadar development will deepen its political relation with Pakistan further. strategic analysts stated that China's political and economic presence in the Middle East is also the major reason for Gwadar port development<sup>239</sup>.

For Beijing's policymakers, Gwadar port satisfies two main foreign policy objectives of China : i/ to give direct land access to China toward the Indian Ocean, ii/ to stabilize the western part of China and reduce insecurity in its territory. The China's Central Asian

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233 Ibid

234 Mohammad Yousaf, , Dr. Adil Zaman Kasi, Dr. Mulazim Hussain (2021) "Geo-strategic consequence of Chabahar and Gwadar Sea ports and the interests of the external player," *Pakistan Journal of International Affairs*, 4(3). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.52337/pjia.v4i3.257>.

235 Mineral resources in Afghanistan, available at [https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/Pnab1961.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pnab1961.pdf) accessed on 28<sup>th</sup> December 2022

236 Faramarz Ramazi Bonish, Current motivation of India to enter the Chabahar port available at <http://www.haqiqat.org/>  
237 Government of Pakistan, 'Transport and Logistics', in *Annual Plan 2015-16*, Islamabad: Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform, 2015, p. 207, available at <https://www.pc.gov.pk/uploads/docs/Ch27-Transport-logistic.pdf>, accessed on 12 July 2019.

238 M. Akram Zaki, 'The Evolution in Global Power Balance and Pak-China Relations', *Policy Perspectives*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2014, pp. 3-5.

239 M.H. Rajesh, *China in the Indian Ocean: One Ocean, Many Strategies*, New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2018, p. 129

policy to connect these countries to the CPEC project also plays a dominant role in Gwadar port infrastructure development.

## **The strategic significance of Gwadar port for Pakistan and China connectivity**

China, today the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest economy, established soon after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 new diplomatic relations with the five independent states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, understanding their rich and abundant natural resources. Since China shares a direct border with the three Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan and Tajikistan through its Xinjiang autonomous region, it increased its investment from \$1 billion to \$ 50 billion in the last three decades.<sup>240</sup> It also is trying to link Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan through Afghanistan as part of the CPEC project directly to Gwadar port of Pakistan. Records show that around 75% of trade between China and Central Asian Republics (CARs) passes through the Chinese Xinjiang region.<sup>241</sup>

Bilateral and multilateral trade and transit relations and interdependencies reduce conflict and promote regional cooperation and connectivity<sup>242</sup>. The strategic significance of Gwadar port is connecting the Belt-Road Project introduced by the president of China in 2013 aims to connect China to the Middle East, Europe and Africa. Therefore, the port of Gwadar is strategically, economically and militarily noteworthy for both Islamabad and Beijing in this respect.

Additionally, Gwadar Port is a strategic location in the Baluchistan Province of Pakistan which can serve as a geo-strategic hub for China's commercial, political, and military activity in the northern Indian ocean<sup>243</sup>.

According to analysts, China's aim to build the Gwadar port is not merely commercial, it is internal security and foreign affairs policy of China. Moreover, the port is placed at the mouth of the Strait of Hormuz, on the Arabian Sea near the Persian Gulf and is also the world's third biggest port in the region. Considering China's desire to establish its existence in the Indian Ocean, Gwadar port is the only option in this regard. Besides being connected to some maritime routes through which many shipments pass through, around 40% of China's required oil imported is transported and stored in Gwadar port which makes it more significant for China strategically<sup>244</sup>.

The Gwadar port's geo-strategic importance increases for China policymakers as it expands sea transport lines in south Asia, cutting off shipping time and cost significantly for Chinese products to the rest of the world. Based on research conducted by the Pentagon called "Military and Security Developments Including China: "A more robust military basis would enable China to extend its military might and capabilities to further areas<sup>245</sup>.

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240 China's Long March into Central Asia," Stratfor, April 27, 2016, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/chinas-long-march-central-asia>.

241 The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor "gateway to Central Asia, [www.worldscientific.com](http://www.worldscientific.com)

242 Umbreen Javaid and Azhar Rashid, "China, Central Asia and Opportunities for Pakistan," Research Journal of South Asian Studies, Vol. 31, No. 2 (July–December 2016), pp. 157–175.

243 X. Jinping. Working Together Toward a Better Future for Asia and the World. 2013

244 Ibid

245 Butt, K. M., & Butt, A. A. (2015). Proceedings of International Conference on Chinapakistan Economic Co

The port of Gwadar development is essential for Pakistan as well, the port expands Pakistan-China strategic relations, adds to its economic development, creates thousands of jobs and gives access to Chinese traders to build commercial relations with Pakistan.

Overall, the Gwadar port development has a strategic significance for both China and Pakistan to improve and build a regional balance, in contrast to India's increasing relations with the USA and its closeness to China.

## **Economic implications of Gwadar and Chabahar ports to the host countries and the region**

The Gwadar and Chabahar ports have become the utmost reference points of discussions on the geo-strategic and geo-economics of the region.

### ***Chabahar Port economic implications***

These include i/ the existing Iranian road network from Chabahar port can link up to Zaranj-Delaram in Afghanistan, about 883 km from the port, it gives access to Afghanistan's Garland highway, setting up road access to four major Afghanistan cities of Kandahar, Herat, Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif near Surkhan Darya province of Uzbekistan. ii/ the Chabahar port allows India, the world's 4<sup>th</sup> largest energy consumer to access Iran's crude oil reserves of over 150 billion barrels and 1,187 trillion cubic feet of gas reserves. iii/ the Chabahar port development provides access to India to reach Central Asia and get access to the added energy resources of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan<sup>246</sup>. iv/ the corridor from Chabahar-Zahedan-Zaranj is a potential game-changer for regional connectivity as it gives alternative access for Afghanistan to India via the sea route. this connectivity will enhance the development nature of economic engagement between India and Afghanistan. v/ the Central Asian countries (CARs) have limited access to sea routes, the development of Chabahar port gives open access to these countries to trade with India and the middle east which reduces the cost and time of delivery; vi/ the port of Chabahar pave the way for the flow of trade and investment between the region and help economic development. vii/ expansion of trade and transit via Chabahar port increases employment and reduces regional poverty. viii/ Iran may get a higher role in Afghanistan's economic engagement. hence, there is a higher scope and benefit for mutual trade between Iran and Afghanistan in the future and the new port deal is very important as a trade facilitator. The port of Chabahar connecting Central Asia to India and Middle Eastern markets is shorter, safer and economically cost-effective than the Gwadar port of Pakistan<sup>247</sup>.

### ***Gwadar Port economic implications***

The Gwadar port has geo-economic and geo-strategic implications for both China and Pakistan. i/ Gwadar port cut off the distance to West Asia and Africa for the China transit, bringing China- Pakistan relations closer and links between Central, West and South Asia. ii/ Based on China and Pakistan policy makers opinions, the CPEC project will become a bridge between South Asia and central Asian countries and in this connection, Gwadar is the main player. iii/ the corridor facilitates CARs to develop trade

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246 <https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/the-challenging-geopolitics-of-the-port-at-chabahar/>

247 A Comparative Analysis of the Benefits and Capabilities of Pakistan's Gwadar Port and Iran's Chabahar Port <http://www.tarabaranmag.ir/ModuleDefinitions/NewsArticles/ViewArticle.aspx?ArticleId=444>

and transit relations with south Asia, the Middle East and Europe. Moreover, Gwadar port development and the joining of the Central Asian Countries may assist them to come out of Russia's direct control. iv/ The Gwadar port will enable China to more safely and reliably import oil. the projected pipeline will carry crude oil from Arab and African states to China through Gwadar port. v/ The Gwadar Port would generate billions of dollars in revenue and create 0.7 million jobs for the uneducated youth of the two countries in future. vi/ Gwadar port provides China with a transit terminal for crude-oil imports from Iran and Africa to China's Xinjiang province. vii/ The Gwadar port will boost the cooperation of Pakistan and China with other countries in the oil and Energy sectors.

## Challenges ahead of Gwadar and Chabahar Ports

**Political challenge:** Both Gwadar and Chabahar ports are located in the same geographical location but two rival countries such as China and India have their own political interest.

**Security challenges:** The Gwadar port is under threat by the Balochis insurgency and it has happened many times Chabahar port also the road connecting Zaranj-Delaram in Helmand and Farah provinces of Afghanistan have not been secure since Taliban fighters exist in the region.

**Infrastructure:** Both Gwadar and Chabahar Ports funded by China and India respectively are still not constructed completely and the required facilities have not been placed for fully operationalisation.

**Direct route connectivity:** the railroad and highways from Gwadar port to western China, road from Gwadar to Quetta which connects to Kandahar, Afghanistan, the road from Afghanistan to Central Asia is not in good condition as well which poses difficulty for India's trade with Central Asia.

**India-Pakistan Relations :** India-Pakistan relations are the main challenges of these two ports' development. Pakistan joined China to oversee the Chabahar project funded by India and Afghanistan joined hand with India and Iran in the Chabahar port construction are the clear message of both sides having issues in helping the functionality of the said ports.

**Islamic extremism :** This issue has been a crucial point the regions concern for their national security. the recent regime changes in Afghanistan and the existence of more than 27 international terrorist groups including TTP, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and East Turkistan Islamic movements are the major threats to these project's implementation.

**Geopolitical competition between great powers in the energy sector:** There is intense competition in the region between great powers of the world such as the US, and Russia and emerging power like China and India which are economically as well as politically involved in the region and have their own geopolitical interest.

**Covid 19<sup>th</sup> :** The covid 19 had its negative effects in early operationalisation of these ports which the investor countries spent a huge amount of money fighting Covid and it delayed the projects constructions.

**The recent development in Iran and Pakistan :** The recent development in Iran and Pakistan which brought more pressure on their governments had negative impacts on the completion of both ports based on the plan.

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In conclusion, the Gwadar and Chabahar ports play an important role in regional and extra-regional connectivity and economic development. These two ports connect South Asia to central Asia, the Middle east, Africa and Europe. The development of these ports will generate more income and create job opportunities in the region. These ports will not only help China and India trade and commercial expansion but all the countries in the region and far regions.

The landlocked countries of Central Asia will get easy access to warm waters and trade and commercial activities will increase.

However, both ports' connectivity lies within Afghanistan which is shortened and more cost-effective in terms of trade and transit but its internal security problems and the existence of international terrorism are real barriers to regional connectivity. As security in Afghanistan will benefit all the countries and stakeholders involved with these two ports, it requires a collective responsibility to put all differences aside and work for a peaceful Afghanistan to establish a responsible government in this country in order to make it a land bridge to the region.

For a full operationalisation of the two ports , the regional powers should put their political matters aside and work for the economic benefits of all the countries, regional connectivity and development. at the same time other surrounding countries should cooperate as regional development will benefit all nations.

# The increasing significance of the Middle Corridor and the role of Azerbaijan

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The current geopolitical situation in Eurasia has a serious impact on international transport and cargo transportation. It is observed that the traditional routes have lost their relevance, the direction of international cargo transportation in the east-west direction has been changed, and the enormous cargo flow has been diverted from the north to the south.

In this context, Azerbaijan's favourable geographical position serves to enhance the development of connectivity between Asia and Europe. By improving its transportation infrastructure in recent years, Baku has developed various projects, including the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway (BTK) and the Port of Baku is an important leg of the East-West and the North-South corridors.

The Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), also known as the Middle Corridor is a multimodal corridor linking China and the EU through Central Asia, the South Caucasus, Turkey, and Eastern Europe. In order to increase the flow of goods, the Coordination Committee for the Development of the TITR was established in February 2014. In December 2016, the participants of the Coordinating Committee for the Development of the TITR—Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia—decided to establish the International Association “Trans-Caspian International Transport Route”.<sup>248</sup>

## The Russia-Ukraine war: impact on logistics and connectivity

The Russian-Ukrainian war has affected all global processes, including the global supply chain and the cargo transportation in the direction of Europe-Asia. The war, since March 2022, has seriously affected the traditional transit routes, in particular it has paralyzed the Northern Corridor that passes across Russian and Belarusian territory.

The Middle Corridor has existed for many years but attracting little attention as it was much less competitive than the Northern Corridor. Before the war started, according to the Asian Development Bank Institute, high costs and slower transit times made it practically uneconomical for commercial use.<sup>249</sup> The main reason behind this was the limited capacity of the Middle Corridor.

This can be clearly seen from the freight transport data. For instance, in 2021, 1.46 million TEU was transported via the China-Europe rail network, according to the China National Railway Group.<sup>250</sup> The 2021 rail freight shipped between China and Europe was 4.45%

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248 <https://middlecorridor.com/en/about-the-association/history-en>

249 <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/705226/adbi-wp1268.pdf>

250 <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202201/1245139.shtml#:~:text=China's%20railway%20operator%20reported%20on,State%20Railway%20Group%20Co%20said.>



of the total Asia-Europe ocean containerized trade of 32.8 million TEU.<sup>251</sup> However, the maximum capacity of the Middle Corridor is around 100,000-120,000 TEUs at its best.<sup>252</sup>

This means that the capacity of the Middle Corridor is evidently too small to absorb all these volumes. Putting it differently, the Middle Corridor cannot meet all the volume and capacity demands resulting from the disruption of the routes passing through Russia. The corridor accounts for about 3-5% of the total capacity of northern routes.<sup>253</sup>

Furthermore, in comparison with the northern route, the Middle Corridor still takes relatively long due to the Caspian and Black Seas crossing and many re-loadings on the way. Resulting from that, the costs and logistics of the route is much more complicated. Thus, countries involved in the Middle Corridor take decisive steps to make it more attractive by facilitating traffic.

In this respect, the June 2023 establishment of a joint venture between the national railway companies of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan is a critical development.<sup>254</sup> Such a joint venture will definitely add value to the Middle Corridor since it will facilitate transshipment processes and make the passage smoother. Besides, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan are about to adopt a roadmap for the development of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route.<sup>255</sup>

Against the background of the processes taking place in the region, interest in the Middle Corridor passing through Azerbaijan has considerably increased. Especially, stopping to use cargo transportation from the northern direction has caused global companies automatically to turn to the Middle Corridor. China has launched a new railway connection with Europe, passing through the Caspian Sea toward the final destination in Germany. The first train, loaded with textile goods, departed from the Xi'an International Dry Port<sup>256</sup> on 13 April and arrived in Mannheim on 18 May, 2022.<sup>257</sup>

This new multimodal service, which spans 11,300 km crosses the Caspian and Black Seas, passing through Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic.<sup>258</sup>

However, Chinese rail companies are not the only ones showing a preference for the Trans-Caspian route. In response to the growing demand for Eurasian traffic, a host of global forwarders, such as Rail-Bridge Cargo, Nurminen Logistics, Maersk, CEVA Logistics, etc. have added a new option – the Middle Corridor – to their portfolio. In other words, when the war in Ukraine started, these companies adjusted their policy and announced that they stopped to use the traditional route – the Northern Corridor and preferred the Middle Corridor that avoids Russia and Belarus in its transport between Asia and Europe.

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251 <https://georgiatoday.ge/bridging-the-gap-georgias-middle-corridor-opportunity/>

252 <https://www.railfreight.com/corridors/2022/11/16/eu-scrambles-for-central-asian-connections-a-response-to-growing-russian-presence/>

253 <https://www.railpage.com.au/news/s/middle-corridor-unable-to-absorb-northern-volumes-opportunities-still-there>

254 <https://report.az/en/infrastructure/azerbaijan-georgia-and-kazakhstan-establishing-joint-venture-in-field-of-railways/>

255 <https://report.az/en/infrastructure/azerbaijan-kazakhstan-mull-roadmap-for-development-of-trans-caspian-int-l-transport-route/>

256 <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/chinas-new-railway-connection-with-europe-passes-through-caspian-sea-2022-4-22-0/>

257 <https://www.railvolution.net/news/xi-an-mannheim-train-routed-via-southern-route-has-arrived>

258 <https://www.railfreight.com/beltandroad/2022/04/19/xian-starts-new-trans-caspian-multimodal-service-but-its-not-the-only-one/>

## Challenges triggered by the new situation

There are a number of impediments to the development of the Middle Corridor: these are both the institutional and physical geography of the countries. Before the war in Ukraine started, the share of the corridor was between 3-5%. Some of this traffic is now promptly shifting to the Middle Corridor. Along with this shift some difficulties have also more evidently appeared. The corridor has so far been unable to absorb larger volumes because of the restrained capacity of the corridor which needs to be immediately increased.

The World Bank carried out an extensive study on the route and came up with a Strategy and Action Plan. According to this plan, the Trans-Caucasus Transport Corridor, an important segment of the Middle Corridor, can reach a high-efficiency level if Georgia and Azerbaijan coordinate and follow specific actions, including customs processes, access transparency and fair competition, the launching and proper set-up of a joint venture, the organisation of block trains and the optimisation of intermodal infrastructure.<sup>259</sup>

Due to the sharp increase in cargo volumes transported through the Middle Corridor, one of the main challenges the stakeholders of the Middle Corridor faced is to deliver the cargo according to the schedule. To achieve this, the parties should settle the problem of the shortage of wagon platforms. In parallel, the number of feeder vessels operating between the ports in both the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea needs to be increased to strengthen transport connectivity along the route. Last year, one of the first step taken was to launch additional feeder services over the Caspian Sea.

As can be seen, the main problem with the corridor is that it involves slow and costly ferry legs to cross, first, the Caspian Sea and, then, the Black Sea from Georgia to the ports of Romania or Bulgaria. As ferry and port services are insufficient, the crossing of the Caspian Sea is a major bottleneck. Also, an underdeveloped rail route through Turkey and Romania creates extra hurdles.

Moreover, one of the Middle Corridor's disadvantages is the lack of unified tariff for the entire length of the route. Coordination among countries located along the route seems to be lacking, too. This lack of a single operator can be indicated as the weakest point affecting the corridor, which would greatly reduce the cost of transportation. In addition, another major issue that reduced the efficiency of the Middle Corridor and contributed to the cost and delays is the infrastructure that is also relatively outdated and requires more upgrades. Among other things, it is pivotal to resolve all these bureaucratic problems.

In outline, to meet all these demands emerged from the disruption in traditional routes, first of all, it requires to identify some institutional problems and secondly some major physical infrastructure bottlenecks along the Middle Corridor that links the West and the East.

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259 <https://report.az/en/infrastructure/wb-azerbaijan-georgia-can-transform-middle-corridor-here-s-what-they-should-do/>

## Opportunities in the circumstances of today

European shippers importing goods from China through Russian territory faced an ethical dilemma when Moscow launched the war against Ukraine. In that situation, the Middle Corridor became the most feasible alternative to the main route, running through Russia and Belarus. Additionally, as a transit link between Europe and Asia, the Middle Corridor is 2.000 km shorter compared to the Northern Corridor. It also has more favourable climate conditions which can help to shorten the travel time. The most noteworthy advantage of the Middle Corridor is its availability: this route is not subject to any international sanction.

Most importantly, if the Middle Corridor is used effectively, along with important economic benefits from the trade between China and Europe it will assist the Central Asian and the South Caucasus countries to strengthen their strategic autonomy.

Currently, the main priority is to increase the competitive advantage of the Middle Corridor and accelerate the implementation of works to increase the capacity of this route. This depends on how the countries of the Middle Corridor can attract the required investment. According to the EBRD, an estimated total amount is €18.5 billion.<sup>260</sup> If the parties are able to achieve this goal, the route will continue increasingly to become attractive, with improved transit times and quality.

Above all, which geopolitical actor provides that amount of investment, it will unquestionably increase its presence in the Central Asia and the South Caucasus regions.

## The Middle Corridor related infrastructure projects in Azerbaijan

**Port of Baku:** Azerbaijan has built a new port in Alat, with a total area of 400 hectare. Located at the strategic crossroads of major North-South and East-West transport corridors, the Port of Baku provides access to the country's major road networks. The port is connected to the four main international transport routes: to the north (Russia); to the south (Iran); to the west (Georgia and Turkey); to the east (Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan). In other words, all Azerbaijan's major road links meet at Alat, including the Baku-Alat-Ganja-Gazakh-Georgian Border (M2 Highway); the Baku-Guba-Russian Border (M1 Highway) and the Baku-Astara- Iranian Border (M3 Highway), both of which are Azerbaijani segments of the North-South Corridor.

Following the termination of the first phase development in 2018, the Port of Baku has a total throughput capacity of 15 million tons of general cargo, including 100,000 TEU in containers. However, the Port of Baku is currently planning to expand due to the increasing demand. After completing the second phase, the port will be able to transport up to 25 million tons of cargo and 500,000 TEU containers. The master plan for the second construction phase of the Baku Port's expansion has been designed by the Dutch Royal HaskoningDHV consultancy.<sup>261</sup> The design of the second construction phase of Baku International Sea Trade Port will be ready in October 2023.<sup>262</sup> Taleh Ziyadov,

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<sup>260</sup> <https://www.ebrd.com/documents/comms-and-bis/sustainable-transport-connections-between-europe-and-central-asia-pdf.pdf>

<sup>261</sup> <https://www.azernews.az/business/203092.html>

<sup>262</sup> [https://azertag.az/en/xeber/Minister\\_Design\\_of\\_the\\_second\\_construction\\_phase\\_of\\_Baku\\_International\\_Sea\\_Trade\\_Port\\_will\\_be\\_ready\\_in\\_October-2533079](https://azertag.az/en/xeber/Minister_Design_of_the_second_construction_phase_of_Baku_International_Sea_Trade_Port_will_be_ready_in_October-2533079)

Director-General of Baku International Sea Trade Port said that during the second phase, special attention will be paid to container transportation.<sup>263</sup>

Baku port handled over 6.3 million tons of cargo in 2022, which is 13.6% more than in 2021. Also, nearly 52, 300 TEU containers were handled (16% more than 2021).<sup>264</sup> At the same time, during the first seven months of this year, an increase from 3.6 million tons to 4.1 million tons (14% or 500,000 tons) was recorded in the transportation of cargo through the Port of Baku.<sup>265</sup> In general, over the past 7 years, the volume of cargo transshipment at the Baku International Sea Trade Port has more than doubled.<sup>266</sup>

In brief, the strategic position of the Port of Baku at the confluence of numerous international transportation gateways enables it to function as the premier port of the region. The modern port infrastructure provides an increased impetus not only to the national economy and attract investments to its segments, but also the development of international transit and connectivity. What all this means is that the establishment of the port has given a strong boost to the Middle Corridor project and has improved the trade relations between Azerbaijan, Central Asia and the EU.

## **Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line**

The most important development of the past 25 years is the finalisation of the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars (BTK) railroad in the end of 2017. The BTK reopened direct rail transport between the South Caucasus region and Turkey. The railway, after being connected to Turkey's railway grid enables goods to reach further westward into Europe. Since becoming operational in 2017, the 826-kilometer railway line helped to boost trade among Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey with its transport capacity of 6.5 million tons of cargo annually. The figures are expected to ultimately reach 17 million tons per year when the railroad reaches at its maximum capacity. More than 1,5 million tons of cargo have been transported on the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway since its launch in 2017.<sup>267</sup>

The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars line saw 432,284 tons of cargo passing through in 2022. According to Azerbaijan Railways (ADY). ADY claimed that 3,9 million tons of cargo were moved on the route, signalling an increase of over half a million tons compared to 2021 in the East-West route. In general, the transits through Azerbaijan increased by 75% in 2022, 90% of which happened in the North-South route. In 2022, due to the increase in cargo volume, transit transportation reached 7,5 million tons, growing by 2,9 million tons compared to 2021. Additionally, total transportation increased by 3,7 million tons compared to the year before and reached 18,7 million tons of transported cargo.<sup>268</sup>

## **The Zangezur corridor:**

Against the background of the growing demand, it is required to diversify the existing routes and expand the alternatives within the Middle Corridor to keep the supply chain

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263 <https://en.trend.az/business/transport/3736543.html>

264 <https://www.portseurope.com/baku-port-handled-over-6-3-million-tonnes-of-cargo-in-2022/>

265 <https://fins.az/biznes/302954/baki-beynelxalq-deniz-ticaret-limani-ile-yukdasimlar-14-artib/>

266 <https://abc.az/en/news/115689/baku-ports-cargo-transshipment-for-7-years-more-than-doubled>

267 <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/azerbaijan-railways-reveals-cargo-volume-moved-on-baku-tbilisi-kars-2023-1-16-0/>

268 <https://en.trend.az/business/transport/3695664.html>

between Asia and Europe intact. In this context, the Zangezur Corridor proposed by Azerbaijan is the first and most feasible option that comes to mind.

According to the trilateral agreement signed by the Presidents of Azerbaijan, Russia and the Prime Minister of Armenia on 10 November 2020, the main part of Azerbaijan and the country's Nakhchivan exclave will be connected by **a transport line passing through the territory of Armenia.**

Azerbaijan continues the work of creating the necessary infrastructure in its territory, within the framework of the Zangazur Corridor. The construction work of the Horadiz-Aghbend railway has been completed by 38%, and the Horadiz-Jabrayil-Zangilan-Aghbend highway—by 74%. The construction of the two roads will be completed in 2024.

The launch of the Zangezur Corridor is set to benefit all sides in the region with a nominal GDP of \$1.1 trillion. Moreover, the Zangazur Corridor will contribute to Eurasian trade and transport communications that incorporate the interregional economies. Without a doubt, when the Zangezur Corridor starts to operate, transport and logistics capacities of the Middle Corridor will increase significantly. Moreover, the Zangezur Corridor will become a very important transport artery connecting Europe with Asia, and help the entire region to become an international transport and logistics centre.

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In conclusion, the current geopolitical situation in Eurasia has a serious impact on international transport and cargo transportation. It is observed that the traditional routes have lost their relevance, the direction of the international cargo transportation in the East-West direction has been changed, and the enormous cargo flow has been diverted from the north to the south. With optimisation of transit routes on the Eurasian continent, new strategic prospects have been opened up for interregional cooperation.

Under such circumstances, the Middle Corridor has gained momentum as it bypasses Russia which faces logistical problems due to the West-led sanctions imposed on the country after its invasion of Ukraine. Undoubtedly, the development of the Middle Corridor is dictated primarily by the global needs. Since the outbreak of the war, global forwarders and rail operators have looked for alternative routes linking Europe and China. From this perspective, strategically positioned at the intersection of Europe and Asia, the countries of the Middle Corridor try to make it one of the quickest multimodal routes for the transportation of cargo.

Although growth is obvious, the Middle Corridor unfortunately still plays a small role in the transportation of goods between Europe and Asia. It should be pointed out that the Middle Corridor cannot meet all the volume and capacity demands resulting from the disruption caused by the Russia-Ukraine war. But the Middle Corridor still seems to be the only viable alternative as Russia and Iran are subject to sanctions. Against the background of the war, the Middle Corridor now seems to be the only viable alternative to keep the supply chain between Asia and Europe intact.

Therefore, the Middle Corridor, which has capacity constraints is in need of improvement. And the countries along the corridor have to develop more solution to resolve the bottlenecks that hinder freight traffic. In this regard, Azerbaijan proposed to establish an information exchange mechanism using “Single Window” among the customs services

of Middle Corridor countries on 4-15 March 2023. The project would facilitate transit procedures and foster interregional trade and transport connectivity.<sup>269</sup>

These events are helpful and create opportunities for the countries of the Middle Corridor for the transformation into a logistics centre and transit hub. In particular, it will make Azerbaijan one of the important players in the supply chain between Europe and Asia.

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<sup>269</sup> [http://www.traceca-org.org/en/news/single-news/n/simplification\\_of\\_customs\\_procedures\\_is\\_one\\_of\\_the\\_priorities\\_in\\_the\\_development\\_of\\_the\\_traceca\\_corr/](http://www.traceca-org.org/en/news/single-news/n/simplification_of_customs_procedures_is_one_of_the_priorities_in_the_development_of_the_traceca_corr/)

# Iran's strategic location in the Southern Corridor of Europe-South Asia

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Trade and transportation of the European Union and South Asia through Turkey, Iran and Pakistan is a topic that has been seriously discussed in recent years. This southern corridor has been very important since ancient times, and currently, due to the agreements between Turkey, Iran and Pakistan in the framework of the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO), this corridor can play a crucial role in inter-regional transportation. The main problem is that this issue could not be implemented under the influence of some non-economic factors.

This chapter answers the questions : what is the importance of the southern corridor? what capabilities and limitations does Iran have to activate this corridor? what is the future perspective of this corridor? Its main idea is that Iran is a missing Component and Linkage for any corridor or transport plan from north to south and from west to east. Considering Iran's geographical location, territorial security, and road, rail, and sea possibilities, the country provides suitable opportunities for the activation of this corridor.

However, the operationalisation of this corridor depends on the resolve of the political issues between Iran and the European Union. To analyse this, the chapter will first to describe the southern corridor, then explain Iran's different capabilities for this corridor, and finally discuss the existing challenges, the future prospects.

## The Southern Corridor from idea to reality

Since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, due to the independence of Eurasian countries, the increase of inter-regionalism and the expansion of the globalisation process, the issue of transport corridors from Europe to Eurasia, the Middle East and Asia has become an increasingly important trend of regional interactions. Various initiatives such as Silk Roads<sup>270</sup>, TRACECA<sup>271</sup>, INSTC<sup>272</sup> and BRI<sup>273</sup> have been proposed. The initiative of Europe's connection to South Asia has gradually gained importance in the light of these developments. Starr writes in this regard that:

Trade between the Indian subcontinent and Europe has burgeoned in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. India, in turn, was the EU's 9<sup>th</sup> biggest trading partner in 2016, according to the European Commission. It is clear that one-third to two-fifths of the total measured by value could be moved most efficiently by road or rail, provided these routes function effectively. The reason for this is the time factor, in which land transport has a decisive advantage over sea-based transport (Starr, 2018).

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270 I mean the various plans that have been proposed by the countries of the Eurasian region and neighbouring regions under the name of the Silk Road.

271 Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia

272 International North-South Transport Corridor

273 Belt and Road Initiative

The dynamism of East and South Asian economies from China to Indonesia and from Bangladesh to India has provided the basis for the expansion of communication and transportation with the Middle East, Eurasia and Europe. Therefore, countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey will play an important role in this regard. The distance between Western Europe and Iran is around 6,000 km. The Southern Corridor existed uninterruptedly for several thousands of years until the formation of the Central Asian Khanate system in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and the transfer of international shipping to the seas and oceans due to the expansion of shipping after the 15<sup>th</sup> century AD. The southern Corridor is a missing Link that would connect the economies of Europe with Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, and ultimately, with those further eastwards.

In a new World Bank report, India, Iran and Afghanistan are jointly promoting the South Asia «Southern Silk Road» construction project and trying to connect the «Maritime Silk Road» and the «Terrestrial Silk Road» (Noorali & Ahmadi, 2022: 1178). The South Asia Corridor is one of the international corridors defined in global transit, the purpose of which is to connect Southeast Asia through Iran to Western countries in the Mediterranean Sea and Southern Europe, especially Turkey. As some researchers claim :

This route, starting from Southeast Asia and passing through the Indian subcontinent, entered the territory of Iran through Mir Javah on the southeastern border of Iran and exited the territory of Iran through the northwestern borders including Bazargan, Razi and Khosravi on the border of Turkey and Iraq. It extends towards the Mediterranean Sea and Europe. The length of this route on the Mir Javah-Razi axis is 2496 km and it has the capacity to transport three million tons of cargo (Noorali & Ahmadi, 2022: 1179).

After the 2015 nuclear agreement (CJPA) between Iran and the 5+1, economic relations between Iran and Europe increased and there were positive developments in the field of transportation and then, Tehran, Baku, Tbilisi and Kiev had signed an agreement in 2016 to potentially divert up to 10 million tons of the India-Europe trade to the path (financial Tribune, June 20, 2017). Negotiations regarding the activation of this corridor are still ongoing, and the authorities of Iran, Armenia and Georgia, especially after the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, have increased efforts to strengthen this transportation route, and the negotiations are continuing at the beginning of 2023.

These points show that the Southern Corridor is a basic necessity for trade interactions between the European Union and South Asia, and the series of talks and agreements have gradually turned it into a reality, and Iran also has an important place in this corridor, which we will discuss further.

## **Iran's capabilities**

Iran has an important position in the region in terms of its geographical location, logistics infrastructure, agreements related to international transportation corridors, and membership in regional organisations, which we will discuss in this section.

### **Geography**

According to Brzezinski, Iran is a geopolitical axis that has the real possibility of becoming an active geopolitical actor (Brzezinski, 1997: 41). According to Kaplan, Iran is located in



the south of Mackinder's central and vital zone and within Spykman's Rimland<sup>274</sup> zone. He describes Iran's communication and transportation importance and writes:

Iran is the global connection point of the Middle East. Mackinder's axis should be moved to the south of Iran instead of the steppe land of Central Asia. Therefore, Iran is of fundamental importance for global geopolitics. Geography dictates that Iran will be a central country in the Greater Middle East and Eurasia (Kaplan, 2012).

With 1,656 nautical miles of proximity to the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman and active and ready ports, Iran has extensive communication advantages. This makes Iran a vital point of access to the seas of the Caucasus and Central Asia. Asisian, writes about Iran's situation:

Iran is a bridge that connects North/South/East and West with ports accessible to Eurasian countries and has a large transportation system that connects the important population centers of Eurasia with the Middle East and Africa. Iran can close the Eurasian ring and make it impenetrable, or Iran's alliance with maritime powers can trouble Eurasian powers (Asisian, 2022: 9-11).

In fact, Iran has been the missing linkage of any Eurasian regional initiative, order, cooperation and integration, because it is a connecting point of cultural, intellectual, security and institutional trends in the three strategic regions of the Middle East, Eurasia and Asia. These important communication features, along with economic, energy and security capabilities, can create an important position for Iran as a responsible and positive actor in shaping the future regional and international system. With Iran's 2021 membership in the SCO, its geographical scope has expanded to the Greater Middle East. Iran's membership increases the strength of the SCO (Yuan, 2021).

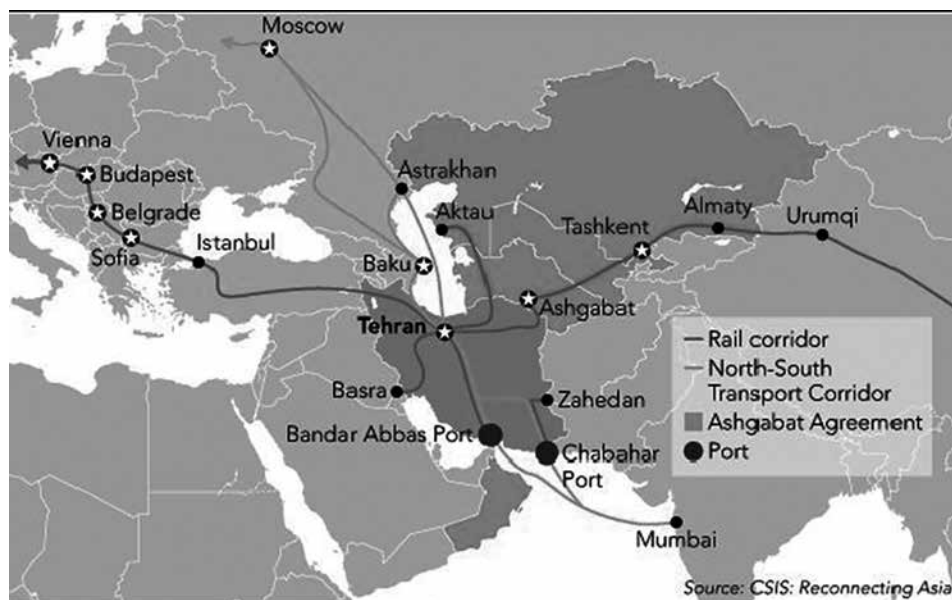
Therefore, we see that Iran has a unique position in connecting the global strategic regions of the Middle East, Eurasia and East Asia. In this regard, Iran's vast communication and transportation infrastructures are abundant for access to the open seas, and its territory is very close and economical to transfer energy to the ports and open seas. As we know one of the important problems of Eurasian countries is the issue of access to global markets and the issue of corridors, despite many efforts, has not yet been able to reach a clear end and be effective in the economy of the countries.

The main reason is related to the exclusive and competitive view of the corridors, which has ignored the main and closest route, which is the North-South corridor from Iran, due to the negative view of the US and the pressure on the regional governments. According to the developments mentioned in this article, Iran's extensive capabilities are increasing in terms of infrastructure, situation and institutions, and the international and regional conditions are also increasing due to the Ukraine war, Russia's eastern strategy, and the US tensions with Russia. Iran's membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation has also provided important opportunities to actualize these capabilities. According to Hafez Nia:

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<sup>274</sup> The Rimland is a concept championed by Spykman, professor of IR at Yale University. To him, geopolitics is the planning of the security policy of a country in terms of its geographical factors. He described the maritime fringe of a country or continent; in particular the densely populated western, southern, and eastern edges of the Eurasian continent (See: <https://americangeopoliticalsociety.com/rimland>).

The new government of Iran's focus on eastern policy and neighbourhood can also create a more suitable situation. In terms of communication location, the geographical space of Iran connects the regions of Europe, Eurasia, the Middle East and South Asia (Hafeznia, 2020: 15).



### International Corridors

Iran's strategic geography has been of great historical importance for connecting the Eurasian regions to the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, the eastern Mediterranean and Levant regions to South Asia, and the European and Anatolian regions to the Indian subcontinent. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this connecting feature still remains and Iran is present in the agreements of North-South Corridor, TRASICA and ECO Regional Economic Cooperation Organisation. But the age of communication corridors in Iran should not be ignored. In this regard, it is said that:

One of the important corridors, which has a historical aspect and was referred to as the "Royal Road"<sup>275</sup> in ancient times, is the west-east route of Iranian roads that connected the Mediterranean to the Indian subcontinent and Central Asia (Raisenejad , 2021: 192-193).

The TRACECA program was launched in Brussels in May 1993 which brought together trade and transport ministers from the original eight countries of Central Asia and Caucasian republics. Iran joined this corridor in 2009 as the 14<sup>th</sup> member. With the activation of the presence and participation of Iran in this corridor and the development of cooperation and the activation of TRASICA programs through Iran, the member countries will see a reduction in the costs of transportation and border traffic and optimize activities, while

<sup>275</sup> The Royal Road was an ancient highway reorganized and rebuilt by the Persian king Darius the Great of the first (Achaemenid) Persian Empire in the 5th century BC. Darius built the road to facilitate rapid communication on the western part of his large empire from Susa to Sardis. Mounted couriers of the Angarium were supposed to travel 1,677 miles (2,699 km) from Susa to Sardis in nine days; the journey took ninety days on foot.

Iran's membership in TRASICA. While it is considered as its southern branch, it will also lead to the joining of countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan that have been willing to join this corridor.

Another international transportation plan in which Iran is at the center is the North-South Corridor, which started in 2000 with the participation of Russia, Iran and India and later joined by other countries of the region, it became operational in 2022 and currently operates from the route of Russia, Southern Caucasus, Iran and the Persian Gulf to India. This plan is a combined land and sea transportation, which, although still started with a limited capacity, is gradually expanding. In its evolutionary process, this plan has also covered :

The path of the Black Sea and talk was initiated by the railways of Iran, Azerbaijan and Georgia in 2016 with the aim of transporting goods from Southeast Asia, India, Persian Gulf countries to Europe and vice versa. In order to activate the "South-West" corridor project and to attract cargo on the way to the member countries, several meetings have been held among the member railways. The member countries of this corridor are Iran, Republic of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine and Republic of Poland<sup>276</sup>.

It should also be mentioned the consultations that are going on in 2023 and are focused on the Black Sea route to Georgia, Armenia and Iran. In this regard, many negotiations have been held and important agreements have been made. Currently, Iran is trying to strengthen the communication infrastructure of this route. After four rounds of expert negotiations—in Tehran (2016), Sofia (2017), Tbilisi (2018) and again in Tehran (2019)—the 5<sup>th</sup> expert meeting on this corridor was hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, in Yerevan on 19 April 2023. Some considerations explain Iran's interest and support for this strategic transit corridor. In this regard,

Iran intends to connect its ports located in the Oman Sea (Chabahar Port) and the Persian Gulf (Bandar Abbas, Imam Khomeini and Khorramshahr ports) in the south of the country, to the ports located on the Caspian Sea (Amir Abad, Nowshahr, Anzali and Astara ports) in the north, via the Iranian rail network (Kaleji, 2021).

### *Regional Cooperation*

Considering that the seven members of the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) are landlocked and do not have access to the open seas (except Iran), therefore, since the 1990s, this organisation has taken important measures to identify missing communication links, connect transportation networks, and create appropriate infrastructures (Koolae & Moaddab, 2009: 138). The ECO's strategy in the field of transportation focuses on creating suitable infrastructure to facilitate the transfer of goods and passengers through rail, road, air and sea transportation lines and postal communication. In the 1996 Izmir Agreement, and the 1998 Almaty «Transportation and Transit Framework Agreement», the necessary legal grounds for the creation of the «East-West» and «North-South» routes including Europe, the Caucasus and Asia have been provided (Omidi, 2009: 227-226).

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276 <http://portalhamlonaghl.ir/fa/138377>

In 2003, the TTFA Trade Transit Framework Agreement was signed in Istanbul with the aim of facilitating trade and transport between ECO member countries, and then, in this regard, the member countries have decided to launch the following routes:

- (1) Corridor Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul, with a length of 6,566 kilometers, which can connect South Asian countries to Central Asia, Persian Gulf and Europe. Also, this corridor helps to reduce road traffic and by connecting Zahedan to Razi and then to Turkey, it increases transportation.
- (2) Istanbul-Almaty Corridor is 6,208 km long, starting from Istanbul, Turkey, and ending in Almaty, Kazakhstan, of which 1,619 km is located in Iran.
- (3) Bandar Abbas-Almaty Corridor with the origin of Bandar Abbas in Iran and the destination of Kazakhstan in Almaty is 3,765 km long, of which 1,619 km is located in Iran, and after Iran, it passes through the countries of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan<sup>277</sup>.

Pakistan has already signed a preferential trade agreement with Tehran, and now Pakistan's talks with Iran on free trade have also begun, which can become a big step in strengthening bilateral trade and helping regional connectivity. The role of ECO member countries is very important for promoting the transit trade agreement and exploiting mutual capabilities in order to realize the vision of ECO and expand trade between them<sup>278</sup>.

### Logistic Infrastructure

Iran's transportation and communication infrastructures have existed since the distant past. In the previous three decades, the Iranian government has been working on modernizing its communication systems both within the framework of the agreements related to ECO, the North-South Corridor and TRACECA. Currently, there is a wide range of these infrastructures.

### Transport and infrastructure in Iran

Ways	Total	per 1 mio inhabitants	per km <sup>2</sup>
Roadways	223,500 km	2,541.81 km	128.06 m
Railroads	8,500 km	96.49 km	4.86 m
Waterways	850 km	9.67 km	0.49 m
Commercial harbors	893	10.16	0.001
Airports	43	0.49	0.025

Source: <https://www.worlddata.info/asia/iran/transport.php>

It should also be mentioned the active ports of Iran along the Caspian Sea (Amir Abad, Nowshahr, Anzali and Astara ports), the Persian Gulf (Bandar Abbas, Imam Khomeini, Rajaei, Bamonar and Khorramshahr ports), and the Oman Sea (Chabahar Port). These ports provide important opportunities for North-South and East-West transportation

<sup>277</sup> <http://portalhamlonaghli.ir/fa/138377>

<sup>278</sup> <https://www.irna.ir/news/85009173>

within the framework of the INSTC, TRACECA and Southern Corridors. Currently, 12 ports are active in international and regional transit.

Chabahar Port, as an oceanic port of Iran with a capacity of about 8.5 million tons in the first phase, has a very high capacity for transit development due to its geographical location. If the railway and road transport infrastructure of Chabahar Port is completed, neighbouring countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Turkey and Central Asian countries will be able to use more of the capacity of this unique port to transport their export and import goods. Chabahar Port, as the gateway to Iran's eastern axis, is a "key part" of the international North-South and West-South corridors, and through the eastern and northeastern borders of Iran, it provides a sea-land route to Afghanistan and Central Asia for India.

## Challenges and Prospects

Despite the basic necessities for activating the southern corridor from Europe to South Asia and Iran's important capacities for this, there are various challenges to activating these capacities. In this regard, one can mention the US sanctions against Iran, as well as the regional crises in the Caucasus, the Middle East, the India-Pakistan rivalry, and Afghanistan. American sanctions have limited the possibility of investing in the creation and expansion of Iran's transportation infrastructure. One of the important limitations for the southern corridor is that there are many missing links from Europe to Iran and from Iran to South Asian countries, without completing them, it will not be possible to fully connect these transportation routes.

In this context, several cases can be mentioned. The case of Chabahar Port is important in this regard and the slow process of cooperation between India and Iran continues. While India was exempted from Trump's sanctions against Iran due to reconstruction activities in Afghanistan, it has stopped all work at Chabahar Port for the past four years and only resumed operations late 2020. In fact, there is fear of secondary sanctions against India. Companies active in trade with Iran have always remained in Iran. The 630 km long railway line was supposed to be built by Indian companies, but eventually Indian media reported in July 2019 that Iran had pulled the country out of the Chabahar-Zahedan railway project due to delays by Delhi.

The agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia to resolve bilateral and regional problems and return of Syria to the Arab community is an important step to resolve the crisis in the Middle East, but it is not enough and more initiatives should be provided for regional stability and security. Stability in Afghanistan requires dialogue with the Taliban to behave within the framework of humanitarian and international standards. South Caucasus issues are becoming more complicated day by day due to the reduction of Russia's role. At the same time, this situation should not be viewed too pessimistically. In Starr's words:

Any assessment of the political risk arising from promoting the Southern Corridor is evidently affected by the likelihood of success in that endeavor. One crucial variable in its favor is the fact that all countries along the Southern Corridor have already launched important infrastructure projects of their own that feed directly into the proposed continental network. If a large financial actor were to calculate and announce the likely scale of continental and regional trade along the Southern Corridor route, and

then proceed to back efforts to remove impediments to its realisation, this would impact dramatically on the calculations of all countries involved (Staar, 2018).

It seems that one of the important possibilities for the activation of the southern corridor is the expansion of relations between Iran and the European Union. In this regard Coville writes:

It is now time for the EU to defend its strategic interests in the region by starting a new partnership with Iran. Such a partnership has vital economic and diplomatic dimensions for Iran and the EU. Besides, framing a policy with Iran with regard to European economic and geopolitical concerns could also be a way to increase EU's legitimacy in Europe and abroad (Coville, 2014).

It seems that there is a promising prospect for the operationalisation of the southern corridor. On the one hand, due to the extensive Western sanctions against Russia, the Northern Corridor has faced problems. On the other hand, the agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the gradual return of Syria to the Arab community, and the negotiations between Turkey and Syria have made the prospect of resolving the crisis clearer than in the past. Despite the priority of the Eastern policy, the Iranian government has understood the importance of Western relations more than ever before. These events can increase the hope of an agreement to strengthen the southern corridor through Iran.

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In conclusion, in the last three decades, in the light of the expansion of globalisation, the independence of Eurasian states and the economic development of East and South Asian countries, the process of interregional cooperation has become an important reality. On the other hand, important transportation plans have been presented to connect the countries of this region to the open seas and global communication centers and TRACECA, INSTC and BRI have been very important in this regard.

But the Southern Corridor, which connects Europe through Turkey, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea to the South Caucasus, Iran, the Persian Gulf, the Oman Sea and South Asia, has received less attention. Due to the crisis in Ukraine since 2014 and the war between Russia and Ukraine since 2022, which has led to extensive Western sanctions against Russia, the conditions for paying more attention to strengthening the southern corridor have increased. Iran has been placed in the center of this corridor due to its geographical and regional strategic features and ignoring it is not easy and any regional transportation plan will be incomplete without taking Iran into account. In fact, Iran will be the missing linkage in any plan for regional cooperation, economic integration and expanding transportation in the Eurasia and Middle East.

The nuclear case and pressures and sanctions against Iran, as well as regional crises in Afghanistan, Syria and the South Caucasus have been obstacles to the creation and strengthening of this corridor. The agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia and the beginning of Arab states' interactions with Syria will be an important step to start the process of solving some regional issues. Now more than ever, Iran wants to solve the problem of America's return to the nuclear agreement. This issue can gradually solve the problem of sanctions and cooperation between Iran and the West. But the cooperation

of Iran, Turkey and Europe will be the main key to start the interactions to create the southern corridor, which seems to be not far from reach.

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The South-West Transport Corridor Project and the Geopolitical Reshaping of the South Caucasus, Publisher Jamestown Foundation, Author Fuad Shahbazov, Publication Date: 17 July 2017, Citation / Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 14 Issue: 93

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# The role of logistics in promoting economic cooperation among Central Asian countries<sup>279</sup>

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The Central Asian region has no access to the oceans but, historically, has always been at the crossroads of trade routes, making logistics a fundamental component of economic growth. New transport routes and well-thought-out logistics can be essential in promoting economic and political cooperation between Central Asia in the face of unpredictable geopolitical risks. This chapter shows and justifies the importance of developing and implementing logistics initiatives and joint projects for developing economic cooperation in Central Asia. It examines the impact of logistics on trade and economic growth in Central Asia and identifies the challenges and opportunities for the development of CA logistics projects.

We used an exploratory design to collect secondary qualitative and quantitative data and analyze selected cases of logistics routes, projects, and initiatives. The chapter provides a deeper understanding of the current situation with the logistics infrastructure and projects implemented in the region and the challenges and opportunities the CA countries may face.

Logistics is critical to the integration and cooperation of Central Asian countries, reducing trade barriers and promoting economic cooperation. The economy of the Central Asian region is characterized by high transport and transit costs because “land-lockedness implies a high transport cost burden”<sup>280</sup>. Central Asia is a region that brings together the five countries of the former Soviet Union, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan, whose mutual trade in foreign one increased from 6.4% in 2013 to 9.9% in 2021<sup>281</sup> and which share a common historical past and strategic importance for the Eurasian continent and has some potential for deeper economic and political integration.

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279 The Committee of Science of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan funds the research. The targeted funding program is BR18574168 “The role of Kazakhstan in deepening regional integration of CA countries and its sustainable development goals within modern global trends.”

280 Raballand, G. (2003). Determinants of the negative impact of being landlocked on trade: An empirical investigation through the Central Asian Case. *Comparative Economic Studies*, 45(4), 520–536. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.ces.8100031>

281 Eurasian Development Bank. (2022). *Economy of Central Asia: A new look (In Russ.)*. Retrieved 2023, from [https://eabr.org/upload/iblock/d0b/EDB\\_2022\\_Report-3\\_The-Economy-of-CA\\_rus.pdf](https://eabr.org/upload/iblock/d0b/EDB_2022_Report-3_The-Economy-of-CA_rus.pdf)



Today, Central Asia is the object of a “fierce game” between key countries and regions such as Russia, the United States, China, the European Union, Japan, India, Iran, and Turkey over “energy geopolitics”.<sup>282</sup> On the one hand, the “BRI initiative presents a colossal opportunity” for Kazakhstan to become a central logistics hub; on the other hand, “this prospect is overshadowed by geopolitical risks that have escalated since the beginning of 2022”.<sup>283</sup>

The CA countries’ ability to access worldwide markets and increase their competitiveness would be made possible by an effective and efficient logistics infrastructure. The logistics infrastructure will also help promote intra-regional trade by offering platforms for exchanging goods and services. So, Central Asian countries may benefit from better regional integration and cooperation thanks to logistical infrastructure and services. Additionally, governments may promote economic cooperation, develop trade, and enhance regional integration by putting adequate logistical infrastructure in place. It may strengthen ties between the countries and pave the way for more cooperation in security, education, and tourism.

The chapter emphasizes the necessity of effective logistics to ensure smooth commodities flow, lower transportation costs, and boost regional economic development.

## **Literature review : how logistics promotes regional and intra-regional economic cooperation.**

Logistics is a military-based term<sup>284</sup> first of moved military troops, equipment, and products. Because of “the technology boom and the complexity,” *logistics* has become a multifaceted and intricate process<sup>285</sup> that involves the detailed planning, organisation, and implementation of delivery and storage of goods, services, and information from the point of origin to the point of consumption. Logistics is still crucial in the military, although it is often employed in supply chain logistics.<sup>286</sup> Logistics is necessary for any economy, ensuring that goods, services, and information are transported *smoothly* for businesses, consumers, and states. It encompasses an array of activities, including “managing pipelines, vehicles, storage facilities, and distribution centers.”<sup>287</sup>

The significance of logistics cannot be overstated, particularly regarding integration and cooperation in CA. Abula et al. (2022) examined the effects on the cross-border supply chain for agricultural products between China and Central Asian nations in the analysis based on panel data of Central Asian countries from 2010 to 2019. Their findings demonstrate that the supply chain’s degree of development is favorably influenced at various levels of importance by the economic development, market size, logistics development level, and connectivity of the region’s railway and road networks.<sup>288</sup>

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282 Zhou, Q., He, Z., & Yang, Y. (2020). Energy geopolitics in Central Asia: China’s involvement and responses. *Journal of Geographical Sciences*, 30(11), 1871–1895. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11442-020-1816-6>

283 Brauweiler, H.-C., & Yerimpasheva, A. (2022). *Challenges and opportunities to develop Kazakhstani logistics projects within the BRI*. Discourses in Social Market Economy. Retrieved April 27, 2023, from <https://ideas.repec.org/p/zbw/opodis/20222.html>

284 Kenton, W. (2023, January 13). *Logistics: What it means and how businesses use it*. Investopedia. Retrieved April 9, 2023, from <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/l/logistics.asp>

285 Ibid

286 Essex, D. (2019, October 29). *What is logistics?* ERP. Retrieved April 8, 2023, from <https://www.techtarget.com/searcherp/definition/logistics>

287 *What is logistics? definition of logistics, logistics meaning*. The Economic Times. (2023). Retrieved April 9, 2023, from <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/definition/logistics>

288 Abula, K., Abula, B., Hu, Q., Chen, X., & Wang, D. (2022). Research on the High-Quality Development Path of the Cross-

At the same time, it is essential to distinguish between these modes of transport since railways, while requiring high investments, have a long-term sustainable impact. In contrast, the construction of roads is cheaper and has a direct effect in the short term, but requires constant investment in their maintenance.<sup>289</sup>

In 2007, the World Bank, together with the University of Turku (Finland), for the first time, developed a methodology for evaluating the Logistics Performance Index (LPI).<sup>290</sup>

The essence of the Logistic Performance Index is to provide the “quality of trade and transport-related infrastructure.”<sup>291</sup> The Logistic Performance Index’s components are: Speed and simplicity of customs control, Development of trade and transport infrastructure, Organisation of deliveries at competitive prices, Competence of logisticians and quality of logistics services, Ability to track cargo (monitoring and tracking), Timeliness of cargo delivery.<sup>292</sup>

The CA countries have one of the lowest LPI indices, even though “they are quite attractive due to their available natural resources, large markets for industrial and consumer goods, and a convenient transit position.”<sup>293</sup>

Table 1 provides information on the logistical performance index and its six parameters in Central Asian states for the year 2018.

**Table 1. Logistical Performance Index in Central Asian Countries<sup>294</sup> (1 = low to 5 = high), 2018**

	Overall	Competence and quality of logistics services	Ease of arranging competitively priced shipments	Quality of trade and transport-related infrastructure	Efficiency of customs clearance process	Ability to track and trace consignments	Frequency shipments reach consignee
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Kazakhstan	2.81	2.58	2.73	2.55	2.66	2.78	3.53
Kyrgyz Republic	2.55	2.36	2.22	2.38	2.75	2.64	2.94
Tajikistan	2.34	2.33	2.31	2.17	1.92	2.33	2.95
Uzbekistan	2.58	2.59	2.42	2.57	2.10	2.71	3.09
Turkmenistan	2.41	2.31	2.29	2.23	2.35	2.56	2.72

Border Agricultural Product Supply Chain between China and Central Asia. *Agronomy*, 12(10). <https://doi.org/10.3390/agronomy12102558>

289 Karymshakov, K. and B. Sulaimanova. (2020). *The Impact of Infrastructure on Trade in Central Asia*. ADBI Working Paper 1184. Tokyo: Asian Development Bank Institute. Retrieved April 26, 2023, from <https://www.adb.org/publications/impact-infrastructure-trade-central-asia>

290 Kurochkin, D. (2013). Evaluation of the effectiveness of logistics according to the methodology of the World Bank and its correctness (in Russ.). *Logistics and supply chain management*, 2(55). URL: <http://www.lscm.ru/index.php/ru/po-godam/item/761>

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293 Azimov, P. H., & Nadzhmiddinov, D. I. (2019). Development of regional transport and logistics system in Central Asia in the context of globalisation of world economy (in Russ.). *Scientific and Technical Bulletin of SPbSTU. Economic Sciences*, 12(6), 85–92. <https://doi.org/10.18721/JE.12607>

294 The World Bank. Logistics performance index: Overall (1=low to 5=high). (2018). World Bank Open Data. Retrieved April 26, 2023, from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/LP.LPI.OVRL.XQ>

According to Table 1, the overall LPIs for all CA states are at the average level varying from the lowest 2.34 in Tajikistan to the highest 2.81 in Kazakhstan. The other indicators vary across countries. For example, in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the performance based on competence and quality of logistics services is at 2.58 and 2.59, while in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, these indices are at 2.36, 2.33, and 2.31. The ease of arranging competitively priced shipments was the worst in Kyrgyzstan and the highest in Kazakhstan. Quality of trade and transport-related infrastructure is another index where Uzbekistan has a higher score: 2.57 to 2.55; in contrast, rest indices (6), (7), (8) are demonstrating better performance in Kazakhstan; and Uzbekistan is in second place.

Sergi et al. (2021) examined how strategic sub-components of the Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) affect LPI in different regions such as Africa, Asia, and Europe: the LPI and chosen GCI factors - infrastructure, human factor, and institutions - are hypothesized to be related. So, according to research, the human aspect is more critical for LPI improvement in Europe, infrastructure for Asia, and Africa logistics growth depends on all three.<sup>295</sup> Bhukiya & Patel (2023) insist on the relationship between LPI and International Trade, and due to LPI, countries can identify areas where they can improve to “compete effectively in the global market.”<sup>296</sup> Alioni and Park (2020) investigated the cause-and-effect relationships between “logistics performance, environmental performance, ease of doing business, and global competitiveness and the GDP” and defined that “logistics performance is the essential construct” for the growth of GDP in the selected countries, with a more significant impact in low-income nations and governments are recommended “to prioritize the improvement of logistics performance if they lead to better GDP performance.”<sup>297</sup>

According to James Jay Carafano (2022), nations in the southern Caucasus and Central Asia have been quick to take advantage of Russia’s problems and expand their alternative China-Europe freight route, and today they are communicating through the Middle Corridor, sometimes referred to as the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR); it travels from Southeast Asia and China via Kazakhstan, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey before arriving in Southern or Central Europe. It is the quickest path between Western China and Europe regarding distance. The governments of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Turkey joined together on 31 March 2022, to sign a statement on enhancing the region’s transportation potential.<sup>298</sup> Today’s regional integration of the countries of Central Asia along the “Middle Corridor” has been one of the many significant geopolitical effects of Russia’s war in Ukraine, can entitle itself as a “viable alternative to the long-established northern route through Russia.”<sup>299</sup>

The prospects for developing the logistics infrastructure of Central Asia will be associated with the search for ways to bypass Russia. For example, South Korean researcher Gu Ho

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295 Sergi, B. S., D’Aleo, V., Konecka, S., Szopik-Deczyńska, K., Dembińska, I., & Ioppolo, G. (2021). Competitiveness and the Logistics Performance Index: The ANOVA method application for Africa, Asia, and the EU regions. *Sustainable Cities and Society*, 69, 102845. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scs.2021.102845> The World Bank. Logistics performance index: Overall (1=low to 5=high). (2018). World Bank Open Data. Retrieved April 26, 2023, from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/LP.LPI.OVRL.XQ>

296 Bhukiya, S., & Patel, R. (2023). The relationship between Logistics Performance index and International Trade: An empirical analysis. *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews*, 4(3), 1505–1508. <https://doi.org/10.55248/gengpi.2023.32488>

297 Alioni, C., & Park, B.-I. (2020). Analyzing the path model of GDP performance through logistics performance and related global index variables. *Korean Logistics Research Association*, 30(5), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.17825/klr.2020.30.5.1>

298 Carafano, J. J. (2022, August 29). *Central Asia’s Middle Corridor gains traction at Russia’s expense*. GIS Reports. Retrieved April 22, 2023, from <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/middle-corridor/>

299 Ibid

(2022) considers that the Russian invasion of Ukraine will affect Central Asia's politics and economy.<sup>300</sup> However, according to the same Gu Ho (2022), it would be difficult for Central Asia to reduce its reliance on Russia in the short term because this country continues to be the dominating regional actor in the region's political, economic, and security spheres, despite China's expanding influence in Central Asia.<sup>301</sup>

The same opinion is shared by Kazantsev et al. (2021), who insist that CA countries have only the choice to integrate with Russia and China, which is defined by the present geopolitical climate.<sup>302</sup> The content of such discourse changed dramatically after February 2022. The war in Ukraine has brought to the surface the problems and weaknesses of transport and logistics routes, which were cut off due to hostilities and economic sanctions. Such a weak and risky link turned out to be the CPC pipeline system with a length of 1,511 km and a current capacity of 67 million tons of oil per year<sup>303</sup> (Milkin, 2022) and connecting the fields of Western Kazakhstan with an oil terminal near the Russian city of Novorossiysk.

Since 1991, the five Central Asian republics previously known as “Kazakhstan and Srednyaya Aziya” have been participating in integration logistics initiatives of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Let us consider the main infrastructure projects crossing the borders of the countries of Central Asia. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, mass media, the Silk Road Economic Belt, and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) were considered the “driving forces behind Eurasia's development.”<sup>304</sup> However, “the growing democratic sentiments in the post-Soviet countries... make the cooperation of the EAEU and the Belt Road Initiative (BRI) more problematic”<sup>305</sup> and especially nowadays in the context the war in the center of the continent. The New Silk Road program overlaps existing integration logistics projects, such as TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia) and CAREC (Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation).

TRACECA, a multilateral cooperation program proposed by the European Union in 1993, is a complex multimodal system of land and sea routes providing a direct link between Europe and Asia. The peculiarity of this route is the delivery of goods according to a single transport document throughout the entire route using different modes of transport, significantly reducing the cost of transportation and the duration of the journey. It has been believed that TRACECA “may affect the geopolitical interests of the Russian Federation.”<sup>306</sup>

Another integration initiative is the CAREC, launched in 1997 with the involvement of China, Russia, and Mongolia. Eleven nations and development partners are members of the CAREC Program, which aims to accelerate economic growth and reduce poverty by fostering development via collaboration.<sup>307</sup>

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300 Gu Ho, E. (2022). Impact of the Ukrainian War on South Korea's diplomacy in Central Asia. *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 13(2), 172–179. <https://doi.org/10.1177/18793665221124814>

301 Ibid

302 Kazantsev, A., Medvedeva, S., & Safranchuk, I. (2021). Between Russia and China: Central Asia in Greater Eurasia. *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 12(1), 57–71. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1879366521998242>

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## Methodology and theoretical framework of the research

The theoretical framework of the study is the theory of new regionalism. In contrast to the old regionalism, which was characterized “by competition between two superpowers (bipolar)” and in the “Cold War context was shaped by the interests of the dominant superpowers,” the new regionalism is shaped by the “interests of actors such as domestic civil society in addition to the states themselves.”<sup>308</sup> Zimmerbauer K. & Paasi A. (2013) suggest “that regional identity, regional activism, and resistance should not be downplayed or mis-labelled as regressive features, but should be understood as important ingredients in contemporary regional transformation.”<sup>309</sup>

According to Zvyagelskaya (2022), “the concept of regionalism is based on identity, i.e., the cultural, historical, political association of individuals, peoples, states, leaders with a certain region” which fully corresponds to when we talk about a region such as Central Asia.<sup>310</sup> Moreover, Neilson et al. (2018) state that “logistics change working lives and contribute to the making of world regions” and even “entwine with political power, historical forces, labour movements, and new technologies.”<sup>311</sup>

The authors consider logistics as a “political technology for producing and organizing space and power,” and “Logistical Asia tracks how digital technologies and material infrastructure combine to remake urban and regional territories and produce new forms of *governance and subjectivity*.”<sup>312</sup>

Furthermore, this moment is critical in light of the statements made by the Chinese ambassador to France that the CIS countries do not have full sovereignty because they “do not have effective status under international law”<sup>313</sup> and have to be in the field of interests of the Russian Federation.

## Results and discussion

Trade facilitation is closely related to the level of development of logistics and is considered a technique for encouraging trade via declining formal trade barriers. Felipe & Kumar (2012) estimated the increases in a trade that the Central Asian nations experienced as a result of better trade facilitation<sup>314</sup>: on the other hand, as was mentioned earlier, the Logistic Performance Index by the World Bank can be used to assess trade facilitation.

Economic integration in the Central Asian region, on the one hand, demonstrates certain results in the development of regional logistics infrastructure and the expansion of cross-border trade. For example, the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (Middle Corridor), which runs through China, Kazakhstan, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan,

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308 Buzdugan, S. (2017). *New regionalism*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/new-regionalism>

309 Zimmerbauer, K., & Paasi, A. (2013). When old and new regionalism collide: Deinstitutionalisation of regions and resistance identity in municipality amalgamations. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 30, 31-40. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2012.11.004>

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314 Felipe, J., & Kumar, U. (2012). The role of trade facilitation in Central Asia. *Eastern European Economics*, 50(4), 5–20. <https://doi.org/10.2753/EEE0012-8775500401>

and Georgia, and then goes to Turkey and European countries, and the construction of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway would significantly reduce transportation costs.

On the other hand, there are severe failures and problems in the logistics industry in Central Asia; with a solution, it will be easier to carry out economic cooperation in the region. Concerted actions of all stakeholders to expand logistics capabilities and promote cooperation and integration of the CA countries should be identified, agreed and implemented.

These actions include the construction and modernisation of infrastructure, the optimisation of customs procedures, the expansion of trade, innovation in new technologies, the development of human capital, and the development of common rules and standards. International economic organisations, subject to close regional cooperation and coordination of all Central Asian countries, should facilitate this activity.

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In conclusion, logistics are essential to promote economic cooperation in Central Asia: lowering transportation costs, promoting intra-regional trade, and enhancing regional integration may result from investments in efficient logistics infrastructure and services. The role of logistics in facilitating economic cooperation among the countries of Central Asia must be considered since logistics is the framework for the development of economic development and sustainable growth in Central Asia. The countries of Central Asia are actively involved in joint international and regional logistics infrastructure projects and cross-border trade.

In the last decade, the countries of Central Asia have implemented many logistics infrastructure projects that have contributed to the development of trade in the region by reducing formal trade barriers. Some authors attribute the increase in trade volumes to the development of logistics infrastructure. This analysis is carried out using the Logistics Performance Index, which can be used as an indicator for evaluating trade facilitation.

# CONCLUSION

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My pleasure in being asked to conclude such a fine book that draws from so many clear-sighted intelligences as that of its chapter-authors, besides myself, is tainted by the daunting – yet simple – fact that it is still countries and their territories that “lead the world”, not “ideas” as such and no longer abstract theories, philosophies or *Weltanschauungen* ...

The book proceeds from a powerful title : “*Logistics and Diplomacy*”. Is this over-ambitious ? Yes, if the ambition is to “squeeze” the full complexity of decisions and choices as to the routes or *Roads* borrowed - or indeed created - for transporting goods across-borders into some “categories of the mind” (Kant) that would explain and indeed rationalise all these choices and arbitrations. No, if the ambition is to document – and this book is a treasure of up-to-date information on transport corridors, negotiations, obstacles and solutions to that effect – the present situation in the 2020s, beyond Covid-19 and over the war in Ukraine and by-passing Russia’s territory (North route). As well as provide the reader, beyond this state-of-the-art account, with reflexions for the long years and for the decades to come.

In other words, conceptual analysis, even if it pales before the “astonishing seeds [glitches] of reality” (J. Prévert), is still welcome by practitioners who accept “facts” as necessary starting points of social sciences (Durkheim), facts that ought to be addressed to concepts and visions. I therefore ask all readers and all chapter-authors for their benevolence when I address this conclusion from the point of view of social sciences.

From an epistemological point of view, the title *Logistics and Diplomacy* suggests to highlight the causal and perhaps determining link between “Logistics” and “Diplomacy”. There is no need to fully define the terms Logistics and Diplomacy - this would take days; but to find their link, the relation between them. Still, logistics is the organisational fine-tuning of transport, it is much more than transport. And Diplomacy is the framework (and inasmuch as possible peace or at least security) within which such a fine-tuning may at best be feasible.

Since the epistemological rupture of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, with Machiavelli and Montesquieu, social sciences have turned to the search for causality among societal phenomena, that Durkheim called “things”. This search for causality requires the highlighting enabled by the triple contribution of Positivism, of Relativism and of Determinism.

*Positivism* suggests that there *exists* a relation among social facts, thus between Diplomacy and Logistics. Indeed, diplomacy can be a context facilitating exchanges but it is not enough as such for material prosperity. It takes production and transport, and border-crossings for International Trade, theorized by D. Ricardo, to generate “the Wealth of Nations”, to paraphrase A. Smith.

*Relativism* posits that this relation is of a *causal* type: Logistics and Diplomacy would be the cause of each other, or else – as Durkheim said – they would both be the effect of a third phenomenon. That is the whole point ! : suggesting that Diplomacy is not enough. Something is missing for international trade. But what is missing ? A universal peace, in a Kantian idealist approach ? A lasting humanism and therefore a utopia ? Or ... ?

*Determinism* then suggests that this causality *explains* the facts (and perhaps explains them completely (?) if it is a question of absolute determinism). There would then exist a “thing”, a “phenomenon”, which would not only transcend Diplomacy in its causal relation to Logistics but which, moreover, would enable Logistics to reverse the logic and make Diplomacy dependent on commercial exchanges. Hence the “Commercial Diplomacy” that has been gradually taking over ambassadorial work over the elapsed thirty years.

These are, in a nutshell, the preliminary aspects, or Point 1 : the premises of an epistemological reflection, that to me “flows” quite naturally from this book.

Point 2 consists of the book-chapters and their informative and probing intelligence. Through their presentations and analyses, they bridge the passage from Epistemology to Methodology. These chapters build on from the requirement to “understand” what we are talking about, to the requirement to “know” this “thing” of which we are tackling the analysis. How Asia imposes itself on the world *as a Trade Route*, whether it is called the Silk Road or something else. How Europe and the Pacific become “mere” *relay-points*, from the “core” Asia (MacKinder), to the rest of the world ... “peripheries” (Spykman).

To these questions, this seminar in Tajikistan and the next one in 2024 in South Asia, offer answers. The Dushanbe seminar is published in this second book (2023-2024) – after the seminars in Tashkent, Almaty and Bishkek were published in 2022. As to the 2024 seminar in South Asia, it will be published in 2024-2025.

It goes without saying that the book editors are, each time, in the debt of the chapter-authors, without whom no hint of an analysis would have seen the day of light, not to mention the human contacts and friendships that ensue.

*P. Chabal*

Le Havre, Almaty, Astana, Bishkek, Tashkent, Ulaanbaatar...

19 November 2023



# POSTFACE

*Abdukhalil DAVLATALI*

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Tajikistan has gone through a difficult path of formation, development and improvement, finding an optimal model of interstate and institutional cooperation, adapting its institutions and mechanisms to modern realities. The institutional and political development of Tajikistan in relation to the world, like any other process, is undergoing stages of evolution, when new structures and institutions are built gradually, and today this is observed all over the globe.

On this path of formation, the young state, which had just gained its independence, faced a series of urgent challenges, the solution of which depended on the fate of millions of its citizens and the future of the entire Central Asian region. Among these challenges, one should especially highlight the way out of the communication impasse in which our state was located, which was previously located on the periphery of another state that ceased to exist (USSR). The result of the almost complete absence of transport and logistics links with other states of the region was clearly seen in the insufficient intensity of economic activity and humanitarian contacts, which in terms of their volume clearly did not correspond to the potential of the states of the region.

In subsequent years, thanks to the targeted policy of the leadership of our republic, Tajikistan was able to radically transform its transport and logistics infrastructure, which in turn led to a multiple increase in trade between the states of the region and an increase in the total number of transit international cargo transportation through the logistical hubs of our republic.

The states of the region did not limit themselves to the rapid growth of trade in the region, but also tried to include humanitarian issues in the agenda of joint activities, one of the clearest examples of which is the issue of assistance to Afghanistan.

Over the years of its independence, Tajikistan has advocated an increase in humanitarian cooperation with Afghanistan, the proof of which is:

- construction of a large number of bridges across the Panj River, which plays the role of a natural border between both states;
- launch and implementation of the CASA-1000 project, through which it is planned to redirect electricity generated in the territory of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in the summer to Pakistan and Afghanistan;
- the construction of other power transmission lines through which Tajikistan has not stopped the transmission of electricity to Afghanistan for a single day since the day these infrastructures were built;
- admission to higher educational institutions of the Republic of Tajikistan of a large number of students who are citizens of Afghanistan.

And today, despite the current serious situation in Afghanistan, Tajikistan was the first to offer its territory for the transportation of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. Moreover,

humanitarian aid of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan is distributed among more than 120 thousand people in need in Afghanistan.

Multilateral diplomacy allows, taking into account nation-state interests, to achieve the level of interaction with other countries which is necessary for the region:

- strengthening regional security, this relates to the political sphere of geopolitical reality, as well as to achievements, tasks and dilemmas of foreign policy and diplomacy;
- in the economic sphere, the implementation of the principles of a free trade zone, the evolution of foreign policy interaction in the face of threats and new challenges of our time;
- in the field of education, the development of cooperation in cultural, educational, scientific and other fields.

Over the past decades, Tajikistan has been adhering to water diplomacy. The initiatives of the President of the Republic, esteemed Emomali Rahmon, made a valuable contribution to the correct understanding of water-related issues and problems at the global level, and their solution for economic and social development, ensuring the sustainability of environmental protection, achieving peace and stability and overall sustainable development. The Republic of Tajikistan, taking into account the growing attention of the world community to water issues and the importance of water resources, has managed to put water issues on the world agenda in order to achieve the sustainable development of this vital resource.

Nowadays, the importance of culture in international relations is increasing. The practice of international cooperation shows that cultural influence is particularly effective in comparison with other methods. The choice of a model for the implementation of cultural diplomacy is determined by historical traditions and features of the political system, the degree of influence of the state on the dynamics of cultural processes, and also by the international conjuncture. Tajikistan has a unique experience of actively using the tools of cultural diplomacy to achieve its foreign policy goals.

The degree of influence of the state on the process of forming the image of the country and the development of intercultural dialogue is determined not only by historical traditions and political structure. The strengthening of this role is dictated by the realities of international processes in the current conditions of globalisation and information openness. One of the priorities of the country's foreign policy is the development of international relations based largely on the rapprochement of cultures. Tajik diplomacy is a diplomacy of peace. Tajikistan stands for cultural dialogue, for peace and harmony, not only in the countries of Central Asia, but throughout the world.

The path to the universal resolution of conflicts relies precisely on dialogue, which is based on the assertion of the principles of justice and human rights, as well as a culture of tolerance and peace. Throughout the history of all mankind, diplomacy, regardless of its historical model, be it political, economic or cultural, is called upon to serve as the most effective tool for dialogue.

# AFTERWORD

Mino SALMONOVA

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This book *Logistics and Diplomacy (II) in the extended Central Asia* offers readers a scientific insight into the larger part of the Central Asian (CA) region which spans over 4 million km<sup>2</sup> and possesses natural and manufactural resources that, in cumulative GDPs, have expanded by an annual average of 6.2% in real terms, reaching \$347 billion. Populated by nearly 80 million residents located in five countries : Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, today's CA is regarded as one of the fast-growing regions in terms of population and economy. It is thus a region in high-demand on trade and logistic infrastructure necessary to accommodate the needs of its respective population while considering economic diversification. In brief, CA thrives to become a regional transport and logistic hub.

Despite the challenges of finding a common ground for solving several impending threats from the southern borders adjoining Afghanistan, the CA region shows tremendous potentials in becoming a leading exporter hydropower electricity. Whilst the book reveals a strength through advantages of some countries attained and possess in energy independence, some are landlocked, and thus need to look for other options to establish or regain a traditional trade diplomacy. Once paved in the past as the "Silk Road" and renewed in the "Belt and Road" initiative, these "routes" today are longed for and meant to create thousands of miles of the inland roads and bridges to become a trusted partner for the past communist allies. At the same time, the book gives an interesting diversion of the strategical alternative routes in the South Asia such as Iran's Chabahar port and Gwadar port of Pakistan that have a promising potential to robust economic ties with the CA and far beyond. These are not only advantageous for the CA's economies and also allows to shed the light to the existing need for Afghanistan in reinforcing initiatives as Trans-Afghan Corridor (TAC) via CA's countries. Entrusting some certain projects to revive shall give to a significant part of the region grasp for new socio-economic opportunities as well as interlaced in mutual benefits.

Another perspective of an extended co-operation exemplified by the Transcaspian corridor, thoroughly analysed in the book, as an alternative is that established by the Turkic States – including Georgia – Transcaspian International Transport Route known as a Middle Corridor. Aimed to provide coordinative co-operation of the participants in transportation of goods and containers along the route from Asia via the Caucasus to further Europe and in a reversed direction. International land and sea-based multi-mode transport network was also brought as functioning sample of the International North-South (Transport) Corridor. Among others, this also holds a function to attract investment links for the landlocked Eurasia via India and vice-versa. It is worthwhile to mention also the role of the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) in widening the export range of services and products that require a robust set of measures in areas such as trade policy, co-ordination of sectoral policies, diversification, and business reforms.

On the whole, thus, the book provides an interesting perspective of CA collaboration with the European Union through TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus – Asia) considered to support the political and economic independence after the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union and subsequent CA access to the European and global markets through road, rail and sea.

Such a scientific approach in exploring the CA region has always been in a limelight of the researchers' interest, however not always has it been reflected duly in the historical manuscripts for the European audience, as the region was curtailed under the Soviet Union and later under its legacy. The joint initiatives such as that of IFEAC, LexFEIM and Fondation SEFACIL along with academicians are very timely arranged to reveal the state of affairs and related policies. For CA, such initiatives aimed to facilitate in attaining its deserved attention and become a widely known as a potential strategical partner, therefore attract more investment in trade and logistics.

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# LOGISTICS & DIPLOMACY II IN THE EXTENDED CENTRAL ASIA

edited by **Pierre CHABAL**, **Parviz MULLOJONOV**, **Adrien FAUVE**  
with the collaboration of **Eva TAUZIET**

"Logistics and diplomacy", historically, constitute a joint dynamics in Central Asia. From the influence of Chinese dynasties to the Mongol conquests by Genghis Khan, from the epic tales of Marco Polo to the powerful trading role of the caravanserais, Central Asia constitutes a formidable mosaic of geographic immensity and anthropic diversity. From this boundless horizon, peoples have turned logistics into a vector of diplomacy. Unless it be diplomacy which unites humans around logistical imperatives in order to guarantee the unhindered movement of goods and people?

As a continuum of transition and connectivity, Central Asia is establishing itself as a global crossroads. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan aspire to ever more diplomatic and logistical convergence. Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, India, the European Union, the United States of America and even Turkey: almost all the major world players also claim synergies and partnerships on the altar of the "diplomacy and logistics" couple.

This book brings a new key to understanding the issues, challenges and perspectives of the "logistics and diplomacy" duo in a vision that expands Central Asia beyond its immediate margins. The multidisciplinary nature of this opus demonstrates how the "logistics and diplomacy" couple embraces a multiplicity of other couples such as those of "politics and economy", "energy and ecology", "culture and aesthetics", "history and geostrategy".

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