



AGENDA OF COOPERATION IN CENTRAL ASIA ACCORDING TO COMMON INTERESTS

At a time when the political and security issues in the region became more and more important, a consultation meeting was held under the chairmanship of the leaders of the Central Asian states, President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, President of Kyrgyzstan Sadyr Japarov, President of Tajikistan Imomali Rahman, President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev and President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguli Berdimuhamedov. Along with the presidents of the Central Asian countries, the special representative of the United Nations (UN) Secretary General in Central Asia, Natalya German, also attended the meeting. A program for the future was formed by discussing important issues regarding the security of the region and improving international relations between the five brotherly and neighboring states. The first consultation meeting of the heads of state of the Central Asian countries was held in Kazakhstan in 2018 and the second in Uzbekistan in 2019. The third meeting, which was planned to be held in Kyrgyzstan in August 2020, was postponed due to the pandemic. The consultation meeting, which was postponed to different dates, was held in Turkmenistan on August 6th 2021 with the slogan "Five fingers of one hand".

In recent years, developments in the national economies of countries, energy demand as a result of population growth and the importance of security has become a frequent topic on the agenda of the countries of the region. When the introduction of green energy and energy-efficient technologies, the creation of energy fields, the fight against drought and the solution of water shortages are considered as common interests, the rapid resolution of regional problems will also contribute positively to the development process. Among these problems, there are common interests and common security issues such as the increasing cooperation of the relevant ministries of the countries in the field of energy in the solution of energy problems, the ever-growing demographic of the region, and the inadequacy of food and agricultural products which have become more visible due to the pandemic. At this point, the need to establish a regional food safety monitoring system for each country has emerged by the agriculture ministers of the Central Asian countries. It was decided to come together and hold a meeting every year to resolve such issues. In this context, the joint action and cooperation of the Central Asian states is directly related to all the states in the region. There are also common points in the establishment and development process of the Central Asian states, which have a common origin, as independent states. As a result of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, five Central Asian states declared their independence in 1991 and established diplomatic relations among them. First, on December 13th 1991, the leaders of these five brotherly countries made suggestions to strengthen cooperation between the states. It was even suggested that the name of the region be changed to Turkestan. However, the civil war in Tajikistan in 1992 and Turkmenistan's preference for a "neutral country" hampered the attempt to mobilize this union in the region. However, despite such difficulties, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan after the agreement on the establishment of an economic union in 1993, formed an organization in 1994 and declared its name as "single economic area". Afterwards, the name of the organization was changed to the "Central Asian Union" in 1995 and the "Central Asian Economic Union" in 1998. Although the name of the organization was later

changed to "Central Asian Cooperation Organization", it has not played an active role in the development of cooperation between the countries of the region for many years. In 2007, the Central Asian Union was established with the suggestion of the Founding President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, in order to develop cooperation between the countries of the region.

Among the cooperation issues of the countries in the region, economic and commercial relations are among the leading issues. As it is known, the trade volume between Central Asian countries has a small share in the total exports of the countries. At this point, the differences between economic sizes should also be taken into account. For example, if the total trade volume of the countries in the region exceeded 152 billion dollars in 2019, intra-regional trade remained at the level of 6.1 billion dollars. In both numbers, Kazakhstan has the majority share. In this regard, we can state that the region has not reached its full trade potential, although the low share of the intra-regional trade volume in the total is taken into account in issues such as global competition, export and import compatibility. Continuing to develop the economic relations between the countries of the region in various aspects will allow the trade volume to increase to a certain extent.

Through the frequent inclusion of regional countries' interests and common interests in the policy agenda, emphasize the importance of joint evaluation and solution of public transport and transportation as well as economy, trade and infrastructure problems. During the last consultation meeting, the Presidents called for sharing the available opportunities and jointly resolving the shortcomings. It has been noted that there are many opportunities to increase the trade volume between the five countries through the efficient use of infrastructure opportunities. Kazakhstan, emphasizing the importance of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, stated that there is a great logistics and transportation potential in the China-Europe-China direction and that they attach great importance to the development of these opportunities. As an example of regional transportation projects can be shown the second line of the "Dostik-Moyinti" railway with a cost of 2 billion dollars. If the construction of this project is completed by 2025, it is estimated that the transport capacity of the region will increase by up to five times. At the same time, the Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railway line will provide ample opportunities for the Central Asian countries to increase their trade with Persian Gulf countries. On the other hand, the development of the southern corridor of the Trans-Asian railway line has a great role. For example, the Darbaza-Maktaal railway line between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan has reduced the freight transport time by one and half times. The Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabil-Peshawar railway line will not only bring Central Asian countries to a new level of international relations with South Asia, but will also be one of the ways to support Afghanistan in accelerating the process of global economic relations. The "Turkmenbashi-Karabogaz-Kazakhstan Border" highway is expected to increase freight and passenger traffic between Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. It has been noted that the ports of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have great potential in the region, the number of containers transported over the Caspian Sea has increased 13 times in the last three years, and a container center is planned to be established in Aktau port of Kazakhstan. There are other projects apart from the

Turkestan-Shymkent-Tashkent high-speed railway line (project cost of 70 million dollars) between the states of Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan. Kazakhstan stated that the modernization of the Beyneu-Akjiigt highway will positively affect the transportation issue from the city of Kurik in Uzbekistan to the port of Aktau.

Military and defense security, which is among the most important areas of security issues, has attracted the attention of the whole world in the past months, and the latest events in Afghanistan cause various concerns about the stability and future of the region. The joint action and cooperation of the Central Asian states is directly related to every state in the region. In this context, an important factor in ensuring and strengthening security and stability in the region is the peaceful resolution of the situation in Afghanistan as soon as possible. The capture of capital Kabul and almost the whole of the country by Taliban causes uncertainties in many subjects, from the conduct of state affairs to the attitude towards the local people, where Central Asian countries need to discuss many new security problems from forced migration to border security. It was noted that the leaders, who are aware of the importance of working jointly with both Central Asian countries and international organizations on the migration wave and the delivery of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, are ready to provide all necessary assistance for the solution of the problems that may arise in Afghanistan and for the stability in the country at the consultation meeting of the presidents of the Central Asian countries. Nevertheless, as mentioned before, ensuring security and stability in Afghanistan is among the essential issues in line with the interests of the countries in the region.

The participation of Natalya German in the meeting reveals the view that the leaders want to emphasize the desire of the Central Asian countries to strengthen their cooperation with other countries and the UN in the international arena. At this point, it is also important that there are many references to UN documents in the text of the declaration adopted at the end of the meeting. Finally, in line with the joint agreement of the consultation meeting, it is expected that the creation of a working group from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Central Asian countries will increase the cooperation between the states. The leaders of the five countries agreed to maintain trust and equality, promote common interests in the development of the Central Asian region and solve common problems through negotiations and consultations on the basis of the statutes and principles of the UN and other international organizations.

As a result, the importance of acting with the understanding of unity and solidarity within the scope of cooperation with the countries of the region was felt by the five Central Asian countries, which gained independence in 1991 and became members of the UN on March 2nd 1992, after completing the state establishment and seeking a new way for the development of the countries. It is clear that this process will continue in the future. It is necessary to solve the stability and security issues in the region together in order to bring new breakthroughs in economy, trade and investment to the agenda more frequently. Thus, regional cooperation will be strengthened and continued in the future, thanks to joint cooperation against the economy, food, defense and similar security problems. It will make positive contributions to the interests of the countries of the region and will enable their relations to be strengthened.

Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- The President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev delivered a State-of-the-Nation Address outlining the key priorities of the national agenda for the forthcoming period. The President evaluated the implementation of the "Economy of Simple Things" and "Business Roadmap" programs as efficient and extended the validity periods of these programs. Thus, the course for large-scale and prompt support of small and medium-sized enterprises has been preserved. (Kazinform, 01.09.2021).
- The United Kingdom revealed its plans to provide financial assistance to the countries bordering Afghanistan. It will allocate \$41 million to help accommodate refugees. According to the presented plan, of this amount, \$14 million will be sent to humanitarian organizations, including the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. The remaining funds will be provided to Pakistan, Tajikistan, Iran, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, where there are significant numbers of refugees leaving Afghanistan. According to data, most of the refugees go to Pakistan, and Tajikistan has promised to take 100 thousand people (Trend, 03.09.2021).
- Kazakhstan took part in the joint anti-terrorist exercise of the competent authorities of the CIS member states "Caspian-Anti-terror - 2021" in Aktau. The opening of the meeting was attended by delegations of security agencies and special services of the CIS member states. The exercise was aimed at conducting an anti-terrorist operation to free hostages and demonstration of the actions to eliminate the consequences of a terrorist act on marine oil and gas industry infrastructure (Tengrinews, 02.09.2021).
- The President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko announced that Belarus would acquire dozens of combat jets, helicopters and air defense missile systems from Russia. President Lukashenko also admitted that Belarus could receive S-400 anti-aircraft systems, which are capable of shooting down air targets at a distance of 250 kilometers. The news is in line with recent intensification of cooperation between Russia and Belarus (Euronews, 02.09.2021).
- The U.S. and Ukraine reached strategic agreements during the visit of the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy to Washington as part of a working visit at the invitation of the head of the White House, Joe Biden. The sides signed important documents on military cooperation including the framework agreement on strategic foundations of defense partnership. The United States is announcing a new \$60 million security assistance package and express its readiness to support Ukraine's aspirations to join NATO if Ukraine manages to implement necessary reforms (Whitehouse.gov, 01.09.2021).
- Turkey and Azerbaijan began a joint military exercise in Baku. The main goal of the exercises with the participation of Azerbaijani and Turkish servicemen is to improve the interaction of the armies of the two countries during hostilities, to develop the skills of military decision-making, command and control of units among the commanders. The exercise will also include submarine attack and submarine defense (Aa.com.tr, 02.09.2021).

Economy, Finance, and Energy

- According to Kazakh Minister of Energy Nurlan Nogayev, 59 new renewable energy facilities will appear in Kazakhstan by 2025. As a result, a total number of the facilities will exceed 180 throughout the country with a capacity of approximately 4500 megawatts. Development of the renewable energy sector is an important condition for ensuring the energy security of Kazakhstan. The authorities plan to attract one trillion tenge of investments (\$2.31 billion) in the sector, which will double the share of renewable energy sources (Qazaq TV, 03.09.2021).
- Uzbekistan continues to deepen cooperation with international financial institutions. On the sidelines of the 46th annual meeting of the Islamic Development Bank Board of Governors held in Tashkent on September 2, Uzbekistan's government and Bank have agreed to establish a new \$500 million Fund for Expanding Economic Opportunities to support projects aimed at reducing poverty and developing entrepreneurship. The President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev considered this event as a recognition of Uzbekistan's success in implementation of consistent reforms (UzReport, 02.09.2021).
- The energy cooperation between Kyrgyzstan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is deepening. Recently, representatives of the country's Ministry of Energy and Industry had a meeting with a delegation from the UAE. The UAE delegation mentioned a high potential for renewable energy sources in Kyrgyzstan. The MASDAR Company had previously invested \$110 thousand in the construction of a solar power plant in Uzbekistan and now it is interested in investing in solar power plants in Kyrgyzstan (Kabar, 04.09.2021).
- The Belarusian Agriculture and Food Minister Ivan Krupko had a meeting with Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Belarus to China Yuri Senko. According to officials, during the first half of 2021, the country's exports to China increased by 1.5 times compared to the same period of 2020, reaching \$156 million. The parties discussed new measures to promote the country's products on China's market. In 2020, agricultural exports to China increased by 1.9 times in comparison with 2019 exceeding \$255 million (BelTA, 03.09.2021).
- The number of international partners of the Eurasian Economic Union is rising. The Prime Minister of Thailand Prayut Chan-ocha during his speech at the Eastern Economic Forum mentioned that the country hoped to conclude a free trade zone agreement with the EAEU. Thailand intends to continue constructive dialogue with the EAEU member states, in particular Russia and Kazakhstan. The Prime Minister also stressed that Russia's Far Eastern region can contribute to the creation of the Greater Eurasian Partnership (TASS, 04.09.2021).
- Ukraine and the State of Qatar are expanding their economic cooperation. The Prime Minister of Ukraine Denys Shmyhal had a meeting with the Minister of Commerce and Industry of Qatar Ali bin Ahmed Al Kuwari. The parties discussed trade and investment issues. Shmyhal mentioned that in 2020, the volume of trade in goods and services between the two countries amounted to \$146 million. The parties reached an agreement on the establishment of a Joint Business Council (Ukrinform, 02.09.2021).

Society and Culture

- The Youth Choir of TURKSOY makes a tour of the cities of Turkey dedicated to the 30th anniversary of the independence of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The first concert of the TURKSOY Youth Choir took place in the city of Hatay and was organized in cooperation with the mayor's office of the city. This concert, organized with the participation of the mayor of the city of Hatay Lütfü Savaş and held within the framework of the Year of Yunus Emre and the Year of the Turkic language in the city of Hatay (Turksoy.org, 03.09.2021).
- The government of Japan will allocate almost \$600 thousand for the construction and reconstruction of six schools in Tajikistan. The grant projects will be implemented within the framework of the Government of Japan Program for Gratuitous Aid and Humanitarian Security for the General Population (GGP). The documents were signed by the Ambassador of Japan to Tajikistan Takayuki Miyashita and representatives of the beneficiary organizations. The new school will be built in the cities of Rogun, Levakante, Kulyab as well as remote villages Shakhrinov, Khovaling, Lakhsh, Varzob, Kuhistoni Mastchoh and Baldzhuvan districts (Avesta.tj, 03.09.2021).
- The Kyrgyz city of Osh hosted the 3rd Young Leaders Forum, which was organized by the Turkic Council and the State Agency for Youth Affairs, Physical Culture and Sport of Kyrgyzstan. About 100 youngsters from the Turkic Council countries participated in the event dedicated to the 30th anniversary of the independence of Kyrgyzstan. The forum consisted of sessions focusing on ways to strengthen youth cooperation within the scope of the Turkic Council. The event was attended by Deputy Secretary General of the Turkic Council Omer Kocaman, and the Deputy Director of the State Agency for Youth Affairs of Kyrgyzstan Soyuzbek Nadirbekov and other high-ranking officials (Dailysabah.com, 02.09.2021).
- The feature film "Tomiris" produced by the "Kazakhfilm" studio was released in Turkey. The premiere of the film took place with the participation of Kazakh diplomats, Turkish politicians, representatives of the intelligentsia and the Kazakh diaspora. The screening will also take place in more than 200 cinemas in various Turkish cities. Distributors from America, Great Britain, Italy, Spain, Japan, the Middle East, South Korea, the CIS, Singapore, Romania and France also acquired the rights to show the picture about the queen of the great steppe (Kazinform, 03.09.2021).
- The prospects of cooperation between Azerbaijan and Georgia and the rehabilitation of cultural monuments in Azerbaijan's liberated lands were discussed during the meeting of Azerbaijani First Deputy Culture Minister Vagif Aliyev and Chairman of the Georgian State Agency For Religious Issues Zaza Vashakmadze. Vagif Aliyev expressed gratitude to the Georgian government for its political support to Azerbaijan during the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War. Zaza Vashakmadze expressed his confidence that the bilateral ties between Azerbaijan and Georgia will continue to successfully develop in various areas (Azernews, 01.09.2021).
- The Embassy of Kazakhstan in Armenia, with the assistance of the Dilijan City Hall, organized a photo exhibition dedicated to the 30th anniversary of the closure of the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site. The visitors of the event could see unique historical photographs depicting nuclear tests at the test site and their consequences. They were also familiarized with the Nevada-Semei anti-nuclear movement and Kazakhstan's contribution to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation (Kazinform, 01.09.2021).