



SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION: HISTORY AND ROLE IN REGIONAL SECURITY

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is an international organization that was established in 1996 with the members of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan. From its first meeting of the leaders of five countries in 1996 during 20 years it has become an international organization. Russian and Chinese are the two official languages of the SCO, the organization has two permanent bodies one of which is the General Secretariat in Beijing and the other is the Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure in Tashkent. Under the SCO organization cooperation among the member states did not limit with the security area and span to other fields such as education, economy and transport which strengthened the cooperation ties between member states over the years. In 2007, Russia proposed the establishment of a university that would provide a system of interaction between universities of the SCO member states. The proposal was accepted in 2008 and the university started operating in 2010. It includes universities from more than 80 universities in Belarus, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Specialists are trained in 7 areas of master's degree, including regional studies, ecology, energy, IT technology, nanotechnology, pedagogy and ecology.

Within the development process of SCO number of countries in the region had shown interest in joining the organization. For instance, in 2000 Uzbekistan participated in the summit as an observer. On June 15th, 2001 during the Shanghai Summit Uzbekistan has become the new member of the Shanghai Five, and after this event, the name of the organization has changed to SCO. The member states signed the Shanghai Convention on Strengthening Friendship and Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism, in addition to political, economic and scientific spheres, agreed to establish a regional anti-terrorist structure and proposed Bishkek as their center. In 2002 in St. Petersburg heads of state of the SCO signed the SCO Charter and established a regional anti-terrorist structure.

In 2004, the SCO was granted observer status at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly. Since then, the organization's geographical expansion has increased, and in the same year, Mongolia became an observer state. At the 2005 meeting of the Organization, the Presidents decided to grant observer status to India, Iran and Pakistan. In 2007, the SCO member states signed an agreement on long-term good neighborliness, friendship and cooperation. It was decided to grant the status of dialogue partner to Sri Lanka and Belarus in 2009. In 2012, the SCO member states adopted the Declaration on the Establishment of a Zone of

Long-Term Peace and Common Prosperity. In the same year, Afghanistan was granted observer status and Turkey was granted dialogue partner status. In 2014, India and Pakistan applied for full membership in the SCO. In 2015, the procedure for consideration of applications from India and Pakistan began. Iran and Afghanistan are full members, Belarus is an observer state, and Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia and Nepal have become dialogue partners. After these developments, SCO, including the observer countries, has spread across the 61% of the Eurasian continent.

With two important economic and military power of the Asia namely India and Pakistan becoming a full members of SCO in the 2017 Astana (Nur-Sultan) Summit the global prestige of the organization has gained important momentum. This is due to being able to gather around major players in Eurasia and the Middle East, which pursue different political agendas would allow the SCO to become a platform for dialogue with member states to resolve their issues and enhance their cooperation in security, economy and political sphere. Therefore the participation of the major regional powers like Iran, India and Pakistan has provided a boost to the global prestige of the SCO. In this context, SCO aiming to become an organization that tries to strengthen the cooperation among member states and preserve stability and security would show us that the organization could play a key role in the resolution of the security-related matters in the region. Bringing four nuclear powers together within SCO means of great importance for maintaining global strategic stability. Hence it is also important to state that SCO is not a military bloc like NATO, but an organization working together against the terrorist threat. In this regard, the SCO is working with the UN to strengthen international cooperation in combating threats.

However, after Iran became a full member in September 2021, the long-known "NATO in the East" definition for the SCO has deepened. Nevertheless, as stated in the Declaration on the Establishment of the SCO, the organization is not a military bloc and did not establish itself as an organization to compete with other countries or international organizations. Moreover, it is been stated that SCO would always be loyal to this article in their declaration. For instance, SCO did not stand against U.S. and NATO to carry military equipment via Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in 2021.

The SCO member states will be able to use the principles of the "Shanghai spirit", geographical proximity and its advantages. At the 2018 Qingdao Summit, the Chinese side

announced that they value greatly strengthening the trade and economic relations in general and in particular increasing the cooperation opportunities in transport, e-commerce, education, tourism, logistics and innovation areas. In this regard, the establishment of a "demonstration zone" would act as a trade center for the SCO member states. This could be understood as an initiative to expand the reach of the investments of China's "One Belt, One Road" to the member states of the SCO. China has signed the memorandum of the demonstration zone with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Uzbekistan and Iran. The demonstration zone agreement also fully meets the objectives and directions of multilateral trade and economic cooperation of the SCO member states until 2035 which is discussed in the Tashkent Summit in 2019. On November 20th, 2020, 20 construction projects worth 8,6 billion dollars were launched in the Demonstration Zone. More than 40 cooperation projects have been registered in the region.

The multimodal transport center of the demonstration zone has opened 20 railway freight routes, including 6 international routes to Central Asia, Europe, the Republic of Korea, Mongolia, Russia, ASEAN countries and Belarus. Among them, the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway aims to significantly increase freight traffic. In 2019, the multimodal transport center transported 670 thousand containers in the SCO-China region. In 2020, this number increased by 5%. There is a need to create and develop the infrastructure of multimodal logistics centers connecting different modes along the transport routes of the SCO member states. In order to provide an unimpeded passage of imports and exports at checkpoints of the SCO member states establishment of "green corridors", "single window" procedures and creation of special traffic algorithms are the priority issues which waits for their solution in the agenda of SCO.

In conclusion, it could be said that SCO in its geographical area aims to sustain stability not only by fighting terrorism but also by strengthening its cooperation in economic, transport, education fields which are the important parts of the development process of countries. Therefore the main purpose of this organization is to strengthen cooperation within the region and preserve peace, security and stability. On this point jointly standing against the difficulties and threat and strengthening cooperation among the member states and providing assistance to each other would be evaluated as a good development and valid contribution for the prestige of SCO in the future as well taking into account that many of them at different stages of their development process.

Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- With the start of protests all over the country in Kazakhstan, President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev declared that outside intervention posed a threat to Kazakhstan's national security and sovereignty and asked for help from the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Following this statement, the Chairman of the CSTO Council, Nikol Pashinyan, decided to send peacekeepers to Kazakhstan. The President of Kazakhstan imposed a two-week state of emergency in the country and accepted the government's resignation (Kabar, 06.01.2022).
- The government of Kazakhstan resigned following fuel price protests. The announcement came hours after the government declared a two-week state of emergency following protests over surging fuel prices. By the President's decree, the duties of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan were temporarily assigned to Alikhan Smailov who was the first Deputy Prime Minister in the resigned government (ASIA-Plus, 05.01.2022).
- China and Kyrgyzstan celebrate the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. Recently, the Premier of the State Council of China Li Keqiang sent a message with congratulations to the Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers of Kyrgyzstan Akylbek Zhaparov. Li Keqiang notes that thanks to the strategic leadership and personal involvement of the leaders of the countries, the level of Chinese-Kyrgyz relations has been constantly growing and China attaches great importance to their development (Kabar, 06.01.2022).
- The head of the military intelligence of Ukraine, Brigadier General Kyrlyo Budanov paid a visit to Turkey where he met with his Turkish counterpart, Lieutenant General Rafet Dalkıran. The military intelligence leaders discussed the state of the security situation in the Black Sea region, and around Ukraine, considering current and future threats to the national security of both countries. The leaders of the military intelligence of Ukraine and Turkey signed an agreement on deepening cooperation between the Ukrainian and Turkish military intelligence (Ukrinform.net, 05.01.2022).
- The Secretary-General of NATO Jens Stoltenberg reaffirmed the decisions of the Bucharest Summit on the future membership of Ukraine and Georgia in the military alliance in response to the rhetoric coming from Russia. In particular, it was stated that the Alliance would continue to provide support and continue to work with Ukraine and Georgia as they move forward and comply with the requirements. Jens Stoltenberg also underlined that the freedom of each sovereign state to choose its path and alliances also includes their right not to join the Alliance (Ukrinform.net, 08.01.2022).
- The President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev held a telephone conversation with the President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The Heads of State discussed the current state and prospects of the strategic partnership between Uzbekistan and Turkey, as well as issues of further enhancing cooperation. The sides exchanged views on the situation in Kazakhstan and agreed on the need for taking all measures aimed at ensuring peace and stability in Kazakhstan (UzDaily, 06.01.2022).

Economy, Finance, and Energy

- According to the Energy Minister of Kazakhstan Magzum Mirzagaliyev, oil and gas production in the country continues and three oil refineries are operating in normal mode. The Minister mentioned that the extraction of raw materials decreased only at the Tengiz field and the sale of gas is temporarily restricted at filling stations in some regions. Mirzagaliyev added that retail prices of liquefied gas fell to 50-75 tenge (\$0.12-0.17) per liter on behalf of the President of Kazakhstan (Qazaq TV, 07.01.2022).
- The Ministry of Investments and Foreign Trade of Uzbekistan recently reported that in 2021 the country attracted foreign direct investments worth \$8.6 billion. Within the framework of the state investment program, 318 large investment projects worth \$5.9 billion were implemented. Under the framework of regional investment programs, the country implemented 15,710 projects in the amount of \$7.4 billion (Kun.uz, 07.01.2022).
- Russia will restore oil production in 2022. Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak recently reported that the country would restore oil production by 85% in 2022 from the maximum reduction level in May-June 2020. This came after the Ministerial Meeting of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, which decided to increase output by 400 thousand barrels per day for February 2022. As a result, Russia will restore 1.7 million barrels per day (TASS, 04.01.2022).
- According to data from the Agriculture and Food Ministry of Belarus, the country's export of food products and agricultural raw materials increased by 16% in January-November of 2021 and exceeded \$6 billion. Foreign currency proceeds increased by \$832 million, which are record-high figures compared to the previous years. Belarus supplied food to 106 countries. Export to the CIS countries increased by 12%, while deliveries to non-CIS countries surged by almost 42% (BelTA, 06.01.2022).
- The Ministry of Economy of Ukraine reported that in 2021, exports of the country demonstrated record figures exceeding \$68.2 billion. This volume is the highest figure since 2012. The exports remain important for the country as the inflow of foreign currency allows to finance import costs without destabilizing the foreign exchange market and accumulating international reserves. In 2021, the turnover of goods in Ukraine totaled \$141.54 billion, up 36.71% compared to 2020 (Ukrinform, 05.01.2022).
- Bilateral trade between Azerbaijan and Iran demonstrated positive dynamics in 2021. According to the State Customs Committee of Azerbaijan, trade turnover between the two countries increased by 22.4% or \$87.6 million in January-November 2021. In particular, during the first 11 months of 2021, the trade turnover amounted to \$390.4 million, with exports accounting for \$39.1 million and imports for \$351.2 million. Azerbaijan's exports to Iran increased by 6.6% year on year, while imports from that country increased by 32% (AzerNews, 07.01.2022).

Society and Culture

- Since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, Turkey has provided humanitarian aid to 160 countries in different forms, from protective bodysuits for health care personnel to COVID-19 diagnosis kits and ventilators. Moreover, Turkey is now in talks with nine countries for Phase 3 trials of Turkovac, its first domestically developed vaccine, which recently received emergency use approval. Turkey has long advocated for global solidarity against the pandemic, which raised its profile as a generous nation (dailysabah.com, 05.01.2022).
- The Tajik State Academic Opera and Ballet Theater named after Sadriiddin Aini and the State Academic Bolshoi Theater of Uzbekistan named after Alisher Navoi signed a memorandum of cooperation. The document is intended to strengthen friendly ties between institutions and opens wide opportunities for the touring activities of teams from both sides. Within the framework of the document, special attention will be paid to the implementation of joint creative projects (Centralasia.news, 06.01.2022).
- The Kyrgyz city of Karakol was nominated as the cultural capital of the CIS in 2022. Within the framework of this event, a number of high-level international events are planned to be held in the city. The main task of the decision is to unite and expand cultural ties, promote humanistic values and draw public attention to the rich heritage of a non-capital city (Centralasia.news, 05.01.2022).
- The International Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation organized an event titled "Solidarity of the children of the Turkic world" dedicated to the December 31 – International Solidarity Day of Azerbaijanis and the New Year. The event was aimed to bring together children from different Turkic countries and demonstrate the rich traditions and cultural heritage of the Turkic people. At the event, children from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, and Turkmenistan read poems and sang songs belonging to the countries they represent (Azertag.az, 06.01.2022).
- A music album of "Balaban-Mysterious Musical Heritage" has been released with financial support from the Fund for Support to Azerbaijani Diaspora. The project is meant to promote Azerbaijani music culture, folk music, and composer songs, as well as national musical instruments. Balaban is an ancient Azerbaijani wind musical instrument. The word "balaban" consists of two semantic syllables: "bala" (small) and "ban" (voice), signifying the low voice that matches the timbre of the instrument (Azertag.az, 04.01.2022).
- A well-known blogger on pilgrim tourism, Serdar Tuncer with the help of the Turkish TV channel TRT is filming a program dedicated to the promotion of pilgrim tourism in Uzbekistan. Filming is being carried out in Uzbekistan for the program "along the Golden Chain". The project is intended to promote the tourist potential of the shrines of the "golden chain" on Turkish TV channels. The program will be broadcast in 128 countries on the Turkish channel TRT during the month of Ramadan (UzDaily, 06.01.2022).