

SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION IN COMBATING THE LATEST SECURITY THREATS: IMPACT ON THE COUNTRIES OF CENTRAL ASIA

Zhanar
MEDEUBAYEVA*

Candidate of Historical Sciences, Acting Professor of L.Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan, balapan1967@yandex.kz

DOI: 10.52123/1994-2370-2022-622

UDC 327

CICSTI 11.25.91

Abstract. The article is devoted to the analysis of the activities of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to overcome the latest threats to socio-economic and political security in its area of responsibility. Recently, membership in the SCO has been updated for the countries of Central Asia in the context of the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and post-coronavirus recovery. Standing up against such challenges highlights a number of problems specific to the SCO itself, the effect of which is obvious to the Central Asian members of the Organization.

Keywords: Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the countries of Central Asia, Afghanistan, COVID-19, post-coronavirus recovery, "One Belt - One Way".

JEL codes: F53, F55, F52

Аңдатпа. Мақала Шанхай Ынтымақтастық Ұйымының оның жауапкершілік аймағындағы әлеуметтік-экономикалық және саяси қауіпсіздікке төнген соңғы қатерлерді еңсеру жөніндегі қызметін талдауға арналған. Бүгінде Ауғанстандағы жағдайдың нашарлауы, COVID-19 пандемиясымен күрес және коронавирустан кейінгі қалпына келтіру аясында Орталық Азия елдері үшін ШЫҰ-ға мүшеліктің маңызы артып отыр. Мұндай сын-қатерлерге қарсы тұру ШЫҰ-ның өзіне тән бірқатар мәселелерін ашып көрсетуде, олардың әсері Ұйымның Орталық Азия мүшелері үшін айшықты болып отыр.

Түйін сөздер: Шанхай Ынтымақтастық Ұйымы, Орталық Азия елдері, Ауғанстан, COVID-19, коронавирустан кейінгі қалпына келтіру, «Бір белдеу - бір жол».

JEL кодтар: F53, F55, F52

Аннотация. Статья посвящена анализу деятельности Шанхайской Организации Сотрудничества по преодолению новейших угроз социально-экономической, политической безопасности в своей зоне ответственности. На сегодняшний день членство в ШОС актуализируется для стран Центральной Азии в контексте ухудшения ситуации в Афганистане, борьбы против пандемии COVID-19 и посткоронавирусного восстановления. Противостояние против таких вызовов оттеняет ряд проблем, характерных для самой ШОС, эффект которых очевиден для центральноазиатских членов Организации.

Ключевые слова: Шанхайская Организация Сотрудничества, страны Центральной Азии, Афганистан, COVID-19, посткоронавирусное восстановление, «Один пояс - один путь».

JEL коды: F53, F55, F52

Introduction

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is one of the pillars of the security system in Eurasia. Today this Organization uniting countries with large human and natural resources has become a tangible factor in world politics. For Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan the SCO is one of the necessary platforms for discussing pressing problems, improving interstate cooperation in the absence of intraregional integration mechanisms. The SCO membership means

the aiming for ensuring both national and regional security in the most essential aspects – from economy to the threat of terrorism and extremism for them.

The SCO as an organization for security and cooperation on the vast territory of the Eurasian continent reacts sharply to challenges that can undermine socio-economic and political stability in its area of responsibility. In recent years the COVID-19 pandemic has become a key factor in global security, casting doubt on all previous achievements of globalization. Today the

* Corresponding author: Zh. Medeubayeva, balapan1967@yandex.kz

world community is solving the difficult tasks of restoring the economy affected by the pandemic. The countries of Central Asia are also experiencing the socio-economic difficulties that have arisen due to COVID-19. The withdrawal of Western coalition forces from Afghanistan in the summer of 2021 multiplied the threats to the security of neighboring regions and countries, especially affecting the Central Asian region.

Such factors determine the relevance of the topic of this article and require an analysis of the latest trends in the SCO that affect the states of Central Asia. A study of the phenomena and events associated with the SCO in recent years has made it possible to put forward a hypothesis that the further strengthening of China's role in the Organization is obvious due to the socio-economic vulnerability of member states, primarily Central Asian ones, as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. The post-coronavirus recovery of the region will also contribute to a greater expansion of the Chinese presence in Central Asia in the nearest future. But along with this, the Chinese factor in the SCO has not yet contributed to the regulation of the Afghan problem which is extremely topical for the countries of Central Asia.

Methodology

The participation of the above-mentioned countries in the SCO can be analyzed on the basis of neoclassical realism, which echoes the Thucydides' formula, that "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must" (Rose, 1998). Proceeding from these two assumptions can be made: first, the membership of weak states in organizations with the participation of stronger ones is imposed by the first to the seconds; second - within the framework of the organization, weak states have the role of obedient performers without any pretensions. If neoclassical realism sees in weak states the executors of the will of superpowers, then liberal institutionalism leaves them chances for some independence. The strengthening of globalization processes, whose central idea is liberalization, promises the further development of liberal institutionalism. "The institutional research program in international relations is a promising one. The logic of institutional theory, with its

focus on the informational role of institutions, appears solid" (Keochane, Martin, 1995). With the strengthening of the role of the institutional foundations of interstate relations, weak states using their membership in international organizations may play their role as an equal member of the international community in the future. Being the members of certain international organizations, such states, along with obtaining a guarantee of economic, military security, get a hypothetical opportunity to set medium and long-term objectives for the realization of their national interests. Moreover, the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic once again clearly highlighted the importance of striving for greater mutual understanding and interactions based on previous theoretical visions and international institutions for all countries of the world.

Research methods included the study of primary sources, systematization, and analysis of the opinions of experts, researchers, typical for desk research.

Relevant issues of membership of the CAR countries in the SCO

There is a self-positioning of the SCO as a unique unification in the world. The "Shanghai spirit" is called upon to promote the idea of a democratic, innovative character of the Organization. «The Shanghai spirit Cooperation in the framework of the SCO is distinguished by the spirit of mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, mutual consultation, respect for the diversity of cultures and the desire for joint development. These principles, called the "Shanghai spirit," will continue to lie at the heart of relations between the SCO member states». This explanation is given to this phenomenon in the "Development Strategy of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization till 2025" (2020). The declaration of "equality, mutual consultation, respect ..." is confirmed by the fact that all members have the right to preside in the Organization and no one has the prescribed privileges for decision-making. But it's not a secret that decisions on matters of principle are taken at the highest level, during bilateral meetings of leaders (although not only in the SCO, but in the entire world practice the decision-making process is not yet fully transparent). The predominance of bilateral relations and the closeness of the decision-making process,

the inaccessibility of a number of important documents cause difficulties for the Central Asian members of the SCO in pursuing their goals and interests within the Organization.

Because of the proximity of a dangerous source of insecurity such as Afghanistan these Central Asian countries naturally try to fit into systems promising to maintain security at the national and regional levels. The closest international environment represented by two major actors in the international politics such as China and Russia that almost seal off the region, does not leave much choice to these countries. Some experts consider efforts of Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan and other countries in the region to defend their positions and security by diversifying their international relations at least as short-sightedness and an inconsistency in their foreign policy course. Most likely the SCO is a variation of ways to ensure their national security for the Central Asian countries. To date, the multifactor security system has cemented its place in Central Asia, where the Collective Security Treaty Organization and NATO are involved in addition to the SCO. R. Allison justifies the participation of the Central Asian countries in the SCO in the following way: «The US military presence in Central Asia since autumn 2001 may tempt Moscow and Beijing to try to instrumentalize the SCO as a regional balancing structure against Washington. But this goal will not be accepted by its Central Asian members, keen on exploring the limits of their new bilateral security ties with the United States. In any case, for these regional states the uniqueness of the SCO lies in the opportunity it offers to bandwagon with both Russia and China in a framework where the Chinese presence increasingly offsets any Russian efforts to impose unwanted aspects of its integration agenda on the Central Asian states, while the Russian presence equally provides reassurance about Chinese policies and therefore enables the SCO to act as a vehicle to incorporate Chinese interests in developing joint responses to selected security challenges in Central Asia. In this arrangement the Central Asian member states retain some latitude to advance their own priorities and leave their imprint on the agenda of the SCO» (*Allison, 2004*).

But on the other hand, it is also obvious that the participation of these countries in

regional security structures is not obligatory for military cooperation on a bilateral basis. For example, if we draw parallels with the Collective Security Treaty (hereinafter the CSTO), Uzbekistan had temporarily suspended its membership in it, but this did not in any way affect the Russian Uzbek military cooperation. On the contrary with the administration of the new president of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyev the military cooperation between the two countries has been intensified. An agreement was signed on the development of military-technical cooperation and Uzbekistan was given the opportunity to purchase, repair and modernize weapons at domestic prices, and train officers in Russian military universities. In addition, it became possible for the Uzbek military to participate in Russian military festivals, joint military exercises (the first in 12 years was held in October last year), send delegations to exchange experiences. In fact, Uzbekistan received the same privileges as CSTO members, only Russia does not have formal duties to protect Uzbekistan, as it does under the SCTO (*Starchak, 2017*). In the case of the SCO, the situation would be similar: if any member of this organization leaves temporarily or permanently, China will still continue to maintain bilateral relations with it. That is, regardless of membership in the SCO or the CSTO, the Central Asian states will be in close contact with Russia and China in a bilateral format. It turns out that the SCO is a convenient tool for China to optimize its relations with these countries and a marker that outlines its zone of interests in the region to the West from it.

It was China from all the members of the Organization that first benefited from the establishment of the SCO: the harmonization of delimitation and demarcation of borders between the Central Asian countries, on the one hand, and China on the other. However, border contradictions, closely related to the water and energy pool of problems within the region, remain frozen, and the organization is not used as an effective institutional mechanism for their resolution, despite the fact that one of the principles prescribed in its Charter is precisely the peaceful settlement of disagreements among the participating countries, and one of the areas of cooperation is the provision of rational use of water resources (*Charter of the Shanghai*

Cooperation Organization, 2002). It turns out that the solution of interstate problems in the CAR, which theoretically is possible to provide within the Organization, is not a priority or completely uninteresting for China?

The hasty withdrawal of Western alliance troops from Afghanistan not only increased the security threats in the SCO zone, but also revealed all problems within the Organization of a conceptual and functional nature. The situation has become especially threatening for the countries of Central Asia located in close proximity to Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is the problem that the SCO has dealt with specifically during almost all of its activities. It is hard to argue that the withdrawal of Western troops from this country was a big surprise for the SCO. At least the Central Asian members, especially those bordering Afghanistan, considered the possibility of such a scenario and were not shocked by the Taliban advance. Theoretically the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure and the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group were supposed to have some preparations in case the Western allies left and the Taliban attacked. But as practice shows the Organization is not yet actively involved in the Afghan settlement process and has not distinguished itself by effective measures in this matter.

In the final Declaration of the 20th anniversary of the SCO, all member states advocated the formation of an inclusive government with the participation of representatives of all ethnic, religious and political groups of Afghan society. "The continuous political and diplomatic support of the inter-Afghan dialogue, carried out through the SCO member states, made it possible to outline encouraging prospects in the search for recipes for a peaceful settlement of the conflict in the country. At the same time, the SCO member states provide all kinds of support and assistance to Afghanistan on a bilateral basis, as well as develop ties in various fields," Secretary General V. Norov said at a meeting of the foreign ministers of the SCO member states in the format of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group in July 2021 (2021). In fact, the Organization has not yet developed a joint, collective plan of action, still relying on bilateral relations. "Meanwhile, at the

meetings of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Russia and China agreed that it is necessary to coordinate the actions of all SCO members regarding Afghanistan, which is under the rule of the Taliban, but they did not announce the development of a road map or detailed proposals for joint work" (Sinovits, 2021).

For the SCO the change in the political regime in Afghanistan has complicated the process of consolidation on resolving the Afghan issue. According to most experts, Russia and China have their own geostrategic interests both in Central Asia and South Asia, which are still being held back by them as part of their partnership in confronting the West. But in the event of a critical deterioration of the situation in Afghanistan, they will be forced to act more actively, and as a result, the Russian Federation and China may find themselves in some degree of conflict. So far they like other regional and global actors are vigilantly watching the situation in Afghanistan and are directly or indirectly forming the context that seems chaotic and at the same time manageable.

The lack of unanimity on the Afghan issue also concerns the Central Asian members of the SCO. According to German expert Beata Ashment, the Central Asian countries have two different positions in relation to the change of power in Afghanistan: "Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are in favor of contacts with the Taliban who came to power, representatives of Tashkent even took part in negotiations with the Taliban in Doha. Tajikistan, on the contrary, it is an opponent of the Taliban. Such a different attitude towards the Taliban in the region is due to several reasons. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have, first of all, a pronounced economic interest. According to the data given by Beate Ashment, the trade turnover between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan is \$234 million" (Pozdnyakova, 2021).

The coronavirus pandemic has also highlighted a number of issues that are important for the long-term activities of the SCO and its Central Asian members.

Digitalization and the fight against coronavirus within the framework of the SCO

In recent years, there has been a close

relationship between such factors as digitalization and the fight against the coronavirus pandemic in the activities of the SCO. The “Digital Silk Road”, announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping at the first OBOR forum in 2017, has certainly been integrated into the SCO as a relevant area of cooperation within the Organization. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated informatization and digitalization in all countries of the world, here the countries of Central Asia, of course, are no exception. Thus, the pandemic created additional conditions for strengthening China's influence on the Central Asian countries within the framework of the SCO.

China, which has become the undisputed leader in 5G technology by 2019 met the pandemic in full digital readiness, having completed ahead of schedule the “Plan of State Informatization for the 13th Five-Year Plan”, adopted in December 2016 (*Silk-Road - Review, 2019*). Informatization and digitalization, which have been rapidly developing in China in recent years, have become even more relevant in the conditions of closedness, restrictions during the coronavirus pandemic, having received further development and spread in all spheres of public life. After the most critical year of 2020 already in January 2021 as part of the 20th anniversary of the SCO the first expanded business meeting “Shanghai Business Connect” was held in Shanghai. The purpose of the meeting was to establish contacts and exchange experience between companies from China and the SCO countries in the field of electronic commerce, artificial intelligence and financial technology, as well as the creation of innovative projects in the field of information technology and the digital economy. During the meeting the importance of developing the digital economy and using modern digital technologies, which can play a decisive role in overcoming the negative consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and creating new sources of economic growth in the SCO countries was emphasized. Attention was drawn to the fact that the SCO is a huge market for the implementation of joint innovative projects in the field of IT and the digital economy (*The Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Business Council, 2021*).

In this context a new trend in China's relations with the countries of Central Asia as

the predominant Chinese participation in the digitalization of the economies of the region is expected. The visits of the presidents of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to China in 2019 were notable for their special attention to the Chinese experience in creating “safe cities”. Immediately after returning from China the President of Kazakhstan K.K. Tokayev instructed the government to adopt the Chinese experience in digitizing citizens' personal data. (*Mamyshev, 2019*). Now Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan (half with Russian participation) and Tajikistan are implementing a digital system for ensuring social stability based on Chinese technology.

Naturally, cooperation in the field of digitalization is closely linked to the general line of the SCO, as recorded in the “Dushanbe Declaration of the twentieth anniversary of the SCO»: “Noting the need for targeted attention to overcoming the socio-economic consequences of the digital divide between member states, they emphasize the importance of deepening mutually beneficial cooperation and exchange of experience in the field of the digital economy and the use of digital technologies” (*Shanghai Cooperation Secretariat, 2021a*).

The holding of the China-SCO Digital Economy Forum in Chongqing, China in August 2021 announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping at the 2020 SCO Summit was an expected event. Digital Technology Exhibition Smart China Expo 2021 (SCE 2021), which occupied 70 thousand square meters and demonstrated Chinese achievements in the field of smart technologies, became the central event during the forum (*PR Newswire, 2021*).

China, a leader in the field of digital technologies, will undoubtedly further expand the areas of implementation of the 5G communication format, artificial intelligence, big data, the industrial Internet, the Internet of things in its zone of influence, primarily within the SCO. Of course, this has a positive effect on the Central Asian members of the SCO. On the other hand, here the Central Asian countries are considered as the main consumers of Chinese digital products and the object of testing its capacities, since other SCO members, for example, Russia and India, have their own technological developments and can themselves offer services in this

area. The expansion of Chinese influence in the digital sphere in the CAR is also predictable, given the emergence and spread of new strains of coronavirus that require rapid response, monitoring and accounting based on digital technologies.

The topic of combating the COVID-19 pandemic was promptly included in the agenda of the SCO. During the Moscow SCO Summit in November 2020, a separate "Statement on joint counteraction to coronavirus infection and implementation of comprehensive measures of a sanitary and epidemiological nature" was adopted, which identified the main areas of cooperation between the members of the Organization in this area. An additional impetus to this work was given at the summit held in Dushanbe this year, at which the "Plan of recommendatory joint measures to overcome the negative socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for 2021-2023" was approved (Norov, 2021). The adoption of the "Statement of the SCO Member States "On Joint Countering the Threats of Epidemics in the Space of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization" on June 10, 2018 suggests that even then there was some vision of a plan of action in case of disasters like the coronavirus pandemic. In 2018 at the SCO summit in Qingdao a special statement was adopted on jointly countering the threat of epidemics. Also, shortly before the start of the pandemic in China, on June 14, 2019, during the Bishkek SCO summit, the "Plan of basic measures for the development of cooperation in the field of healthcare for 2019-2021" was adopted, which contained a number of tasks for cooperation between member states to improve prevention and management of infectious diseases. In fact, the SCO was conceptually prepared for cases of viral epidemics.

According to SCO Secretary-General V. Norov: "During the acute period of the pandemic, the SCO countries provided moral and political support to each other, there was an exchange of epidemiological and organizational experience, and financial, economic and food assistance was provided to the SCO members most affected by the virus" (*Shanghai Cooperation Organization Secretariat, 2021b*).

The fight against the spread of the coronavirus pandemic within the framework

of the SCO has brought China to the forefront as a country with experience in combating COVID-19 and as a potential donor to help member states. Since the start of the pandemic, China has been building relationships with high-profile humanitarian and medical missions and by promoting its digital technologies as a way to limit the spread of the virus. In this situation, Beijing has become the main source of assistance for Central Asia (*Central Asian Analytical Network, 2021*). In 2020 alone, China provided about \$10 million worth of humanitarian aid to Kazakhstan, which accounted for more than half of all humanitarian materials received by Kazakhstan. China is the country that provided Kazakhstan with the largest amount of anti-epidemic assistance and all kinds of auxiliary materials (*Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2021*). Kazakhstan has purchased 3 million doses of the Chinese vaccine Sinovac. By September 2021, China had provided 2.8 million doses of vaccines to Tajikistan, which is more than half of the total number of vaccines received by Tajikistan (*Kurbanova, 2021*). According to some reports, Uzbekistan purchased 1 million ZF-UZ-VAC 2001, created by the Chinese Anhui Zhifei Longcom Biopharmaceutical (*Central Asia News, 2021*). In Kyrgyzstan, people are being vaccinated with the products of the Chinese pharmaceutical company Sinopharm. In December 2021, the Chinese side transferred 1.5 million doses of the vaccine to Kyrgyzstan (*Xinhua news, 2021*).

In fact, the PRC is actively promoting its vaccine diplomacy in the CAR and takes a position almost on a par with Russia in terms of its results. According to Alexander Cooley, Director of the Harriman Institute at Columbia University: "For China vaccine diplomacy is another commodity offered under the «Belt and Road Initiative» and the «Health Silk Road», which usually comes bundled with other goods" (*Muratliyeva, 2021*). Specialists point to a number of conveniences that are typical for Chinese vaccines, such as relatively easy storage and transportation conditions, which make them more preferable. In the case of Kazakhstan, many people prefer the Russian vaccine, but the Chinese vaccine benefits from the fact that, for example, Sinovac is recognized in the West, and you can enter a number of

European countries with a passport confirming that you have been vaccinated with it.

Along with recognizing the role of China in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic, there are opinions that the eastern neighbor is not fully using its capabilities to help the Central Asian member states of the SCO to overcome the consequences of COVID-19. «In the years before the pandemic Chinese President Xi Jinping promoted the «Health Silk Road Initiative» in Central Asia to promote traditional Chinese medicine and health cooperation through the Belt and Road mega-project. In the context of the rapid spread of COVID-19, the initiative has gained particular relevance, but its vague concept has practically not taken on any concrete forms» (*Central Asia News*, 2021). At the most difficult, initial stage the Central Asian countries, especially Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which have borders with China, did not particularly rely on Chinese assistance because of the difficult situation in China itself and the closure of borders, the cessation of supplies. For example, in such a situation Tajikistan has requested financial assistance from the European Union and international financial organizations (*Akhunov*, 2020).

China quickly recovered from the pandemic, began to provide humanitarian assistance to other countries, share experience in treating and countering the further spread of the virus, and send teams of medical experts to the Central Asian countries for practical assistance. Various online events were held with the participation of Chinese doctors and specialists within the framework of the SCO. But if we remember that the Central Asian countries themselves provided humanitarian assistance to the PRC during a difficult period for it, then, naturally, the expectations from China, which has recovered from the pandemic, with its enormous potential in terms of assistance and assistance, were greater than it actually provides. Especially, this concerns the technological assistance of the PRC in the development of its own vaccines of the CAR countries; China supports only Uzbekistan to develop and produce its own vaccine, which is very important for the state with the largest population in the Central Asian region.

According to Chinese specialist Zhang

Xin, “in response to the pandemic, the SCO has essentially limited itself to a number of formal statements. Declarations previously adopted by the SCO have already mentioned the problem of the spread of infectious diseases, but no practical steps have been taken in this direction” (*Ivanova*, 2020). The bilateral format of relations between the members of the Organization has been fully reflected in cooperation to combat the pandemic within the framework of the SCO. In this aspect, we can agree with the «Valdai Club» expert F. Ibragimov: “Of course, contacts are maintained, there are deliveries of the vaccine, partnerships are developing. But this most often happens on the basis of bilateral relations: Chinese Uzbek, Russian-Uzbek, etc. The problem is not only with the SCO – the problem concerns the whole world” (*Cherkassova*, 2021). Moreover, official information on actions to overcome COVID-19 within the framework of the SCO is limited to listing how certain member states of the Organization are fighting the pandemic. Nevertheless, for all its limitations, the role of the SCO, largely through the Chinese factor, is important for the CAR countries both in confronting the coronavirus pandemic and in socio-economic recovery.

SCO and post-COVID recovery of Central Asian Countries

“The unfolding of the COVID-19 pandemic in Central Asia in early 2020 caused huge social and economic upheavals in the region, which at that time had not yet recovered from the effects of the global financial crisis of 2008-2009 and the commodity price shock of 2014-2015. The reduction in growth potential from mining, in particular hydrocarbons, has even affected countries that were not among the leading exporters of fuels and metals, such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Thus, the countries of Central Asia were already struggling to regain momentum and lay the groundwork for new growth patterns when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the region, first through trade channels and then with the emergence of the virus itself” (*OECD*, 2021). Along with other socio-economic problems, the pandemic has exacerbated the debt problem of the CAR countries: today Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are dangerously close to a debt crisis. “The debt of Tajikistan

and Kyrgyzstan is highly dollarized and is particularly susceptible to the influence of China. If China does not write off part of the debt to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, revenue collection and the ability to service other outstanding loans in both countries will be further weakened" (*Taliga, 2021*). The closure of borders, interrupted trade chains have led to a reduction in the volume of trade between SCO member states. The economic systems of the CAR countries, which are highly dependent on foreign trade, except for Uzbekistan, found themselves in a crisis situation. The decrease in foreign direct investment also has become a test for them (only Kazakhstan restored the pre-coronavirus indicators of investment inflow). In such conditions, the question naturally arises about the possibilities, ways of post-COVID recovery of the CAR countries, which can count on bilateral and multilateral ties, both at the global and regional levels. In this vein, great hopes are pinned on the SCO, the main core of which is China and Russia due to their geographical proximity and power.

The topic of post-COVID recovery has been voiced in all official documents of the SCO over the past two years. The reconstruction process itself is perceived as a factor requiring closer cooperation, greater mutual understanding, and trust among member states in all areas. As expected, China whose influence on the region is multidirectional and has been established in the process of implementing bilateral relations under the auspices of the SCO, should logically become a stabilizer in the post-coronavirus economic turbulence in the CAR. For this it has an effective tool, such as the further implementation of the «One Belt - One Road» initiative. As a Chinese specialist writes: "As a regional public product the Belt and Road Initiative is having an ever-deeper impact on relations between China and the countries of Central Asia. Ultimately, the epidemic not only failed to weaken the Belt and Road, but also contributed to the expansion of its significance ... The adverse effects of the disruption of ties with China during the epidemic also has made the countries of Central Asia more aware of the role of cooperation between the two parties and their policy towards China became more objective and rational" (*Central Asian Analytical Network, 2021*).

The «One Belt - One Road» initiative

as a geostrategic project is designed for the long term and will gain momentum along with the further growth of China's economic power. Even during the most depressing period during the pandemic, this project continued to grow in influence on a regional and global scale. «Since November 2018 the list of BRI projects has included 203 bridges (road and rail); 199 power plants and 41 pipelines. China has signed 200 cooperation agreements with 138 countries and regions and 30 international organizations as of May 2020 under the BRI, according to the China Global Television Network (GCTN)» (*Taliga, 2021*). In this context, further expansion of the geography and increase in the capitalization of the initiative will be associated with the post-COVID recovery of China itself and, in principle, will positively affect the Central African Republic in terms of achieving pre-COVID economic indicators. According to Russian specialist A. Bugaenko: "The coronavirus crisis will not lead to a fundamental change in priorities in the implementation of the Belt and Road. However, the epidemic will become a catalyst for new processes within the framework of the Chinese initiative. Previous trends will take root: The Belt and Road will become more focused on China's practical goals. In the coming years, China's resources will be used to restore its own economy, but China will return to active investments, primarily in the resources necessary for the Chinese economy, as well as in the transfer of simple types of production to the Belt and Road countries. The countries of Central Asia will be increasingly involved in the economic orbit of China, but thanks to this they will be able to adapt to the new realities of the world after the pandemic" (*Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting, 2020*).

As it is all known all CA countries have adopted programs for accelerated industrialization and innovative development, the implementation of which has become more difficult due to COVID-19. Therefore, the restoration of the socio-economic sphere in these countries will go hand in hand with industrialization requiring more and more new investments. Moreover, "two or three years ago, China began to diversify its investments in Central Asia, moving from large infrastructure projects of the previous period to manufacturing

industries" (*Taliga, 2021*), which makes Chinese investments even more attractive for the countries of the region.

"The post-pandemic period may open up new opportunities for industrial cooperation. In the next five years, China will consolidate its technological advantage" (*Alimov, 2021*). Thus, China will have additional opportunities to get rid of technologically obsolete, environmentally harmful industries, transferring them to the territory of the Central African Republic. But at the same time, Chinese companies will expand markets for the sale of products based on the latest technologies in the field of informatization and digitalization, as well as greening (for example, solar panels, with which the Chinese market is already oversaturated).

"According to experts, infrastructure development projects are not just investments for the countries of Central Asia, but also a means of connecting to world trade. Governments expect that investments, primarily in infrastructure projects, will open the doors to the region's economies that do not have maritime borders and attract more diversified projects and increased attention from countries around the world" (*Taliga, 2021*).

The opinions of experts and researchers on the consequences of the Project for the countries of Central Asia are ambiguous, sometimes diametrically opposed. But the further strengthening of China's influence in the CAR countries as a result of the implementation of its infrastructure initiative and post-COVID recovery is recognized by most experts. Opinions differ on the nature and consequences of China's active presence in the region. The positive effect of such presence is emphasized as opportunities for industrial, innovative development, and as a result, the improvement of the situation in the social sphere for the CAR countries. OBOR in the best way reveals the resource, transit potential of the region. With the help of the Chinese megaproject, the Central Asian countries will be able to overcome continental isolation, gaining infrastructural and logistical access for supplies, trade in all directions and connecting to international trading networks.

The negative effect of the Chinese initiative, according to experts, is as follows:

China implementing the One Belt - One Belt initiative sets far-reaching strategic goals for its own development, prosperity and for it Central Asia is a platform for transferring excess human resources, outdated production capacities. In the era of economy 4.0, the region will become a testing ground for China to test the latest technologies. All this will be carried out without regard to the vital interests of the countries of the region, the environment, the rights of local workers employed in Chinese or joint ventures. The expanding Chinese presence in the CAR will not contribute to the solution of the topical socio-economic problems of the region, but will only lead to their conservation, hindering the strengthening of civil, democratic institutions. And the political elites, who see Chinese loans and investments as a pillar for innovative development, underestimate the risks associated with the growth of China's influence.

Conclusion

Today the SCO as a regional organization for cooperation and security is being tested for strength by the difficult situation in Afghanistan that has developed after the withdrawal of Western forces and the activation of the Taliban. The close proximity of Afghanistan to the area of responsibility of the SCO requires the Organization to take urgent measures to ensure the security of member states, in particular, the countries of Central Asia. But while we have to state that the SCO has not shown itself properly, the Organization has not yet worked out a coherent plan of action. The fact that the Organization remains inactive in relation to Afghanistan has a negative impact on the security system in Central Asia. The Chinese influence in the Organization has not acted as a catalyst for accelerating the development and implementation of a common policy to reduce the negative consequences of the establishment of the Taliban regime on the region.

The coronavirus pandemic has made certain adjustments to the activities of the SCO. Closing borders, limiting, or stopping direct contacts, alienation in the context of the pandemic have updated cooperation in the field of digitalization. And China as a leader in the field of informatization and digitalization sets the tone for interactions in

this area. In this capacity it becomes the main partner of the Central Asian states in the implementation of digital technologies.

China with its colossal economic potential and extensive experience in fighting the pandemic, is seen as a key factor in overcoming COVID-19 and post-COVID recovery within the SCO. Eastern neighbor is actually a donor of aid in the fight against the pandemic, a supplier of vaccines to the Central Asian countries and the initiator of many events that promote the exchange of experience in overcoming a dangerous virus. At the same time, the PRC could provide more assistance and support to the Central Asian countries based on its potential, especially in developing the production of their own vaccine.

The post-Covid recovery of the socio-economic sphere of the SCO member states, primarily the CAR states, is largely due to the further build-up of the «Chinese One Belt, One Road» initiative. The dynamics of the implementation of this initiative, which was not prevented by the Covid pandemic, speaks of the intensification of its influence on the region in the nearest future. An increase in the volume of the PRC investments in various projects in the CAR, respectively, will make the already influential Chinese factor the most dominant one, the risks of which should be properly analyzed and adequately taken into account by the political establishment of regional states in their investment and foreign economic policy.

REFERENCES

- Akhunov, A.M. (2020). The COVID-19 Pandemic as a Challenge for Post-Soviet Central Asia Countries. *Journal of International Analytics*. 11(1). 114-128. <https://doi.org/10.46272/2587-8476-2020-11-1-114-128>. (In Russian).
- Alimov, R. (2021). *China and Central Asia: a new partnership format opens up additional opportunities for cooperation*. <https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/opinion/20210514/kitai-i-tsentralnaya-aziya-novii-format-partnerstva-otkrivaet-dopolnitelnie-vozmozhnosti-dlya-sotrudnichestva>. (In Russian).
- Allison, R. (2004). Regionalism, regional structures and security management in Central Asia. *International Affairs*. 80 (3), P. 478.
- Central Asia News. (2021). *1 million doses of ZF-UZ-VAC 2001 vaccine were delivered to Uzbekistan*. <https://centralasia.news/9051-v-uzbekistan-bylo-dostavleno-1-mln-doz-vakciny-zf-uz-vac-2001.html> (In Russian).
- Central Asian Analytical Network. (2021). *How the coronavirus affected the Belt and Road projects*. <https://www.caa-network.org/archives/21493/kak-koronavirus-povliyal-na-proekty-poyas-i-put-v-tsentralnoj-azii-vzglyad-iz-kitaya> (In Russian).
- Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting. (2020). *International online discussion with IWPR: COVID-19 and the Chinese BRI in Central Asia*. <https://cabar.asia/ru/mezhdunarodnaya-onlajn-diskussiya-s-iwpr-covid-19-i-initsiativa-poyas-i-put-v-tsentralnoj-azii> (In Russian).
- Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. (2002).
- Cherkassova, A. (2021). Uzbekistan as a central power in the SCO. *Sputnik*. <https://uz.sputniknews.ru/20210615/uzbekistan-kak-tsentralnaya-sila-v-shos-kakie-ispytaniya-jdut-etot-soyuz-19252104.html> (In Russian).
- Development Strategy of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization until 2025*. (2020) http://scochina.mfa.gov.cn/rus/shjs_2/t1495736.htm
- Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Kazakhstan. (2021). *Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the People's Republic of China to the Republic of Kazakhstan Zhang Xiao has given an interview to the Kazakh media on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of Kazakhstan's independence*. http://kz.chineseembassy.org/rus/sqxx/sqdt/202109/t20210930_9570911.htm. (In Russian).
- Ivanova, A. (2020). Coronocracy. Strategic dilemmas of the SCO in the post-coronavirus world. *Minsk Dialogue*. <http://minskdialogue.by/research/memorable-notes/koronakratiia-strategicheskije-dilemmy-shos-v-mire-posle-koronavirusa>. (In Russian).
- Keohane, R., Martin, L. (1995). The Promise of Institutional Theory. *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 39-51.
- Kurbanova, J. (2021). *China asks not to politicize COVID-19*. <https://avesta.tj/2021/09/02/kitaj-prizyvaet-ne-politizirovat-covid-19-zainteresovan-v-stabilnom-afganistane-i-uveren-v-budushhem-shos/> (In Russian).
- Kuzmin, N. (2020). *SCO in a pandemic: when medicine and security come to the fore*. <https://ia-centr.ru/experts/nikolay-kuzmin/shos-v-pandemiyu-kogda-meditsina-i-bezopasnost-vykhodyat-na>

- [pervyy-plan](#) (In Russian).
- Mamyshev, Zh. (2019). *Tokayev has instructed to adopt the experience of digitalization of citizens from China.* <https://kursiv.kz/news/obschestvo/2019-10/tokaev-poruchil-perenyat-u-kitaya-opyt-cifrovizacii-grazhdan> (In Russian).
- Muratliyeva, N. (2021). Vaccine Diplomacy in Central Asia: Geopolitics, Business and Soft Power. *Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting.* <https://cabar.asia/ru/diplomatiya-vaktsin-v-tsentralnoj-azii-geopolitika-biznes-i-myaqkaya-sila>. (In Russian).
- Norov, V. (2021). *The SCO has stood the test of the COVID-19 pandemic.* http://russian.news.cn/2021-12/22/c_1310388208.htm (In Russian).
- OECD. (2021). *Beyond COVID-19: Prospects for Economic Recovery in Central Asia.* [Beyond COVID 19 Central Asia RU.pdf](#)
- Pozdnyakova, N. (2021). They are not afraid of the Taliban. Experts from Germany on the fears of Afghanistan's neighbors. *Deutsche Welle.* <https://www.dw.com/ru/bojatsja-ne-talibov-jeksperty-iz-germanii-otnosheniya-k-afganistana/a-59284653>. (In Russian).
- PR Newswire. (2021). *China-SCO Digital Economy Forum has opened in Chongqing.* <https://www.prnewswire.com/ru/press-releases/v-chuntsine-otkrytsia-forum-tsifrovoy-ekonomiki-kitai-shos-879809669.html> (In Russian).
- Rose, G. (1998). Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy. *World Politics*, Vol.51, No 1, pp.144-172.
- Shanghai Cooperation Organization Secretariat. (2021a). *Dushanbe Declaration of the twentieth Anniversary of the SCO.* <http://rus.sectsc.org/news/20210917/779142.html>. (In Russian).
- Shanghai Cooperation Organization Secretariat. (2021b). *The SCO Secretary General has spoken at a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the SCO member states and Afghanistan in the format of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group.* <http://rus.sectsc.org/news/20210714/768216.html>. (In Russian).
- Silk Road – Review. (2019). *Journal of the Administration for Publication and Distribution of Literature in Foreign Languages of the People's Republic of China.* 10 (October). p.14. (In Russian).
- Sinovits, R. (2021). *Center for Anti-Western Sentiment. Who will fill the vacuum after the West withdraws from Afghanistan: China or Russia?* <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/31606611.html> (In Russian).
- Standish, R. (2020). *How the “coronavirus” crisis has affected relations between China and Central Asia.* <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/covid-19-china-influence-in-central-asia/30754369.html>. (In Russian).
- Starchak, M., (2017). There is a possibility of the formation of an alternative security structure, which, due to the economic opportunities of China, will reduce the influence of both the CSTO and in Russia. *Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting.* <http://cabar.asia/ru/maksim-starchak-est-veroyatnost-obrazovaniya-alternativnoj-struktury-bezopasnosti-kotoraya-za-schet-ekonomicheskikh-vozmozhnostey-kitaya-snizit-vliyanie-kak-odkb-tak-i-rossii/> (In Russian).
- Taliga, Kh. (2021). One Belt – One Road Initiative in Central Asia. https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/belt_and_road_initiative_in_central_asia_ru.pdf. (In Russian).
- The Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Business Council Web site.* (2021). https://bcsc.org/our_news.
- Xinhua news. (2021). *Another batch of Chinese vaccines against COVID-19 has been delivered to Kyrgyzstan.* http://russian.news.cn/2021-12/15/c_1310374098.htm/. (In Russian).

ШАНХАЙ ЫНТЫМАҚТАСТЫҚ ҰЙЫМЫ ҚАУІПСІЗДІККЕ ТӨНГЕН ЖАҢА ҚАТЕРЛЕРМЕН КҮРЕСТЕ: ОРТАЛЫҚ АЗИЯ ЕЛДЕРІНЕ ӘСЕРІ

Жанар МЕДЕУБАЕВА, тарих ғылымдарының кандидаты, Л.Н. Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университетінің профессор м.а., Нұр-Сұлтан, Қазақстан, balapan1967@yandex.kz

ШАНХАЙСКАЯ ОРГАНИЗАЦИЯ СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВА В БОРЬБЕ С НОВЕЙШИМИ УГРОЗАМИ БЕЗОПАСНОСТИ: ВЛИЯНИЕ НА СТРАНЫ ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ

Жанар МЕДЕУБАЕВА, кандидат исторических наук, и.о. профессора Евразийского национального университета имени Л.Н. Гумилева, Нур-Султан, Казахстан, balapan1967@yandex.kz