

THE EUROPEAN UNION MODEL IN CENTRAL ASIAN INTEGRATION

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Annotation: This article aims to discuss what role the model of European Union can play in forming and nurturing an integration atmosphere in the Central Asian region. Similar to other regions of the world, Central Asian countries have, in recent years, been paying attention to integration. This can be seen in the consultative forums in which the Central Asian heads of state and government meet, which of course helps to forge regional dialogue and is likely to be important in deepening integration in the future. Without doubt, the European Union structure is the best integration model in the world because it is the only international organization which has a legal order, supranational institutions, and a monetary union which illustrate the existence of well functioning integration. Therefore, although it is possible to argue that there is a possibility to construct an integration model in Central Asia using the EU approach, there are many obstacles that stand in the way of making this a reality.

Keywords: Regional dialogue, Consultative meeting, European Union, C5+1, Economic integration, Great Game, SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization), CIAP (Central Asia Investment Partnership), EAEU (Eurasian Economic Union).

Introduction.

The European Union gathers 27 member states to constitute a political and economic community across Europe. The modern-day mission of the European Union is to promote the well-being, freedom, connectivity, mobility, and trade facilitation for its citizens. And the greatest example of integration would thereby be the development of Central Asian countries through the cooperation within the framework of the European Union¹. Assuming Central Asia aims at comprehensive economic and social development, it should take advantage of lessons learned from European integration. Interregional cooperation initiatives and exchange of experiences between the European Union and Central Asia could be harnessed in rejuvenating integration processes in the region.

The process of integration began in Europe after the Second World War, following a series of integration attempts. For economic growth, security, and lasting reconciliation between the French and Germans, several Western European countries sought the deeper economic, social, and political ties after the war.

The Treaty of Paris was signed in 1951 by six countries: Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and West Germany. The treaty was enforced in 1952 and gave rise to the European Coal and Steel Community; this is, thus, considered the start of efforts to integrate

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/European-Union>

Europe as a Union. The union was then officially established with the coming into force of the Maastricht Treaty on November 1, 1993. The treaty sought to forge a closer political and economic union by introducing a single currency (the euro), a shared foreign and security policy, and common citizenship².

A model was envisioned. After gaining independence, the Central Asian countries started pushing for close collaboration. In July 1993, the governments of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan signed an agreement on deepening economic considerations for the period 1994-2000. To give lifeblood to integration, on January 10, 1994, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan signed an agreement to set up a "Single Economic Space." Kazakhstan joined the agreement later on January 16, 1994. From 1991 to 2006, the rapprochement process in Central Asia went steadily and successfully. However, it would be worth also mentioning a few hurdles confronted along its way. Likewise, the process of forming the union had not been an easy one-it had made an attempt But unlike Europe, the Central Asian countries have very close ties in history, ethno-cultural bonds, and value systems. In 1993, therefore, a "Central Asian Economic Community" was established, where steps were underway, also, for a common market. It is worth mentioning nearly fifty project ideas of common interest were worked out in this sphere. Full-fledged economic integration was supposed to be put in force throughout the region by the year 2000. Eventually, the "Central Asian Economic Community" became the "Central Asian Cooperation Organization." This was a progression from economic integration to political integration.

There was valid reasoning, clearly evidenced in the presidents' value-based statements. In the first place, Kazakhstan received a fair amount of assistance by virtue of its natural resources and by the time the integration processes began, Kazakhstan was able to experience phenomenal success. Unfortunately, by 2006, the integration process collapsed because the Central Asian Cooperation Organization took as a member a powerful non-regional state, the Russian Federation.

While the idea of a Central Asian integration still remains relevant, none of these new proposals have been advocated inside Central Asia. For example, in 2005, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev proposed a step towards integration, but Uzbekistan refused to support this attempt for Uzbekistan's own reasons, and took the position of developing bilateral relations as a priority.

Consequently, the organization has lost its identity as a strictly regional organization. Similarly, Russia's accession to the CACO can be viewed as a factor that partially stalled the Central Asian rapprochement policy³. Despite the number of regional organizations expanding in almost every region of the world after the Cold War, attempts to strengthen regional cooperation among Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan failed. Some Central Asian countries were involved in wider regional organizations such as the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), but there was a decline in integration after the "Central Asian Cooperation Organization" was disbanded⁴. With regard to the cultural, economic, and political context the absence of a regional organization among the five Central Asian countries was somewhat contentious. Since Uzbekistan's renewed and focused

² <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/european-integration>

³ https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu_en

⁴ <https://m.kun.uz/uz/news/2021/01/05/markaziy-osiyo-davlatlari-ozaro-birlasha-oladim>

attention to Central Asia in 2016, thawing relations, good neighborliness, and a pragmatic foreign policy have allowed regionalism to gain traction.

The geostrategic position of Central Asia does not provide sea access, and its valuable natural resources will not last forever. Being in the center of Eurasia must provide a shared imperative to come together as a region, not to remain on the outskirts of development. Central Asia mirrors some of the common challenges pre-integration European countries once faced.

First and foremost, it is important to note the ethno-cultural community of the peoples of Central Asia. Central Asian peoples are made up of groups with ethnicities of, predominantly, Turkic-Mongol origin and mostly Persian origin. The regional peoples realized there are many differences in clothing and our outside appearance but we believe that our identity has been shaped by a shared culture existing in traditions of Islam and non-Islamic, pre-Islamic traditions.

In Europe, a common religion and traditions of its peoples in terms of ethnic or cultural backgrounds was an important principle of a 'shared civilization' and there was a greater realization that it was a 'founding principle'. In addition to the common cultural basis from which to move forward, the economic relationship that exists among Central Asian nation-states, unlike that of European nation-states after the war when economic ties were significantly disrupted along with cultural ties.

Like in traditional Europe and the challenge of shortages that existed in economic sectors and resources, there also exist shortages. For example, in the last century mutual cooperation in the coal and steel areas minimised bilateral tension between the primary centrifugal force ie France and Germany of initial European integration and served in affecting an originally frictionless enabled regional partnership.

By dealing with the coal and steel question and relatively free movement of sovereignty with the well-documented and resourced ties to mutually agreed frameworks like, among others, trade, transport, and, agriculture. In Central Asia the supply of water and energy remains one of the biggest challenges, which is why most regional cooperation initiatives pay most of attention to these sphere. If the countries in the region can agree that water is a common good and resolve the issue of to unsustainable use of water then they might come to some form of agreement for energy supply. If they can also cooperate together to create a transport system, they could then cooperate on trade and harmonization of custom policy.

Thirdly another similarity is that they have external threats, which can be political competition between big powers wanting control of this resource-rich region and transnational threats⁵. For example, the countries in Central Asia face the same threats such as drugs trafficking, terrorism and the ideologies that motivate them, so efforts to come together to remove these shared threats, just like Europe stood up a shared threat of communism, which could serve as another factor of integration for the region. Analysts say that one of the primary achievements during the time of the "Central Asian Cooperation Organization" was the signing of an agreement to collectively combat terrorism, political and religious extremism, transnational organized crime, and other security issues. To date, the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia has been another major success of regional cooperation area.

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_19_2494

The region also has elements that are resembling opportunities in the European Union relating to establishing a unified visa system. In Europe, the major players, primarily Germany and France, started the process toward implementing the common visa system. Then, on 14 June, 1985, the "Schengen Agreement" was signed, which included the internal border between countries will progressively be dismantled while reinforcing control over the external borders.

In Central Asia, the region has also begun steps in the direction of implementing a unified visa regime. An initiative of the "Silk Road" visa system has been deliberated by officials Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan in cooperation with bordering countries which includes Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan who expressed a great deal of interest. Initiative organizers stated that it would aid in resolving immigration-related concerns while also establishing a surge of tourist to the region. Noted that the effort would allow foreign travelers to immerse themselves in the history of cities on the historical "Great Silk Road," and also take in those places as they are now.

The European Union has created the European Peace Facility, which is worth 5 billion euros. This funding will aid partner countries of the EU in enhancing their security-related capacities. The funding covers the period from 2021–2027 activities of the fund. Overall, the aim is to boost the ability of the EU to prevent the escalation of conflicts, to maintain peace and enforce international stability and security. The funding will go to peace expansion mission in partner countries and to enhance the capability of their armed forces.

In a similar manner, the Central Asian countries have agreed to create the Central Asian Economic Fund. The interest in completing projects in the Central Asia region in various areas of oil and gas, energy, chemical industry, transport, construction, banking, pharmaceuticals and other areas of the economy give this fund a high chance of success⁶. The countries of the region, therefore, express their interest in developing a "Central Asia Investment Fund" intended to promote development in the form of large-scale infrastructure-related projects. The creation of such funds may be important in helping to foster a pull together of the countries in the Central Asia.

If Central Asian states want to achieve a mode of successful integration, they must continue to collaborate with the European Union. In our history, over the last century, we have developed the most structured and successful form of integration in the European Union. In 2007, a regionally based assistance strategy was established between the European Union and Central Asia for the 2007-2013 time span.

The European Council documents began to really emphasize the development of transport and logistics systems as one of the integration difficulties or barriers, in the Central Asian context. According to Clause 15: "Cooperation in the fields of energy and transport between the European Union and Central Asia is crucial to support the integration of Central Asian countries into both intra-regional and international markets." In 2019, the European Union adopted a new strategy for cooperation with Central Asia in a meeting in Brussels for the time period 2020-2027.

Central Asia is a region of great geostrategic and geoeconomic significance. With the new phase of revitalization of multilateral regional cooperation being predominately linked to

⁶ <https://fx.sauder.ubc.ca/euro/euro.html>

Shavkat Mirziyoyev's accession to power in Uzbekistan in 2016 and the comprehensive reforms initiated in the country, Uzbekistan's open policy means that regional cooperation is currently progressing. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's initiative under the auspices of the United Nations to establish a regional centre developing "Transport and Communication" links remains of great significance for the regional countries. The head of state also proposed in 2017 the initiative to organize the "Consultative Meeting of the Heads of Central Asian States."⁷ This important initiative received a great deal of support and subsequently acted upon it swiftly because it matched the desires of our kindred peoples⁸. The first summit took place in March of 2018 in Nur-Sultan, the capital of Kazakhstan, and followed by a second summit in November 2019 in Tashkent. Uzbekistan, as the initiator of the summits and the host of the second summit, put forth many regional ideas. However, Turkmenistan was represented in the second summit not by its parliamentary president, but by its president Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow⁹. 3rd Summit of the "Consultative Meeting of the Heads of Central Asian States" met on August 6, 2021, in the "Avaza" national tourist zone in Turkmenistan. The significance of these consultative meetings of heads of states or governments from Central Asia could shape the direction of the new political reality¹⁰.

Perhaps the unification process among the Central Asian states will not be realized in the same way as the EU. There are many contexts for that.

From the perspective of economic maturity, Central Asian countries show varying degrees of economic development. For example, in this area, can one compare Kazakhstan's economic indicators with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan's moderate indicators such that Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan would be at the low end? In contrast, the countries that made up the European Union had relatively similar economic developments levels. This is one of the reasons that attempts made by European countries to create a single currency in the 1970s started to yield results only thirty years later¹¹. The euro has been the common currency in Europe since January 1, 2002, which also represents the potential for European economic strength.

Secondly, Central Asian countries base regional cooperation and foreign policy on their own political interests. For regional integration to occur successfully, it is very effective if the region's leadership is united and coordinated. The states have different views by their foreign policy but the European Union has continued function today, and is the most successful integrative union in history¹².

At last, external factors impede the economic unification of Central Asian states. The process of governmental and economic integration in Europe faced next to no disruptions from other states. In contrast, Russia and China are actively pursuing economic hegemony in Central Asia. Clearly, regional integration cannot, in their view, benefit their interests. Russia and China's attempts to

⁷ <https://davr24.uz/archives/5614>

⁸ <https://president.uz/oz/lists/view/4530>

¹⁰ <https://m.kun.uz/uz/news/2021/01/05/markaziy-osiyo-davlatlari-ozaro-birlasha-oladimi>

¹¹ <https://tradingeconomics.com/country-list/gdp?continent=asia>

¹² <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/04/19/reflecting-on-quarter-century-of-russia-s-relations-with-central-asia-pub-76117>

assert both political and economic influence in Central Asia are often termed the "New Great Game"¹³.

Conclusion

The process of integration is the vehicle that can bring about the most advantages and benefits for all concerned countries; more than 60-years of concept from the European Union will demonstrate that this process takes both time and political will. Central Asia needs to learn from examples of the European experience, and with the help of regional and international experts, develop integration initiatives with the further assistance of the EU. Once the countries make attempts to be open, the region will see far more attractiveness for investment. The EU is already promoting this idea by advancing selected regional programs in Central Asia. Second, Central Asia must take the opportunity to have its regional initiatives institutionalised. This will lead to more effective cooperation and act as a further guarantee to prevent states from going to war or regional conflict. The priority areas are the common use of water resources, energy supply, trade, and the protection of borders. Now is the chance for all the countries in Central Asia to create favorable conditions for entrepreneurs who, as a result of their own internal motivation, are the true supporters of integration projects. The integration process in Central Asia is crucial for the region's security, stability, and economic growth. Enhanced political encompass of the countries that makes up the region, corporate partnerships in trade, energy, transport obligations, border security, and planned joint use of shared water resources, can bring about a more stable and rapidly developing region. Likewise, cooperation in the joint fight against terrorism, climate change, foreign interference and drug trafficking challenges will further strengthen Central Asia's overall competency and develop the region as a competitive region in the world.

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