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Security challenges in Central Asia

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Security challenges in Central Asia

Introduction and aim

While defining security challenges of Central Asia, local and international scholars highlight the list of security concerns that are connected with territorial disputes, water management issue, ethnic violence, religious fundamentalism and other forms of complex emergencies, which require regional response. By social scientists Central Asia is defined as one of the most vulnerable regions to natural hazards and complex emergencies. Vulnerability of the region also is connected with Fergana valley, which is one of the most densely populated area and the same time it is prone to natural hazards (earthquake, landslides, flooding) and complex emergencies (ethnic conflict, border tensions and territorial disputes). Besides, three of the Central Asian countries are bordered with Afghanistan whereas situation in Afghanistan directly influences for the stability in the region. All of those above-mentioned security challenges require regional approach and without partnership and cooperation it is hard to work out any formula for establishing peace and stability in the region. Thus, this paper accentuates on regional response and regional institutions in the region. Paper aims to analyze the role of regional institutions in Central Asia, interplay and inter-state bargaining of member states on security issues. Additionally, it would be equally relevant to question: What are main obstacles for regional cooperation and integration?

In international system, regional and intergovernmental organizations gained their popularity in diplomacy and international cooperation. While comparing other regional organization such as the EU, NAFTA, ASEAN, African Union and others, one can conclude that all of those organizations pursue the regional concern and all of them concentrate on regional security policy from political, economic and social perspective. Most scholars argue that the EU is the best example of regional institution which managed to create such a union that could include interests of all member states. Regardless of disagreements and different views on political and economic issues among the EU member state, it has provided intergovernmental platform that led to negotiations and diplomatic discussions. In contrast to other regions, the EU member states could get rid of hostility, hatred and mistrust among member states. Looking back to history of the European countries, it is evident that Europe was divided. Hostility and hatred was high due to

war and conflict among nation states of Europe. However, in the contemporary European Union, society has changed through integration and regionalization. Of course, one can see disagreements of European leaders on EU policy in security area, but none of the EU member state sees threat from members. Therefore, I am also convinced that from that perspective the EU is the best example of regional institution.

As for the case of Central Asia, it has created regional institutions such as Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Collective Security Organization (CSO) and Central Asian countries also became members of Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). When I think about Central Asia, this region is defined as common and unique from social cultural context. However, from political and economic perspective Central Asia region is hard to define as independent. Cultural, traditional and language commonness in Central Asia is even higher than in other regions, but current inter-state relations indicate that Central Asian states are far from regional integration. The main reason is that the region is in the middle of powerful states such as Russia, China, Turkey and Iran. The history of the region is interlinked to Russia, China, Turkey and Iran and it would be also wrong to envisage independent policy of Central Asian countries in regional scope. Moreover, Central Asian cultural, economic, political and security issues are connected with its powerful neighbors. Therefore, while analyzing regional institutions of Central Asia one can notice that regional organizations SCO, CSO and OSCE include other member states which are beyond the Central Asian region.

It is argued that there have been taken promising actions in regional scope of Central Asia through bilateral and multilateral agreements which aim to address regional concerns. For instance, SCO, CSO, and OSCE, have been working in capacity building of member states security personal and policemen in crisis mitigation and combating against terrorism. However, there still presents criticism towards Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, who follow isolationist policy or neutrality on regional approach. Therefore, this paper considers important to analyze not only the role of regional institutions on regional security issue of Central Asia, but also to take into account disputes, tensions, competition, state-bargaining and interplay of member states. In addition, paper considers important to include mechanisms and tools which are applied by OSCE, Shanghai Cooperation as well as other regional institutions.

1.1 Common problems and types of disasters in the region

With the breakup of Soviet Union, five newly independent Central Asian states emerged into global civil society. The fall of communism brought a great number of topics for research in social science area, which includes: democratization, human rights promotion, nation-building, corruption, power change in Central Asian region and others. When scholars discuss about transition period and post-soviet period of Central Asia, critics focus mostly on low progress in economic and political reforms, power structure and political system, but less attention is given to common problems of Central Asian countries and vulnerability of the region into natural and man-made disasters. For instance, all Central Asian countries have multinational society; they have territorial disputes and the same time three Central Asian countries are bordered with Afghanistan, which also represent security challenge in the region.

In general context Central Asia is in the category of the most vulnerable sub-regions to natural hazards due to its geographic and climatic features, whereas the region is prone not only to earthquake, flooding, mudslides but it is also vulnerable to technological and man-made disasters. Central Asia is home to thousands of disaster prone areas and at the same time countries of the region is inherited with territorial disputes, enclaves that can turn out into inter-ethnic conflict and other types of complex emergencies. Thus, it is equally important to take into account vulnerability of the region for natural and man-made crisis.

Table 1 Disaster prone areas and potential natural hazards in the region

Country	Natural Hazards	Man-made disasters and complex emergencies
Kazakhstan	Geophysical: Earthquake, Hydrological: Floods Climatological: Extreme temperatures, Drought	Central Asian countries, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan inherited with enclaves which raise territorial disputes and conflicts.
Kyrgyzstan	Geophysical: Earthquake, landslides Hydrological: Floods Climatological: Extreme	Complex emergencies/conflicts also home to the region and it result displacement of people and refugee flow. Besides, three of the Central Asian

	temperatures, Drought	countries are bordered with Afghanistan whereas situation in Afghanistan directly influences for stability in the region. Therefore, while considering the complex emergencies connected with conflict and refugee flow, the case of Central Asia will cover external complex emergencies (deployment of American troops from Afghanistan, which may affect the intervention of radical extremists such as IMU, Hizbut Tahrir) that can affect the region.
Tajikistan	Geophysical: Earthquake, landslides Hydrological: Floods Climatological: Extreme temperatures, Drought	
Turkmenistan	Geophysical: Earthquake, landslides Hydrological: Floods Climatological: Extreme temperatures, Drought	
Uzbekistan	Geophysical: Earthquake, landslides Hydrological: Floods Climatological: Extreme temperatures, Drought	

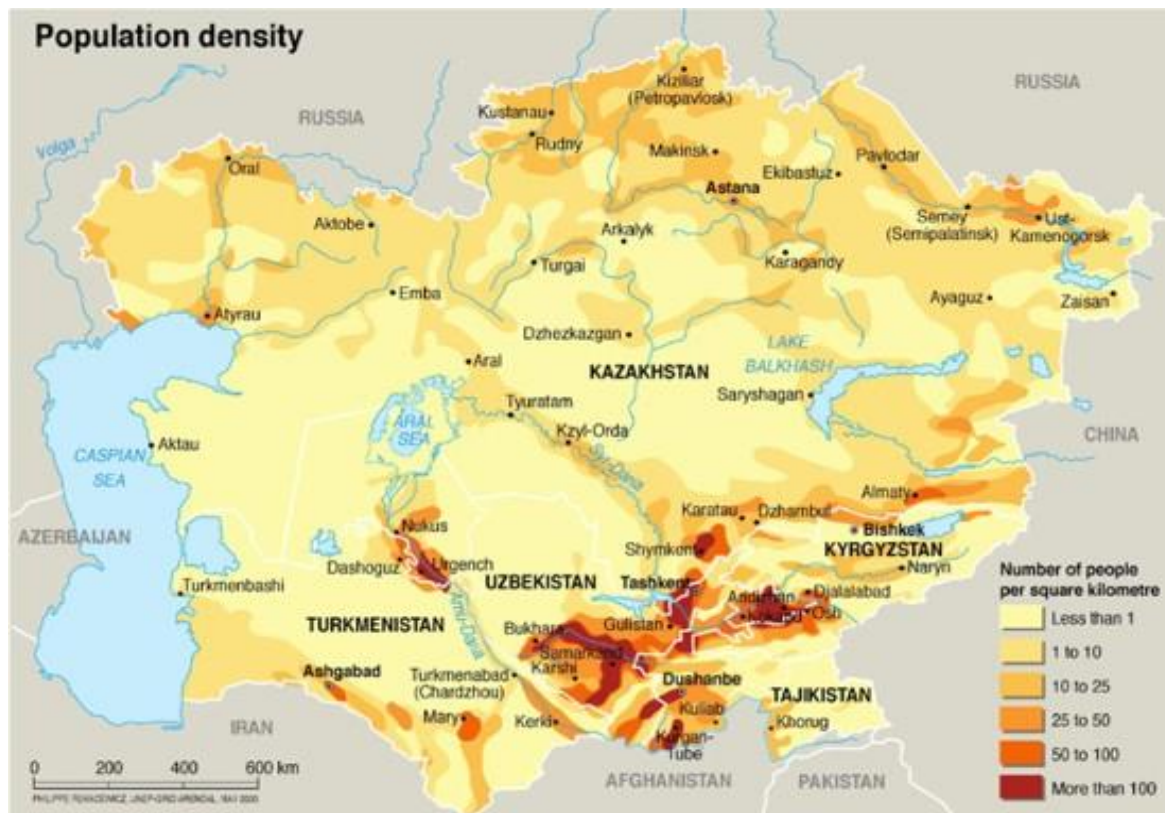
While going to sub-regional level, one can note that Central Asia is equipped with several types of disasters and different types of complex emergencies. Without active participation of all Central Asian states it would be impossible to respond natural hazards as well as complex emergencies. When one refers to regional institutions - Shanghai Cooperation and CSO, not all Central Asian states are members, whereas Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan declined from membership due to their tension with Moscow or neutrality policy.

In the case Central Asia, it is relevant to highlight the role of intergovernmental organization OSCE and European Union funded projects for the stabilization of the region. For instance, all Central Asian countries are members of OSCE and all of them benefitted from the EU funded TACIS projects, which pursued to address security issues in Central Asia. However, one can note that OSCE also not actively used as platform for Central Asian countries.

1.2 Fergana Valley

In Central Asia, the Fergana valley, while straddling Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, is the most densely populated and disaster prone area of the CIS region and it is home to the largest cities of Central Asia as Andijon - the fourth largest in Uzbekistan, and Osh – the second biggest in Kyrgyzstan.

Map 1, Map of Fergana valley, which includes the population density index



While accommodating a quarter of region's total population in less than 5 % of Central Asian territory and having 1600 people per square mile, Fergana Valley is defined by local and western scholars as the most densely populated part of Central Asia. The high population density, border disputes and existence of enclaves in Fergana increases vulnerability of the region to greater extent. Fergana valley is defined as highly vulnerable to natural and man-made disasters and it is prone to complex emergencies connected with ethnic violence, territorial disputes, water disputes and radicalism.

Table 2 Population density in Central Asia for 2013

Country	Population	Population density (people per sq. km)
Central Asia	65,115,059	40,8
Kazakhstan	16,909,776	6,2
Kyrgyzstan	5,663,100	28,3
Tajikistan	7,807,212	56,1
Turkmenistan	5,179,571	11,1
Uzbekistan	29,555,400	71,1
Fergana valley	14,000,000	1600

Moreover, social scientists draw attention to the fact that “the Ferghana region was always prone to disasters. A powerful earthquake and resulting floods in the seventeenth century forced Namangan and other cities to move, while a powerful earthquake in 1920 obliterated scores of settlements, killing thousands”¹. Therefore, while investigating projects of OSCE and agendas of Shanghai Cooperation one can notice that Fergana region is carefully addressed in terms of disaster risk reduction and crisis management.

Apart from natural hazards, the Fergana valley is defined by social scientists as the potentially explosive region in CIS region, which is followed with social and ethnic conflicts. For instance, all last major ethnic conflicts (that resulted displacement and flow of refugees across the region), revolts and ethnic violence in Central Asia took place in Fergana valley:

- *The ethnic conflict between Uzbek and Kyrgyz took place in Southern part of Kyrgyzstan in 1990s, in 2010*
- *In 1992 the Uzbek city of Namangan witnessed an outbreak of religious-based violence that presaged the founding of the radical Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.*
- *In 1999 a Tajik colonel, Mahmud Khudoiberdiev, took control of large areas of the Tajik sector of the valley in an attempt to oust President Emomali Rakhmonov*
- *In 2005, Uzbek forces opened fire on Uzbek protestors in Andijon, killing from several hundred to 1,000 people according to differing estimates (Frederick Starr 2010).*

¹ Frederrick Starr (2005), *Introducing the Ferghana Valley*, Mesharpe Inc.,

The list of ethnic violence and conflicts in Fergana valley can be quite long. In addition, Fergana Valley accommodates all seven existing enclaves of three Central Asian countries which retain the ethnic tension and violence.

Map 2, Map of Fergana Valley, which indicates the existing enclaves²



2.1 Regional organizations in the region

Analyzing regional organizations in different parts of the world, it can be argued that geographical location, common culture, history, and common heritage matters for successful integration of member states in regional organizations. Contemporary social scientists connect the notion of regionalism with themes such as common identity, common heritage and cultural values. It is argued that common heritage and common values matter for successful regional integration and institutionalization process. Without common past, common history and common heritage it is doubted to create unified and institutionalized regional institution.

² The Map of Fergana Valley .,

In the case of the EU, Eurocrats state about common past, history, common values, culture and religion. Regardless of East – West cleavage, old and new member state divisions, scholars find common values of Europeanness. While defining 5 axioms of Europeanness, Milan Kundera defined coffee house as one of the main axioms to define European commonness (Kundera, 1984). Of course, even the EU member states have different views on security issues but all the EU members use the EU institution, Council of Europe, European Parliament, European Commission and OSCE as a platform for discussion that result inter-state bargaining and negotiations on regional issues.

As for the case of Central Asia, the region also can be defined unique in terms of their socio-cultural, traditional values. At the same time the Soviet period brought more than cultural and traditional commonness for the region, called Soviet civic and political culture. The Soviet period of Central Asia is described as one of educational advancement and modernization of society in the region, which had vital significance for political system and power structure. The Soviet past inherited the region with interdependency on Russia from political, economic, education and even cultural perspective. Therefore, it is hard to discuss security challenges of Central Asia without Russian participation.

The next important fact regarding regionalization in the region is connected with the role of China as well, which has increased in economic area. Avery Goldstein wrote that “China has rapidly become a key actor on the regional scene, and even if Beijing traditionally promotes bilateral relations, it is now experimenting with new regional platforms. The CA region is today understood as a driver of China’s ensuring its ‘peaceful rise’ (heping jueqi) in order to allay international concerns” (2005:13). Therefore, while analyzing the region, one can conclude that regional institutions of Central Asia either led by Russia or China. It shows the interdependency of Central Asian countries from China and Russia on political and economic terms.

At the same time, neither Shanghai Cooperation nor CSO includes all Central Asian countries, only Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan are full-fledged members of two regional organizations. It means, both of these organizations serve as a platform only for three Central Asian countries to discuss common security challenges with China and Russia, whereas

Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are left behind from regional scope. In the analysis of Regional security issues in the region, one can note that all Central Asian countries acknowledge challenges such as terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism, security threat from Afghanistan, migration flow, human trafficking, organized crime and drug trafficking are common concern of all Central Asian countries.

However, the approach of Central Asian leaders to address above-mentioned issues differ from one state to another, whereby three Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan show trust and credibility to solve it with the participation of Russia and China whereas Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan keep distance. According to Martin C. Spechler political frictions among the states of the region and their preference for dealing with outsiders, perceived to be more capable and less dangerous, are responsible for the failure to put regional cooperation into practice (2000; p.10). There is another interesting view by Luca Anceschi, who draws attention to Turkmenistan's unique position since it is the only CA country to have declared its reluctance to engage in any multilateral or regional cooperation and refuses to envisage, even symbolically³. Uzbekistan's position also can be characterized as distant from Russia and isolationist. Although there are many factors favoring for regional integration, Central Asian leaders have been showing the lack of will for integration process.

2.2 Shanghai Cooperation and its role for security in the region

SCO, which includes 4 states of Central Asia (except Turkmenistan), China and Russia, is intergovernmental organization that aims addressing not only security but also economic issues in the region. As local and international scholars argue, SCO already appeared as an umbrella under which member states can initiate and deepen economic ties with one another. For example,

Kyrgyzstan's northwestern Talas province in February 2011 announced plans to sign a memorandum of economic partnership with Russia's Altai province under the SCO's umbrella.⁵² And in 2009, the SCO's umbrella was used to initiate joint economic cooperation amidst the global financial crisis,⁵³ with the first meeting of SCO finance ministers and heads of central banks held in Kazakhstan that December.⁵⁴ China, though, has by far used this umbrella the most (J. Boland 2011, p.13).

³ Luca Anceschi, *Turkmenistan's Foreign Policy. Positive Neutrality and the Consolidation of the Turkmen Regime* (London: Routledge, 2008); Sebastien Peyrouse, *Turkmenistan: Strategies of Power, Dilemmas of Development* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2011).

Furthermore, the latest annual meeting of SCO in China showed, how this platform is now used to tie up economic, business and trade relations.

However, when one analyzes SCO annual meeting agendas, the security activities dominate. As far as Central Asia is bordered with Afghanistan, security issues connected with counter-terrorism and combatting trafficking is prioritized in regional scope. In this regard, Julie Boland emphasized that,

The SCO has made progress on counter narcotics issues as well, to complement its Afghanistan-focused efforts. The RATS signed a Protocol of Cooperation with the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center (CARICC) on September 27th, 2010 to combat drug trafficking, trans-border drug crime, and subsequent terrorist related financing (2011, p.13).

In high security issues connected with border management, counter-trafficking counter-terrorism and radicalism, SCO can be considered more operative. In the frame of SCO countries of Central Asian countries have been participating security exercises on counter-terrorism, drug trafficking which develops capacity building of member states. Importance of regional approach in the scope of SCO also derives from the NATO deployment in Afghanistan by the end of 2014. According to Stephen Aris "SCO's elites are increasingly focused on developing a regional approach to Afghanistan" (2013, p.6).

2.3 OSCE launched projects in security area in the region

Regarding security issues of Central Asia, experts refer to OSCE which includes all Central Asian countries and it is assumed that OSCE can be used as platform for state bargaining, cooperation and partnership of member states on security issues. The main reason is that in OSCE Turkmenistan as well as Uzbekistan, who declined on their membership in CSO and Shanghai Cooperation due to concern on their independent position, have opportunity to discuss Central Asian security challenges in OSCE platform in presence of the third party countries from Europe. Besides, OSCE mission aims cover issues on border management, conflict resolution, counter-trafficking, combating terrorism, arm control and other security issues which are relevant to the case of Central Asian regional security.

It is argued that OSCE while being intergovernmental organization have been actively participating in launching projects in security and human rights area in the region. Central Asian

countries' leaders have been expressing joint will for OSCE activation to combat in terrorism, border management, human-trafficking. According to Roy Alison, Central Asian presidents jointly appealed to the UN, the OSCE and other international organizations for greater efforts to resolve the crisis in Afganistan. However, as annual reports of OSCE on Human Dimension implementation indicates, even OSCE is passively used for cooperation by Central Asian states. To some extend even in OSCE framework, the cooperation and partnership among Central Asian states is ignored.

Central Asian countries, by being members of OSCE got a great opportunity to develop civil society from the Western perspective. Most social scientists have been expressing their hope for changes in Central Asia through neoliberal approach that pursue civil society development through NGOs activities and non state actors. However, as UN reports on human rights issues and OSCE Reports on the Human Dimension Implementation indicate, Central Asia has been identified as a highly problematic region due to human rights violations and suppression of non-state actors in the region.

Table 3, Ranking of Central Asian countries in Freedom House report

<i>Country</i>	<i>Freedom Status</i>	<i>Political rights</i>	<i>Civic Liberties</i>
Kazakhstan	Not free	6	7
Kyrgyzstan	Not free	5	7
Tajikistan	Not free	6	7
Turkmenistan	Not free	7	7
Uzbekistan	Not free	7	7

This ranking is based on Freedom House ranking scale report for 2011/2012 for PR and CL (7 represents the least free rating)

As table three shows all Central Asian countries are categorized as not free in terms of political and civic rights. There can be several factors which hamper to effective implementation of OSCE projects in Central Asian. In one hand, it is connected with human rights concept, which

is enhanced by OSCE in different areas. Security issues of border management, combating terrorism and counter-trafficking are tightly related with law enforcement, protection of human rights, and application of rule of law. At the same time, OSCE covers European, Balkan, Caucasus and Central Asian regions whereby adopted documents and recommendations are based on European values.

The next point is that in contrast to CSO and SCO, OSCE projects accentuates at civil society development through neoliberal approach, which seeks to foster democratic reforms, application of rule of law, decentralization, political and civic participation and human rights promotion. All the above values interpreted by local experts and governmental institutions as external and native to western culture. Therefore, OSCE also cannot be seen as active intergovernmental platform for Central Asian countries.

Conclusion

In overall context, the region represents a great opportunity to research the common security challenges, cooperation, consultation, bargaining and response on the scope of regional institutions. Security issues connected with vulnerability of Central Asian countries into natural hazards and complex emergencies (that may derive from territorial disputes, ethnic violence, drug trafficking, combating against terrorism and extremism) equally proves that regional cooperation is necessary to solve common problems. However, geopolitical interests, rivalry and competition of Central Asian states result disinterest and ignorance in security questions. Security issues of Central Asia are not only border management, drug trafficking, and counter-terrorism, but it is tightly related with complex emergencies connected with ethnic conflict, territorial disputes and border tensions among member states.

Geopolitical interest and rivalry brings for confrontations and competitions in other regional institutions as well. Even the EU, which is exemplified as success story of regional integration, has full of disagreements, disputes on security related issues. The debate over Ukrainian crisis on EU agenda, where EU member states' view differs from one state to another, clearly shows that the EU also has not common view in regional scope. Nevertheless, the EU state bargaining shows only their difference, plurality and voice of each member state. The EU member do not

threaten each other because of geopolitical and economic interest. In contrast to European region, Central Asian countries still have border tensions which result death of civilian. Regardless of their interdependency, Central Asian states develop rivalry rather than friendly relations.

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