

External Forces in Central Asia: Shaping the Regional Balance

*Mubinzhon Abduvaliev, Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation Institute of the Asian Development Bank (ADB)*¹

*Ricardo Bustillo, University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU*²

*Crina Viju-Miljusevic, Institute of European, Russian and Eurasian Studies, Carleton University*³

Abstract

Competing regional cooperation mechanisms in Central Asia provide a unique opportunity for a case study of overlapping regionalisms pursued by three *core* external actors: the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Russian Federation (RF), and the European Union (EU). The authors' analysis is focused on the increasingly competing trade routes or corridors in Central Asia as well as the rivalry and interdependency between the participating countries. The research question addressed is what are the distinctive roles of the core powers—EU, RF and PRC—in reshaping the region? The mapping of the most important external-driven regional initiatives in Central Asia, their goals and achievements presented in this article, provides supporting evidence to a potential divide-and-conquer strategy pursued by the three external powers in Central Asia. The use of bilateral agreements and privileged relations with certain countries (Kazakhstan) hinder the development of regional cooperation.

¹ Mubinzhon Abduvaliev is a researcher and national consultant of the Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation Institute of the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

² Ricardo Bustillo is an Associate professor at the University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU in Leioa, Spain.²

³ Crina Viju-Miljusevic is an Associate Professor at the Institute of European, Russian and Eurasian Studies at Carleton University.

Introduction

Studies on regional integration have yielded a set of heterogeneous generalizations and theoretical frameworks based on various case studies of well-known international regions in Europe, North America, Southeast Asia, and, to a lesser extent, South America and Africa. Scholars use different terminology in referring to these various integrative arrangements in different regions of the world, but “regionalism” has emerged as the general term to refer to international cooperation based on geographic area (Börzel and Risse 2016; Hettne 2005; Katzenstein 2005; Söderbaum and Shaw 2003; van Langehove 2011).

This article focuses on the models of regionalism exhibited within Central Asia. The countries in the region follow multi-vector foreign policies by seeking to balance relations with the EU, Russia, China, the US, but also Turkey and Iran. Thus, Central Asia provides a unique case study of overlapping regionalisms pursued by different core actors, among which we consider China, Russia, and the EU. This article will seek to answer the following research question: what are the distinctive roles of the core powers—EU, Russia, and China—in reshaping the region?

The article is structured as follows: the first section starts with a discussion of the history of regionalism in Central Asia. The following section provides an empirical analysis to assess trade integration in Central Asia, followed by a discussion of the roles played by the EU, Russia, and China in regional integration. The article ends with conclusions and future policy recommendations.

History of Regionalism in Central Asia

Regionalism was a form of territorial government during the Soviet era since administrative divisions played an important role in Soviet territorial organization. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) consisted of 15 separate union republics⁴ (Simon 1987). Through the further division of the republics into *oblasts*, *krais*,⁵ and districts, a complex administrative system that often crossed ethnic and linguistic boundaries was created. Moreover, this structure reinforced the idea of a multinational state by promoting regionalism as a method for organizing a country with a diverse population.

The collapse of the USSR in 1991 shifted the focus of regional attention to nation-states due to the rise of new sovereign nations after the Soviet era. As a significant part of the USSR, the Central Asian republics (CARs) of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan experienced some degree of autonomy and collaborated with each other (Patel 2020). During the period of the Soviet Union, Central Asia was a significant region that underwent extensive administrative and political restructuring. The Soviet government aimed to integrate CARs into the broader framework of the USSR, promoting industrialization, collectivization of agriculture, and the establishment of a centralized economy. This integration often involved suppressing local cultures and identities in favour of a unified Soviet identity. Each republic had its own unique ethnic composition and historical background but was governed under the overarching policies dictated by Moscow (Cummins 2004). The collaboration within Central Asia as part of the USSR was marked by both cooperation and tension among the various ethnic groups and local leaders. While there were efforts to promote economic

⁴ The list of republics was as follows: Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), Azerbaijan SSR, Byelorussian SSR, Estonian SSR, Georgian SSR, Kazakh SSR, Kirghiz SSR, Latvian SSR, Lithuanian SSR, Moldavian SSR, Russian SSR, Tajik SSR, Turkmen SSR, Ukrainian SSR, and Uzbek SSR.

⁵ The term “oblast” (Russian: область) translates to “province” or “region.” During the Soviet era, oblasts became the primary top-level administrative division of the Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs). The term “krai” (Russian: край) can be translated as “territory” or “frontier.” Historically, krais were larger administrative divisions than oblasts and were often associated with border regions or areas of significant geographical importance.

development through shared resources and infrastructure projects, there were also significant challenges related to ethnic nationalism and resistance to central authority. The legacy of this collaboration continues to influence post-Soviet relations among these countries today (Olcott 2005). Following the collapse of the USSR, the absence of a central government to manage the economy left them without key state institutions, sovereign legal frameworks, and military forces. The newly independent CARs exhibited an outstanding degree of heterogeneity following the breakup of the USSR—a heterogeneity that was hidden under the centralized Soviet hierarchy (Laitin 1991).

In the early years of independence, CARs focused primarily on nation-building and consolidating their sovereignty. A number of internal issues occupied their attention, including the establishment of political institutions, constitutional development, and the transition from centrally planned to market-driven economies (Rakhimov 2018). Therefore, regional cooperation and integration were not a priority at the time. However, CARs recognized the benefits of regional cooperation as they progressed through the initial phase of nation-building. Regional cooperation contributes to economic development, security, and environmental issues. It was at this point that Central Asian regionalism began to take shape.

As the region shared a similar historical and cultural heritage (Bohr 2004) due to several empires and civilizations leaving their mark on Central Asia over time, CARs were starting to develop a sense of common identity. CARs realized that by working together, they could better overcome their individual economic challenges triggered by the transition from centrally planned to market-oriented economies (Libman and Obydenkova 2017). As a result, they explored opportunities for trade, investment, infrastructure development, and security within the region. Consequently, the lack of regional cooperation among CARs is surprising and the failure of regionalism in Central Asia is puzzling. CARs have not been able to establish durable regional cooperation since the end of the Cold War despite efforts to do so (Krapohl and Vasileva-Dienes 2020). The failure of Central Asian regionalism can be explained by domestic political factors as well as their dependency on extra-regional economies and external powers.

Although some CARs are members of wider regional organizations, such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the integration of these organizations is often questioned.⁶ For instance, political challenges, economic struggles, and security concerns have all contributed to the perception of CIS' weakness. Organizational weakness can be attributed to a lack of strong central authority, political disagreements, economic disparities, corruption, and security threats (Sattar and Shiells 2004). Thus, Soviet policies, both intentional and unintentional, contributed to the strengthening of regional identities and regionalism in various parts of the USSR. Regional cooperation may exist in developing regions, but this does not imply that it is supplied automatically (Krapohl et al. 2014). However, while organizational weaknesses may pose challenges to regional cooperation in developing areas like Central Asia, forums such as the Consultative Meeting of Central Asian Heads of State exemplify how countries can come together independently to address mutual concerns effectively.

From 2018 to 2023, the Consultative Meeting of Central Asian Heads of State became pivotal in reshaping regionalism in Central Asia by fostering dialogue on economic integration, security cooperation, cultural exchange, and collaboration with international organizations (Umirzakova and

⁶ Pomfret (2009, 54) argues that regionalization is not worth going through with in this region due to the similarity of the economies, as all CARs are specialized in a similar group of primary goods. Additionally, Wang (2014) argues that CARs' exports are similar, with a low degree of complementariness. Looking at different regions for comparison, in 2023, approximately 60 percent of the total trade value of the EU takes place within the EU (Eurostat 2025), 25 percent of exports take place within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region, while only 9 percent of exports take place within Central Asia (Asian Development Bank 2023).

Marat 2024). This evolving discourse reflects a growing recognition among Central Asian states that their futures are interconnected and that cooperative strategies are essential for addressing common challenges (Rakhimov 2023). As part of the Fifth Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State, a Joint Statement was adopted, outlining the main priorities of regional cooperation, as well as highlighting challenges and suggesting solutions. Additionally, the Heads of State adopted agreements concerning land transport and youth policy in Central Asia (UNRCCA 2023). On August 9, 2024, the Sixth Consultative Meeting of Central Asian Heads of State was held in Astana, Kazakhstan, with the goal of enhancing regional cooperation. There have been reports that economic ties and political dialogue are becoming increasingly intensive (*Astana Times* 2024). In this light, Central Asian cooperation can be viewed as a crucial tool for the region's countries as they navigate and deal with globalization's challenges. The configuration of the Consultative Meeting of Central Asian Heads of State serves as a vital forum that unites the countries of the region independently of external influences. It addresses the pressing requirement for mutual comprehension, unity, and regional development.

Current Status of Central Asian Regionalism

Regional Integration and Economic Development: An Empirical Analysis of Trade

The New Trade Theory (NTT) (Krugman 1979, 1980) outlined the role of regional integration (especially among medium or small-sized countries) as an important factor for economic growth. NTT identified the relevance of economies of scale and network effects as key elements to explain specialization patterns among countries. Therefore, localization of economic activities would require free access to enlarged integrated markets, hence suggesting improved cooperation among (too small) neighbouring countries. The traditional reference for CARs was the European Union (EU), but later, the relative success of Mercosur⁷ or other integration schemes for developing nations demonstrated to CARs the convenience of closer cooperation between themselves. However, the path towards regional integration has not been easy for the Central Asian states; they are still unable to agree on the basis for an eventual free trade agreement. Moreover, their access to global markets has not been too successful either, as figures of trade openness over the last two decades reveal (Figure 1, Appendix I): total trade over GDP decreased from around 80 percent in the early 2000s to levels between 50–60 percent in the 2020s. The percentage seems to have increased only for Kazakhstan, whereas the share for Uzbekistan has stayed at the same level.

Most studies explain the poor trade performance of CARs as a multi-factorial phenomenon. Firstly, most CARs are landlocked countries, whose road and railway infrastructures should be improved to boost intraregional trade. Although Central Asia is strategically located on the route between Europe and East Asia, which formed the ancient “Silk Road” (Frankopan 2017), nowadays it could be considered a peripheral region according to its economic appeal (Allison 2004). Secondly, even though three of the CARs belong to the WTO, trade policies remain rather protectionist. Moreover, all CARs tend to establish cumbersome customs controls, which hinder import-export operations. The WTO, as well as other institutions, have warned about the need to apply trade facilitation measures over the entire region (Asian Development Bank 2021). Finally, yet importantly, transport and logistic problems become even more significant for countries specializing in commodities such as energy, agricultural, or mineral products (Ogunleye et al. 2018).

The average share of intraregional trade between CARs from the total trade of each CAR was 15 percent in 2022, rather low in comparison with countries belonging to trade integration schemes; for instance, intraregional exports of each Mercosur country are 40–50 percent of total exports (CEPAL

⁷ Mercosur is a South American trade bloc established in 1994, whose members are Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay.

2022). CARs' intraregional trade average share has stayed unchanged from 2000 (14 percent) to 2022 (15 percent). There are, however, differences among CARs (Figures 2–6): whereas Tajikistan registers a high share of intraregional share over the total (30 percent), Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan's percentage is much lower (approximately 5 percent). The other two reveal a share around the average (Figures 2–6). The external partner whose share in CARs trade has grown the most is China. This is mainly due to its recent economic upsurge using an export-led growth strategy, which is even more relevant for CARs as China's neighbouring countries (Aizenman et al. 2018). China is the most important trade partner for Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan (Figures 1, 4, and 6, Appendix I); for Kazakhstan, the most relevant one is the EU (Figure 5, Appendix I); for Tajikistan, it is the Russian Federation (Figure 3, Appendix I). Despite the EU's low percentage of trade with most CARs, it is nevertheless the main trade partner of the region due to the increased trade flows with Kazakhstan (European Commission 2023). The application of a "multivector policy" (Paramonov and Akramova 2024) has permitted the establishment of strong economic ties between the EU and Kazakhstan. There has been a slight reduction in Russia's average trade participation from 19 percent in 2000 to 17 percent in 2022 despite the formation of the Eurasian Economic Union. Russia still holds relevant participation in the total trade figures for Tajikistan (24 percent), Kyrgyzstan (29 percent), and Kazakhstan (20 percent), whereas Uzbekistan (10 percent) and Turkmenistan (5 percent) register lower shares (Figures 2–6). Therefore, it seems that both China and the EU exhibit the largest trade potential. China has managed to increase its trade participation while the EU has just maintained its role in the region. Nevertheless, the decreasing trade role of Russia does not mean a decreased Russian influence in Central Asia. Apart from the trade link, Russia benefits from other types of connections, such as migration flows (especially from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) together with security agreements in the region.

The nomadic lifestyle prevalent among many ethnic groups in this region contributed to a fluidity in population movements. The Soviet era further complicated these dynamics as borders were drawn that did not necessarily reflect ethnic or cultural lines. Forced migrations during this period led to significant demographic changes that still affect mobility patterns today. In contemporary times, labour mobility is a critical aspect of people's movement in Central Asia. Economic disparities between countries have prompted many individuals to seek employment opportunities abroad. For instance, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have seen substantial numbers of their citizens migrate to Russia for work due to higher wages compared to what is available domestically. Remittances are an important source of external financing exceeding the inflow of foreign direct investment and official development assistance in these countries, making up as much as 16 percent to 48 percent of their GDP, respectively (World Bank 2023a). It is estimated that 5.6 million international migrants have been living in the five Central Asian countries since 2020. Almost nine percent of the international migrants hosted in Central Asia originate from the region itself. However, while there is potential for improved human mobility in Central Asia due to its strategic location and resources, various barriers—including geopolitical constraints, economic challenges, infrastructure deficiencies, cultural attitudes, and inadequate legal frameworks—have hindered this progress. These factors collectively create an environment where many individuals feel compelled to migrate out of the region in search of better opportunities for themselves and their families. In 2020, the total number of international migrants from Central Asian countries reached 7.8 million. Of this total, 63 percent (4.9 million) resided in the Russian Federation, 17 percent (1.3 million) in Germany, and 7 percent (529 thousand) in the United States, Ukraine, and Gulf countries combined (UN DESA 2020). The Central Asia-Russia migration corridor is characterized by significant labour movements driven by economic necessity, established social networks, political relationships, and demographic trends (IOM 2021). Delovarova et al. (2013) argue that considering the fact that Russia is a key player in the region, strengthening cooperation both among Central Asian countries and between Russia and Central Asia is essential for addressing key regional issues, as this remains a defining characteristic of the area. In addition, they argue that

Kazakhstan possesses significant potential to become a strong migration hub due to its economic stability, dynamic development trajectory, and proactive role in promoting regional cooperation in migration matters.

In 2022, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Central Asian countries experienced a significant increase in the number of Russian citizens arriving, which represented the largest influx since the CARs gained independence from the Soviet Union (Wahlang 2022). Despite the significant decrease in migration flows in 2023, the economies of all five Central Asian countries continue to benefit from Russian migrant workers and relocated companies, as well as the increasing demand for workers in Russia. There was general stability in Central Asian countries during 2023, as conflicts were avoided and economies grew, aided by high remittances from Russia. However, as a consequence of the gradual reversal of Russian migration flows in favour of other destinations, the EU has been attracting more migrants from Central Asia and Eastern Europe, owing to the unfavourable security and socioeconomic conditions in Russia as well as strategic measures taken by origin countries to diversify labour migration destinations and strengthen national economies. In 2022, there were 1.1 million valid work permits in the EU held by nationals of Central Asia and Eastern Europe (ICMPD 2024). The report provides a partial overview of advancements in the twelve countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA), as categorized by the ICMPD - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

To sum up, the trade figures underline the limited contribution of intraregional trade among CARs over the past 20 years. Additionally, the role of external actors has fluctuated over time, with an almost even distribution of trade among the EU, Russia, and China, with the EU and China increasing their trade shares with CARs during the past few years. As it pertains to people mobility, due to economic limitations, internal migration in Central Asian countries remains underdeveloped; however, external migration is flourishing primarily towards Russia in search of better opportunities, facilitated by economic incentives, fewer language barriers, social networks, and significant remittance inflows. The following sections will evaluate the main regional initiatives pursued by external actors in Central Asia.

Russia's Impact on Eurasian Regionalism: Challenges and Perspectives

In the period following the break-up of the Soviet Union, Russia initiated a spaghetti bowl of regional agreements with overlapping memberships, including the CARs. Russia has favoured the creation of several institutions aimed at strengthening its relations with the CARs, however, not many were successful. Thus, the authors will focus on three of the most prominent examples: the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) led by Russia, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) led by Russia, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) led by Russia and China.

The origins of EAEU were established in 1995 with the formation of a customs union by Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. In 2000, the five countries furthered their economic integration by forming the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC). Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia decided to take the economic relations further and thus, first, in January 2010, they formed the Eurasian Customs Union, followed by the signing in May 2014 of the Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), which became effective on January 1, 2015. A key aim of the EAEU is to create a single market and economic space among its member states. However, the EAEU's economic viability and significance are highly debated.

The EAEU is structured along a strict four-tiered institutional framework in which a higher-level institution may override a lower-level institution's decision (Yeliseyeu 2019). According to Mostafa and Mahmood (2018), upon initial observation of its external appearance and organizational framework, it may seem that the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) has achieved considerable advancement and operates effectively as a successful entity. However, a deeper examination reveals

that the organization encounters a multitude of challenges and obstacles, stemming both from its member states and the broader regional context. Russia plays an active role and contributes to the integration process, however, the lack of complementarity of the economies involved raises questions about the real objectives and motivations of Russia for pursuing such a project. According to some authors, Russia sometimes paternalizes CARs, as if Russia continues to understand CARs still as a part of the Great Game dynamics (Dadabaev 2021). The member states of the EAEU are different in terms of economic size, interests, and structures as well as their main trading partners. A common tariff policy within the EAEU benefits Russia more than smaller and poorer countries due to its large natural resource reserves, competitive economy, and relatively better-developed industry. Linn (2012) claims that the EAEU has the limitation of not including key CARs (Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) as well as not fully conforming to open regional principles. Additionally, the presence of non-tariff barriers has impeded the development of trade relations between its member states (Kaczmarek 2017). One of the main issues related to EAEU has been the large power asymmetry, with Russia being the dominant economic and military player (Libman et al. 2022). Thus, according to a number of analysts, the main goals of the EAEU are to revive and strengthen the former Soviet empire and establish Russian imperialism by building on the best values of the USSR (Mankoff 2022; Stronski and Sokolski 2020). However, the Russian annexation of Crimea and the war in Ukraine brought to the surface two important aspects of the EAEU. First, Western sanctions have raised major controversy in the EAEU. On the one hand, the sanctions imposed on Russia resulted in negative impacts for all members of the EAEU, which are dealt with by imposing domestic measures on currencies, remittances, and trade in commodities (Wolczuk and Dragneva 2022). On the other hand, countries of the EAEU can benefit from financial opportunities given the open borders with Russia. Additionally, a consensus within the EAEU on how to react to the Western sanctions could not be reached. Thus, not all members of the EAEU followed the Russian lead in imposing countersanctions on Western food products despite the customs union rules (Stronski and Sokolski 2020).

As far as CARs are concerned, only Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are members of the EAEU. One of the main goals of joining the EAEU is to establish bilateral relations with Russia, rather than multilateral integration. Kyrgyzstan joined the EAEU primarily for military, security, and strategic reasons (Trilling 2010). As remittances from Kyrgyz seasonal migrants represented about 30 percent of the country's annual gross domestic product in 2022 and given that most Kyrgyz workers migrate to Russia, Kyrgyzstan's membership in the EAEU was seen as a significant factor (World Bank 2023a). Joining the EAEU was also expected to ease trade barriers in agricultural exports to Russia and Kazakhstan (Satke 2015). Using a computational general equilibrium model to estimate the net impact of multiple channels (changing tariffs, re-exporting, and migration) between Kyrgyzstan and EAEU members, Mogilevskii et al. (2018) concluded that accession to the EAEU would result in a reduction in welfare as the falling profit from re-exporting outweighs an increase in migrant remittances and tariffs. Their conclusion, however, is that accession would be beneficial only to poor households. Given the lack of economic benefits for Kyrgyzstan, its membership in the EAEU is seen by many as merely a continuation of a long-standing Russian stranglehold (Peyrouse 2015). The expansion of the EAEU to states with weak economic and institutional foundations might delay the decision-making process within the organization. In exchange for its support of Russian initiatives in the EAEU, Kyrgyzstan likely sought certain economic benefits from Russia, such as benefits for migrants, foreign direct investment, and financial support in various areas (Tarr 2014).

Compared to Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan's government has been a staunch supporter of the EAEU despite the doubts related to its economic goals raised by scholars. Thus, the country has actively participated in the decision-making processes of the EAEU, contributing to the development of the organization's policies and initiatives. Without Kazakhstan's participation, Eurasian integration would not have been possible in Central Asia (Yuneman 2020). At first, Kazakhstan's economic conditions improved, trade and investment increased, and economic growth was stimulated, however, this was followed by a

gradual decline in trade and foreign direct investment (FDI), especially since 2014 when the Western sanctions against Russia started and oil prices declined (Mostafa and Mahmood 2018). According to Konopelko (2018), the EAEU will result in an increased dependence on Russia for its member states. Regarding the effects on trade, most studies have found that trade turnovers experienced only negligible increases (Isakova et al., 2015), whereas the overall well-being of the countries involved tended to decline. However, investments and migration were positively impacted, which led to questions about the necessity of a customs union (Obydenkova and Libman 2019).

Aside from economic challenges, CARs face security challenges that require greater attention from researchers and policymakers. Due to the deterioration of Afghanistan's security situation and the Russo-Ukrainian war, the perception that Central Asian countries have more limited room to maneuver than other post-Soviet states has been heightened. Due to these processes, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO)⁸ has been strengthened, serving both to support Russian sovereignty abroad as well as a method to enhance Russian supremacy at home. CSTO has developed a common military command and rapid reaction forces. Russian military forces are dominant in the CSTO and Russia has military bases located in some CARs (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan) (Hussain et al. 2022). Thus, the Central Asian states are quite limited in terms of freedom of initiative within the CSTO. An exception is Uzbekistan, which is not dependent on Russia from a political, economic, or security perspective (de Haas 2017).

To summarize, Russia has tried to continue its role as a hegemon in the region with the help of institutions that primarily defend its economic (EAEU) or military interests (CSTO), but without a genuine objective of favouring the development of trade and economic activity in the region. The reasoning behind supporting such integration initiatives is diverse, including support for like-minded regimes and their legitimacy and status at the international level. Russia, for example, describes the EAEU as the ultimate confirmation of the country's status as a global power (Libman 2017). Of the three leading powers, Russia's regionalization projects are the most comprehensive, addressing both economic and military aspects. In addition to regional frameworks and organizations, Russia has also signed several bilateral agreements with the CARs, particularly in the field of energy. Russian oil companies have also engaged heavily in every CAR with the backing of the Russian state, spreading the country's energy dominance in the region (Kazantsev et al. 2021).

China's Impact on Eurasian Regionalism: Challenges and Perspectives

China has been active in Central Asia since the early 1990s, with the signing of multiple bilateral investment agreements (BIT).⁹ In addition to bilateral treaties, China has also engaged in multilateral cooperation through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in line with its supporting institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Regionalism efforts in the twenty-first century have been driven by more multilateral cooperation through SCO as well as BRI, although BRI investment agreements are generally conducted on a bilateral basis.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), composed of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, was established in 2001 with the goal of promoting regional cooperation in areas such as security, economy, and culture. India and Pakistan joined the organization in 2017, followed by Iran in 2023. The SCO developed an institutional framework that allows regular meetings

⁸ The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is an intergovernmental military alliance in Eurasia consisting of six post-Soviet states: Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan, formed in 2002, which originates from the Collective Security Treaty signed in 1992 by Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The Treaty was joined in 1993 by Azerbaijan, Belarus and Georgia (CSTO 2025).

⁹ China signed bilateral agreements with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan (updated 2011), Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan in 1992, and with Tajikistan in 1993 (updated 2024).

at different levels (Heads of State, Business Councils and other working groups) (de Haas 2017). The SCO is viewed by some as an instrument to improve relations between Russia and China and to promote their interests in the region (Aris 2008). Others consider that the SCO is mainly a Chinese initiative through which China attempts to implement its development model in Central Asia (Yuan 2010).

The relationship between China and CARs has steadily deepened in new multilateral settings since the founding of the SCO. However, several authors have argued that China's foreign policy in Central Asia is characterized by a form of "new regionalism," establishing vassal relations with Central Asia or executing geopolitical maneuvers (Ba 2009; Chung 2004). Kolpakova and Kuchinskaya (2015) and Yun and Park (2012) assert that the SCO provides a basis for the deepening of Chinese-Russian relations, whereas Kembayev (2017) argues that the SCO contributes to economic prosperity among its members and complements the One Belt One Road initiative.

In addition to strengthening the influence of Russia and China in Central Asia, the SCO also demonstrates a new model for regional cooperation,¹⁰ which is crucial to establishing a mechanism of trust in security and economic cooperation. Furthermore, China is actively promoting economic and financial cooperation within the SCO, prioritizing investment projects in addition to being the largest economic partner of Central Asia. Due to China's heavy reliance on loans to implement investment projects in Central Asia, CARs have become China's debtors over the years (Stonis 2022).

SCO members and observers, however, do not share a common set of objectives. The organization's diverse membership and wide-ranging agenda inevitably undermine the organization's effectiveness (de Haas 2017). As an example, China is looking for (Central Asian) markets to expand its economy and energy sources to sustain its economic growth (Pradhan and Mohanty 2021), as well as resolve border issues with Central Asian countries and maintain stability in the Xinjiang region (Chao 2022). Russia aspires to regain its regional leadership within the CIS as well as the status of a global power. The protection of Russia and China, as well as the SCO, is viewed by some Central Asian regimes as a guarantee of their survival. Additionally, there are a number of conflicting interests among the SCO member states concerning military transit, regional rivalry, and confrontation (between China and Russia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and India and Pakistan) (de Haas 2017). It is clear from this mixture of divergent objectives that there is not much common ground between the member states of the SCO. However, focusing on the economic aspects, there are many benefits to Central Asia's economic development through SCO, as it provides a platform to do business with other SCO members and ensures that neither Moscow nor Beijing will take the first step towards dominating Central Asia. SCO is a valuable organization for the regional development of Central Asia by providing a platform to launch multilateral or bilateral negotiations. It achieved most successes in solving border disputes, in promoting a security agenda and in fighting international terrorism. From a trade perspective, the SCO shows quite limited results. However, scholars pointed out that most efficient decisions are taken at the bilateral level, thus bringing into question its multilateral goals (Obydenkova and Libman 2019).

Moving on to China's economic-focused initiatives, during the ancient Silk Road (207 BCE-220 CE), Central Asia was an important hub for long-distance overland trade between China, Europe, and the Middle East (Yazdan 2020). A new historical period in the relationship between China and Central Asia began with the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. Whereas China offers Central Asia a way to travel between China and Europe overland, Central Asia can access the Pacific Ocean safely and securely through China (Zhuangzhi 2007). The Silk Road Economic Belt crosses

¹⁰ There have been significant efforts to create a productive security agenda in Central Asia and to increase solidarity among the members of the SCO. In the meantime, international relations scholars are concerned about the excessive presence of two influential members of the SCO, namely Russia and China. It is likely that these two enormous powers may be compelled to go beyond these objectives in an attempt to mimic Western-style organizations as a result of increased cooperation opportunities in the Asian region (Ünaldilar Kocamaz 2019).

through Central Asia, which is an important strategic region for China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Additionally, the region is replete with natural resources that are vital to the growth of the Chinese economy.

A key component of the Belt and Road Initiative is the Silk Road Economic Belt, introduced by President Xi Jinping in 2013 as the Central Asian component of the BRI (*Astana Times* 2013). This initiative is intended to promote trade and develop infrastructure to deliver stability to all (Davé and Kobayashi 2018). Furthermore, it launches new initiatives aimed at improving connections between Central Asia, South Asia, and China as well as expanding the security arc westward to serve as a corridor between China and Europe, in addition to consolidating Beijing's existing economic investments and security measures.

The number of countries that signed a Memorandum of Understanding with China has reached 138 (Yue and Nedopil 2022). BRI is divided into six corridors, each with its own set of trade and investment opportunities, with the China–Central Asia–West Asia Corridor belonging to CARs. This corridor will connect Western China to Turkey and improve connectivity between China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, and Turkey by connecting railway networks from China to the Mediterranean Sea (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China 2019). Furthermore, to invest in rail, China is building roads and other infrastructure projects that have the potential to transform the economies of Central Asia.

According to the China Global Investment Tracker of the American Enterprise Institute (November 2020), the total volume of Chinese investments within the BRI in 2013–2020 was 755.17 billion US dollars (USD). Moreover, the total volume of Chinese investment in Central Asian countries from 2005 to 2020 amounted to 50 billion USD, of which 35.58 billion USD went to Kazakhstan, 5.79 billion to Uzbekistan, 4.73 billion to Kyrgyzstan, and 2.15 billion to Tajikistan. Additionally, the Chinese government has invested in the construction of an oil pipeline between Kazakhstan and China, a gas pipeline between Kyrgyzstan and China, and a power transmission line between Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Bishkek-Tashkent and Lanzhou-Xinjiang are examples of railways and highways that China has built in the region.

It is highly likely that China's BRI Initiative will become one of the most important contributions to the economic development of Central Asia. CARs will benefit from increased investments under BRI, increased trade, and job creation. However, there are also concerns about the potential risks and challenges associated with China's growing influence in the region, such as debt sustainability and environmental impacts. China is the largest lender in the region, and all CARs, except for Kazakhstan, are heavily indebted to China (Matveeva 2023). Additionally, all projects are negotiated and implemented at the bilateral rather than multilateral level, with no centralized coordination mechanism (Dunford and Liu 2019; Huang 2016; Tekdal 2018).

There has been no doubt that China's economic transformation over the past few decades has been nothing short of extraordinary. As a result of this rapid growth, the Chinese leadership has developed a sense of "moral superiority," believing that their success entitles them to export their "benevolence" around the globe. In addition to its aspirations for global influence, this belief is rooted in China's historical and cultural identity. Therefore, the BRI appears to be based on a combination of Western and Confucian values, suggesting a post-Western/Chinese form of regionalism (Bunskoek and Shih 2021). However, international observers have expressed concern and debate over this self-perceived "benevolence." Some view China's actions as driven by strategic interests rather than genuine altruism, raising questions about the implications of China's expanding influence on global governance and norms.

Cheng (2010) argues that while the "Great Game" provides historical context, it falls short of explaining contemporary complexities in Central Asia's geopolitical landscape. A complex power

structure model better encapsulates the interplay between traditional powers like Russia, rising influences such as China and the US and the assertive roles played by regional states. However, a nuanced understanding requires consideration of a complex power structure model that incorporates both traditional influences and emerging dynamics. Understanding Central Asia requires moving beyond the simplistic binary framework of the “Great Game” to embrace a more nuanced perspective that accounts for multiple layers of influence from powers like Russia, China, and the United States alongside regional actors.

To summarize, China’s substantial involvement in Central Asia has been dubbed “The New Great Game” (Cooley 2012; Fingar 2016). Economic interests have taken precedence over security concerns. China’s relative influence in Central Asia compared to Russia and Western countries (EU and US) has grown with its increasing economic engagement in the region. In fact, there is no doubt that China’s economic expansion and dynamism can have a win-win effect that benefits both, China as well as the CARs. While Chinese investment in Central Asia offers opportunities for economic growth and development, it also presents several challenges that need to be carefully managed to ensure sustainable and mutually beneficial outcomes for all parties involved. One of the primary challenges associated with Chinese investment in Central Asia is the risk of debt dependency. As China provides loans and investments for infrastructure projects in the region, there is a concern that Central Asian countries may accumulate unsustainable levels of debt. Furthermore, Chinese investments in Central Asia may also bring about social challenges. Large-scale infrastructure projects often require significant labour forces, and there have been reports of Chinese companies bringing in their workers rather than employing locals (Hillman and Tippet 2021). In addition, the growing influence of China in Central Asia through its investments poses geopolitical risks for the region. As China expands its economic footprint, there are concerns about potential political interference or pressure exerted by Beijing on Central Asian governments. This could lead to shifts in regional power dynamics and create instability if countries in the region feel compelled to align themselves more closely with China at the expense of other international relationships.

Overall, China’s regionalism projects in the region, except for the SCO, are largely carried out through initiatives with global scope. China has an undeniable interest in Central Asia, where significant investments have been made in oil and gas infrastructure and transport corridors. This has led to a gradual supplantation of Russia as the leading power in the region. Chinese regionalism has largely focused on stability and infrastructure investments for economic connectivity. While China attempted to promote free trade in the early 2000s through the SCO, this appears to have largely failed (Song 2013).

The EU’s Impact on Eurasian Regionalism: Challenges and Perspectives

At first, the EU did not show much interest in strengthening its relations with the newly independent CARs (Matveeva 2023). Although the EU established diplomatic links with the five CARs in 1992, the connections were scarce until 2001; after the September 11 terrorist attacks, international attention shifted towards Afghanistan. From that moment onwards, the reborn European interest resulted in initiatives aimed at strengthening the link with the CARs. The first EU initiative in the region was the Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia (TRACECA) launched in 1993 as an integration scheme bringing together the European Union (EU) and 13 member states¹¹ from the wider area stretching from the Black Sea across to Central Asia. The main goals of the initiative are to increase trade, investment, and transport infrastructure in the region. TRACECA is acknowledged by some as the EU trial of re-establishing the Silk Route long before China disclosed its Belt and Road initiative in 2013 (Blandy 1999; Gorshkov and Baraturia 2001).

¹¹ The 13 member states part of TRACECA are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Iran, Moldova, Romania, Turkey, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.

Over the years, the EU has favoured a regional approach to Central Asia, with the expectation of regional economic integration. This was expressed through the first EU strategy towards Central Asia in 2007 (Council of the European Union 2007). However, the CARs were not successful in reaching a high level of regional integration in comparison with other consolidated schemes such as the Southern Common Market (Mercosur), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) or even the Southern African Development Community (SADC) (Krapohl 2017). Additionally, only three out of the five CARs acceded to the WTO (Kyrgyzstan in 1998, Tajikistan in 2013, and Kazakhstan in 2015). Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are still going through their accession process. Thus, the lack of a shared multilateral trade framework has hindered not only intraregional commerce but also bilateral ties with main trade blocs, such as the EU or NAFTA.

In these circumstances, the EU has had to make an almost titanic effort aimed at strengthening relations with each CAR. The new approach combines unilateral trade policy measures with bilateral and regional ones. Regarding the EU's unilateral trade policy approach¹² in Central Asia, only three out of the five CARs (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) are provided with preferential access to the EU markets. The EU grants preferential access to its markets through the enhanced Generalized Scheme of Preferences (GSP+)¹³ solely to Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, whereas Tajikistan receives the standard GSP scheme (European Commission 2023).¹⁴ Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan cannot benefit from any GSP scheme since they have acquired the status of upper-middle-income level countries. Moreover, in recent years, the EU has attempted to design a general strategy for Central Asia, thus trying to overcome the fragmentation problems explained above. The new EU strategy, entitled "New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership," outlines three priority strands: resilience, prosperity, and regional cooperation (Council of the European Union 2019). First, resilience refers to cooperation in strengthening reforms, respect of human rights and the rule of law as well as facing environmental challenges. Secondly, prosperity promotes accession of all CARs to the WTO and favours private entrepreneurship, research, and innovation, together with improving connectivity and economic modernization. Finally, regional cooperation supports sustainable regional trade integration as well as working together for peace in Afghanistan and the fight against terrorism. Concisely, the EU plan is aimed at boosting social, economic, and political reforms in the CARs, paying special attention to economic reforms and trade integration together with security and environmental issues. The EU will continue to provide funding under the EU Development Cooperation instrument, which reached a level of 1.1 billion euros (EUR) between 2014 and 2020 (European Commission 2023). However, the plan does not appear to be excessively innovative, as it proposes financial support schemes, which supply funds based on approval of economic or political reforms. The contestation of past IMF conditionality of financial support, as well as China's willingness to provide funds without

¹² According to the European Commission, "unilateral trade arrangements are one-sided, non-reciprocal trade preferences granted by developed countries to developing ones, with the goal of helping them to increase exports and spur economic development" (European Commission. "Unilateral Trade Arrangements." Accessed March 6, 2025. <https://trade.ec.europa.eu/access-to-markets/en/content/unilateral-trade-arrangements>).

¹³ "The GSP+ is the special incentive arrangement for Sustainable Development and Good Governance that supports vulnerable developing countries that ratified 27 international conventions on human rights, labour rights, environmental protection and climate change, and good governance" (European Commission. "Generalised Scheme of Preferences." Accessed March 6, 2025. https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/development-and-sustainability/generalised-scheme-preferences_en).

¹⁴ "Standard GSP for low and lower-middle income countries. This means a partial or full removal of customs duties on two-thirds of tariff lines." (European Commission. "Generalised Scheme of Preferences." Accessed March 6, 2025. https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/development-and-sustainability/generalised-scheme-preferences_en).

conditions attached, might suggest that conditional funding, as well as criticism, might not be the best way forward. Despite that, when compared with previous initiatives, the EU policy in Central Asia is more pragmatically based, and it puts more weight on resilience rather than democratization. This is a direct consequence of geopolitics and competition with Russia and China in the region (Winn and Gänzle 2022).

The cooperation instrument introduced by the new EU strategy is the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA), signed individually with each country. The first EPCA was signed with Kazakhstan and entered into force on March 1, 2020. It reinforces bilateral political dialogue, especially in sensitive fields such as human rights and democratization, promotes sectoral cooperation and boosts bilateral trade and investment. Both parties signed a Memorandum of Understanding in November 2022 on sustainable raw materials, batteries, and hydrogen value chains (European Commission 2023). Moreover, the EPCA seeks to create a better regulatory framework for businesses involved in trading in services and energy, so that Kazakhstan could eventually sign the plurilateral Public Procurement WTO agreement. To allow the implementation of the EPCA, the EU provides a bilateral cooperation facility of 9 million euros. Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have also signed EPCAs with the EU, but the EU has raised concerns regarding human rights and democracy in both countries, as well as the bilateral border dispute between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. As the most isolated country in the region, Turkmenistan's relations with the EU are still conducted according to the Interim Trade Agreement of 2010. However, the EU and Turkmenistan maintain annual bilateral dialogues on human rights and security issues. Finally, negotiations for an EPCA with Tajikistan started in 2023. Additionally, the EU has encouraged Tajikistan to improve its respect for human rights. To summarize, advances in the negotiation of a future closer relationship between the EU and CARs are still weak. Moreover, it seems that oil and gas exporting countries are becoming the centre of attention for EU policy cooperation in the region. Nevertheless, EU officials have clearly stated that without a deep institutional change in the region, the prospects for economic expansion are bleak. This view explains European insistence on issues such as democracy improvement or respect for human rights.

Despite outlining the importance of institution-building and respect for human rights, the EU has embraced a more pragmatic approach in its latest strategy, which was dictated by the role of Russia and China in the region. Central Asia holds significant strategic importance as a trade facilitator between Europe and Asia. Unlike the US, the EU adopts a soft approach, prioritizing connectivity and security over sanctions in the current geopolitical context. Recent initiatives include the Global Gateway Investors Forum, expert conferences, and the High-Level Political and Security Dialogue. The EU focuses on the "Middle Corridor," a route bypassing Russia, connecting Southeast Asia, China, Kazakhstan, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Europe. Kazakhstan is an important player for the EU within Central Asia. As a result of the latest strategies, the EU is favouring bilateral relations rather than regional ones, which undermines the original promoted regional perspective (Winn and Gänzle 2022). Moreover, the recent success of the Consultative Meetings of Central Asian Leaders in 2018 sheds doubts about the convenience of prioritizing a bilateral approach in the region.

Conclusion: Comparing the role of external actors (China, Russia, and the European Union) in Shaping Regionalism in Central Asia

Since academic literature understands "regionalism" as a response to multilateral globalization (Dür 2006; Schirm 2002), CARs could have prioritized regional integration. Regionalism is also interpreted as an alternative against a globalization paradigm dominated by a unique hegemon, the US (Pelagidis and Papisotiriou 2002). According to Acharya (2007), weaker states can also form regional coalitions to restrict the powers of regional hegemons, in this case, Russia. However, the attempt to create a regional organization failed when the Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO) was dissolved in 2005. In consequence, and despite sharing common cultural and historical features, the five Central

Asian countries were not successful in creating a common regional trade organization, a phenomenon generally viewed as a puzzle. In general, continuous border and resource disputes have impeded the creation of a trade institutional framework for the region (Matveeva 2023).

Modern regionalism in Central Asia has been driven by the extensive involvement of key global powers (Russia, the US, China, and the EU). As a result of this involvement, different geopolitically motivated projects of regionalism are undertaken and, in some way, shape or reshape the borders of regional areas (Kazantsev 2014). A network of roads, railways, and sea routes connecting China and Europe is part of the Belt and Road Initiative and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, which China has heavily invested in. Russia remains committed to expanding its traditional sphere of influence politically through CSTO and economically through EAEU, while the EU interests in the region are focused on counterterrorism, economic and political modernization as well as the large natural reserves.

The large number of regional organizations developed in Central Asia, each with a different membership, provide a good case for comparing regionalism. The types of regionalism pursued by the three actors in the region differ in terms of their goals, achievements and the actors involved. Many of the regional organizations created in Central Asia, such as SCO, CSTO, and EAEU, are founded and dominated by authoritarian regimes. This phenomenon is described by Odydenkova and Libman (2019) as “authoritarian regionalism.” Such regional organizations have, in general, different goals as compared to their democratic counterparts as the analysis above has shown. In addition to the official goals of economic and security integration, which in most cases are not successful, authoritarian regionalism provides support and legitimacy for like-minded regimes and increases the global status of the founder (Odydenkova and Libman 2019). The question that needs to be raised is whether all these regional organizations pursued by external actors had impacted Central Asian regionalization. The literature has identified two possible scenarios related to the role of external powers in the process of regional cooperation. In the first scenario, the external actors reward regional cooperation with financial benefits or, in general, stronger economic and security relations. One important assumption of this scenario is that all countries in the region benefit equally from cooperation with each other and the external partner (Krapohl 2017). In the second scenario, the external actors do not reward regional cooperation, and thus, they privilege relations with certain countries within the region by pursuing, for example, bilateral trade and investment agreements, selective opening of labour markets or privileged access to infrastructure (Krapohl et al. 2014).

The mapping of the most important external-driven regional initiatives in Central Asia, their goals and achievements presented in this article, provides supporting evidence to a potential divide-and-conquer strategy pursued by the three external powers in Central Asia. The use of bilateral agreements and privileged relations with certain countries (Kazakhstan) hinder the development of regional cooperation. This conclusion is supported by other scholars (Krapohl and Vasileva-Dienes 2020), however, it will be further tested empirically in future research.

REFERENCES

- Acharya, Amitav. 2007. "The Emerging Regional Architecture of World Politics." *World Politics* 59 (4): 629–652. <https://doi.org/10.1353/wp.2008.0000>.
- AEI (American Enterprise Institute). "China Global Investment Tracker." Accessed January 18, 2024. <https://www.aei.org/china-global-investment-tracker/>.
- Aizenman, Joshua, Yothin Jinjarak, and Huanhuan Zheng. 2018. "Chinese Outwards Mercantilism—the Art and Practice of Bundling." *Journal of International Money and Finance* 86: 31–49. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jimonfin.2018.03.016>.
- Allison, Roy. 2004. "Regionalism, Regional Structures and Security Management in Central Asia." *International Affairs* 80 (3): 463–483. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2004.00393.x>.
- Aris, Stephen. 2008. "Russian-Chinese Relations through the Lens of the SCO." *Ifri Russia/NIS Center* (September): 1–20. https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/migrated_files/documents/atoms/files/ifri_rnv_aris_sco_eng_3.pdf.
- Asian Development Bank. 2006. "Central Asia: Increasing Gains from Trade Through Regional Cooperation in Trade Policy, Transport, and Customs Transit." <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/29927/central-asia-trade-policy.pdf>.
- . 2021. "Asia-Pacific Trade Facilitation Report 2021: Supply Chains of Critical Goods Amid the Covid-19 Pandemic Disruptions, Recovery, and Resilience." October 21, 2021. Accessed September 19, 2023. <https://dx.doi.org/10.22617/SPR210365-2>.
- . 2023. "Asian Economic Integration Report 2023. Trade, Investment, and Climate Change in Asia and the Pacific." Accessed September 19, 2024. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/859946/asian-economic-integration-report-2023.pdf>.
- Astana Times. 2013. "Xi Jinping Calls For Regional Cooperation Via New Silk Road." September 11, 2013. Accessed September 19, 2024. <https://astanatimes.com/2013/09/xi-jinping-calls-for-regional-cooperation-via-new-silk-road/>.
- . 2024. "Central Asia Consultative Meeting Advances Cooperation in Key Sectors, Expert Says." August 12, 2024. Accessed March 6, 2025. <https://astanatimes.com/2024/08/central-asia-consultative-meeting-advances-cooperation-in-key-sectors-expert-says/>.
- Ba, Alice D. 2009. *(Re) Negotiating East and Southeast Asia: Region, Regionalism, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations*. Stanford University Press.
- Blandy, Charles W. 1999. "Rebirth of the Great Silk Road: Myth or Substance?" *Conflict Studies Research Centre*. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/43788/03_Aug_10.pdf.
- Bohr, Annette. 2004. "Regionalism in Central Asia: New Geopolitics, Old Regional Order." *International Affairs* 80 (3): 485–502. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2004.00394.x>.
- Börzel, Tanja A., and Thomas Risse. 2016. "Introduction." In *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, edited by Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse, 3–16. Oxford University Press.
- Brown, Rachel. 2016. "Where Will the New Silk Road Lead? The Effects of Chinese Investment and Migration in Xinjiang and Central Asia." *Academic Commons, Columbia University*. <https://doi.org/10.7916/D8KH0N9C>.

- Bunskoek, Raoul, and Chih-Yu Shih. 2021. "Community of Common Destiny Post-Western Regionalism: Rethinking China's Belt and Road Initiative from a Confucian Perspective." *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi* 18 (70): 85–101. <http://dx.doi.org/10.33458/uidergisi.954744>.
- CEPAL (La Comisión Económica para América Latina). 2022. "Superación de la pandemia de enfermedad por coronavirus (COVID-19) y desafíos de la guerra en Ucrania" [Overcoming the coronavirus disease pandemic (COVID-19) and the challenges of war in Ukraine]. *Boletín de Comercio Exterior del MERCOSUR* no. 5. <https://repositorio.cepal.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/217d5838-c5cd-4d23-ac58-1755d5996f75/content>.
- Chao, Wen-Chih. 2022. "The Political Economy of China's Rising Role in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO): Leading with Balance." *The Chinese Economy* 55 (4): 293–302. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10971475.2021.1972548>.
- Cheng, Yang. 2010. "The Emerging Regional Configuration in Central Asia: The Remaining Traces of Unipolarity, Unstable Multipolarity and Other Alternatives." In *EDB Eurasian Integration Yearbook 2010*, edited by Evgeny Vonokurov: 175–205. https://eabr.org/bitrix/redirect.php?event1=Archives+of+EDB+periodical+publications+%E2%80%93+Eurasian+Development+Bank&event2=7.+Emerging+Regional+Configuration+in+Central+Asia%3A+Remaining+Traces+of+Unipolarity%2C+Unstable+Multipolarity+and+other+Alternatives%2C+Yang+Cheng&event3=download&goto=%2Fupload%2Fiblock%2F29c%2Fa_n3_2010_13.pdf.
- Chung, Chien-peng. 2004. "The Shanghai Co-operation Organization: China's changing influence in Central Asia." *The China Quarterly* 180: 989–1009. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741004000712>.
- Cooley, Alexander. 2012. *Great games, local rules: the new great power contest in Central Asia*. Oxford University Press.
- Council of the European Union. 2007. "The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership." Brussels, May 31. Accessed January 20, 2024. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10113-2007-INIT/en/pdf>.
- . 2019. "Council Conclusions on the New Strategy on Central Asia. Proceedings From: General Secretariat of the Council." Brussels, June 17. Accessed January 20, 2024. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/39778/st10221-en19.pdf>
- CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization). 2025. "Collective Security Treaty Organization." Accessed March 6, 2025. <https://en.odkb-csto.org>.
- Cummings, Sally (Ed.). 2004. *Power and change in Central Asia*. Routledge.
- Dadabaev, Timur. 2021. *Decolonizing Central Asian International Relations: Beyond Empires*. Routledge.
- Davé, Bhavna, and Yuka Kobayashi. 2018. "China's Silk Road Economic Belt Initiative in Central Asia: Economic and Security Implications." *Asia Europe Journal* 16: 267–281. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10308-018-0513-x>.
- de Haas, Marcel. 2017. "Relations of Central Asia with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization." *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 30 (1): 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2017.1271642>.

- Delovarova, Al-Farabi, Delovarova, Leila, Shkapyak Oxana, and Fatima Kukeyeva. 2013. "Migration Processes in Central Asia: Main Directions and Key Issues of Regional System." *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research* 15 (11): 1505–10. <https://doi.org/10.5829/idosi.mejsr.2013.15.11.11580>.
- Dunford, Michael and Weidong Liu. 2019. "Chinese perspectives on the Belt and Road Initiative." *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 12 (1): 145-167. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsy032>.
- Dür, Andreas. 2006. "Regionalism in the World Economy: Building Block or Stumbling Stone for Globalization." In *Globalization State of the Art and Perspectives*, edited by Stefan A. Schirm: 199–215. Routledge.
- European Commission. 2023. "EU Trade Relations with Central Asia. Facts, Figures and Latest Developments." Accessed January 20, 2024. https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/central-asia_en.
- European Commission. n.d. "Generalised Scheme of Preferences." Accessed March 6, 2025. https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/development-and-sustainability/generalised-scheme-preferences_en
- . n.d. "Unilateral Trade Arrangements." Accessed March 6, 2025. <https://trade.ec.europa.eu/access-to-markets/en/content/unilateral-trade-arrangements>.
- Eurostat. 2025. "International Trade In Goods for the EU - An Overview." Accessed February 20, 2025. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=International_trade_in_goods_for_the_EU_-_an_overview.
- Fawn, Rick. 2022. "Not Here for Geopolitical Interests or Games": The EU's 2019 Strategy and the Regional and Inter-Regional Competition for Central Asia." *Central Asian Survey* 41 (4): 675–698. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2021.1951662>.
- Fingar, Thomas, ed. 2016. *The New Great Game: China and South and Central Asia in the Era of Reform*. Stanford University Press.
- Frankopan, Peter. 2017. *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World*. Vintage Books.
- Gorshkov, Teimuraz, and George Bagaturia, 2001. "TRACECA–Restoration of Silk Route." *Japan Railway & Transport Review* 28: 50–55. https://www.ejrcf.or.jp/jrtr/jrtr28/pdf/f50_gor.pdf.
- Hettne, Björn. 2005. "Beyond the 'New' Regionalism." *New Political Economy* 10 (4): 543–571. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13563460500344484>.
- Hillman, Jennifer, and Alex Tippett. 2021. "Who built that? Labor and the Belt and Road Initiative." *Council on Foreign Relations*, July 6, 2021. Accessed March 6, 2025. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/who-built-labor-and-belt-and-road-initiative>.
- Huang, Yiping. 2016. "Understanding China's Belt & Road Initiative: Motivation, Framework and Assessment." *China Economic Review* 40: 314–321. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chieco.2016.07.007>.
- Hussain, Mumtaz, Mahrukh, Hamna, and Saleem Maimona. 2022. "Study of Russian Security Activities in Central Asia under Collective Security Treaty Organization." *Journal of Development and Social Sciences* 3 (3): 186–193. [https://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2022\(3-III\)19](https://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2022(3-III)19).
- ICMPD (International Centre for Migration Policy Development). 2024. "Migration Outlook." <https://www.icmpd.org/file/download/60848/file/ICMPD%2520Migration%2520Outlook%2520EECA%25202024.pdf>

- Indeo, Fabio. 2018. "The Role of Russia in the Central Asian Security Architecture." *OSCE Academy in Bishkek Policy Brief* 48 (June): 1–12. [https://osce-academy.net/upload/file/PB48The Role of Russia in the Central Asian Security Architecture.pdf](https://osce-academy.net/upload/file/PB48The%20Role%20of%20Russia%20in%20the%20Central%20Asian%20Security%20Architecture.pdf).
- IOM (International Organization for Migration). 2021. "World Migration Report 2022." Accessed March 6, 2025. <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2022>.
- Isakova, Asel, Zsoka, Koczan, and Alexander Plekhanov. 2015. "How Much Do Tariffs Matter? Evidence from the Customs Union of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia." *Journal of Economic Policy Reform* 19 (2): 166–184. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17487870.2014.988212>.
- Kaczmarek, Marcin. 2017. "Two Ways of Influence-Building: The Eurasian Economic Union and the One Belt, One Road Initiative." *Europe-Asia Studies* 69 (7): 1027–1046. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2017.1373270>.
- Katzenstein, Peter. 2005. *A World of Regions: Asia and Europe in the American Imperium*. Cornell University Press.
- Kazantsev, A. Andrey. 2014. "Eurasian Perspectives on Regionalism: Central Asia and Beyond." In *Eurasian Integration-The View from Within*, edited by Piotr Dutkiewicz and Richard Sakwa, 231–249. Routledge.
- Kazantsev, A. Andrey, Medvedeva, Svetlana, and Ivan Safranchuk. 2021. "Between Russia and China: Central Asia in Greater Eurasia." *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 12 (1): 57–71. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1879366521998242>.
- Kembayev, Zhenis. 2017. "Implementing the Silk Road Economic Belt: from the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation to the Silk Road Union?" *Asia Europe Journal* 16 (1): 37–50. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10308-017-0483-4>.
- Korneev, Oleg. 2013. "EU Migration Governance in Central Asia: Everybody's Business—Nobody's Business?" *European Journal of Migration and Law* 15 (3): 301–318. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/15718166-00002038>.
- Kolpakova, Tatyana V., and Tatiana N. Kuchinskaya. 2015. "China's "New Regionalism" as a Mechanism to Strengthen the Influence of China in the Global Integration Processes: An Example of Eurasian Economic Union." *International Journal of Economics and Financial Issues* 5 (2): 109–115. <https://www.econjournals.com/index.php/ijefi/article/view/1590/pdf>.
- Konopelko, Agnieszka. 2018. "Eurasian Economic Union: A Challenge for EU Policy Towards Kazakhstan." *Asia Europe Journal* 16 (1): 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10308-017-0480-7>.
- Krapohl, Sebastian. 2015. "Financial Crises as Catalysts for Regional Cooperation? Chances and Obstacles for Financial Integration in Asean+3, Mercosur and the Eurozone." *Contemporary Politics* 21 (2): 161–178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2015.1030171>.
- . 2017. "Two Logics of Regional Integration and the Games Regional Actors Play." In *Regional integration in the global south: the external influence on economic cooperation in ASEAN, MERCOSUR and SADC*, edited by Sebastian Krapohl, 33–62. Palgrave.
- Krapohl, Sebastian, Meissner, Katharina L., and Johannes Muntschick. 2014. "Regional Powers as Leaders or Rambos of Regional Integration? Unilateral Actions of Brazil and South Africa and Their Negative Effects on Mercosur and Sadc." *Journal of Common Market Studies* 52 (4): 879–895. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12116>.
- Krapohl, Sebastian, and Alexandra Vasileva-Dienes. 2020. "The Region That Isn't: China, Russia and the Failure of Regional Integration in Central Asia." *Asia Europe Journal* 18 (3): 347–366. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10308-019-00548-0>.

- Krugman, Paul R. 1979. "Increasing Returns, Monopolistic Competition, and International Trade." *Journal of International Economics* 9 (4): 469–479. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-1996\(79\)90017-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-1996(79)90017-5).
- . 1980. "Scale Economies, Product Differentiation, and the Pattern of Trade." *The American Economic Review* 70 (5): 950–959. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1805774>.
- Laitin, David D. 1991. "The National Uprisings in the Soviet Union." *World Politics* 44 (1): 139–177. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2010426>.
- Libman, Alexander, 2017. "Russian Power Politics and the Eurasian Economic Union: The Real and the Imagined." *Rising Powers Quarterly* 2 (1): 81–103. <https://rpquarterly.kureselcalismalar.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/vol2.1-Alexander-Libman.pdf>.
- Libman, Alexander, Obydenkova, Anastassia, and Erik Davtyan. 2022. "Eurasian Regionalism and Russia's War Against Ukraine: Consequences for the EAEU and Kazakhstan." *Russian Analytical Digest* 287: 2–6. <https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000577719>.
- Libman, Alexander, and Anastassia Obydenkova. 2017. "Why Is the 'Post-Soviet' Regionalism Post-Soviet?" Historical Legacies and Regional Integration in Eurasia." *Munich Personal RePEc Paper* 83506. Accessed March 6, 2025. <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/83506/>.
- Linn, Jonansen J. 2012. "Central Asian Regional Integration and Cooperation: Reality or Mirage?" *EDB Eurasian Integration Yearbook*. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/10-regional-integration-and-cooperation-linn.pdf>.
- Mankoff, Jeffrey. 2022. "The War in Ukraine and Eurasia's New Imperial Moment." *The Washington Quarterly* 45 (2): 127–147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2022.2090761>.
- Matveeva, Anna. 2023. "A New Opening for EU–Central Asia Relations?" *Carnegie Europe*, April 13, 2023. Accessed March 6, 2025. <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2023/04/13/new-opening-for-eu-central-asia-relations-pub-89454>.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. 2019. "Joint Communiqué of the Leaders' Roundtable of the 2nd Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation." Beijing, April 27, 2019. Accessed January 20, 2024. http://english.scio.gov.cn/BRF2019/2019-04/28/content_74730528.htm.
- Mogilevskii, Roman, Thurlow, James, and Adeline Yeh. 2018. "Kyrgyzstan's Accession to the Eurasian Economic Union: Measuring Economy-Wide Impacts and Uncertainties." *University of Central Asia – Institute of Public Policy and Administration (IPPA) Working Paper* no. 44. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3807831>.
- Mostafa, Golam and Monowar Mahmood. 2018. "Eurasian Economic Union: Evolution, challenges and possible future directions." *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 9 (2): 163–172. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euras.2018.05.001>.
- Nikiforova, Elena, and Olga Brednikova. 2018. "On Labor Migration to Russia: Central Asian Migrants and Migrant Families in the Matrix of Russia's Bordering Policies." *Political Geography* 66: 142–150. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2018.04.006>.
- Obydenkova, Anastassia, and Alexander Libman. 2019. *Authoritarian Regionalism in the World of International Organizations. Global Perspectives & the Eurasian Enigma*. Oxford University Press.
- Olcott, Martha Brill. 2005. *Central Asia's Second Chance*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

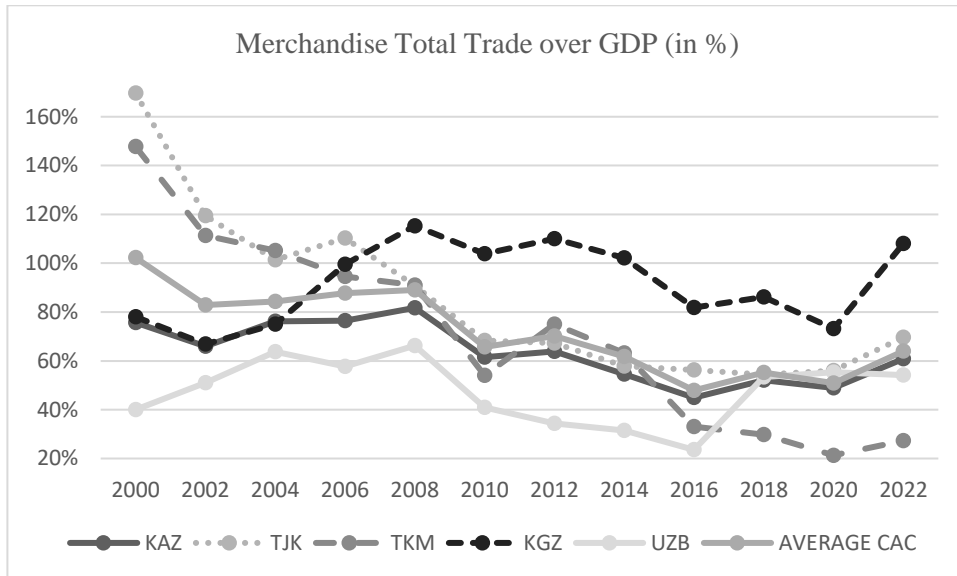
- Ogunleye, Olusogo, Akinyemi, Ajibola, Oluwafemi, Enilolobo, and Olufolakemi, Shogunle. 2018. "Influence of Road Transport Infrastructure on Agricultural Sector Development in Nigeria." *Logistics & Sustainable Transport* 9 (1): 39–50. <https://doi.org/10.2478/jlst-2018-0004>.
- Paramonov, Vladimir, and Lola Akramova. 2024. "Economic Relations of Central Asia and the European Union". *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies* 28: 71–94. Accessed March 6, 2024. <https://www.himalayanresearch.org/journal-2024.php>.
- Patel, K. Kiran. 2020. *Project Europe: A History*. Cambridge University Press.
- Pelagidis, Theodore, and Harry Papatotiriou. 2002. "Globalisation or Regionalism? States, Markets and the Structure of International Trade." *Review of International Studies* 28 (3): 519–535. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210502005193>.
- Peyrouse, Sebastian. 2015. "Kyrgyzstan's Membership in the Eurasian Economic Union: A Marriage of Convenience." *Russian Analytical Digest* 165 (10): 10–12.
- Pomfret, Richard. 2009. "Regional Integration in Central Asia." *Economic Change and Restructuring* 42 (1): 47–68. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10644-008-9060-6>.
- Pradhan, Ramakrushna, and Sankar S. Mohanty. 2021. "Chinese Grand Strategies in Central Asia: The Role of Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Belt and Road Initiative." *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 14 (2): 197–223. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40647-021-00318-6>.
- Rakhimov, Mirzhokhid. 2018. "Complex Regionalism in Central Asia: Local, Regional, and Global Factors." *Cambridge Journal of Eurasian Studies* 2: 1–13. <http://dx.doi.org/10.22261/CJES.J6Y3O7>.
- . 2023. "Multilateral Relations in Central Asia: A Perspective on the Central Asian Consultative Forum." In *The Completion of Eurasia? Continental Convergence or Regional Dissent in the Context of 'Historic Turns'*, edited by Kuralay Baizakova, Yann Alix, and Pierre Chabal, 83–93. Peter Lang.
- Satke, Ryskeldi. 2015. "Kyrgyzstan and the Eurasian Economic Union: The View from Bishkek." *European Council on Foreign Relations*, May 9, 2015. Accessed January 20, 2024. Accessed March 6, 2025. https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_kyrgyzstan_and_the_eurasian_economic_union_the_view_from_bis3022/.
- Schirm, Stefan. 2002. *Globalization and the New Regionalism: Global Markets, Domestic Politics and Regional Cooperation*. Wiley.
- Shiells, Clinton R., and Sarosh Sattar, eds. 2004. *The Low-Income Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States: Progress and Challenges in Transition*. International Monetary Fund.
- Simon, Gerhard. 1987. "Regionalism in the Soviet Union: Challenging or Stabilizing the Soviet System?" *Journal of Baltic Studies* 18 (3): 257–268. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01629778700000111>.
- Söderbaum, Frederik, and Timothy M. Shaw, eds. 2003. *Theories of New Regionalism: A Palgrave Reader*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Song, Weiqing. 2013. "Interests, Power and China's Difficult Game in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)." *Journal of Contemporary China* 23 (85): 85–101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2013.80998>.
- Stonis, Danylo. 2022. "Comparative Analysis of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and European Union Strategy on Central Asia: Confrontation or Cooperation?" *Polish Political Science Yearbook* 51: 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.15804/ppsy202230>.

- Stronski, Paul, and Richard Sokolsky. 2020. "The Eurasian Economic Union. Multipolarity in Practice: Understanding Russia's Engagement with Regional Institutions." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Accessed January 20, 2024. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/01/08/multipolarity-in-practice-understanding-russia-s-engagement-with-regional-institutions-pub-80717>.
- Tarr, David. 2014. "The Eurasian Customs Union among Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan: Can It Succeed Where Its Predecessor Failed?" *Applied Trade Policy Modeling in 16 Countries*. (May): 509–516. https://doi.org/10.1142/9789814551434_0020.
- Tekdal, Veysel. 2018. "China's Belt and Road Initiative: at the crossroads of challenges and ambitions." *The Pacific Review* 31 (3): 373–390. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2017.1391864>.
- Trilling, David. 2010. "Moscow Using New Customs Union to Extend Influence in Central Asia." *Eurasianet*. July 7, 2010. Accessed March 6, 2025. <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/61484>.
- Umirzakova N., and T. Marat. 2024. "Consultative Meetings of the Heads of States of Central Asia: Analyzing the Prospects of Regionalism and Cooperation in Central Asia." *International School of Economics Maqst Narikbayev University*. <http://repository.kazguu.kz/bitstream/handle/123456789/2095/Gr%2010%20Umirzakova%20N.%2C%20Marat%20T..pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.
- Ünalldılar Kocamaz, Sinem. 2019. "The Rise of New Powers in World Politics: Russia, China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization." *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi* 16 (61): 127–141. <https://doi.org/10.33458/uidergisi.541542>.
- UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development). "China: Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs)." Accessed September 12, 2024. <https://investmentpolicy.unctad.org/international-investment-agreements/countries/42/china>.
- United Nations Comtrade Database. 2023. "The United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database." Accessed September 19, 2023. <http://comtrade.un.org/>.
- UN DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs). 2020. *International Migrant Stock 2020*. Accessed March 6, 2025. https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesapd_2020_ims_stock_by_sex_and_destination.xlsx.
- UNRCCA (United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia). 2023. "SRSG Kaha Imnadze Participates at the Fifth Consultative Meeting of Heads of State of Central Asia." Accessed March 6, 2025. <https://unrcca.unmissions.org/srsg-kaha-imnadze-participates-fifth-consultative-meeting-heads-state-central-asia>.
- van Langehove, Luk. 2011. *Building Regions: The Regionalization of the World Order*. Ashgate Publishing.
- Wahlang, Jason. 2022. "Russia's 'Partial Mobilization' And Central Asia – Analysis." *Eurasia Review*, November 28, 2022. Accessed March 6, 2025. <https://www.eurasiareview.com/28112022-russias-partial-mobilization-and-central-asia-analysis/>.
- Wang, Weiran. 2014. "The Effects of Regional Integration in Central Asia." *Emerging Markets Finance and Trade* 50 (sup2): 219–232. <https://doi.org/10.2753/ree1540-496x5002s215>.
- Wilson, Jeanne L. 2021. "Russia and China in Central Asia: Deepening Tensions in the Relationship." *Acta Via Serica* 6 (1): 55–90.

- Winn, Neil, and Stefan Gänzle. 2022. "Recalibrating EU Foreign Policy *Vis-à-vis* Central Asia: Towards Principled Pragmatism and Resilience." *Geopolitics* 28 (3): 1342–1361. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2022.2042260>.
- Wolczuk, Kataryna, and Rilka Dragneva. 2022. "Putin's Eurasian Dream May Soon Become a Nightmare." *Chatham House Expert Comment*, May 3, 2022. Accessed March 6, 2024. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/05/putins-eurasian-dream-may-soon-become-nightmare>.
- World Bank. 2023a. "Remittances Remain Resilient but Are Slowing." Accessed on September 19, 2023. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD>.
- . 2023b. "World Development Indicators." Accessed January 20, 2024. <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>.
- . 2024. "World Development Indicators." Accessed September 12, 2024. <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>
- Yazdani, Enayatollah. 2020. "China-Central Asia Relations and Role of the Belt and Road Initiative." *Chinese Business Review* 19 (5): 178–195. <https://doi.org/10.17265/1537-1506/2020.05.004>.
- Yeliseyeu, Andrey. 2019. "The Eurasian Economic Union: Expectations, Challenges, and Achievements." *German Marshall Fund of the United States*, May 15, 2019. Accessed March 6, 2025. <https://www.gmfus.org/news/eurasian-economic-union-expectations-challenges-and-achievements>.
- Yuan, Jing-Dong. 2010. "China's Role in Establishing and Building the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)." *Journal of Contemporary China* 19 (67): 855–869.
- Yue, Mengdi, and Christoph Nedopil. 2022. "Chinese Role on Public External Debt in DSS Countries and the Belt and Road Initiative." *Green Finance and Development Center*, March 21, 2022. Accessed January 20, 2024. <https://greenfdc.org/2022/03/21/>.
- Yun, Yeonhee, and Kinam Park. 2012. "An Analysis of the Multilateral Cooperation and Competition Between Russia and China in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Issues and Prospects." *Pacific Focus* 27 (1): 62–85. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1976-5118.2012.01076.x>.
- Yuneman, A. Roman. 2020. "Kazakhstan and the Eurasian Economic Union." *Russia in Global Affairs* 18 (4): 37–55. <https://doi.org/10.31278/1810-6374-2020-18-4-37-55>.
- Zhuangzhi, Sun. 2007. "The Relationship Between China and Central Asia." In *Eager Eyes Fixed on Eurasia*, edited by Iwashita Akihiro, 41–63. Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University.

Appendix I

Figure 1: Merchandise Trade over GDP in percentage



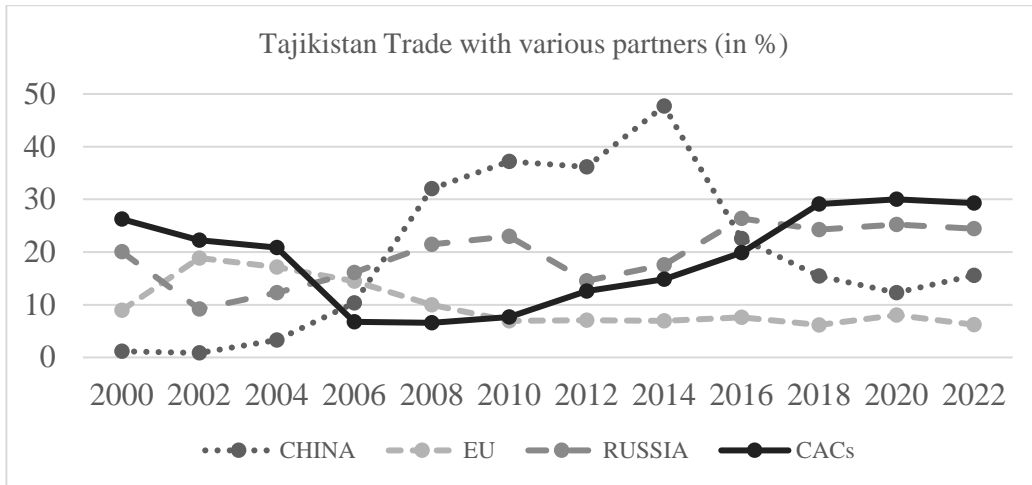
Source: World Bank WDI, 2023

Figure 2: Evolution of Uzbekistan’s trade with its partners, 2000-22



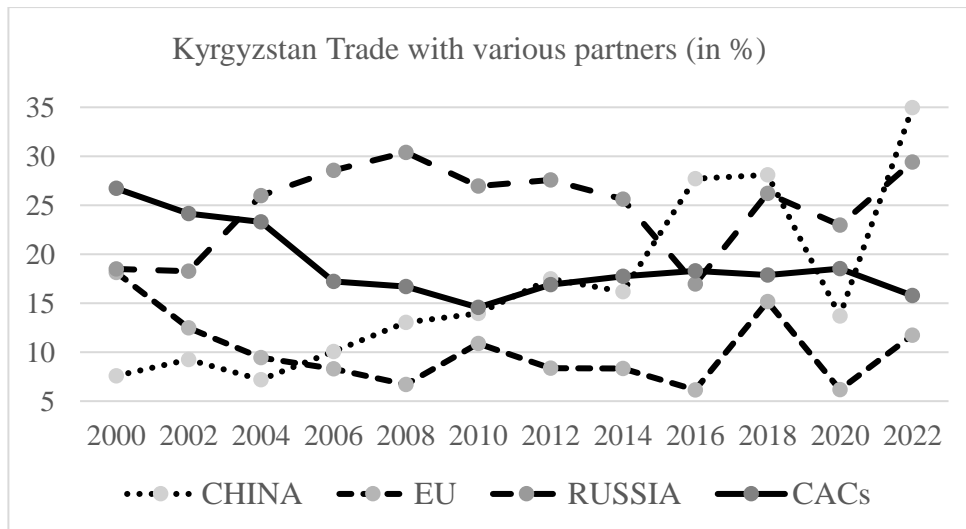
Source: Comtrade UN, 2023, WDI 2023 and ADB 2006.

Figure 3: Evolution of Tajikistan’s trade with its partners, 2000-22



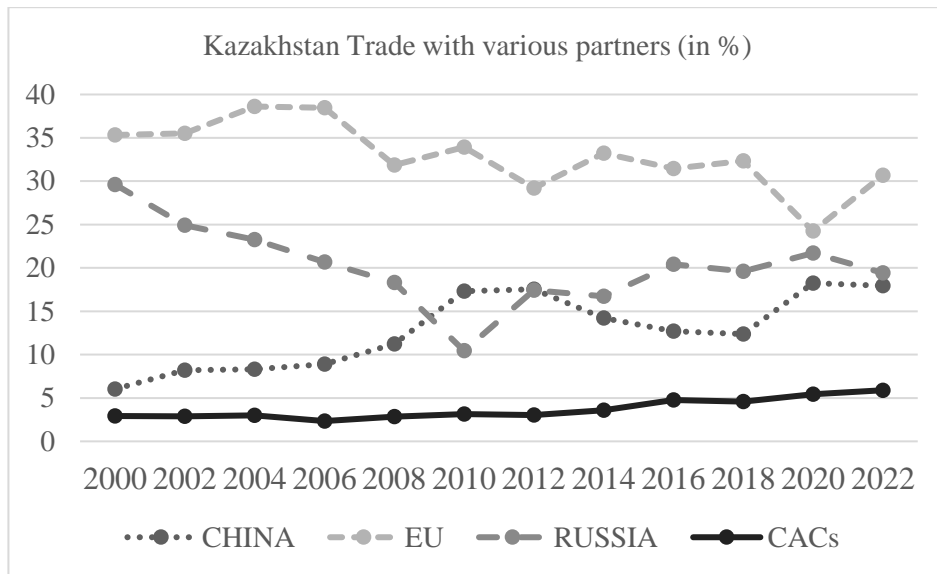
Source: Comtrade UN, 2023, WDI 2023 and ADB 2006.

Figure 4: Evolution of Kyrgyzstan’s trade with its partners, 2000-22



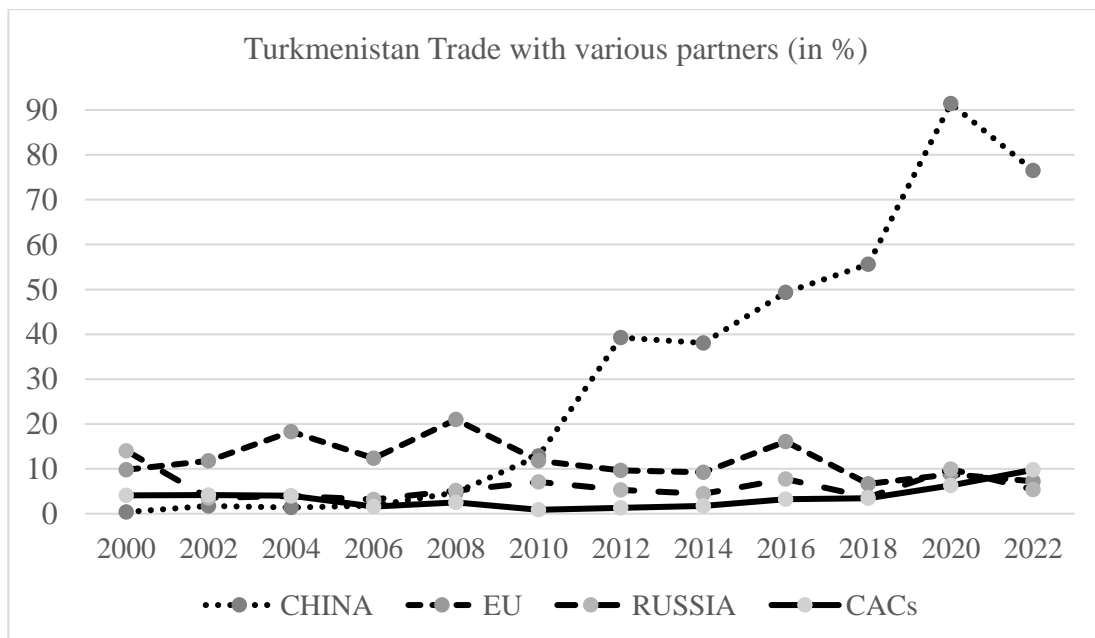
Source: Comtrade UN, 2023, WDI 2023 and ADB 2006.

Figure 5: Evolution of Kazakhstan’s trade with its partners, 2000-22



Source: Comtrade UN, 2023, WDI 2023 and ADB 2006.

Figure 6: Evolution of Turkmenistan trade with various partners, 2000-22



Source: Comtrade UN, 2023, WDI 2023 and ADB 2006.

Published by the Centre for European Studies at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada
Available online at: <https://ojs.library.carleton.ca/index.php/CJERS/index>

The *Canadian Journal of European and Russian Studies* (CJERS – formerly *Review of European and Russian Affairs*) is an open-access electronic academic peer-reviewed journal: articles are subject to double-blind peer-review. Topics relate to the European Union, its Member States, the former Soviet Union, and Central and Eastern Europe. The journal is published by the Centre for European Studies, an associated unit of the Institute of European, Russian and Eurasian Studies at Carleton University. CJERS aims to provide an accessible forum for the promotion and dissemination of high-quality research and scholarship.

Contact:

Carleton University
The Centre for European Studies
1103 Dunton Tower
1125 Colonel By Drive
Ottawa, ON K1S 5B6
Canada
E-mail: CJERS@carleton.ca

Creative Commons License

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-No Derivs 4.0 Unported License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). Articles appearing in this publication may be freely quoted and reproduced, in unadapted form only, provided the source is acknowledged. We request that for any online postings, you do so by providing the title and/or abstract with the DOI link back to the original version of the article on the journal's website.
ISSN: 2562-8429

© 2025 The Author(s)