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UNIVERSITY



FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND
ADMINISTRATIVE SCIENCES
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
DEPARTMENT



International and Regional Political Studies Congress - 2025

REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CAUCASUS: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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PROCEEDINGS
İSTANBUL AREL UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS 2025
REGIONAL INTERGRATION IN CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CAUCASUS:
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CONTENTS

Aim and Scope.....	1
Programme.....	3-5
Organization Committee.....	6
Scientific Advisory Committee.....	7-8
Abstracts.....	9-41

AIM AND SCOPE

From a global perspective, Central Asia and the Caucasus as a geopolitical complex is one of the most notable regions of the world. The area also marks unprecedented geopolitical importance and geo-ethnic composition for Turkish peoples. Shared Turk identity however is not mature enough for regional integration but is one of the most driving forces of the regional dynamics which has a potential for changes in the Eurasian continent.

Changing geopolitics of the region which retains challenges and prospects in the same pot is crucial not only for its periphery but also for the rest of the world. While the great and regional powers' contests; interstate, intrastate, and extra-state conflicts; terrorism; and organized crime challenge the stability of the region, prospects of security, economic, and organizational cooperation promote a new horizon of peace, stability, and prosperity.

Central Asia's and the Caucasus' future will likely be more dynamic than ever. The changing dynamics of the region transforms its geopolitics. The 21st Century has brought a new atmosphere of cooperation, uncertain ties, risks, and threats to the region.

A new understanding of scholarship is one of the determinant factors in shaping a safe and secure future for the region. This may also help positive developments for the entire world. Thus, İstanbul Arel University / Türkiye has organized the International and Regional Political Studies Congress – 2025 titled “Regional Integration in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Challenges and Prospects” (08 February 2025).

Congress aims to discuss the present and future areas of concern and opportunities in Central Asia and the Caucasus and analyse and assess the possibility of regional integration. The Congress will be held in two days, with six successive sessions. The first three sessions will deal with challenges with an understanding of the enlarged security approach. The fourth and fifth sessions will concentrate on regional cooperation areas of the economy, energy, and transportation. The final session will deal with the roles and the future of regional organizations, and forums.

DAY 1: 1st Session

8 February 2025

09.30– 12.15 a.m. (İstanbul Time)

[In order to participate in the session, Ctrl+click here](#)

Opening Remark – Introduction (9.00-9.30 a.m.)

Opening Speech by Assoc. Prof. Ali Bilgin Varlık

Session-I: The New Geopolitics of Central Asia and the Caucasus

Moderator: Assoc. Prof. Ali Bilgin Varlık

Session	No.	Speaker	The topic of the Paper
I	1.	Javed Zafar	Changing Strategic Geography of Eurasia and Central Asian Strategic Chessboard
I	2.	Quaisar Alam, Yazdani Hasan, Mohammad Shahi, Indu Yadav	Understanding “the Regional Security of Central Asia” in the Contemporary World
I	3.	Assad Mehmood Khan	Security Alliances in Regional Integration: Analyzing Strategic Opportunities and Underlying Risks
I	4.	Mohammad Shahid, Quaisar Alam, Yazdani Hasan	Analysing the “New Great Game and the Geopolitical Dynamics” of Central Asia
I	5.	Ömer Kocaman	The Evolution of the Organization of Turkic States in the AK Party Era
	6.	Can Demir	The Challenges against the Organization of Turkic States
I	7.	Doğuş Sönmez	Turkey, Russia, and Iran: A Comparative Analysis of Foreign Policies in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict
I	8.	Görkem Atsungur	The Evolution of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO): Challenges and Opportunities for Central Asian States
I	9.	Qasem Osuli Odlu	Drivers and Obstacles of Regional Integration in Central Asian Region

DAY 1: 2nd Session

8 February 2025

12.45– 15.00 p.m. (İstanbul Time)

[In order to participate in the session, Ctrl+click here](#)

Session- II: Regional Dynamics of Central Asia and the Caucasus

Moderator: Assoc. Prof. Bülent Durgun

II	10.	Gökhan Ak	Armenian Diaspora and its Future in the Context of Transnational Nationalism
II	11.	Bogdan Ştefanachi	War in Ukraine and South Caucasus – An Opportunity for a Strategic European Union?
II	12.	Mirwais Balkhi	Defining Afghanistan Region
II	13.	Hirad Mokhayer, Farid Soltangeys	Pathology of Iran’s Cultural Diplomacy in the South Caucasus: Parties New Opportunities and Challenges
II	14.	Afsane Danesh	Strategic Barriers in Iran’s Foreign Policy Toward Azerbaijan
II	15.	Rifat Ullah Rifat	Russia’s Risk Potential in Key Geostrategic Regions and Deterrence Response Solutions
II	16.	Hirad Mokhayer, Farid Soltangeys	Futures Studies and Analysis of Israel’s Cultural Diplomacy Objectives in the South and North Caucasus
II	17.	Quaisar Alam, Yazdani Hasan, Mohammad Shahid, Indu Yadav	Examining the “Political Dynamics of Kazakhstan” in the Globalized World
II	18.	Ebrahim Rezaei Rad	New Great Game in Energy in Central Asia since the Beginning Ukraine War

DAY 1: 3rd Session

8 February 2025

15.30– 17.00 p.m. (İstanbul Time)

[In order to participate in the session, Ctrl+click here](#)

Session- III: Cultural, Educational and Technological Dimensions of Central Asia and the Caucasus

Moderator: Assoc. Prof. Aşkın İnci Sökmen Alaca

III	19.	Assad Mehmood Khan	Soft-Power Diplomacy through Stamps: Politico-Cultural Narratives in Central Asia and the Caucasus
III	20.	Mohammad Shahid, Quaisar Alam, Yazdani Hasan	Deciphering the Dynamics of Technological Advancements in the Contemporary Central Asian Discourse
III	21.	Muhammad Nasir Khan	Future of Higher Education in South Asian Region: Needs and Challenges
III	22.	Kiram Hashmi	Policy, Curriculum, and Teacher Education: Drivers of Regional Integration in Central Asia and the Caucasus
III	23.	Ana Yousefian	Digital Innovations and their Prospects for Boosting Regional Integration in Central Asia and the Caucasus

Closing Remarks: Assoc. Prof. Ali Bilgin Varlık (17:00 pm-17:30 pm İstanbul Time)

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DAY 1: 1st Session

8 February 2025

09.30 – 12.45 p.m. (İstanbul Time)

Moderator: Assoc. Prof. Ali Bilgin Varlık

**Session-I: The New Geopolitics of Central Asia and the
Caucasus**

Changing Strategic Geography of Eurasia and Central Asian strategic chessboard

Javed Zafar*

Abstract

Central Asia has consistently held a pivotal position in geopolitical theories and strategies. In classical geopolitics, the region's location and strategic position played a crucial role in shaping imperial geopolitical orders. Central Asia is the cornerstone of one of the most influential geopolitical theories, the "Heartland Theory." During the Cold War, the region was largely excluded from geopolitical debates due to the unchallenged dominance of the USSR over Eastern Europe and Central Asia. However, leading theorists and strategists have always emphasized the importance of Central Asia within their broader Eurasian visions.

In the post-Cold War era, Central Asia once again became a focal point of geopolitical and geostrategic discussions. The U.S. invasion of Afghanistan was interpreted as part of Washington's broader ambition to dominate the region while countering current and potential challengers to U.S. hegemony. Similarly, NATO's efforts to expand into the Caspian region reflect a strategy to access Central Asia through alternative routes, encroaching on Russia's sphere of influence.

The ongoing war in Ukraine may prove to be a decisive factor in shaping NATO, Russia, and China's strategies toward Central Asia. China, through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), is steadily increasing its presence and influence in the region. Beijing is also enhancing its military engagement and adopting a pluralistic approach, as demonstrated by its rapprochement with the Taliban-led Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Russia, the traditional hegemon in Central Asia, faces challenges in maintaining its influence and prestige, with the outcome of the Ukraine conflict likely to shape its future in the region.

The shifting dynamics in Afghanistan and the broader Middle East are reshaping the strategic calculations of both regional and global powers. This paper seeks to investigate the historical evolution of geopolitical and geostrategic theories concerning Central Asia, analyzing how these frameworks have defined the region's importance. Furthermore, it will examine the policies and strategies employed by regional and global powers to exert influence over Central Asia in the post-Cold War era, with a particular focus on the implications of the Russia-Ukraine war and the evolving political landscape in Afghanistan.

Key Words: Central Asia, Geopolitics, Geostrategy, Eurasia, History

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Understanding “the Regional Security of Central Asia” in the Contemporary World

Quaisar Alam*, Yazdani Hasan**, Mohammad Shahid***, Indu Yadav****

Abstract

Central Asia, a region at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, holds significant geopolitical importance in the contemporary world. Its security dynamics are shaped by a confluence of historical legacies, regional rivalries, and global strategic interests. This research paper explores the evolving contours of regional security in Central Asia, with a focus on how internal and external factors interact to create opportunities and challenges for stability and development. Internally, the region is characterized by a diverse mix of political systems, ethnic compositions, and socio-economic conditions, which often fuel tensions and vulnerabilities. Persistent challenges such as weak governance, corruption, border disputes, and the threat of radicalization further complicate the security landscape. Additionally, the region faces shared threats from transnational issues, including terrorism, organized crime, and drug trafficking, which transcend national borders and require cooperative responses. Externally, Central Asia occupies a pivotal position in the strategies of major powers such as Russia, China, the United States, and the European Union, each vying for influence in the region. The geopolitical competition is evident in initiatives such as China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Russia’s Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and the U.S.’s New Silk Road project. While these initiatives promise economic development and infrastructure investment, they also introduce power asymmetries and dependency risks that affect regional stability. The study also examines the role of regional organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in addressing security concerns. While these institutions have made strides in fostering dialogue and cooperation, their effectiveness in managing conflicts and ensuring collective security remains a subject of debate. By integrating a multidisciplinary approach, this research underscores the interconnectedness of domestic policies, regional dynamics, and global strategies in shaping the security architecture of Central Asia. It argues that sustainable regional security requires inclusive governance, enhanced regional cooperation, and a balanced approach to external partnerships. In conclusion, understanding the regional security of Central Asia necessitates a nuanced appreciation of its unique geopolitical realities and a concerted effort to address both traditional and non-traditional security challenges. This paper contributes to the discourse by providing a comprehensive analysis of the region’s security dynamics, highlighting the need for innovative strategies to navigate its complex and rapidly changing environment.

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Keywords: Regional Security, Major Powers, Central Asia, Contemporary World
**Security Alliances in Regional Integration: Analyzing Strategic Opportunities
and Underlying Risks**

Assad Mehmood Khan*

Abstract

This paper examines the role of security alliances in regional integration, focusing on their strategic opportunities and underlying risks. In an increasingly interconnected global landscape, security alliances play a crucial role in shaping the political, economic, and security dynamics of regional cooperation. By utilizing a multi-theoretical approach that incorporates Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism, this study provides a comprehensive analysis of how these alliances impact the integration process. Realism emphasizes the competitive nature of security alliances, where state interests and power dynamics often drive collaboration. Liberalism highlights the potential for cooperation and mutual benefit through alliances, while Constructivism examines the influence of identity, norms, and shared values in fostering integration. Through this theoretical lens, the paper explores how security alliances influence the stability of regions and the relationships among key global and regional actors. It analyzes the motivations of states and non-state actors involved in these alliances, considering their roles in advancing or hindering regional cooperation. The study also applies Game Theory models, such as the Prisoners' Dilemma and Stag Hunt, to understand the strategic interactions between states and predict potential outcomes in regional cooperation scenarios. The paper further evaluates the risks and challenges associated with security alliances, including the potential for escalating conflicts, reinforcing geopolitical divisions, and creating dependency. It also forecasts future scenarios for regional integration, exploring both optimistic and pessimistic outcomes. By identifying the opportunities and risks inherent in security alliances, the paper offers valuable insights for policymakers and international stakeholders, providing a foundation for strategies aimed at promoting regional stability, mitigating risks, and fostering sustainable integration. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics of regional integration in the context of security alliances.

Key Words: Security Alliances, Regional Integration, Geopolitical Stability, Prospective Scenarios

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Analysing the “New Great Game and the Geopolitical Dynamics” of Central Asia

Quaisar Alam*, Yazdani Hasan**, Mohammad Shahid***

Abstract

The concept of the "New Great Game" has become a cornerstone in analysing the geopolitical dynamics of Central Asia, a region marked by its strategic importance and abundant natural resources. This study talks about the varying perspectives surrounding this geopolitical framework, focusing on the interplay between major global powers such as the United States, China, and Russia, as well as the role of regional actors like Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. By examining historical precedents and contemporary strategies, the paper highlights how economic interests, energy politics, security concerns, and cultural influences shape the regional discourse. The New Great Game is not merely a continuation of the 19th-century rivalry between the British and Russian Empires; it is a multidimensional struggle where modern-day actors vie for influence in this pivotal region. The research underscores the significance of initiatives like China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Russia's Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) as tools for asserting dominance. It also evaluates the responses of Central Asian nations, which strive to balance external influences while maintaining sovereignty and fostering regional cooperation. The New Great Game also underscores the significance of Central Asia as a crossroads of civilizations, where cultural and historical linkages play a pivotal role in shaping contemporary geopolitics. As global powers compete for influence, the region emerges as a site for soft power initiatives, including cultural diplomacy and educational exchanges. Furthermore, the paper highlights the environmental challenges linked to resource exploitation, emphasizing the need for sustainable approaches to development that can harmonize economic growth with ecological preservation. Through qualitative analysis of policy documents, diplomatic engagements, and economic agreements, this paper provides a comprehensive understanding of the strategic manoeuvres characterizing the New Great Game. It argues that the evolving discourse in Central Asia is shaped by a combination of historical legacies and contemporary power dynamics. The findings suggest that Central Asia is transitioning from being a passive object of global rivalry to becoming an active participant, reshaping the contours of the New Great Game. This research contributes to the broader understanding of geopolitics by presenting a nuanced perspective of Central Asia's role in the global order. It emphasizes the need for a balanced approach that considers the aspirations of Central Asian nations alongside the strategic interests of global powers. By doing so, it seeks to redefine the regional discourse and offers insights into fostering sustainable and equitable development in Central Asia amidst the geopolitical tug-of-war.

Keywords: New Great Game, Central Asia, Geopolitics, Energy Politics, Regional Cooperation

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The Evolution of the Organization of Turkic States in the AK Party Era

Ömer Kocaman*

Abstract

The evolution of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) has been significantly shaped by the strong support of Turkey's AK Party government, which has worked to transform the Turkic Council into a more active and influential regional body. Initially established in 2009 as the Turkic Council, its main aim was to enhance cooperation among Turkic-speaking nations. Over time, under the leadership of the AK Party, the organization has grown both in scope and importance. The AK Party government prioritized strengthening the ties between Turkey and other Turkic nations, leveraging shared cultural, linguistic, and historical bonds. This vision culminated in 2021, when the organization was rebranded as the Organization of Turkic States, marking a new phase of institutional development and expanding its potential for regional cooperation.

The transformation of the Turkic Council into the Organization of Turkic States has reflected an increasing emphasis on regional integration, as the organization shifted from merely being a forum for dialogue to a more structured and action-oriented institution. With the AK Party's backing, the OTS has promoted initiatives that focus on economic cooperation, cultural exchange, transportation and infrastructure development, and educational collaboration among member states. These initiatives aim to enhance connectivity and foster mutual growth among Turkic-speaking countries, with a focus on creating synergies that benefit the region as a whole.

In the context of Turkish foreign policy, the Organization of Turkic States occupies an increasingly central place. Under the AK Party, Turkey has sought to enhance its leadership role in the region, positioning itself as a key advocate for the interests of Turkic-speaking countries. The OTS aligns with Turkey's broader foreign policy objectives of fostering multilateralism, promoting stability in Central Asia, and deepening relations with countries that share historical and cultural ties. As the OTS continues to evolve, its growing importance in shaping regional cooperation and integration is poised to be a defining feature of Turkish foreign policy in the coming years.

Key Words: Organization of Turkic States, AK Party, Turkish Foreign Policy

* PhD, Organization of Turkic States, Deputy Secretary General, Türkiye

The Challenges against the Organization of Turkic States

Can Demir*

Abstract

The Organization of Turkic States (OTS) has charted a promising course as the culminating stage of the Turkic world's historical efforts toward integration. Under this umbrella, member states have initiated substantial cooperation and integration projects. Despite these promising advancements, the OTS confronts a complex array of challenges that could undermine its potential for cohesion and effectiveness. These challenges arise from geopolitical tensions, divergent security alignments within its membership, and the competing influences of global and regional powers.

This study analyzes the current challenges against the OTS through a qualitative approach. The study focuses on weaknesses within and threats against the OTS unlike the majority of the studies related to the OTS, which grants it an important space in the related literature.

The Turkic states continue to experience significant Russian influence, a legacy of historical ties, shared institutional structures, and substantial Russian populations. The Russian language retains its importance in these countries, and economic dependencies remain evident, particularly through trade, labor migration, and remittances.

The divergent security affiliations within the OTS create a potential source of discord. For example, while countries like Türkiye and Hungary are aligned with NATO, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are CSTO members, leading to potential conflicts in security policy and weakening the unity of the OTS.

Further complicating matters are the border disputes and related security situations in Central Asia, particularly the contested territories in the Fergana Valley, where Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan share overlapping boundaries. These unresolved issues contribute to regional instability and present opportunities for external actors to exploit these vulnerabilities, undermining the OTS's effectiveness in fostering unity and regional security. Additionally, the security situation in Afghanistan remains a substantial concern for the Central Asian Turkic states, especially Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, both of which share borders with Afghanistan.

China has also expanded its footprint in the region, particularly through initiatives such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the C+C5 framework. The Turkic states are thus faced with the delicate task of balancing their relationships with both Russia and China, a balancing act that influences their economic and security policies. While this

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presents significant opportunities, it also creates vulnerabilities, as these competing powers vie for influence in the region.

The broader geopolitical rivalry between major powers also poses long-term risks to the region. While the United States seeks to counter China's economic dominance, Russia and China view the strengthening of Turkic unity, particularly through the OTS, as a potential threat to their regional influence. Russia's concerns about the rise of pan-Turkism, coupled with China's unease regarding the Uyghur issue, further complicate the geopolitical landscape.

In this context, Türkiye's growing influence in the region is a point of contention for Russia, China and Iran. While Türkiye's approach is rooted in cooperation rather than imperial ambition, its increasing role in the Turkic world is perceived as a challenge to Russian, Chinese and Iranian influence.

Consequently, the OTS faces significant geopolitical and internal obstacles that could hinder its ability to realize its full potential for regional integration and cooperation.

Keywords: The Organization of Turkic States, OTS, Turkic world, challenges.

**Turkey, Russia, and Iran: A Comparative Analysis of Foreign Policies
in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict**

Doğuş Sönmez*

Abstract

Foreign policy decisions are complex outcomes shaped by the interplay of international dynamics and domestic politics. While the structure of the international system imposes constraints and limits the range of options available to states, the unique characteristics of each state, including their capacities, leadership, and internal political dynamics, determine how they respond to these constraints. Consequently, foreign policy decision-making processes are inherently distinct, reflecting the singularities of each state's strategic environment and internal configuration. Understanding these processes requires an analysis that incorporates both systemic factors and domestic influences, offering a multifaceted view of state behaviour in the international arena. This study focuses on the foreign policy approaches of Turkey, Russia, and Iran during the reconciliation process of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict. The primary research question seeks to determine whether the motivations of these three states in the reconciliation process are similar, despite their distinctive decision-making frameworks. To address this question, the study argues that while each state's foreign policy process is unique, their decisions were influenced by comparable global and regional systemic restrictions, as well as parallel domestic motivations. These factors shaped their engagement in the conflict and their approaches to its resolution, creating a context where their actions, though distinct in execution, align in underlying drivers. The theoretical framework employed in this study is neoclassical realism, which integrates systemic-level constraints and domestic-level factors to explain foreign policy behaviour. Neoclassical realism is particularly suited for this analysis as it bridges the structural determinants of international relations with the internal characteristics of states, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how systemic pressures interact with domestic political contexts. The research adopts a single case study design, focusing on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict, and employs process-tracing methods to explore the sequence and logic of decisions made by these states. The case of Nagorno-Karabakh is particularly significant given its geopolitical implications, the involvement of regional and global powers, and its role as a site of intersection for diverse foreign policy objectives. Process-tracing enables a detailed examination of the causal mechanisms underlying the decisions of Turkey, Russia, and Iran, highlighting the interplay of systemic and domestic factors in shaping their actions. This study is important for several reasons. First, it sheds light on the foreign policy motivations of three key actors — Turkey, Russia, and Iran — in a conflict that has significant implications for regional stability and international relations. By examining their roles in the reconciliation process, the study contributes to a deeper

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understanding of the strategies and priorities of these states. Second, the research advances the field of comparative foreign policy analysis by offering a comprehensive evaluation of how similar systemic and domestic pressures can lead to both convergent and divergent foreign policy outcomes. Lastly, the study provides valuable insights into the broader dynamics of conflict resolution in the South Caucasus, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach that accounts for both external constraints and internal drivers.

Keywords: Comparative Foreign Policy Analysis, Neoclassical Realism, Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict, Turkey.

The Evolution of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO): Challenges and Opportunities for Central Asian States

Görkem Atsungur*

Abstract

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) has been expanded, adding new members and observers from Central Asia and beyond. India and Pakistan joined the group in 2017. Iran became a member in 2023, and Belarus in 2024. This enlargement signifies a shift in the regional power dynamics with profound implications for Central Asian states. This enlargement signifies a change in the regional power dynamics with a profound impact on Central Asian states. The expansion presents enhanced economic cooperation, security partnerships, and infrastructural development opportunities, particularly through the SCO's initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative. However, it also raises concerns regarding the potential for increased Chinese influence and competition with existing Western partnerships.

For Central Asian states, the SCO's enlargement offers a platform for greater political and economic integration, potentially unlocking access to new markets and investment opportunities. The organization's focus on security cooperation could also provide crucial support against transnational threats such as terrorism and drug trafficking. Conversely, the potential for increased Chinese dominance within the organization raises concerns about economic dependence and political maneuvering, potentially impacting the region's autonomy and strategic choices. The enlargement also introduces a dynamic between the SCO and existing Western partnerships, with implications for regional security alliances and economic collaborations.

The methodology encompasses both qualitative and quantitative approaches, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing SCO's expansion, its implications for member states, and the geopolitical dynamics at play. Conducting qualitative interviews with experts in international relations provides insights into the challenges and opportunities of SCO's expansion for Central Asian states. A quantitative analysis is performed using data on trade, security cooperation, and economic indicators among SCO member states before and after enlargement. This analysis helps assess the economic and security impacts of the SCO's expansion for Central Asian states.

Ultimately, the impact of SCO's enlargement on Central Asia is determined by how individual states in the region navigate these complex dynamics. The region's ability to leverage the organization's opportunities while mitigating potential risks shapes the future of Central Asian development and geopolitical influence.

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The SCO has significantly expanded its membership, including the recent additions of Iran and Belarus. This expansion holds both potential benefits and challenges for Central Asia, the region where the SCO originated.

Keywords: Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Central Asia, China, Regional Integration and Cooperation.

Drivers and Obstacles of Regional Integration in Central Asian Region

Qasem Osuli Odlu*

Abstract

This study explores the drivers and obstacles of regional integration in Central Asia, a region which its economic integration historically shaped by Soviet-era central planning that fostered artificial economic interconnectivity. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, these imposed integrative structures disintegrated, and regional integration lost prominence amid new geopolitical realities. However, recent developments have reignited efforts toward regional cooperation. Key drivers include Uzbekistan's shift toward a proactive and peaceful foreign policy, agreements such as the legal status of the Caspian Sea, constructive resolutions of border and water disputes, and the geopolitical impacts of the Ukraine war and shifts in the international system. Despite these advancements, significant challenges hinder integration. These include a lack of economic complementarity among regional states, with over 60% of trade conducted with non-regional partners, and the resurgence of a "Great Game" dynamic, characterized by geopolitical and geo economic competition among major powers. Using an explanatory approach and both quantitative and qualitative methods, this study examines the intricate balance of these factors, providing insights into the evolving prospects for regional integration in Central Asia.

Keywords: regional integration, great powers, economic complementarity, political agenda.

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DAY 1: 2nd Session
8 February 2025
12.45 – 15.00 (İstanbul Time)

Moderator: Assoc. Prof. Bülent Durgun

**Session-II: Regional Dynamics of Central Asia and the
Caucasus**

Armenian Diaspora and its Future in the Context of Transnational Nationalism

Gökhan Ak*

Abstract

Today's diaspora communities are politicized communities that influence relations between host countries and homelands. Diasporas do not hesitate to enter into debates with the ruling powers in the homeland. Thus, the subject of diaspora has been the subject of many theoretical and empirical studies in recent years. In a rapidly globalizing world, international migrations, developments in transportation and communication systems have placed diaspora communities on the margins of the homeland and the new homeland. Migrations from Türkiye to the United States of America (USA) and various countries in Europe have led to the formation of an Armenian diaspora.

This paper examines the Armenian diaspora in light of theoretical and empirical discussions in the literature; it also aims to shed light on the success of the Armenian diaspora, whose effects reach beyond continents, and to make assessments regarding its future. Because analysing Armenian diaspora and its future in the context of transnational nationalism will have significant advantages on regulating the future of Türkiye-Armenia relations.

The Armenian diaspora, as many researchers and writers have noted, is one of the largest financial resources of Armenia, but it is also a serious actor in realpolitik. Many established diasporic social networks are used for this purpose. At the same time, it expands its sphere of influence with its wide media network. The Armenian diaspora has made a significant contribution to the so-called genocide issue occupying Turkey's agenda more after 2005. When the power, influence and activities of the Armenian diaspora, which is a transnational movement, are taken into consideration, it is obvious that Turkey must constantly develop strategies against this problem. Because the Armenian diaspora can become stronger than a nation by using its connections.

Accordingly, the content of this paper is the Armenian diaspora and its effects on Türkiye-Armenia relations. The importance of the subject represents that the Armenian diaspora has a great and critical effect on the mainland Armenians regarding so-called Armenian Massacre and Türkiye-Armenia relations, thus in order to explore the outcomes of those effects, it seems important to analyse Armenian diaspora and its future in the context of transnational nationalism.

As for the methodology, within the scope of this research, a series of process analyses will be conducted and inferences will be made based on the results of these analyses. For this study, which has essentially adopted a qualitative research; scientific research techniques such as analytical descriptive method, content analysis, document analysis will be used. These methods include using sources such as published scientific books, articles, book chapters and reports on the subject.

Keywords: Armenia, Diaspora, Armenian Diaspora, Türkiye-Armenia Relations

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War in Ukraine and South Caucasus – An Opportunity for a Strategic

European Union?
Bogdan Ștefanachi*

Abstract

During the Cold War, but even more obvious in its aftermath, the EU became an integrated part of the global geopolitical equilibrium. Being a “geopolitical project of Kantian inspiration” *pax europæana* developed in the subsidiarity of EU proposes a new geopolitical pattern, based on different set of values than of the brutal balance of power. Beyond these alternative valences of the European power Parag Khanna considered that the world has 3 relatively equal centers of influence: Washington, Brussels and Beijing, the planet being simultaneously Americanized, Europeanized and Chinesed. In a somehow similar way Zbigniew Brzezinski placed Europe next to China and Russia in the geostrategic triad together with whom the USA have to live, only that the national security advisor of President Carter also said “Europe, despite its economic power, of the significant economic and financial integration and of its solid transatlantic friendship – is, de facto, a military United States protectorate.” The Ukraine crisis and the incoherent European response regarding this crisis are proofs of the inconsistency of European geostrategic project, while emphasizing the need for the European Union to overcome its condition of “political dwarf.”

On the other hand, The Russian invasion of Ukraine has not only increased tensions between the world’s major powers, but also mitigate the Russian influence and projection of power in its traditional vicinities. This applies especially to areas in the wider Eurasian region that the Russian Federation unjustifiably considers as part of its sphere of influence, such as the South Caucasus. The strategic importance of this area stems from the fact that it is located between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea, which, even more so, in the current geopolitical context, transforms it into an area of confrontation between internationally relevant powers.

The EU was often criticized over its lack of a strategy in the region which was firstly integrated in its more general European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and later the multilateral Eastern Partnership (EP) framework. But, Russia’s 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine placed the EU and its three South Caucasus neighbors in a new geopolitical reality: EU sanctions targeting the Kremlin financial support for the war have had a major impact on the economies of all three South Caucasus countries, as have disputes over regional trade routes. The intersection of geopolitics, security, and economics in the South Caucasus creates a dynamic and evolving landscape not only for the region but for the EU as well.

In this context, by critically analyzing the relevant EU documents and positions towards the South Caucasus, the article is aiming to present the main objectives of the European Union in the region and to examine the extent to which they could become important and relevant leverages to catalyze EU strategic relevance. Based on this approach, the paper will underscore possible recommendations in order to improve the European tailored made strategy in the region and to boost the international (geo)political/geostrategic importance of the European Union.

Keywords: South Caucasus, European Union, security, geopolitics.

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Defining Afghanistan Region

Mirwais Balkhi*

Abstract

Unlike many neighboring countries, Afghanistan has a unique geographical and geostrategic location; it lies neither in South Asia, Central Asia nor in West Asia or East Asia. While there has been abundant literature on the whereabouts of the location of Afghanistan in the Western universities, but on Afghanistan there is no argumentative or academic paper per se which talks about the precise location of Afghanistan and its importance. Since 2001, Afghanistan has been surrounded by four contested regional security systems. Under the current circumstances, Afghanistan has no significant experience in regional studies. Theoretically, they have interacted with other countries of the region in different periods of contemporary history; but their policies have been based on the governance structure of the area. In other words, there is no source or literature in the field of regional studies in Afghanistan. Therefore, theoretical and practical regional studies are Afghanistan's essential needs in international relations.

Keywords: Intra-Disciplinary, Cross-Cutting Region, Area Studies, Think Tank, Shared Culture, Common Memory.

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Pathology of Iran's Cultural Diplomacy in the South Caucasus:

Parties New Opportunities and Challenges

Hirad Mokhayer* & Farid Soltangeys**

Abstract

In the transition of today's international order, powerful countries and emerging powerful countries in the region are making special efforts in the direction of obtaining maximum national interests enhancing their power and drawing their new image, along with the classical diplomacy of the past, towards Modern diplomacy that surely cultural diplomacy is at the top of them.

In the new field of international relations, cultural diplomacy has become one of the most important complementary tools in the foreign policy apparatus of countries in advancing goals such as soft power and economic and military diplomacy. In this article, relying on the analytical descriptive method and specialized academic documents, the pathology of the achievements and failures of Iran's cultural diplomacy against the emerging States of the South Caucasus from the 90s to 2023 has been discussed.

This research, with this description, attempts to ask the question, "What are the main factors of failure resulting from the cultural diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran vis-a-vis South Caucasus countries, and what is the new way to overcome them?"

An attempt has been made to evaluate and respond to the assumptions raised by the question. Finally, the most important hypothesis that is raised is that "the Islamic Republic of Iran in the course of its cultural diplomacy at the beginning of the formation of the New States of the South Caucasus with special reliance on religious and passive diplomacy Being expedient in the multi-faceted crises of the South Caucasus, could not build the foundations of its beneficial cultural diplomacy goals in these countries, and finally, such an approach seems to overtake cultural diplomacy from its competitors. Abduction of a region of Iran in the South Caucasus"; Solutions have been reviewed and presented

Keywords: Cultural diplomacy – Islamic Republic of Iran – South Caucasus - New World Order

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Strategic Barriers in Iran's Foreign Policy Toward Azerbaijan

Afsane Danesh*

Abstract

Iran's foreign policy toward the Republic of Azerbaijan faces significant strategic challenges rooted in historical, geopolitical, cultural, and security factors. These challenges have become more complex in recent years due to emerging developments. Key developments include the growing influence of Israel and Turkey in Azerbaijan's regional policies, tensions stemming from the Second Karabakh War and its aftermath, Azerbaijan's attempts to alter the balance of power in the South Caucasus, and its insistence on the Zangezur Corridor project. Additionally, the rise of Azerbaijani nationalism and its impact on Iran's north-western regions have further strained bilateral relations. Disputes over energy, border security, and Iran's concerns regarding the presence of foreign actors in the region have also added to the complexity of the relationship. This paper with a descriptive research method and neoclassical realism theory analyses these strategic barriers and examines the impact of recent developments, aiming to propose solutions to reduce tensions and strengthen relations based on Iran's national interests. This paper analyzes how national interests, security concerns, and domestic political factors shape Iran's foreign policy decisions.

Keywords: Iran, Azerbaijan, foreign policy, strategic barriers, neoclassical Realism

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Russia's Risk Potential in Key Geostrategic Regions and Deterrence Response Solutions

Rifat Ullah Rifat*

Abstract

The Russo-Ukraine War has challenged the global political order on the one hand and has also exposed the vulnerabilities of neighbouring regions in terms of their dependence on the West, especially NATO. The War has breached the notion of integrated deterrence, which has been prevalent since the end of the Cold War, raising serious concerns for these regions, which may be looking for new geostrategic realignments. This scenario would be more likely if the new regime in the U.S. promoting an "America First" policy distances itself from the transatlantic security cooperation mechanism or demands increased burden sharing by the EU. It will translate into reduced U.S. ownership aligned with 'transactional nationalism' and 'strategic protectionism' while meriting more economic and political onus by the regional countries and the EU.

To investigate Russia's strategic interests in key geostrategic regions vital for U.S. global security objectives and military alliances like NATO, including NATO's Eastern flank, Black Sea, South Caucasus, and Central Asia.

Research Objectives:

To analyze the risk potential posed by Russia to the security and stability matrix of these regions in line with its geostrategic ambitions.

To assess the existing deterrence mechanisms, define gaps that can be bridged through integrated deterrence.

To identify key drivers of change and uncertainties and orchestrate all possible scenarios while defining strategic triggers for each scenario.

To propose deterrence strategies and policy recommendations for the stakeholders to mitigate Russian influence and threat in each region.

Purpose:

To conduct a nuanced analysis of the existing security and deterrence mechanism of each vital region under the lens of Russian geostrategic interests, influence, and ambitions concerning these regions in order to highlight grey areas, using Risk Potential Assessment (RPA) and integrated SWOT-PESSTEL analysis, primarily focusing on U.S. global security objectives. Further building on this threadbare analysis, identify key drivers of change and uncertainties, articulate probable scenarios, and propose a model for integrated deterrence response mechanism and policy recommendation to ward off the envisaged threats.

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Methodology:

The research adopts a qualitative approach using content analysis of thematic clusters technique, primarily focusing on case studies while conducting comparative analysis. The study applies a geopolitical risk assessment framework to gauge Russia's military, economic and diplomatic manoeuvres. In addition, integrated SWOT-PESSTEL analysis (with an additional 'S' for "security" in the traditional model of PESTEL) to draw a nuanced analysis of existing deterrence apparatus in these regions and their efficacy.

Keywords: Integrated Deterrence, Risk Potential Assessment, Black Sea, South Caucasus, Central Asia

Futures Studies and Analysis of Israel's Cultural Diplomacy Objectives in the South and North Caucasus

Hirad Mokhayer*

Abstract

Since the Establishment of independent states in the South Caucasus and the subsequent identity formation of the autonomous regions in the North Caucasus within the Russian Federation in the 1990s, many neighbouring countries, as well as non-neighbouring states, have sought to establish favourable multidimensional relations with these Caucasian regions. These efforts were primarily driven by shared cultural, religious, and historical affinities, aiming to lay the groundwork for leveraging these commonalities as initial steps toward achieving their soft power objectives for future strategic benefits. In this context, Israel, utilising its diverse tools such as active political, cultural, and religious lobbies, effectively engaged with these regions from the outset. By relying on cultural diplomacy, Israel strategically designed and implemented its multifaceted soft power initiatives, tailored to the unique potentials of each Caucasian region. For instance, the culmination of Israel's cultural activities in certain South Caucasus states, such as Azerbaijan, resulted in the Judaization of certain cities, villages, and key areas historically associated with non-Jewish religions and ethnic groups. This, in turn, facilitated the concentration and relocation of Jewish populations from other parts of the Middle East and the Caucasus to these regions. This study employs a descriptive-analytical methodology and specialised research tools to critically analyze Israel's cultural diplomacy in the South and North Caucasus regions. With a forward-looking approach, the author seeks to examine the main indicators and multidimensional objectives of Israel's cultural diplomacy in these areas.

Keywords : Cultural Diplomacy , Soft Power , Israel , South Caucasus , North Caucasus , Future Studies

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Examining the “Political Dynamics of Kazakhstan” in the Globalized World

Quaisar Alam*, Yazdani Hasan**, Mohammad Shahid***, Indu Yadav****

Abstract

This research examines the political dynamics of Kazakhstan within the context of a globalized world, emphasizing its strategic location, resource wealth, and evolving foreign policy. As a key player in Central Asia, Kazakhstan’s political framework has been shaped by its transition from a Soviet republic to an independent nation. The study explores the nation’s domestic governance, including its semi-authoritarian system and recent constitutional reforms aimed at decentralizing power and enhancing democratic processes. In the global arena, Kazakhstan’s multi-vector foreign policy underscores its attempt to balance relations with major powers such as Russia, China, and the United States while fostering partnerships with the European Union and neighboring Central Asian states. The research highlights how this approach has allowed Kazakhstan to maintain political stability and economic growth amidst regional and global challenges, including geopolitical tensions and the shifting balance of power in Eurasia. A critical aspect of this analysis is the role of globalization in shaping Kazakhstan’s policies and identity. The study evaluates the nation’s integration into global economic and political structures through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its membership in organizations such as the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the United Nations. It also addresses Kazakhstan’s efforts in promoting regional cooperation, sustainable development, and its ambition to become a key transit hub for Eurasian trade. The research further explores the domestic implications of global engagement, including economic diversification efforts, social modernization, and challenges in managing national identity amidst the influences of globalization. By analyzing these dynamics, the study provides insights into Kazakhstan’s unique position as a bridge between East and West, navigating the complexities of globalization while striving to maintain sovereignty and cultural heritage. The findings underscore Kazakhstan’s ability to adapt its political strategies to the evolving global landscape while addressing internal challenges. The study concludes by emphasizing the importance of continued reform and strategic engagement in ensuring Kazakhstan’s long-term stability and growth.

Keywords: Kazakhstan, Political dynamics, Globalization, Multi-vector Foreign Policy, Central Asia

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New Great Game in Energy in Central Asia since the Beginning Ukraine War

Ebrahim Rezaei Rad*

Abstract

The Central Asian region gained prominence after the Soviet Union's collapse, attracting global attention due to its proximity to Russia and rich oil and gas resources. Newly independent countries focused on exploring these resources but faced challenges like low economic power and limited technological access. This situation has sparked a new "great game" among powerful nations seeking to exploit the region's energy potential. The importance of this competition in the energy field becomes important and noticeable when we know that the two energy giant countries in the world, Iran and Russia, are located in the neighborhood of this region, and the presence of competing countries in this region can seriously challenge their interests. In fact, in this period, especially after beginning the Ukrainian war, we are witnessing the formation of a new great game on the issue of energy in the Central Asian region, which can have extensive dimensions. The importance of this research is that, as the time this article was written, research had yet to be conducted. Accordingly, this article uses a hybrid method (quantitative-qualitative) and an energy security theoretical framework. The main question is, How did the great energy game in the Central Asian region take shape since the Ukraine war? The main research hypothesis suggests that the rise of a new great game in Central Asia, revolving around energy, has triggered a fierce competition between China, Russia, Iran, and Western countries, primarily European nations. Each participant is driven by its energy security concerns. The extensive sanctions against Russia and Iran, particularly in the energy sector, have significantly diminished their power and influence in this competition. Notably, the inclusion of China in this competition underscores the complexity and global nature of the issue. The research findings indicate that after the start of the Ukrainian war, we are witnessing the formation of intense competition over energy resources in the Central Asian region. Iran has lost its power as a key player in the energy sector to some extent due to US sanctions and infrastructure issues. Russia has also lost its power in the field of natural gas and its export and market capacity due to Western sanctions and the reluctance of Western countries, especially Europe, to buy natural gas. The main competition between China and Europe in the Central Asian region has been formed in the energy field. China is trying to diversify its energy import route by expanding its presence and influence in Central Asia. The European Union is also trying to accelerate the connection between Central Asia and pipelines, such as the Trans-Caspian pipeline to the Southern Gas Corridor, to provide a new source of energy supply from the Central Asian region.

Keywords: New Great game, Energy, Central Asia, Ukraine war, Energy security

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DAY 1: 3rd Session

8 February 2025

15.30 – 17.00 (İstanbul Time)

Moderator: Prof. Aşkın İnci Sökmen Alaca

**Session-III: Cultural, Educational and Technological
Dimensions of Central Asia and the Caucasus**

Soft-Power Diplomacy through Stamps: Politico-Cultural Narratives in Central Asia and the Caucasus

Assad Mehmood Khan*

Abstract:

This paper examines how postage stamps function as a form of soft-power diplomacy in Central Asia and the Caucasus, conveying politico-cultural narratives. It explores how stamps, beyond their postal role, reflect national identities, political ideologies, and cultural resistance. By analyzing stamp designs and themes, the study reveals how these symbols serve as tools for shaping domestic and international perceptions, offering a unique perspective on the intersection of culture, politics, and diplomacy in the region.

The use of postage stamps in soft-power diplomacy is crucial for understanding how nations in Central Asia and the Caucasus project cultural and political narratives. This study highlights how stamps serve as subtle tools for shaping national identity, fostering diplomatic relations, and navigating global politics. By focusing on stamps as symbols of political and cultural expression, this research offers new insights into the role of symbolic diplomacy in these geopolitically significant regions.

This paper examines how postage stamps serve as a form of soft-power diplomacy in Central Asia and the Caucasus. It analyzes how stamps reflect political ideologies, national identities, and cultural narratives, highlighting their role in shaping both domestic and international perceptions. The study focuses on the design and themes of stamps, exploring their use as diplomatic tools to assert sovereignty and foster cultural diplomacy in the region.

The discussion centers on the role of postage stamps as a powerful tool of soft-power diplomacy in Central Asia and the Caucasus, emphasizing their ability to shape both political and cultural narratives. The paper explores how stamp designs serve as reflections of national identity, highlighting key historical events, cultural symbols, and political ideologies that define the region. It also examines how stamps are used to assert sovereignty and serve as instruments of cultural resistance, particularly in response to geopolitical pressures. The influence of these stamps extends beyond national borders, impacting cross-border relations and contributing to the way the region is perceived internationally. By analyzing specific stamp examples, the paper discusses how they serve as symbolic diplomacy, strengthening national pride and conveying political messages to a global audience, further emphasizing the often overlooked yet significant role of cultural artifacts in diplomatic strategies.

This paper combines literary analysis and International Relations (IR) theory to explore how postage stamps function as tools of soft-power diplomacy in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Using symbolic analysis, the study examines the narratives and political themes

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embedded in stamp designs, focusing on their representation of national identity, sovereignty, and cultural resistance. Drawing on Constructivism, the paper investigates how stamps shape national identities and influence state behavior, while Soft Power theory is applied to understand how stamps enhance a nation's cultural influence and diplomatic reach. A comparative approach is used to analyze stamps across the region, highlighting their role in shaping international perceptions and diplomatic strategies.

The study highlights the significant role of postage stamps in shaping political narratives and cultural identity in Central Asia and the Caucasus. It demonstrates how stamps serve as tools of soft-power diplomacy, asserting sovereignty, promoting national pride, and fostering cultural resistance. The findings emphasize the diplomatic potential of stamps in enhancing cross-border relations and shaping global perceptions of the region.

Keywords: Soft-power diplomacy, Postage stamps, Cultural identity, Central Asia and the Caucasus,

Deciphering the Dynamics of Technological Advancements in the Contemporary Central Asian Discourse

Quaisar Alam*, Yazdani Hasan**, Mohammad Shahid***, Indu Yadav****

Abstract

This study explores the dynamics of technological advancements within the contemporary Central Asian context, with a focus on their transformative impact on socio-economic, cultural, and political frameworks. Amid the region's rapid globalization and strategic geopolitical positioning, Central Asia has become a vital intersection for the flow of technology-driven innovation. The research critically examines how technological adoption and digital integration influence governance, economic modernization, and societal structures in the region. By assessing case studies from key nations, the study highlights disparities in technology accessibility, infrastructure, and policy frameworks, reflecting varied trajectories of progress. One of the central aims of this research is to clarify how digital technologies are reshaping governance models in Central Asia, with particular emphasis on their role in enhancing transparency, citizen participation, and economic efficiency. The analysis delves into the challenges posed by the digital divide, cybersecurity threats, and the regulatory frameworks needed to sustain technological growth while preserving socio-cultural identities. Furthermore, the study examines the interplay between technological advancements and regional geopolitics, emphasizing the influence of external powers and their technological initiatives in shaping Central Asia's digital future. It highlights the importance of regional cooperation, investment in education, and digital literacy to mitigate inequalities and foster a more inclusive technological landscape. The study also explores how fostering localized innovation and empowering small and medium enterprises (SMEs) can significantly enhance regional competitiveness while maintaining cultural and societal harmony. The findings underscore the duality of technological progression in Central Asia—offering both unprecedented opportunities for regional development and critical challenges, including digital inequalities and dependency on external technological powers. This study contributes to the broader understanding of technology's transformative potential in emerging economies, providing a clearer vision of how Central Asian nations can strategically leverage technological advancements for sustainable development.

Keywords: Central Asia, Technological Advancements, Digital Transformation, Governance, Socio-Economic Development

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Future of Higher Education in South Asian Region: Needs and Challenges

Muhammad Nasir Khan*

Abstract

South Asian region is facing economic crisis and political instability. Illiteracy and lack of comprehensive plans for the success of higher education is existing as well. Although number of higher education institutions is rising. Innovative programs have been launched in the universities. Yet, huge gap is existing in the professional development and market demands in the south Asian region. On other side, unemployment is rising. Human trafficking and legal migration is one of major challenges in south Asian region. Policies exist but practices are partial and unsuccessful. Quality of higher education needs to be readdressed. The study reflects the emerging needs and challenges in the field of higher education in South Asian region. It's important to correlate the teachings and the gaps in the societies so that youth can well address the gaps in future. Curriculum of social sciences is demanding revisions in the field of humanism, justice and equality. The existing curriculum activities look not to be effective to developing the skills in youth for their practical contributions in the society. Quality of teacher training programs and instructional material needs to be ensured in the higher education institutions. Universities are facing economic challenges and leadership in the south Asian region. The study is beneficial for the researchers and academicians.

Keywords: Quality, Higher education, Curriculum, Teacher training, South Asia

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Policy, Curriculum, and Teacher Education: Drivers of Regional Integration in Central Asia and the Caucasus

Kiram Hashmi*

Abstract

The dynamic context of Central Asia and the Caucasus presents a unique set of opportunities and challenges for regional integration, with education emerging as a pivotal factor. This keynote session will explore the transformative potential of education policy, curriculum development, and teacher education in fostering unity across culturally and historically diverse nations. Education policies that align with regional aspirations can provide a shared framework, setting the stage for integration through equitable access, harmonization of standards, and a commitment to fostering mutual respect. Similarly, culturally responsive curricula serve as vital bridges that reflect regional histories, shared values, and collective aspirations, helping to promote understanding and collaboration among diverse populations.

Teacher education programs, as the linchpin of this framework, are critical to equipping educators with the skills and knowledge to effectively implement these curricula. Through such preparation, teachers can foster intercultural understanding, address diversity with sensitivity, and nurture students to become both globally competent and deeply rooted in their regional identity.

This keynote will present insights from case studies and best practices within the region to illustrate the interplay between policy, curriculum, and teacher education. These examples will underscore the collective potential of these elements to create an education system that serves as a foundation for socio-political cohesion, economic collaboration, and a shared regional identity. This session aims to highlight the critical need for harmonized education systems as an enabler of regional integration and to inspire stakeholders to embrace education as a strategic tool for long-term unity and development in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Keywords: Regional integration, education policy, curriculum development, teacher education, intercultural understanding, culturally responsive teaching, Central Asia, Caucasus.

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Digital Innovations and their Prospects for Boosting Regional Integration in Central Asia and the Caucasus

Ana Yousefian*

Abstract

In recent decades the global economic weight has experienced a dramatic shift with emerging economies, mainly in Asia, as key players. These economies will consist 50 % of the global GDP until 2050, more significant compared to the G7 countries that will have a 20% share. The evolving change can be seen a precursor of an economic transformation from the Atlantic zone to the emerging economies beefing up the already existing multi-polar economic order. Moreover the emergence of new production patterns such as near-shoring, friend-shoring, on- shoring and res-shoring is adding another dimension to supply chains and trade policies especially among neighboring countries, with technology as a key player. Asia is now the largest global region where not only the emergence of sub-regions but also the convergence of sub-regions is taking place. Sub-regions that include Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, and West Asia or the Persian Gulf region. Meanwhile there comes the digital order which as some IR scholars put it, for now is a bi-polar one with China and the United States as the two leading actors. Considering the fact that technological and digital innovations have added a new dimension to world affairs this paper tries to investigate whether digital innovations such as Artificial Intelligence providing us with data have the potential to boost a regional integration relying on digital innovations. The research question is in what way digital and technological innovations can lay the ground for regional integration. It is presumed that newly developed production patterns with the help of new technological tools such as Artificial Intelligence, demographic changes in Asia, the growing consumer class, generation Z and their hybrid lifestyle and above all the geopolitical changes provide the countries of the region with various opportunities in fields of economy and culture. Through the lens of institutional liberalism in which states and institutions are the main actors, based on determining factors such as international anarchy, national interests and the functions and efficiency of institutions the hypothesis will be shaped. This research is qualitative and it involves non- numerical data such as texts, podcasts, web casts, therefore a secondary research.

Keywords: Central Asia, the Caucasus, digital innovations, regional integration

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