

**FORMS OF IDENTITY: THE POST-SOVIET DYNAMICS OF CENTRAL ASIA**

***KİMLİK FORMLARI: ORTA ASYA'NIN POST-SOVYET DİNAMIĞI***

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**ABSTRACT**

Contemporary Central Asia attracts the close attention of many Great and Potential Great Powers. The role played by natural resources in this regard is quite obvious. The modern development of Central Asia is largely concerned with the course and direction of various global processes. The states that have gained independence in the region have had to pursue a difficult path to keep abreast of new geopolitical conditions. However, some of the current internal and external problems of the Turkic states are directly related to the pre-Soviet and Soviet past. The future of the region is closely related to its acceptance or rejection of its historical cultural heritage. If the first choice is agreed to, it may be lead to a new development, a truly united and unique region at ease with itself. The second choice suggests that the five post-Soviet states will continue to go their own separate ways.

**Keywords:** Central Asia, Turkic States, Identity, Post-Soviet Independence, Turkic Union

**ÖZ**

Günümüzde Orta Asya bölgesi pek çok Büyük ve potansiyel Büyük Güçlerin yakın ilgisini çekmektedir. Elbette doğal kaynakların rolü çok önemlidir. Orta Asya'nın modern gelişimi büyük oranda çeşitli küresel süreçlerin gidişatı ve yönü ile ilgilidir. Bölgenin bağımsızlığını yeni elde eden devletleri, yeni jeopolitik koşullara ayak uydurabilmek için çok acı veren bir sürece katılmak zorunda kaldılar. Aynı zamanda Türkî devletlerinin mevcut iç ve dış sorunlarının bir kısmının doğrudan Sovyet öncesi ve Sovyet geçmişiyle ilişkili olduğu da unutulmamalıdır. Bölgenin geleceği tarihi kültürel mirasını kabul etme veya reddetmesi ile yakından alakalıdır. İlk tercih gerçekleşirse birleşik ve kendisi ile bağışık yeni bir gelişim sözkonusu olabilir. İkinci tercih Sovyet sonrası baş ayrı devletin ayrı yollarda devam etmesini öngörecektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Orta Asya, Türkî Devletler, Kimlik, Sovyet Sonrası Bağımsızlık, Türk Birliği

The modern development of Central Asia is largely related to the pre-Soviet and Soviet past. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that many parts of the current internal and international problems of the Central Asian states is directly related to this past. The new independent states of the region had to endure a very painful process of adaptation to new geopolitical conditions. The course and direction of global processes also impacted heavily on the region.

Before being forced to enter the Russian Empire, political processes in Central Asia represented a fluid conglomeration of relations between nomadic and agricultural peoples, tribal formations and feudal political formations. The essence of these relations, as well as the relations of others, was the struggle for material resources, the most important of which were pastoral, fertile lands and water. This was the land between the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya rivers and the Fergana Valley. In addition, trade communications and their infrastructure - caravanserai and cities - were an important object of the policy of all the Central Asian political entities.<sup>1</sup>

Within the Ferghana Valley, there had long been different ethnic groups (peoples), mostly Turkic and one Iranian. Since ancient times the Ferghana Valley has been the object of geopolitical expansion of different

<sup>1</sup> Fedorov-Davydov, G. A. (1983). Archaeological research in Central Asia of the Muslim period. World Archaeology, 14(3), 393-405.

rulers. Accordingly, the Ferghana Valley was then included in one or another state. Before Central Asia became a part of Russia, the lands of the Ferghana Valley were part of the Khokand khanate led by the Uzbek rulers.<sup>2</sup>

Causes of existing interethnic contradictions and conflicts within Central Asia consist of the memories of historical contradictions that are a remnant from the Soviet past. This, above all, led to a rise in the administrative-territorial division of Central Asia, which changed the ethnopolitical map of the region. For example, when some territories and cities did not fall into the composition of a particular union republic, they were considered historically as their own.

To illustrate this point Tajiks still consider Bukhara and Samarkand as symbols of their culture and history, which at the same time, these cities became part of Uzbekistan and the Uzbeks consider these cities their own.<sup>3</sup> Such cases arouse national consciousness and contribute to the emergence of mutual territorial and political claims. On the other hand, it must be emphasized that such a situation is the result of a close historical intertwining of destinies and cultures of different peoples, a periodic change from belonging to one or another state's educational system.

Primarily, these were issues related to interethnic and interreligious relations that existed before the Soviet period, which were not resolved by the formation of the Soviet republics. Within the site of former state and tribal formations, there is widespread consensus that the same major republics were constructed on the basis of the main largest ethnic groups: Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Turkmen and Uzbek. By 1920, the khanate of Khiva and the emirate of Bukhara had come under Soviet control and Turkestan become an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic governed in effect from Moscow espousing a totalitarian ideology. What many, though not all, fail to point out is that when Central Asia began to be artificially and purposefully carved up in the early 1920s, even the Soviet planners could not differentiate between Kazakh and Kyrgyz, referring to them as Kara-Kirgiz.<sup>4</sup>

These newly named territorial units formally possessed the status of a state within the USSR and had corresponding institutions. The multiethnic territories of the historic Bukhara emirate, Kokand and Khiva khanates - all pre-Soviet period - entered as territorial possessions of the relevant republics. While new territorial and political communities were created during the Soviet period, on the basis of which the emergence of new Central Asian states and relations between them arose, all Central Asian republics remained polyethnic.<sup>5</sup> There were differences in religious culture, even among the predominant Muslim population.

In addition, one should recall that the borders of the Soviet republics were determined taking into account many factors, one of which was the domestic geopolitics and the interests of the ethnically Russian dominated Soviet Union.<sup>6</sup> Ethnic geography was taken into account, but certain ethnic groups were imposed from above with a particular nationality, included in a certain republic, with a view to creating deliberately controversial issues between ethnic groups and their elites along the republican borders and polyethnic cities, settlements and districts. The ethnic groups of Central Asia were those who determined their identities themselves or had a double, mixed identity and simply oriented themselves towards the titular ethnic groups. In such cases, more often than not, siblings identified themselves depending on the state in which they lived.

The administrative-territorial division that emerged in the Soviet era changed the ethnic and political geography within the regional hierarchy of peoples and their elites in Central Asia. At the same time, the entry of a number of peoples of Central Asia into the Russian Empire defined their outer contours in relation to former territories and states competing with the Russian Empire, in particular China and Great Britain. The borders of the USSR finally consolidated this external outline and the internal policy of Moscow in relation to the union republics which contributed to the formation of a subregion called Central Asia.<sup>7</sup> Undoubtedly the Soviet period greatly influenced the general cultural and political characteristics of Central Asia. The creation of a communist world interrupted the historical ties of the Central Asian peoples with their southern and eastern neighbors which at one time had constituted a single cultural space.

<sup>2</sup> Levi, S. (2007). Turks and Tajiks in Central Asian History. Everyday life in Central Asia: past and present, 15-31.

<sup>3</sup> Bergne, P. (2007). Birth of Tajikistan: National identity and the origins of the republic. IB Tauris.

<sup>4</sup> Grodekov, N. I. (1989). Kirgizy i karakirgizy Syr-Dar'inskoi oblasti [Kyrgyz and Karakirgizy of the Syr-Darya Region]. Vol. 1. Tashkent: Tipolitografiya SI Lakhtina.

<sup>5</sup> Kulchik, Y., Fadin, A. V., & Sergeev, V. M. (1996). Central Asia after the empire. Pluto Press.

<sup>6</sup> Hagedoorn, L., Drogendijk, R., Tumanov, S., & Hraba, J. (1998). Inter-ethnic preferences and ethnic hierarchies in the former Soviet Union. International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 22(4), 483-503.

<sup>7</sup> Luong, P. J. (Ed.). (2004). The transformation of Central Asia: States and societies from Soviet rule to independence. Cornell University Press.

Currently, the Central Asian states are actively developing their external relations with various countries. In post-Soviet Central Asia, various horizontal links are developing, which confirm regional identities. However, it is noticeable that they do not distance themselves from Russia and other CIS countries.

The territories of the newly independent states are a special region that either will remain as a unified historical Central Asia or as five independent republics forming an independent region with a multi-vector external orientation.<sup>8</sup> Although the region's self-worth is limited, since it does not have its own exits to the sea, representing a periphery in terms of the economy the region does possess strategic resources that are of interest to different states. Heading the list are oil and gas, rare metals and uranium ores. The oil and gas reserves in Central Asia, including the East Caspian area, are second only to the Middle East and the Persian Gulf in terms of importance.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the region is important as a geo-economic transport hub. Already, work is underway to build transport corridors towards the south and east-west directions. In geopolitical terms, the region is also important as a buffer between China and the West.

At present, the Central Asian region has three concentric geopolitical systems. The first consists of an internal one, which directly represents relations between the Central Asian states, and two regional centers of power - Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Moreover, the Uzbek elite groups of the past dominated the hierarchy of the other ethnic elites. Currently along with the Uzbek elites, the Kazakh elites claim leadership in Central Asia.<sup>10</sup> The contours of the internal regional system is represented by the territories of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, the southern regions of Uzbekistan as well as the northern and eastern regions of Kazakhstan. These territories border Afghanistan and Iran, Russia and China. Relations with these states form an external system bordering the region and encouraging bilateral relations with the Central Asian states with which they share ethnic kinship.

Secondly, the states of the southern contour of Central Asia play an important geopolitical role in the system of international relations of the region and its relations with the outside world. They, as a link and mediator, create a necessary balance between states that claim to be the center of power in the region or to external forces of influence.<sup>11</sup>

Third is the relationship of the Central Asian states with other states acting as regional and world centers of power. The course of geopolitical processes in the region can and do affect the Russia-China-USA geopolitical triangle.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, any formula for coordinating the interests of these and other players of the Central Asian geopolitical game is very important both for ensuring stability, security, and the successful development of the countries of the region, including the success of various integration projects such as the Eurasian Union.<sup>13</sup> The consensus between Russia, China and the United States is based on the fact that all interested parties realize that in the short term none of them will become the unhindered and unchallenged sole leader in the region.

All these concentric systems interpenetrate one another and interact with each other in parallel and varying directions. Particular attention should be paid to the place and role of Russia in the history and processes of the space of Central Asia. In the context of the history of the participation of the Russian Empire / Soviet Union in the destinies of the Central Asian peoples in the past and present, there are valid reasons to consider Russia an important actor impacting Central Asia.<sup>14</sup> In the past, the Central Asia region neighbored with Russia, afterwards forcibly being incorporated into the Russian space. At present, Russia's presence in Central Asia seems more natural when compared to China and the United States, although the presence of the latter is natural for the unipolar world. In this respect, Russia's presence in the region can be seen as a necessary counterbalance to the US and China.<sup>15</sup>

In addition, in the designated regional subsystem one can distinguish historical geopolitical clusters - the Ferghana Valley, Afghanistan and Eastern Turkestan. It should also be noted that in the post-Soviet period, the Central Asian states restored direct ties with their historically - relatively remote neighbors - the states of

<sup>8</sup> Tsygankov, A. P. (2003). Mastering space in Eurasia: Russia's geopolitical thinking after the Soviet break-up. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 36(1), 101-127.

<sup>9</sup> The Ferghana Valley, on the other hand is rich in iron, copper, chrome, gold, and other rare non-ferrous metals. Tajikistan, furthermore, holds seventh place in the world in terms of uranium reserves.

<sup>10</sup> Allison, R. (2008). Virtual regionalism, regional structures and regime security in Central Asia. *Central Asian Survey*, 27(2), 185-202.

<sup>11</sup> Bohr, A. (2004). Regionalism in Central Asia: new geopolitics, old regional order. *International Affairs*, 80(3), 485-502.

<sup>12</sup> Rumer, E. B., Trenin, D., & Zhao, H. (2007). *Central Asia: Views from Washington, Moscow, and Beijing*. ME Sharpe.

<sup>13</sup> Yigit, S. (2013). Eurasian Union= Energy Union?. *Middle Eastern Analysis/Ortadogu Analiz*, 5(51).

<sup>14</sup> Jonson, L. (2004). Vladimir Putin and Central Asia: the shaping of Russian foreign policy (Vol. 1). IB Tauris.

<sup>15</sup> Kim, Y., & Indeo, F. (2013). The new great game in central Asia post 2014: The US "New Silk Road" strategy and Sino-Russian rivalry. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 46(2), 275-286.

South Asia and the Middle East. The very same region of Central Asia can be broadened and referred to as part of the Greater Middle East.<sup>16</sup>

Open borders and globalization has increased the level of influence of world and regional centers of power on the processes in the Central Asian region. Central Asia has become an object of attention to such powerful countries of the Islamic world as Turkey, Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia. It must be recalled that Islam was originally an important component of the political realm. Arab expansion under the banner of Islam in Central Asia took place during the VII-VIII centuries at first defeating the Sassanians and establishing the Umayyad Caliphate. The Chinese were expelled from Mongolia and the Arabs captured the Central Asian oasis cities. When the Chinese invaded the Ferghana Valley, it was at the Battle of Talas in 751 where the Arabs won the confrontation against the Tang Dynasty. This battle marked the point where the Islamic Empire halted its march eastwards, and the Chinese stopped their expansion to the west.

The Turkic impact on the region centred around the Qarakhanid and Ghaznavid Dynasties. After the Seljuk Turks defeated the Ghaznavids, they went onto capture Baghdad and Anatolia. The next major impact witnessed Genghiz Khan conquering Central Asia and the Mongols incorporating Russia into a largest land empire in world history. Thus the process of Islamization of the population of Central Asia has been lengthy and complex.

With all the differences in the cultures of the peoples of Central Asia, two ways of life can be distinguished. They correspond to the two cultural types that have developed in the region. These are the cultures of sedentary farmers and nomadic herders. For countries where the main historical type is the culture of the oasis, the emphasis on the values of the Islamic tradition is quite characteristic. For states whose population is largely a bearer of another type of culture, it was typical to preserve pre-Islamic traditions. In the Soviet period, the state instilled non-religious values and cultural pluralism, considering it the most favourable condition for the consolidation of socialist society. Due to this, the factor of Islam as a belief was consciously weakened.<sup>17</sup>

At present, the overwhelming majority of the population of the region identifies themselves not only in terms of language and belonging to a particular ethnic group, but also the Muslim religion. Even in the Soviet period, despite Moscow's anti-religious policies, the population and elites of the region remained faithful to religious traditions: between 65-80% openly recognizing themselves as believers.<sup>18</sup> After independence the disappearance of Soviet atheism came to be replaced with the Islamic religion. This was promoted by external forces which assisted in joining international Islamic organizations. To illustrate this point, with their assistance, all countries of the region came to be represented in the Organisation of Islamic Countries.<sup>19</sup>

The ideological vacuum created after the collapse of official Soviet ideology contributed to the fact that most of the population naturally returned to their traditions. In one sense all countries in the region became at once a kind of testing ground in which Islam became the object of a cultural and political process.<sup>20</sup> In general, global megatrends and the perturbation of the entire system of international relations have come to exert their ever-increasing influence on the contemporary cultural, economic and political processes in Central Asia and its environment. It would be wrong, however, to reduce everything only to a new balance of power. The world reality is so complex that it can not be explained by a simple model which existed during the Cold War.

The time of gaining independence by the Central Asian republics coincided with the next stage of strengthening interdependence in the world, namely globalization.<sup>21</sup> In other words, the acquisition of national sovereignty coincided with the beginning of the era of diversification on a world scale. This is manifested by the fact that the young Central Asian states were under the powerful and aggressive influence of external state and non-state actors of world politics.<sup>22</sup> At present, a number of intra-regional factors can be said to stimulate political changes in the states of Central Asia:

<sup>16</sup> Roy, O. (2005). The predicament of 'civil society' in Central Asia and the 'Greater Middle East'. *International Affairs*, 81(5), 1001-1012.

<sup>17</sup> Keller, S. (2001). *To Moscow, Not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign Against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941*. Greenwood Publishing Group.

<sup>18</sup> Olcott, M. B. (1994). Central Asia's Islamic Awakening. *Current History*, 93(582), 150.

<sup>19</sup> Akiner, S. (2003). The politicisation of Islam in postsoviet Central Asia. *Religion, State & Society*, 31(2), 97-122.

<sup>20</sup> Rashid, A. (2002). *Jihad: the rise of militant Islam in Central Asia*. New Haven.

<sup>21</sup> Peyrouse, S. (2007). Islam in Central Asia: national specificities and postsoviet globalisation. *Religion, State & Society*, 35(3), 245-260.

<sup>22</sup> Laruelle, M. (2010). Russia and Central Asia. In *The New Central Asia: The Regional Impact of International Actors* (pp. 149-175).

The natural lifespans for the local leaders to be in power are approaching. Of the five original leaders at the time of independence only one remains. Akaev of Kyrgyzstan, Nabiev of Tajikistan, Niyazov of Turkmenistan and Karimov of Uzbekistan are all dead or in exile. It is only Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan who remains in office. There is low or zero economic growth and the absence of any positive changes in the quality of life of the population.<sup>23</sup> Many socio-economic and political problems have long been stagnant, and in fact have exacerbated. All such factors prepare the environment for potential fluctuations, namely, the possible continuation of colour revolutions.

The traditional societies of Central Asia have entrenched outlooks. There are opportunities for mobilizing their own forces, which are very easy to take to the streets. The wide stratum of marginalized people, driven out of production and unable to find employment or coupled with low earnings; it is they who can be easily and inexpensively used in attaining political goals.

Ethnic and local social conflicts also threaten the national security of states in particular and the region in general. These can be used as an instrument of influence in the hands of both destructive extremist forces in each country as well as extra-regional forces whose aims may be promoting their interests in the region, creating spheres of influence or changing the strategic balance of forces in the region in their favour.

In general, the situation in the field of interethnic relations in the region remains highly complex and uncertain. The very specifics of the transition period does not contribute to the rapid resolution of the ethno-national issue for the near future. In the era of authoritarian leaders who at times have encouraged high politicization of interethnic relations, their sharpness and negative consequences for interstate relations can not be underestimated. The central issue concerns overcoming the existing hidden and open historical contradictions between peoples and establishing a balance of interests of ethnic groups and peoples in the context of commonalities and a unified past.<sup>24</sup> It is especially dangerous if economic and demographic difficulties can be used, as is often the case in this part of the world, for opportunistic political purposes as a means of retaining power, or displacing a government or as a distraction from internal problems.

The outflow of a significant portion of citizens dramatically changed the interethnic structure and social balance in the former Soviet republics. In the USSR, the Russian-speaking population was the most important element and a deterrent in the balance of interethnic relations in the Central Asian republics. The presence of the representatives of the Russian-speaking population in the highest echelons of power structures in the region was the main conductor of the organizing principle of the supposedly unified state.<sup>25</sup> In addition, it should not be forgotten that in the Soviet period, contradictions were regulated in the conditions of a single state - the USSR. Moscow found means and possessed methods of removing inter-group ethnic tensions, imposing its will with ease. With all the shortcomings of unionwide national policy, it restrained local nationalistic sentiments. At present, issues such as absolute and relative overcrowding, lack of land and water as well as high unemployment create social tensions, which in turn could provoke ethnic tension.

In Central Asia, geopolitical tension - determined by geography and the dynamic shifts in the centers of power in the world system - is highly concentrated. The reason why the Central Asian development should be analyzed in the context of global processes is that the manner in which each republic defines its identity - separately from each other or jointly with one or more neighbours - is likely to have significant implications for the geopolitics of the entire region. Accordingly, in connection with the "Arab Spring" political analysts have compared and pondered the possibility of repeating this in Central Asia. Some asserted that the unrest in the city of Zhanaozen in Kazakhstan in December 2011, was the beginning of something similar to the "Arab Spring" in the Central Asian manner.<sup>26</sup> In addition, one should take into account that local interethnic conflicts on the intra-regional borders of Central Asian states are certainly capable of destabilizing the social situation in the region as a whole.

One can not exclude the presence or occurrence of local conflicts and unrest, but their potential is unlikely to cause a domino effect. The authorities have so far found a way to extinguish these conflicts. In addition, states - regional centers of power - share a common approach on this matter. The solidarity of the state leaders of the countries of Central Asia on the maintenance of social and political stability in their countries is obvious. They have also understood that the most important problem of international relations in Central

<sup>23</sup> Falkingham, J. (2005). The end of the rollercoaster? Growth, inequality and poverty in Central Asia and the Caucasus. *Social Policy & Administration*, 39(4), 340-360

<sup>24</sup> Frank, A. G. (1992). The Centrality of Central Asia. *Studies in History*, 8(1), 43-97.

<sup>25</sup> Menon, R. (1995). In the shadow of the bear: security in post-Soviet Central Asia. *International Security*, 20(1), 149-181.

<sup>26</sup> Achilov, D. (2016). When actions speak louder than words: examining collective political protests in Central Asia. *Democratization*, 23(4), 699-722.

Asia is the maintenance of peace in their countries and in the region as a whole. However, it must be remembered that the Afghan problem remains unsolved and there is no certainty that East Turkestan will be immune to any future developments and events in Central Asia.<sup>27</sup>

When analysing the role of the religious factor in the political and social transformation of the countries of the region, it should be emphasized that it manifests itself in one form or another, both in political and public life. In Central Asian countries, the reason for the actualization of the Islamic religion relates to an unconscious desire to overcome the Soviet past. This overcoming is expressed by the return to traditional values, which are personified with the pre-Soviet past and Islam. In turn, the causes of Islamic radicalism and extremism in Central Asia are the social and economic problems that have arisen after the collapse of the USSR, which various internal and external forces have tried to take advantage of.<sup>28</sup>

It is possible to distinguish and categorize under three headings the socio-political and religious forces seeking to use the revival of Islam in the Central Asian republics for their own interests:

- i. Representatives of the former local party-state nomenclatura and the new nationalist elites who seek to use Islam in order to retain power or continue their struggle for power;
- ii. Various Islamic movements, political parties and social organizations using Islamic slogans to achieve political goals and seize power;
- iii. Muslim clergy, for whom religion is part and parcel of their being. They are convinced that only the revival of Islam and a return to the values of the Muslim religion can help the faithful distance themselves from socio-political crises.

At the same time, the leadership of all the states of the region, whilst paying tribute to the process of reviving national culture, understand that the Islamization of the political process or politicization of Islam is fraught with the transfer of power to the hands of Islamists and the destabilization of society.<sup>29</sup> This encourages them to unite their efforts to maintain peace in the region. Nevertheless, one should also take into account the fact that the within the Islamic world there are those which consciously seek to restore and fill the cultural, ideological and political space of Central Asia. Within these expansionist processes there are extremist movements and organizations. It is also a fact that the Central Asian countries' ability to contain the external influence of extremist forces is very limited in terms of ensuring the security of the borders with Afghanistan, where the Taliban movement still has a strong following.<sup>30</sup>

The involvement of Russia in such a possible conflict seems probable. It is possible that if Russia does not take part in ensuring the security of the southern Central Asian republics, the region will be absorbed by the world of religious extremism and Russia could face a very changeable strategic threat on its own southern borders.<sup>31</sup> At the same time global processes capture and draw in individual countries and regions of the world. What is happening in Central Asia is part of a larger, global, in-depth process. One of the components of global processes is democratization. If for a number of countries this is not a goal, at least it is a civilizational landmark. With it, the political elites have to either adopt it or demonstrate recognition of this landmark in order to show themselves as part of the mainstream of world politics. Even the imitation of democratic institutions and procedures, for example in authoritarian states, is proof that democracy is the result of a modern stage of political evolution.<sup>32</sup>

It is another matter that the search for the most acceptable national model of development and the national form of democracy continues and various options are being discussed. In particular, President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan believes the political landscape is formed under the influence of the economic climate. Accordingly, the level of political liberalization should correspond to the degree of economic freedoms which opens the gateway for the formation of a civil, self-organizing society.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Weitz, R. (2006). Averting a new great game in central Asia. *Washington Quarterly*, 29(3), 155-167.

<sup>28</sup> Khalid, A. (2014). *Islam after communism: religion and politics in Central Asia*. Univ of California Press.

<sup>29</sup> Omelicheva, M. Y. (2011). Islam in Kazakhstan: a survey of contemporary trends and sources of securitization. *Central Asian Survey*, 30(2), 243-256.

<sup>30</sup> Schetter, C. (2017). Between Ignoring and Romanticizing: The Position of Area Studies in Policy Advice. In *Area Studies at the Crossroads* (pp. 83-99). Palgrave Macmillan US.

<sup>31</sup> Collins, K. (2009). Economic and security regionalism among patrimonial authoritarian regimes: the case of Central Asia. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 61(2), 249-281.

<sup>32</sup> Bingol, Y. (2004). Nationalism and democracy in post-communist Central Asia. *Asian Ethnicity*, 5(1), 43-60.

<sup>33</sup> Hasanov, M. S., Nuryshva, G. G., Petrova, V. F., Syrgakbaeva, A. S., & Dzhaambaeva, B. A. (2016). Social and Cultural Transformation of Sovereign Kazakhstan. *The Social Sciences*, 11(12), 3095-3102.

The territories of the modern states of Central Asia retain their internal regional ties and geopolitical integrity. Each state in the region, for all its features, is part of a single international system, which affects the domestic and foreign policies of each country and their relationships. This can be explained both by the presence of common interests and challenges, and by the fact that the contours of the regional space began to take shape even during the period of the incorporation of the territories of Central Asia into the Russian Empire and the USSR. The centuries long stay of these states as part of the Russian Empire, then the USSR, contributed to their separate development from the territories with which they had previously been historically formed.<sup>34</sup>

With the disintegration of the Soviet system of self-identification and the beginning of the formation of a new system in the countries of Central Asia, an ideological, value vacuum was formed, which began to be filled with varying ideas and values.<sup>35</sup> A former Soviet citizen in Central Asia found herself in the situation of choosing her identity, the question arising before her: "Who am I?".

Firstly, she immediately found herself in a new geopolitical and ideological situation. On the one hand, she became a citizen of a new independent state with a certain name, and for some groups of the population of such a state the name did not coincide with the name of her ethnic group, her self-identification and the historical name of her residence. As a result, she had to join the ranks of the local territory and clan, without whose support it is difficult to manage in an Eastern collectivist society. Secondly, the former Soviet woman had to assert her new identity in the citizenship of the new states. Thirdly, she returned to her religious roots.

Revolving around different spheres, making connections in a changed society, the population groups of Central Asia feel themselves in different ways depending on the environment and the situation in which they find themselves. The location of the subject changes its self-identification in relation to the new conditions. As a result, multiple identification is born where there is no - or only a minor - role played by the dominant identification, the national-state. This is due to the lack of an underdeveloped national identity, its place being easily occupied by a cultural-civilizational or clan affiliation. Community-clan and tribal identity is based on the age-old Eastern tradition, where the dominant ideology is not individualism, not a personal "I", but relationships with relatives, with a local clan. In Kazakhstan, the zhuzes (Senior, Middle and Junior) meant not only the territorial, but also the socio-political division of the Kazakhs. The zhuz did not die out in Soviet times and were reborn with the birth of a new independent Kazakh state.<sup>36</sup>

In the late 80s and early 90s, the disintegration of the country into regional groupings took place in Tajikistan. At the head of the groupings were representatives of local political elites, for whom clan and personal interests were stronger than state ones. The struggle of local groups for power in the country, in the new state led to a civil war. Historically, during the Soviet Union, there was a certain functional division of spheres of influence and interests between the existing local clans: the Leninabad populace (in the north of the country) were in the hands of the political leadership, the Kulyabs controlled the armed forces, the Pamiris - the state security agencies.<sup>37</sup>

This balance of interests was compromised with the collapse of the Soviet administrative system and the clans' struggle for the fullness of power in the new state. Regional, local identities prevailed, their rivalry encompassed all other spheres of public life. The movement towards reconciliation was possible only with the recognition of the existing clans of their power on the ground and achieving a balance at the level of the supreme organs of the state.<sup>38</sup>

The political settlement in the country included the right to form political parties of a democratic, religious and atheistic character and the fighting formations of the opposition forces were integrated into the national army. In the end, the united Islamic opposition received a one-third representation in the executive and legislative branches. Thus, the mechanism of multiple identification was attempted, in the search for an internal political settlement of the conflict throughout the country. Peace and order were restored, which was based on taking into account the prevailing local traditions, preserving - more accurately reproducing - on a

<sup>34</sup> Luong, P. J. (2002). Institutional change and political continuity in Post-Soviet Central Asia: power, perceptions, and pacts. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>35</sup> March, A. F. (2003). State ideology and the legitimation of authoritarianism: The case of post-Soviet Uzbekistan 1. Journal of Political Ideologies, 8(2), 209-232.

<sup>36</sup> Abazov, R. (1999). The formation of post-Soviet international politics in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.

<sup>37</sup> Lynch, D. (2001). The Tajik civil war and peace process. Civil Wars, 4(4), 49-72.

<sup>38</sup> Rashid, A. (1999). The Taliban: exporting extremism. Foreign Affairs, 22-35.

new basis, the traditional regional balance of interests and values. Cohabitation of various national-ethnic, clan-territorial and religious communities.<sup>39</sup>

Gradually, as socio-political integration, the formation of national identity, local clan-territorial identification could, with the proper conduct of affairs, yield to dominant national-state positions. The ongoing process of political stratification usually moves through the adoption of good-neighborliness towards nation-wide consolidation and awareness of the state structure. But this process is a lengthy one and reverse regressive movements are possible, a departure from national-state identification to cultural-civilizational (religious) changes in the correlation of political and social forces, and other circumstances.<sup>40</sup>

In Central Asia, the main cultural, civilizational, national (state) and clan-territorial (local) self-identifications are formed to a greater or lesser extent at the same time, mutually existing side by side. Naturally, the most powerful is the cultural-civilization layer, based on centuries-old traditions. Belonging to a particular culture and religion was handed down from generation to generation at the domestic level, regardless of the political system or citizenship. With the disappearance of the Soviet system of value orientation, the population groups intuitively, subconsciously and consciously, and even compulsorily turned to tradition. Religion or faith, became a new identity.<sup>41</sup>

In the Central Asian countries, Islamic parties are beginning to make an impact, preaching the values of Islamic culture, the need to create a "just" state - the caliphate.<sup>42</sup> Islamic parties are working on the formation of Islamic consciousness and appropriate identification. Unfortunately, there are no data on the number of adherents to extremist Islamic radical organizations in the countries of Central Asia. In Kazakhstan, for example, in the border areas with Uzbekistan, rural residents feel religious extremism more closer than urban dwellers.

In general, it can be asserted that cultural and civilizational - predominantly Islamic - belonging and the corresponding self-identification has become dominant in the countries of Central Asia. However, the Islamic cultural tradition in the countries of Central Asia is dispersed in local territories. The Uzbek state has asserted that the Ferghana Valley has become both a source of Islamic fundamentalism and extremism, it is there that the "spiritual centers" of historical Central Asia radical Islamic groups have found the ground for their ideas and actions, including attempts to recreate the caliphate, and even an Islamic World order.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, in the post-Soviet period, we can observe the beginning of a new stage in the transformation of the socio-cultural space of the territories of the former Soviet republics of Central Asia. Having become independent states, they seek to form a new identity and go beyond the former intra-Soviet subregion. This is manifested by intensive efforts to assert national statehood, and self-affirmation in relation to each other.<sup>44</sup> The effectiveness of these efforts is determined by the internal potential of each country in Central Asia and their relations with each other and their neighbours. The existing common problems of the transition period in the development of the countries of Central Asia encourage them to coordinate actions and consolidate themselves with respect to external challenges and threats.

In conclusion, it is necessary to state that the formation of a regional system of international relations in Central Asia objectively assumes the existence of different types of interrelations and vectors of different orientations. In the states of Central Asia, there is a divergence in understanding of their interests and the strategy and prospects for the geopolitical development of the region, which is manifested, both in relation to the CIS, and in the development of relations with other foreign states.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, the problems of security and development require the leadership of the Central Asian states to engage in four fronts: firstly, to overcome artificial contradictions; secondly, to seek and find various forms of compromise; thirdly, to improve the diplomacy of cooperation and fourthly, to establish optimal options for bilateral and multilateral ties.

<sup>39</sup> Iji, T. (2001). Multiparty mediation in Tajikistan: The 1997 peace agreement. *International Negotiation*, 6(3), 357-385.

<sup>40</sup> Peyrouse, S. (2007). Islam in Central Asia: national specificities and postsoviet globalisation. *Religion, State & Society*, 35(3), 245-260.

<sup>41</sup> Gunn, T. J. (2003). Shaping an Islamic identity: religion, Islamism, and the state in Central Asia. *Sociology of Religion*, 64(3), 389-410. To illustrate this point studies conducted in Kazakhstan, have indicated a significant leap in the late 90's in the number of believers. In answers to the question "Do you consider yourself a believer?" Residents of the southern regions of the country in 1998 affirmatively answered 40.2%, and in 2000 the figure was 76.7%. In some regions, the number of believers exceeded 80%, although some beliefs were limited to observing traditions and customs, and acquired different meanings. In Tajikistan, sociological studies have shown that 97 percent of the population referred to themselves as believers, with 13 percent as active and 59 percent as inactive. Of course, not all the "active" 13 percent should be considered as radicals and extremists, but, nevertheless, the latter testifies to the possible potential of radicalism in the country in terms of potential conflicts on a religious basis.

<sup>42</sup> Chung, C. P. (2004). The Shanghai Co-operation organization: China's changing influence in Central Asia. *The China Quarterly*, 180, 989-1009.

<sup>43</sup> Cornell, S. E., & Spector, R. A. (2002). Central Asia: More than Islamic Extremists. *Washington Quarterly*, 25(1), 193-206.

<sup>44</sup> Rumer, B. Z. (Ed.). (2002). *Central Asia: a gathering storm?*. ME Sharpe.

<sup>45</sup> Cooley, A. (2012). *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Power Contest in Central Asia*. Oxford University Press.

The area of post-Soviet Central Asia has expanded under the influence of modern global processes. The historical memory of the region is being constantly updated. Already a new contour of Central Asia, close to the spatial contour of the pre-Russian-imperial period, is being formed. To a certain extent, this is the need to address the problem of sustainable development at a higher level. Under certain circumstances, but most likely in the medium to long term, post-Soviet Central Asia can emerge as a pole of an extended and unified historical Central Asia. Such a development, even if desirable is not probable, but still remains within the realm of possibility.

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