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Regional Cooperation in Central Asia: Obstacles, Incentives and Proposals

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List of participants

Abad, Gracia

Saint Louis University

Akiner, Shirin

Cambridge University

Azylov, Jyrgalbek

Embassy of Tajikistan in Belgium

Boonstra, Jos

FRIDE

Bulegenov, Yergali

Embassy of Kazakhstan in Spain

Chamorro, Santiago

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain

Dadabaev, Timur

Tsukuba University

De Pedro, Nicolás

Alternatives Foundation – OPEX

Esteban, Mario

Alternatives Foundation – OPEX

Fernández, Natividad

Ministry of Defense of Spain

Mañé, Aurelia

Observatory of Central Asia

Miñana, Gema

REPSOL

Montes, Raquel

Alternatives Foundation – OPEX

Morales, Santiago

Ex-World Bank

Nebot, Norberto

European Commission

Oriol, Mario

TALGO

Palacio, Vicente

Alternatives Foundation - OPEX

Priego, Alberto

Complutense University

Rustamov, Said

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan

Sartorius, Nicolás

Alternatives Foundation – OPEX

Usmanov, Ravshan

Embassy of Uzbekistan in Spain

Yatimov, Saymumin

Embassy of Kirgizstan in Belgium

Zhakupova, Zarina

Embassy of Kazakhstan in Spain

Zhangarayev, Nurmukhamed

Embassy of Kazakhstan in Spain

Zhumaly, Rasul

Exclusive

Introduction

The stability and the development of Central Asia are of increasing interest for the European Union and Spain, which are more and more conscious of the energetic and geostrategic relevance of the region.

Taken into account the weakness of the Central Asian states and the transnational character of many of the threats they face, the promotion of cooperation and integration in the region could be very positive to assure its stability and development. The five Central Asian republics consider necessary, in major or minor degree, to enhance regional cooperation. However, to date they have failed in its attempts to do it by themselves, which has increased their dependency with respect to the great powers. In an effort to revert this situation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Spain and the Observatory of Spain's Foreign policy of the Alternatives Foundation co-organized a seminar entitled Regional Cooperation in Central Asia: Obstacles, Incentives and Proposals on 5 March 2010. This event was held within the framework of Spain's presidency of the European Union.

During this seminar, held Alternatives Foundation headquarters, four well-known academics presented their views on this issue, triggering a stimulating debate. The four scholars who made a presentation were Shirin Akiner, Timur Dadavaeb, Nicolás de Pedro and Rassul Zhumaly. Besides those and other experts, Kazak, Uzbek, Tajik and Kirgiz diplomats; officials of the European Commission, of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain and of the Ministry of Defense of Spain; and representative s from the private sector all participated in the seminar.

The present document includes three of the four papers (in English) presented during the seminar, as well as the transcription (in Spanish) of the debate triggered by those papers.

The Observatory of Spain's Foreign policy of the Alternatives Foundation thanks the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Spain for its collaboration in the organization of this project and all the participants for enriching the debate with their remarks.

List Of Contributors

Timur Dadabaev

Timur Dadabaev (Ph.D. in International Relations) is an Associate Professor and Director of Central Asian Studies at the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Tsukuba and concurrently Adjunct Associate Professor at the University of Tokyo. His latest publications include monographic volumes on local and regional aspects of international relations in Central Asia like *Uzbekistan in Post-Socialist Era (Looking at Asia Series No.110)*, Tokyo: Institute of Developing Economies, (2008) (in Japanese), *Realities of Mahalla: Changing Cultures and Societies of Central Asia*, University of Tokyo Press, (2006) (in Japanese) and *Towards Post-Soviet Central Asian Regional Integration: A Scheme for Transitional States* (2004) (in English). He also co-edited (with Takashi Inoguchi, Miguel Basanez, Akihiko Tanaka) book series on *Values and Life Styles in Urban Asia* (three volumes in English in 2005, 2006, 2007) on various aspects of values and regional identity formation in East and Central Asia.

Nicolás De Pedro

Nicolás de Pedro is the Expert Adviser on Central Asia of the Observatory of Spain's Foreign Policy at the *Fundación Alternativas*. He is also a member of the Expert Working Group of the EU Central Asia Monitoring Project (EUCAM). He is co-editor of the book *Great Powers and Regional Integration in Central Asia: A Local Perspective* and has published numerous academic papers on Central Asia, besides working papers and policy briefs on Spanish foreign policy in Central Asia for the MFA. He is a PhD candidate and researcher in International Relations at the Complutense University and teaches Central Asian geopolitics in various Spanish postgraduate programs.

Rasul Zhumaly

Rasul Zhumaly is a political scientist. He is author of numerous academic articles and of the book *Geopolitics of Central Asia* (2006) (in Russian). Currently he is editor of *Exclusive* and *Yaprai* magazines and the Coordinator of the Eurasian Club of Bankers. He has a long public and diplomatic experience. From 1992 to 1994 he was Attaché of the Middle East

Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Kazakhstan. In 1995 he was Kazakhstan Foreign Minister's Assistant. From 1996 to 1998 was the Second Secretary of the Kazakh Embassy to Egypt. From 1998 to 1999 Head of the Middle East Division and Press Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan. From 2000 to 2002 he was Official Spokesman of the Prime Minister and of the Government of Kazakhstan. From 2002 to 2003 he was Counsellor of

the Embassy of Kazakhstan to Israel. During 2004-2005 he was Consul General of Kazakhstan to the United Arab Emirates, Dubai. From 2006 to 2007 Charge d'Affairs of Kazakhstan in Libya.

Rasul Zhumaly has a degree in Oriental Studies from the Al-Farabi University (Kazakhstan). He has studied at the Diplomatic Institute of the MFA of Egypt and at the Diplomatic Academy of Saudi Arabia.

The Pending Challenge: Obstacles and Incentives for Regional Cooperation in Central Asia

Nicolás de Pedro

1. Introduction

Regional cooperation is a pending and urgent issue in Central Asia. There are a growing number of serious challenges and threats to be faced by the Central Asian states that could bring harmful consequences to their internal and regional stability. Many of these challenges are of non-conventional and trans-national nature, such as drug trafficking, radical Islamism, international terrorism, environmental degradation, water shortage or economical sustainability. Due to their innate nature, these phenomena require a regional and cooperative approach, which is even more needed due to the worsening situation in Afghanistan. However, cooperation amongst the CAS remains rather poor and ineffective.

Nonetheless, and this is one of the many post-Soviet paradoxes, a large number of

organizations have been created or re-launched over the last years, in order to promote this regional cooperation. No exhaustiveness meant, the following organizations can be mentioned: the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Eurasian Economic Cooperation, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia, the Economic Cooperation Organization, the Turkic Summits, the Special Program of the Economies of Central Asia, the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program. Each one of them have different members, characteristics and aims distinguishing them from each other, but it is important to point out that there is not one exclusively composed of Central Asian republics. This represents, as we will further see, a serious impediment for the enhancement of the intra-regional Central

Asian cooperation. Besides, these multiple initiatives have caused overlaps, confusion and a serious spaghetti bowl problem, instead of the implementation of a real process of regional cooperation.

This paper aims to give an overview of both obstacles and incentives for regional cooperation in Central Asia from an intra-regional and inter-state perspective. However some considerations of the influence of external actors cannot be avoided as they condition the approach towards intra-regional cooperation amongst the Central Asian republics.

2. Obstacles for an effective intra-regional cooperation

There are several factors that have impeded a meaningful cooperation amongst the Central Asian republics in these two decades of independence. They can be considered under three kinds of categories. First of all, those obstacles related to the ongoing nation-building process in the five republics. Secondly, a set of obstacles stemming from the general lack of trust amongst the republics, the prevailing political mindset and the serious differences between them regarding some crucial issues. Last but not least, the obstacles arising from the institutional structure and the nature of governance within the Central Asian countries.

The Central Asian republics are young states. They gained independence with the abrupt collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. This unexpected situation provoked some fears due to the lack of previous historical experience as independent states, the prob-

lematic Soviet inheritance and their political, economic and military weakness at the moment of independence. Therefore, since then, to consolidate as sovereign and independent states has been a strategic priority for the Central Asian republics.

Regarding regional cooperation, this firstly means that the Central Asian states are strongly reluctant to share sovereignty, since this is mainly understood as a potential undermining factor to achieve this consolidation. Secondly, it must be kept in mind that the ongoing nation-and-State-building processes lay on nationalistic discourses. The five republics have adopted ethnonationalism to different degrees as a source of legitimacy for the new states. From a regional perspective, this provokes some tensions. There are many friction points regarding borders or territories and some incompatibilities about their mythical past and formation of their nations and modern States. The issue of Samarkand and Bukhara between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan is the most known example. This situation is part of the problematic Soviet inheritance of the region and contributes to reinforce the lack of trust amongst the republics. However, these suspicions are not only due to this ideological factor.

The problematic internal situation of the Central Asian republics, especially in the cases of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, provokes that they are regarded by their neighbours more as a source of potential challenges and instability than a necessary or beneficial partners. Therefore deepening the links with the neighbouring countries is rather understood as a risk than an opportunity. Thus, the tendency is more

towards isolation from them than rapprochement. For instance, in spite of the active collaboration from external partners like the European Union, it has not been possible to establish effective mechanisms of management in the bordering areas.

This mismanagement in the bordering areas is an undermining factor for trade and economic development in the region, particularly since the Central Asian republics are landlocked countries and surrounded by such an economic and commercially powerful neighbour as China. However, the Central Asian elites seem to pay more attention to the obstacles for strengthening economic cooperation amongst them than to the potential benefits. Firstly, it must be considered that the shared perception of having very similar economies has pushed for pursuing competitive commercial strategies. Secondly, the lack of trust and sometimes of political will, has impeded the creation of a common customs area; a first step towards the building of an economic region. Something that according to the main international financial institutions and fora, like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, would be mandatory to dramatically increase the opportunities for economic development in the region.

Major powers remain as the most influential external actors in the region. Since independence in 1991, the region has attracted the interest of a large number of external actors like Russia, China, the United States, the European Union, Japan, Turkey and India. Each one has its own aims and agendas. Stability is a common headline goal, but there are strong disagreements about how to achieve it. The

need of implementing democratic reforms is the most controversial issue. For actors like Russia, China or the local regimes, democratization is a source of potential instability and threats. For example, that political power might fall in the hands of radical Islamist groups. For others like the United States or the European Union, although with many nuances, the lack of reforms is the source of potential instability in the mid-to-long term. It must be pointed out that there is a gap in the understanding of what stability means between them. For Russia and China stability is preferably understood as the lack or absence of changes while for Washington and Brussels it rather means a predictable change. However, the strongest competition and rivalry amongst these actors is related to the access and control of the hydrocarbon resources of the Caspian basin and the geo-strategic domain over the region. Due to the confluence of major powers with competing agendas over the region, the rediscovered label of the 'new great game' has been widely used to characterise the incorporation of the new Central Asia into World politics. This has several consequences on the intra-regional cooperation.

Firstly, the 'new great game lens' has contributed to the wide adoption of a zero-sum game mentality and of a narrow approach to security. Even when interdependence of many issues is generally accepted, zero-sum and state-centred approaches prevail. But, how to tackle key regional challenges like energy security, water management or environmental degradation through these approaches remain unclear. This conceptual framework, added to the lack of trust amongst them,

is yet another considerable obstacle for regional cooperation. A wider security approach more inspired by the human security paradigm is yet to be assumed in Central Asia. But this is very unlikely because the great game framework is very useful for the local regimes, as it increases their bargaining capacity when dealing with the major powers contributing to their own maintenance.

Secondly, the Central Asian republics use their relationship, particularly with Russia, as a tool in their foreign policy towards their neighbours. For countries such as Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, their link with Russia is useful when dealing stronger and sometimes aggressive neighbours, such as Uzbekistan. So, the great powers are an instrument for the small regional countries to strengthen its intra-regional manoeuvring capacity. Regarding the bigger Central Asian countries, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, their conflicting positions on the role that Russia should play in the region must be pointed out. For Uzbekistan, the Russian role should be downgraded while for Kazakhstan, it should be accepted as an inevitable reality. In this sense, the establishment of an exclusively-composed Central Asian organization under the Kazakh leading role is affected by its close link with Moscow.

As an overall result of the great game dynamic, the regional agenda is still designed outside the region, which consequently deepens their dependency of the Central Asian states, undermining in this sense its sovereignty.

Finally, the obstacles arising from the institutional structure and the governance

nature within the Central Asian countries must be considered. Firstly because some authors consider that, as it happens in the Middle East, the authoritarian nature of the Central Asian regimes could be considered amongst the most relevant factors impeding a consistent and meaningful regional cooperation. In such a dynamic, the presidents, who tend to concentrate all the power in their hands, most likely would have to allow a greater level of pluralism within the decision-making process. In spite of accepting this thesis, the underdevelopment of their foreign-policy making seems a bigger obstacle to regional cooperation; as this is a complex process that requires clear rules and technical abilities. Authoritarianism seems a more relevant factor if it is considered that it is directly linked with corruption. A context of high-spread corruption makes the implementation of any agreement much more difficult. Regional cooperation supposes and to an extent demands agreements and clear rules making more difficult the 'irregular incomes'. That is why many Central Asian decision makers are not very enthusiastic about reaching compromises with their neighbours.

The personal competition between presidents Karimov and Nazarbayev for the leading role in the region is often included in the obstacles for a meaningful cooperation within Central Asia.

Summarizing there are several obstacles to regional cooperation ranging from ideological factors to institutional ones. Nonetheless, as we will further see in the next section, many of these factors could be called into question.

Table 1. Obstacles for an effective intra-regional cooperation

Ideological factors	Political mindset	Institutional structure
Young states	Lack of trust	Authoritarianism
Ongoing nation-building processes	Neighbours as a source of problems	Corruption
Ethnonationalism as a source of legitimacy	Zero-sum approaches	Informal mechanisms of governance
Friction points regarding borders and discourses about the past	Divergent approaches on some crucial issues	Underdevelopment of the foreign-policy making process

Fuente: *Elaboración propia.*

3. Incentives for enhancing intra-regional cooperation

As we have seen, there are several factors constraining the development of intra-regional cooperation in Central Asia. However, there are several incentives for its enhancement as well. In general terms, the volatile regional environment and the impossibility of addressing the main challenges from a national scale should be enough for pushing them to cooperate. Above all, there is one factor that seems more a pure imperative question than an incentive: the landlocked nature of Central Asia.

The incentives could be structured under three kinds of categories considering the area of potential benefits. In the first place, those incentives related to the strengthening of the regional stability and security. Secondly, a set of incentives linked to the geopolitical options for the Central Asian states within the framework of the major powers competitive involve-

ment. Thirdly, the incentives related to the economic prospects for Central Asia.

As it has been pointed out earlier, the main challenges that the Central Asian states must address, such as drug-trafficking, radical Islamism, international terrorism, environmental degradation, water shortage or economical sustainability are of non-conventional and trans-national nature. Therefore, tackling them effectively requires regional and comprehensive approaches. For doing so, trust and confidence amongst them is essential.

For the time being, the only multilateral platforms for addressing these issues are the ones promoted by Russia and China, the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Both fora adopt cooperative security approaches but only with a state and top-down perspective. Therefore it is uncertain that in the mid-to-long run they would help effectively to ensure the stability and development in the complex

Central Asian scenario. Both fora are mainly an instrument for Russia and China to promote their interest and agenda. However, for the time being, they could be a first step to encourage trust and confidence amongst the Central Asian republics. The lack of trust is seriously harming the relationship amongst them.

The Central Asian republics agree when identifying the aforementioned challenges and threats. Even there exists an agreement on considering them transnational issues and about the need of common efforts. Therefore some ground for dialogue and cooperation does exist. This could and advisably should be considered as an incentive to strengthen the dialogue amongst the Central Asian republics.

An environment of cooperation and confidence would allow them to face these complex regional challenges more effectively. Moreover, this would help to ease the growing regional tensions. In recent times, there have been some critical and connected issues that must be addressed urgently. The growing military budget in the last years must be mentioned in the first place. Considering the low level of total defence budget (then and now) and the general weakness in terms of structure and military capabilities, to label it as a regional arms-race could be an exaggeration. But undoubtedly, in a context of lack of dialogue and growing tensions it is a matter of concern. The Tajik project of the Roghun dam and the Uzbek complaints about it are potentially the most dangerous case, as it can provoke an armed conflict between them. It is doubtful that this issue could be resolved positively without peaceful negotiations be-

tween Dushanbe and Tashkent. Besides, the mutual interdependence should rationally encourage their dialogue. The availability of fresh water is crucial for the survival of the Uzbek agricultural sector and population, while this is also linked to the food security of the Tajik population. And obviously the environmental sustainability is in the interest of the whole region. Consequently, it would be particularly beneficial that this issue could serve as a driving factor for enhancing regional cooperation in Central Asia.

Generally speaking, in the context of Central Asia it seems that cooperation among neighbours would strengthen their stability and security. A failed state such as the Afghan is one of the main sources of instability and threats for the Central Asian republics. The collapse of one of them would be a serious threat to all. For that reason, a profound and upgraded intra-regional cooperation must be accepted by the local ruling leaders as an advisable policy.

A second set of incentives are related to potential benefits from a geopolitical perspective. The current level of competition and rivalry among great powers could be of interest to the Central Asian republics and its regimes as it strengthens its bargaining capacity. However, this model of relations has clear limits in its benefits for the Central Asian states, especially in the case of the most developed ones as Kazakhstan. Besides, it condemns Central Asia to be an object rather than a subject of its own destiny and reinforces its peripheral nature. It must be kept in mind that while being strategically relevant for Russia and

China, both consider Central Asia as an appendix or a subsidiary area useful to reinforce their geopolitical projection towards other areas like the European Union or the Pacific region. In this sense, both treat the Central Asian republics as 'junior partners' and at the same time they exert a great pressure on their economic and geopolitical independence. Consequently, a more coordinated position by the Central Asian republics, through an enhanced intra-regional dialogue, would strengthen their manoeuvring options and their negotiating capacity with these major powers.

In the previous section, the obstacles derived from using ethnonationalistic discourses as a source of legitimacy were highlighted. Nevertheless, in spite of national differences, gradually reinforced by these discourses, a certain shared regional identity does exist. Furthermore, the claim that the five republics compose a specific regional unity has come from them, proving that some ground for dialogue does exist.

The previously mentioned incentives for enhancing intra-regional cooperation are politically complex and could be argued for not being straightforwardly connected with the desirable results. But this is not the case when the economic aspects are considered. The Central Asian markets are small in size, low in level of competitiveness, poorly interconnected regionally and remote from the main global flows. Therefore deeper intra-regional integration would increase their commercial and economic viability. This would make the area more attractive for foreign investment beyond the raw materials sector,

which is insufficient for ensuring the development and economic sustainability of the region in the long run.

Economically, the brightest future for the region largely depends on the development of the so-called new Silk Road, connecting Europe and Asia through Central Asia. In its most visionary sense, this project or sum of projects would be feasible only if the Central Asian republics upgrade their level of cooperation, starting from the management of the bordering areas. For the accomplishment of this task, funds from the main international financial institutions are available. So again, potential benefits for the five republics and incentives for implementing this integration do exist.

Besides, the five Central Asian republics are landlocked countries with difficult access to open seas and therefore to the global flows of merchandise. Apart from crossing the territory of the immediate neighbours to reach the oceans, they need to cooperate with more powerful countries, like Russia and China, or with problematic neighbours like Afghanistan or Pakistan. A common position of the Central Asian countries would increase their leverage when engaging with these countries.

Economic integration has another two parallel beneficial consequences regarding security and stability. Firstly, it is a strong factor for constraining violent conflicts, at least in the inter-state level. Secondly, it entails general economic development and this would increase the internal stability of the five republics, strengthening the regional security.

Table 2. Incentives for enhancing the intra-regional cooperation considering the area of potential benefits

Security and stability	Geopolitics	Economic prospects
Challenges to be faced are of trans-national nature	Strengthening options and negotiating capacity with the major powers	Easier access to worldwide markets
Agreement in identifying these challenges exists	Being subject rather than an object	More feasible development of the visionary Silk Road
Need of easing the growing regional tensions	The existence of a certain shared regional identity	Making the region more attractive for foreign investors
Strengthening its own national security through cooperation with neighbours		Developing bigger and more competitive markets with the markets Creating more possibilities for dealing with the bigger neighbours Constraining violent conflicts through interdependence

Fuente: *Elaboración propia.*

4. The path ahead

In this current moment Central Asia has a tremendous geopolitical relevance, mainly due to the worsening situation in neighbouring Afghanistan. However, this would not last forever. Therefore if the Central Asian republics do not want to be a remote and isolated area again, they must develop effective strategies for positioning in this globalization era.

From a Spanish and European perspective, intra-regional cooperation seems as a positive development *per se*. The European Union process has provided multiple benefits for the European states

and citizens; and other successful stories like the ASEAN could be found around the world. The potential benefits for implementing such a process in Central Asia seem enormous and, in some cases, critical for the states and citizens of the region. Moreover, although the obstacles are still strong enough to block regional cooperation, there is some ground for optimism, as we could find some successful stories within the region itself, such as the Central Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone. It is a matter of time that the Central Asian states would accept the need of enhancing the intra-regional cooperation for ensuring a prosperous future for the region.

Integration in Central Asia: The Changes Required

Rassul Zhumaly

1. Introduction

Speaking about integration in Central Asia, I would not wish to review unduly the history of this question, nor the classical examples of regional integration in the rest world. These issues have been analyzed in detail by numerous experts. Therefore I do not see the point in repeating what is already well known. In my opinion, it is much more relevant to focus in the factors which prevent or stimulate regional cooperation and integration in Central Asia.

Let us discuss first the **obstacles for regional cooperation and integration** in Central Asia:

2. Political ambitions

In the early 1990s Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan adhered to a course of con-

structing a secular and democratic society. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan preferred to keep secular too, but with an essentially authoritarian style of the state building. Tajikistan was cast into the abyss of civil war. In the long run, political systems in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, although keeping outwardly democratic elements, have come nearer to the sample of other neighbors in region. Why it has happened so is another question. But world experience testifies that authoritarian countries are not capable to engage in serious integration. This process entails the transfer of sovereignty to supranational bodies. The question is whether the republics of Central Asia are ready to go for it? They are not willing to follow this course of action at the moment. This is especially the case due to the struggle for leadership in the region between Astana and Tashkent. As a result, even in case of force-majeure circumstances, such as war

or ecological disaster, we can not expect more than temporary compelled alliances.

3. Historical phobias

Besides other problems, the collapse of the Soviet Union led to an ideological vacuum in Central Asia, with the concurrent need to fill this vacuum. Certainly, right after independence there were more factors pulling together rather than separating the republics of Central Asia. But in their nation building efforts, their local elites have resorted to historical figures whose greatness was achieved at the expense and enslavement of neighbors in region. Kazakhs identified themselves with Abylai and, in wider plan, with the Altyn Orda khans. Uzbeks identified with Emir Timur, Tadjiks with Ismail Somoni and Kyrgyzs with Manas, a legendary ancestor who has left "seven precepts". The book of the first president of Turkmenistan, "Ruhnama", became an embodiment of greatness of the past and the present in Turkmenistan. Such historical references, which are taken out of context, only aggravate mutual claims. At the same, other kinds of historical characters, such as scientists as Al-Farabi and Al-Khorezmi, are subjected to deep controversies. As a whole, today there is no trend towards convergence, but towards divergence among the Central Asian countries in the cultural-historical arena. It is quite unlikely a change in this scenario in the short term, owing to the absence of preconditions as a common information space.

4. Economic discords

Since the 1990s the economic structures of the Central-Asian countries have start-

ed to strongly move away from each other due to different factors. They have followed different paths in their economic reforms. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan thanks to their richness of raw materials have increased their well-being at the expense of their dependency on the international markets. Uzbekistan and partly Tajikistan have embarked in the construction of a self-sufficient economy therefore have become more isolated. Kyrgyzstan has no hydrocarbons reserves to exploit nor has kept total state control of the economy and appears in the most defective position among the five republics and is the most dependent on international cooperation. Summing up, no country in the region has been able to establish a well-founded and competitive economy, because of negative phenomena such as a high degree of corruption, an ubiquitous shadow economy, the prevalence of clan or political interests over economic sense and low transparency.

In addition, the maintenance of close nomenclatures which control commodities does not promote the growth of mutual trade, investments, or cooperation between manufactories and businessmen from different countries of the region. Moreover, this last factor has caused competitive relations with respect to the exit of those commodities to the international markets. The more relevant examples of this competition are exports of gas from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan and of superfluous labor from Uzbekistan and Kirghizstan. In addition, tariff and tax disagreements have led to numerous disputes. Under these circumstances, the Central Asian countries have reduced the economic interaction with their neighbors, despite the material cost. Kazakhstan has

tried to reduce gas dependency on Uzbekistan, whereas Tashkent has operated in the same spirit with regard to grain and flour. As a result in the early 2000s the trade among the countries of central Asia hardly counted for 10 per cent of their total international trade. The basic external economic priorities of the Central-Asian countries rotate outside of region.

5. Border and water management

Border crossing in Central Asia exemplifies the problems that regional integration faces in the area as it is illustrated by the case of Uzbekistan. Tashkent has virtually closed its borders to its neighbors, significantly hampering flow of trade, goods and people. Its leaders cite various reasons for this action ranging from security to the need for import substitution and economic self-sufficiency. Moreover, Uzbek authorities have mined its borders with Tajikistan. Tashkent also imposes a strict visa regime for the citizen of other Central Asian countries, appealing to the threat of terrorism, illegal migration and smuggling. As a consequence, the petty or shuttle trade which offers one of few sources of income and employment in the region has significantly been reduced, driving a large portion of the country's population to poverty or migration to other countries, in particular Russia and Kazakhstan.

Another challenge for the region is the management of its natural resources. The most present issue with regard to this topic is water management. The mountainous countries of Central Asia, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, control the up streams of the two main rivers of the region: the Amu

Darya and the Syr Darya. These two countries have multiple disagreements with the downstream countries, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, over issues such as payment for use of the water resources and the maintenance of dams and reservoirs. These disputes are generating lot of tension in the region, particularly, between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

6. The errors from previous integration initiatives

Some proposals for regional integration have been raised since the early days after the independence. The author of the majority of such ideas was the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, who is known as a consistent advocate for integration in both the space of the Commonwealth of Independent States and in Central Asia. Despite of these initiatives, some factors have made that nothing tangible has come from them:

- a) Lack of proper planning. Most of these initiatives do not take into account economic feasibility.
- b) Some of these initiatives are mere tools to gain leverage with regard to external actors.
- c) Others are mere public relations actions, oriented to increase the popularity of their authors.
- d) Desire of Astana as well as other proponents of integration initiatives to obtain the status of leader of Central Asia, while the rest of Central Asia countries are expected to play a minor role.

- e) Selfishness of some regional actors who are only willing to take benefits from integration, giving nothing in exchange.
- f) Some of the Central Asian republics show low interest in regional integration, since they have other priorities.
- g) Great powers, such as the United States, Russia and China, are not interested in the integration of Central Asia, but in a "divide and rule" scenario. They have therefore pressed against regional integration in Central Asia. The impact of these external actors is intensifying as they manipulate the contradictions among Central Asian States in order to involve them into their sphere of influence. Washington is placing the emphasis on bilateral security agreements, China is setting hopes on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and Russia promotes the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Custom Union. At the same time that they sponsor their own initiatives, these great powers are striving to hamper the processes promoted by other actors. An illustrative case was provided by Russia, which joined the Organization of Central Asian Cooperation in 2004 to have this organization merged with the Eurasian Economic Community one year later.

In addition, the Central Asian countries found themselves frequently entangled in **the schemes of great powers**. For instance, the attempts of Russia to shut down the American military base in Kyrgyzstan were not crowned with success. Based on the contract signed on 22

June 2009, Bishkek agreed to allow the Pentagon to utilize the Manas airport, on the condition that the rent would be 60 million US dollars. As compensation for Moscow, President Kurmanbek Bakiyev consented to set up a Russian military base in Kantes which is just 20 kilometers away from Bishkek. This action caused anxiety in Uzbekistan and president Islam Karimov expressed his discontent with the deployment of the Russian air-base in Kyrgyzstan and publicly complained about the "launch of a military contest by the great powers in Central Asia". As a reaction to this enhancement of the Russian military presence in Kyrgyzstan, Tashkent has undertaken a forced rapprochement towards the United States.

Besides, the above mentioned obstacles there are also some **factors which facilitate regional integration** in Central Asia:

1. The Central Asian countries face threats that they can not handle alone.
2. The construction of a strong and prosperous state in Central Asia is impossible in an infirm and unstable environment. Consequently one's successful accomplishments have to be converted into the successful advancement of the entire group and the best way to guarantee that is regional integration.
3. The five republics are striving to increase their role in the international community and regional integration is a efficient way of doing so.
4. Notwithstanding their differences, the five republics of Central Asia are

drawn together by a single historical, ethnic and confessional community

other, they will only damage the prospects for regional integration.

In conclusion, the integration of Central Asia is further now than in the aftermath of independence. Yes, many loud statements were made and various regional organizations were created, but none of these actions have had any practical value, and have only served to bring disappointment. Today, no country of Central Asia, not even Kazakhstan, counts on regional integration to solve its more pressing challenges. Moreover, not only the level of integration, but even such a basic element as trust between neighbors is much lower, than in the previous two decades. So far, there are no signs pointing to a reversion of this tendency, but there are three scenarios that could change that:

1. A change of the existing political establishment in the countries of Central Asia.
2. Occurrence of extreme conditions, such as threats calling into question the independence of the regional states.
3. A radical and unexpected strengthening of one of the two most powerful countries of the region: Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

As to **offers and proposals which are capable to bolster integration** in Central Asia, here are some prime steps:

1. The proponents of integration initiatives should not use these initiatives to promote their leadership. If they underline the certain special leadership position of one country over

2. Despite the known obstacles to create a regional forum to settle the most pressing challenges of the region (such as water-power questions, illegal migration, rational use of a manpower, religious extremism, the international terrorism, etc) a real step forward in at least one of those issues could serve as a catalyst for regional integration in Central Asia.
3. Confidence building measures should be promoted in the region, since lack of trust among the Central Asian countries is one of the main obstacles for regional integration. In this sense it is expedient to turn special attention to prospects of expansion of cultural-humanitarian cooperation and the creation of a uniform common information field for the five republics.
4. External powers must be persuaded that the unification of the Central Asia is not only a question of long-term interests of the local countries, but also for the key world players. The integration of Central Asia would not pose a threat to any of the third countries, but would serve as a powerful element of stability for the whole Eurasian continent, since it would reduce the risks related with great powers rivalry for the control of Central Asia and would avoid the collapse of any of the five Central Asia republics.

Discourses on Integration in Central Asia: From Rhetoric to Practice

Timur Dadabaev

1. Introduction

The dissolution of the Soviet Union granted independence to the former Soviet constituencies and at the same time has served as starting point of debates on the schemes for preserving economic, social ties as well as infrastructure between and among post-Soviet independent states. These discussions were framed within the debates on how to guarantee sovereignty of newly independent states, while pursuing integration among them. The logic behind such discussions was that for these Central Asian states, with their similarly sized economies, shared security concerns and common challenges, it is economically and politically more beneficial to integrate efforts toward political stability and economic sustainability than it is to deal with these issues individually. Furthermore, in the conditions of in-

dependence, the creation of individual goods and labor markets, separate (non-convertible) currencies, fiscal and monetary systems, national security schemes and isolated transport networks would have required resources that these states were not able to afford, naturally resulting in larger burdens for Central Asian economies and their citizens.

While these arguments are well understood and in most cases accepted by both leadership and public of Central Asian countries, the process of integrating their political, economic and social systems has not progressed much from the time of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Although the discourse of integration in Central Asian region is mostly supported in these republics, paradoxically the domestic and foreign policies of these states favor deal-

ing with most of the issues either unilaterally or bilaterally at best. What kind of cooperation and integration, if any, is the most desired by Central Asian states? What are likely to be the factors, which make regional integration among the states of Central Asia effective? What are the sectors that can serve as the examples and pilot cases for such regional cooperation and how? The goal of this article is to address these questions and stimulate debate on these issues.

2. Conceptualizing integration in Central Asia

Post-Soviet Central Asian states can choose among several models in pursuit of cooperation and integration in their region. Numerous scholars identify national interests and the gains achieved through integration as the most important factors for the prospects of such schemes. Others analyze such integration and cooperation schemes from an economic point of view, signaling enhanced economic relations, intensified trade between and among regional countries, eventual customs unions, free trade areas, common markets, and a developed economic community as steps towards intensifying economic integration¹. A third group of scholars focuses on the socio-cultural aspects of interstate relations, the issues of values and identities².

The functionalist approach to regional integration is gaining popularity among the

Central Asian governments. This theory presupposes that one can separate social, technical and humanitarian matters from political matters and then concentrate on solving them. Basically, it suggests that political factors are not necessarily important for cooperation and integration schemes, unless there are social, technical and humanitarian grounds for the latter. Accordingly, advanced cooperation, policy coordination and integration can be achieved by indirectly seeking out areas of mutual interests and binding together those interests which are common, where they are common, to the extent to which they are common. The emphasis is on a pragmatic approach to solving the problems. Functionalists also seek an escape from the vertical divisions of the world (nation-states) by developing, instead, a horizontal approach to common problems. The functionalists also (quite logically) entertain the hope that integration in economic and social fields may spill over into the political field as well. The habit of cooperation and the accumulated agendas of constructive work may well eventually bring about integration, even federalism, by installments.

Following this logic, economic integration does not necessarily need to include all factors of production at once, in order to be characterized as 'integration.' For instance, removal of barriers to the exchange of goods alone would be sufficient to create a 'free trade area'³. Erection of common external tariffs added to a free trade agreement would consti-

1 Spruyt Hendrik, "Prospects for Neo-Imperial and Non-Imperial Outcomes in the former Soviet Space", in Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott, eds. *The End of Empire? The Transformation of the USSR in Comparative Perspective*, (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), pp. 315-337, especially p. 319.

2 For instance, see McSweeney, Bill, *Security, Identity and Interests: A Sociology of International Relations*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

3 See Peter Smith, *The Challenge of Integration*, p. 4.

tute a 'customs union⁴.' A partial lowering of commercial tariffs might be enough to comprise a regional zone, for example, so long as the resulting internal barriers are clearly and considerably lower than for non-members of the group. At the end of the process, when all members are ready, "political units cede much of their autonomy to centralized authorities that have the capacity to carry out transfer payments among these entities⁵". It is the interpretation of integration along these lines that seems to reflect the processes that have taken and are currently taking place in Central Asia.

3. Central Asian integration revisited

In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the idea of creating a community or union of Central Asian states was promoted by applying the simple logic that integration of these states (with their weak economies, shared security concerns and common challenges), was economically and politically more efficient than dealing with these issues individually. The history of regional integration was developed through series of summits.

Initially, the idea of creating a community of Central Asian states was fueled by such factors as the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the break-up of economic ties, trade deficiencies, the unilateralism of Russian domination of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the localization of Tajik and Afghan conflicts.

In January 1993, Central Asian states signed the "Protocol of Five Central Asian States on a Common Market" in Tashkent. Yet as some analysts noted "the Tashkent summit produced more words than deeds".

Despite all the negative outcomes of the meeting, the immediate task of currency coordination served as one uniting factor for Central Asian states. Therefore, an agreement was signed between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan in 1993 on coordination of the process of national-currency introduction. While the meeting and consequent agreement were embellished with various plans for coordination between the two states, the outcomes were not convincing enough to persuade regional watchers that these states were determined to move from words to actions.

The history of regional integration summits was continued with the Tashkent Summit on January 10, 1994. The Central Asian Common Economic Space was initially created between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan during that meeting, to promote the free movement of goods across borders and the simplification of procedures for such movement. Kyrgyzstan expressed its intention to join only a few days after the announcement of the creation of the new regional grouping on January 16, 1994 and eventually did at the end of that month. There was an outpouring of predictions among both scholars and politicians about the eventual unification of Central Asian into one state, a new Turkestan, which existed in the region prior to the Russian Revolution. Some even suggested that the Turkistani identity

4 Ibid.

5 Spruyt, "Prospects for Neo-Imperial and Non-Imperial Outcomes", p. 319.

in the region always prevailed over other identities, which is not exactly true. Over time, pan-Turkistan ideas have vanished into obscurity due to a lack of popular and political support behind such a unifying ideology. Central Asian states have chosen a different pattern of integration.

The summit on April 29-30, 1994 in Cholpon-Ata on Lake Issyk Kul stressed the need for increased cooperation in the political, cultural and especially economic spheres among Central Asian states. The Central Asian Common Economic Space was declared open for membership to all Commonwealth of Independent States member-states, which were willing to join and to adhere to the purposes of the organization.

On July 8, 1994, the leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan agreed at a summit in Almaty to form a comprehensive defense and economic union. Under the terms of the agreement, a new Council of Heads of States and a Council of Heads of Governments were formed to oversee the standardization of laws and the implementation of decisions. It was also decided to form a similar Committee of Foreign and Defense Ministers to coordinate the three countries' foreign policies and work on improving regional security.

During the meeting of the Council of Heads of Governments in August 1994 in Bishkek, the Central Asian Bank for Cooperation and Development was also established, based on the contributions of member-states of the Union. The Prime Ministers' Council was also given the responsibility of coordinating finance and economic planning issues.

It was decided that member-states would chair the inter-state committees in rotation. During the Almaty Summit it was announced that Kazakhstan was to chair all committees for a period of a year, and then Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan would chair in turn for one year each. The chair of the summit, Kazakh President Nazarbaev, emphasized that the structure of the Union outlined in the summit documents was only the beginning of the process of integration in the region, and he suggested that membership in the Union was open to all member-states of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The summits were held on a regular basis, focusing on the economic and security issues of the region.

On April 24, 1995, a meeting of the Heads of Governments in Bishkek approved a five-year integration plan. According to many analysts, the institutional dimension of regional integration was finally established at this summit: the Executive Committee of the Interstate Council, the Council of Ministers of Defense, the 'Centralazbat' peacekeeping force, the Assembly of Central Asian Culture and so on.

Another significant document – the Treaty on Eternal Friendship between the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic – was also signed in Bishkek on May 30, 1996.

From the next meeting, the focus of the Heads of States moved on to particular problems of concern. Although summits on the Aral Sea problem had also been held before (Kazakhstan, 1993, Uzbekistan, 1994 and Turkmenistan, 1995), the February 28, 1997 meeting of the Heads of States was the latest devoted to the prob-

lems of the Aral Sea. Consequently, the Almaty Declaration of the leaders of the Central Asian states pronounced 1998 a year of protection of the environment in Central Asian, under the aegis of the UN. The meeting also declared the non-nuclear status of Central Asia.

During the December 1997 meeting in Akmola (later re-named Astana), the Heads of States of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan discussed the process of implementation of the Agreement on a Common Economic Space as well as the issue of establishing water, food, communication and raw-mineral resource consortiums within the region, as had been initially planned. During this meeting the Central Asian leaders showed some concern because most decisions included in the initial agreement had not been implemented.

In January 1998, the Heads of States met in Ashgabat and signed a joint declaration on regional cooperation, specifically referring to certain areas of special relevance. Again, the presidents opted to send a clear political signal of political support for regional integration, because they realized that the integration process in the region was slowing down.

On March 26, 1998, the presidents of four Central Asian states (including Tajikistan, which was not a member of the Union) held the Tashkent Summit. The presidents again focused on the discussion of issues of cooperation within the framework of the Agreement on Common Economic. The four presidents defined their priorities and spheres of particular concern, such as cooperation in

agricultural sectors, water and energy supplies, in the field of transport and the mutual payment arrears settlement. Although this meeting achieved geopolitical significance because it was joined by Tajikistan, the Union entered a phase of stagnation. Its inefficiency was illustrated by its change of name in 2002 to the Central Asian Cooperation Organization, further downsizing the ambitions and expectations of member-states.

In 2004, symbolizing the changing geopolitical environment in the region, Russia joined the Central Asian Cooperation Organization. A year later, with then entry of Uzbekistan's into the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Community, the Central Asian Cooperation Organization was effectively merged into the Eurasian Economic Community, putting the idea of Central Asian regional community on hold for the time being.

4. Pros and cons of regional integration

In addition to the issue of lack of economic compatibility of the regional states, heavy reliance on trade in raw materials and perceived or real regional rivalry between the regional powerhouses of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, there are some conceptual problems which need to be dealt in order to promote common vision and goals for cooperation and integration in the region.

The first factor leading to the failure of the initiatives towards integration in the region is that they have been launched by political leaders who are questioned and

suspected of various hidden agendas. It is also a case demonstrating lack of mutual confidence in the region.

Secondly, numerous terms and concepts related with integration are used without clarifying their meaning and without suggesting realistic mechanisms for their implementation. This results in the situation when ideas are articulated by the leaders in a similar wording, but with a completely different meaning. For example, when president of Kazakhstan Nazarbaev strongly endorses integration initiatives, he tends to refer to both economic and political integration and to the creation of a transnational entity. On the contrary, when the Uzbek president talks about regional integration, he refers to mostly economic integration which does not imply delegation of sovereignty to a third party or to a transnational authority. In real terms, for Uzbekistan the notion of integration mainly implies opening of the markets of neighboring countries for its agricultural and industrial goods, without having to open Uzbek market to excessive capital flow of Kazakhstan or goods and labor from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The same contradiction and mutual exclusion exists in relation to the notion of consortiums in Central Asian. When Kyrgyz and Tajik presidents refer to the creation of consortiums, they mostly refer to creation of schemes which would facilitate water and energy swaps in Central Asian, while for Uzbekistan, creation of water consortium is a tool to ensure maintenance of status-quo of water consumption in the region. A similar difference also exists in the usage of the terms related with free trade regimes and zones. For agricultural producers like Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, this

only implies the creation of markets for their goods, while Kazakhstan focuses on the penetration of the markets of these countries.

The third conceptual problem with regard to the promotion of integration is the misusage of the term "integration" by external states. Very often, when the ideas on regional integration are forwarded by Russia or China, in real terms these ideas mainly imply access to raw and mineral resources of the region. When it comes to Korea/Japan or the EU, these ideas often imply "giving" (provision of official development aid or other type of economic assistance) and "preaching" (offering know-how on how to achieve certain goals using the examples of the EU) to the regional leadership. Naturally, both approaches have little to do with a genuine attempt to promote regional integration but rather use the notion of integration in order to enhance ones' standing in the region. This often results not only in the undermining of the image of those external powers in the region, but also of the notion of cooperation and integration promoted by these states.

5. Sovereignty and cooperation: prospects for water (energy) consortium

One of the cornerstones for setting up effective cooperation and integration is the issue of the sovereignty of each member-state. Integration schemes tend to involve concessions of operational and formal sovereignty. While some states, like Kazakhstan, partly adopt the concept of voluntarily limiting their sovereignty, oth-

ers, such as Uzbekistan, do not consider this as an option. As suggested by the Uzbek President, Karimov, “the matter of importance for us is not to choose between sovereignty and integration, but to harmonize these two concepts⁶”. Therefore, he argues that at this stage, Uzbekistan and other Central Asian states should opt for integration that will not imply significant sacrifices of the sovereignty of the participating member-states.

But at the same time, there is no need to consider the questions of sovereignty as a zero-sum game in the process of integration. The smaller states might receive equal status with bigger states in integration units by partly sacrificing their sovereignty. For instance, smaller states have an opportunity to register their opinions and achieve their foreign policy objectives through the institutions of collective decision making. At the same time, bigger states are uneasy about reducing their own sovereignty, since in arrangements like the economic union, economically larger countries would have to be tied to economically weaker states and eventually bear their burden. Thus, following this logic, ‘small’ states would gain access to important economic and political leverage previously denied them in view of their status⁷.

In this regard, the notion of *common or shared sovereignty* (implying self-limitation of operation sovereignty) can be considered a compromise between sovereign-

ty and integration. The common challenges of Central Asian states include water and energy supplies, population growth and migration, the environment, border delimitation, and other issues. In these areas, problem solving at national levels is less and less effective⁸. Integration does not necessarily imply that states are obliged to either offer full access to their internal affairs or withdraw from the integration process.

One example is water management, in which Central Asian states cannot practice and apply absolute sovereignty, as their internal policies would make an impact on all the states in the region. In this regard, they can apply only limited sovereignty in water policies as opposed to absolute territorial sovereignty. Unfortunately, at this stage, this is not understood by the relevant actors. In many cases, upstream states, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, frustrated by the lack of economic support and energy supplies from downstream countries, apply individualist water policies within their territories. As payback, downstream states utilize all measures at their disposal to pre-empt and retaliate against upstream states, which creates all kinds of tensions. Instead, limited (operational) territorial sovereignty can be considered to be applied by all states in Central Asian, which would provide opportunities for each riparian state to make use of water without interfering with the reasonable uses of the other states. Accordingly, for

6 Islam Karimov, *Uzbekistan na poroge XXI veka: Ugroza bezopasnosti, uslovia i garantii progressa* (Moskva: Drofa, 1992), ss. 302-303.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 341.

8 As Guerra-Borges notes, “the sovereignty issue should not be seen as a zero-sum game, especially when used in the pursuit of collective self-interest. The pursuit of regional interests is often the best way to address national concerns, since integration can optimize the use of each member’s potential resources,” Guerra-Borges quoted by Wolf Grabendorf, “The Price of Integration: Reducing or Redefining State Sovereignty?” in Peter Smith, *The Challenge of Integration*, p. 353.

these states, it is important to accept that the individual sovereignty of each state should be voluntarily limited and transmuted into regional sovereignty, under which all issues regarding inter-state water consumption would become a subject for collective decision making.

While a collective regional decision-making process shows some signs of emerging, collective actions that enforce and implement those collective decisions seem to be lacking. In many cases, these states divide water-management issues into those that fall under domestic water-management policy and those that require inter-state coordination. However, the inter-dependence of these states suggests that considering domestic water consumption as a subject of regional jurisdiction and the creation of a regional water consortium would enforce and protect the individual sovereignty of each state from imbalances and one-sided decisions. Therefore, the foundation of a Central Asian water consortium, if successfully realized, might serve as a case of regional sovereignty application.

The basic document for the formation of the consortium consists of the decision of the heads of States of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, which was made on March 17, 1998 in Bishkek. The participation of Tajikistan in the consortium was agreed upon on May 7, 1999. The consortium brought together states forming the delta of the Syrdarya River to form a system of water and energy swaps between these states.

This 1998 agreement stipulates water supply and consumption coordination be-

tween Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in the Syrdarya River Basin. It is one of the most prominent agreements to date on water and energy exchange between these parties. Article 2 of the agreement states that the parties accede to make joint decisions regarding the mutual amounts of water and energy supply, as well as about the amount of energy to be delivered to upstream countries as compensation for water supply to downstream countries. Importantly, these countries agreed to strictly follow these agreements and to not undertake any measures that would prevent the transit of the water into downstream states, thereby damaging the rights of the latter. Another remarkable point is that the parties agreed that the energy produced by the Toktokul Dam, which exceeds the needs of the Kyrgyz Republic, should be sold to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. In exchange, the Kyrgyz Republic can either receive financial compensation or deliveries of other energy resources such as coal, gas, or services. What makes this agreement specifically prominent is that "instead of just water nomenclatura managing the distribution and allocation of water resources, this agreement called for cooperation between the energy dispatch center and the regional water supply and distribution organization for the Syrdarya river".

This agreement also had a stimulating effect on its member-states to conclude bilateral agreements on a number of small streams, which do not have regional impact. In particular, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan concluded an agreement according to which Kyrgyzstan would supply irrigation water to the farmlands in Tajikistan and in

return receive water from the Kayrakkum Reservoir of Tajikistan for irrigation of its Batken region. The agreement of 1998 had a further encouraging impact on water disputes between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. These two states concluded agreements in January 2000 and May 2001 that provide a basis for joint utilization and maintenance of water structures, canals and reservoirs.

What remains to be done is to make these institutional arrangements efficient and transform them into productive mechanisms for coordinating the policies of all member-states, in order to secure water supplies and environmental sustainability in the region. This task cannot be achieved simply by creating a bureaucratic institutional base. National legislation in many cases contradicts inter-state agreements – a situation that needs to be addressed. A consensus existed through the post-independence years in the region on the importance of preserving the status quo with regard to stable water supply, which has led to a relatively successful institutionalization process. However, increasingly, the positions of various states in the region do not coincide on a number of issues. These points of contradiction should be dealt with at the regional level. Otherwise, they will lead again to crises.

The potential areas of cooperation in this issue can be divided into two: interstate cooperation and confidence building measures and inner-state water demand reduction. In terms of inter-state cooperation on water management, working towards mutual confidence measures, developing common language and mechanism of cooperation in this area, clearly

defining sectors from which to start cooperation and providing impartial arbitration in issues needing such arbitration are the issues which require immediate action. In terms of water-demand reduction, provision of support for developing water consumers associations can be a crucial pillar for providing relief and improving the situation with the water management.

These areas in particular are considered to impact the long-term economic sustainability of the region and inter-state security in Central Asia.

6. Conclusion

The hesitation of the Central Asian countries with regard to closer policy coordination, cooperation and eventual integration is mainly attributable to their perception that integration will limit their sovereignty and will interfere in their internal affairs. Therefore, efforts to radicalize and accelerate the level of cooperation and integration, without first preparing the ground, might result in the failure of the entire process. Defining clear objectives and policies is crucial for any regional integration process. It is essential that these objectives are realistic and achievable.

The most important message here is that regional integration, following the functionalist perspective, should first focus on one or two particular areas (for instance borders and water management). When success in these areas is achieved, integration can expand and move on to the next, taking on new tasks and responsibilities. Closer integration in these areas would imply some kind of voluntary deferral of

national sovereignty in favor of “regional sovereignty”, through the forming of consortiums and mechanisms.

As mentioned above, this needs to be approached at both national and sub-national level projects. While at the national level, there is a need to facilitate creation of common “language” tools and mechanisms of regional water-consumption, at the local level, such projects may focus around support towards local water-consumer associations.

As indicated in this paper, the efficient cooperation on consumption of water does require new systems of monitoring and advanced systems of irrigation, but local water consumers associations demonstrate that human efforts at the local level may prove efficient and cost-effective substitutes to the policy of technical modernization. This is especially true when the

financial resources to invest in such technology are not available. Above all, as discussed above, the task of achieving efficient water consumption requires an evolution in thinking; a change of mentality and an understanding of the urgency of the problem, as well as the development of environmental education programs. In this respect, support towards local initiatives, at the level of local water consumers associations, are instrumental in carrying out this task.

If and when the smaller cooperation and integration arrangements, paired at the national and local level, prove themselves effective in dealing with regional problems, it will send a clear signal to regional states that regionally-based solutions are possible. If it fails to do so, Central Asian risks falling back into the century-old tradition of being manipulated and taken advantage of by external powers.

Transcription of the debate

Nicolás Sartorius

“ Estimados embajadores, queridos amigos, bienvenidos todos a la Fundación Alternativas. Este seminario, que está coorganizado por el Observatorio de Política Exterior Española de la Fundación Alternativas y por la Secretaría de Estado de Asuntos Exteriores, es fruto del gran interés de estas instituciones por Asia Central y se enmarca dentro de las actividades de la presidencia española de la Unión Europea. En el caso de la Fundación Alternativas, hemos publicado anteriormente diversos documentos de trabajo y memorandos, además de un libro, sobre esta región.

Dentro de la globalización estamos asistiendo a diversos procesos de cooperación e integración regional por todo el mundo. Yo

quiero decirles desde el principio que nuestra idea de estos procesos es la siguiente. En primer lugar, estamos convencidos de que cada cual debe encontrar su propio camino según sus condiciones, su historia, su economía, su cultura y sus intereses. Hay que evitar, por lo tanto, pretender dirigir estos procesos desde el exterior. No hay que dar lecciones, sino compartir experiencias.

La experiencia de integración española en la Unión Europea es muy significativa. Cuando España entró en la Comunidad Económica Europea era uno de los países más atrasados de Europa Occidental y salía de una dictadura de cuarenta años. Sin embargo, en relativamente poco tiempo este país ha alcanzado notables cotas de desarrollo en muchos sentidos. Y esto ha sido en parte gracias a nuestra integración en la Unión Europea, hasta el punto de que

dicha integración ha sido el mejor negocio que ha hecho España en toda su historia.

Creo que el procedimiento que se ha seguido en el proceso de cooperación e integración regional en Europa ha sido muy inteligente. Europa venía de una historia traumática de guerras y, tras la Segunda Guerra Mundial, los procesos de cooperación y de integración en Europa no empezaron por grandes cuestiones políticas. Empezaron por el carbón y el acero. Podría haber sido el agua u otras cuestiones. En el caso de Europa eran muy importantes el carbón y el acero. Al cabo de unos años ese proceso condujo a un mercado común y, tiempo después, los países europeos se dieron cuenta de que no era funcional tener un mercado único y mantener cada uno su propia moneda nacional. Por eso fue muy positiva la creación del euro. La crisis actual, especialmente con el caso de Grecia, ha puesto de manifiesto la dificultad de tener una moneda única y carecer de una política económica común. Esta idea se está impulsando desde la presidencia española de la Unión Europea y ha sido alabada por el presidente Barroso. De cara al futuro probablemente habrá que ir más allá e incluso, habrá que alcanzar una cierta armonización fiscal, y todo ello acabará conduciendo a una política exterior y de defensa común, que ya están recogidas en el Tratado de Lisboa. Este es el proceso que estamos haciendo en Europa y que nos está dando buenos resultados, hasta ahora.

En todos estos procesos de regionalización suele surgir el temor a perder soberanía a medida que se avanza en la integración. Pero ¿se pierde soberanía cuando nos integramos en estos procesos regionales? La experiencia española es que se

gana soberanía. Por explicarlo con un ejemplo. Había un temor cuando se creó el euro porque perdíamos nuestra moneda. Sin embargo, antes de la creación del euro, el precio del dinero en Europa lo marcaba el Banco Central Alemán y los demás seguíamos. Hoy, con el Banco Central Europeo, donde todos los países estamos representados, tenemos voz a la hora de decidir el precio del dinero. La soberanía de la peseta era una ficción, porque no decidíamos nosotros. Esta misma dinámica se ha dado en muchos ámbitos. En un mundo global, sólo los actores globales tienen voz propia. Para ser un actor global hace falta unirse, porque, de lo contrario, se acaba dependiendo de unos o de otros.

Vicente Palacio

“ En esta primera sesión vamos a debatir sobre los obstáculos e incentivos para la cooperación regional en Asia Central. Nuestro primer ponente es Nicolás de Pedro.

Nicolás de Pedro

“ Presenta su trabajo titulado “The Pending Challenge: Obstacles and Incentives for Regional Cooperation in Central Asia”, que está reproducido íntegramente en la primera parte de este documento.

Vicente Palacio

“ Doy ahora la palabra a Rasul Zhumaly, cuyo artículo se centra en

analizar qué cambios deberían darse en Asia Central para favorecer su integración regional.

Rassul Zhumaly

“ Presenta su trabajo titulado “Integration in Central Asia: The Changes Required”, que está reproducido íntegramente en la primera parte de este documento.

Vicente Palacio

“ Excelente intervención, señor Zhumaly. Me ha llamado especialmente la atención su reflexión sobre el papel fragmentador que juegan la mayoría de las grandes potencias en Asia Central y las dificultades que impone la juventud de las repúblicas centroasiáticas, que está en pleno proceso de construcción nacional, a los procesos de integración en la zona. El debate queda abierto para quien quiera solicitar la palabra.

Santiago Ruiz

“ Quiero felicitar a los organizadores de este acto por apoyar este tipo de iniciativas, que hace apenas unos años eran impensables, y que evidencian la creciente importancia que confiere España a Asia Central.

Shirin Akiner

“ Estamos hablando de integración regional como un proceso lógico

para Asia Central, pero habría que problematizar esto, porque pueden pasar otras cosas. Pueden darse otros escenarios. En este sentido, yo creo que la Organización de Cooperación de Shanghái es un modelo muy válido para la región, porque es una organización muy resolutiva para afrontar los problemas que preocupan a la región, como la construcción de infraestructuras, y lo hacen sin injerir en los asuntos internos de los países.

También quiero destacar la larga historia de convivencia que tienen los pueblos de Asia Central, que pone de manifiesto su potencial para resolver de forma conjunta los problemas a los que se enfrentan.

Gracia Abad

“ Considero que no tenemos que dar por sentado que el hecho de que los países de Asia Central estén en pleno proceso de construcción nacional sea necesariamente un obstáculo para impulsar procesos de integración en la región. El proceso ASEAN nos muestra cómo las élites políticas pueden utilizar los procesos de cooperación e integración regional como un activo en el proceso de construcción nacional que viven sus países. En el Sudeste asiático no es raro que las élites utilicen los procesos de integración regional en los que participan sus países para justificar políticas internas que pretenden imponer, pero que pueden resultar impopulares. Este ejemplo podría verse como un incentivo para las elites de Asia Central a la hora de intensificar la cooperación y la integración con sus vecinos.

Por último, quiero llamar la atención sobre el activo que supone para una mayor inte-

gración en Asia Central la existencia de una cierta identidad común entre la población de estos países, que se reconocen mayoritariamente a sí mismos como centroasiáticos frente a las personas de otras regiones del mundo.

Vicente Palacio

Yo quería cuestionar la idea de que la Organización de Cooperación de Shanghái es la respuesta a los problemas de Asia Central, ya que no se ocupa de cuestiones básicas para el desarrollo de los países de la región, como puedan ser la educación, el transporte, el agua, etc.

Rassul Zhumaly

Siguiendo con la Organización de Cooperación de Shanghái, hay que subrayar que, al igual que sucede con otras organizaciones en las que participan los países centroasiáticos, éstos tienen un papel secundario en su seno. De ahí la importancia de hablar sobre procesos que incluyan exclusivamente a estos países.

Además, quiero remarcar que los líderes de Asia Central hacen numerosas declaraciones sobre la cooperación y la integración de la zona, pero sus palabras no se materializan en hechos. La aproximación para avanzar en este asunto debería pasar por dar menos importancia a las grandes declaraciones políticas y enfatizar la búsqueda de proyectos concretos, que pudiesen materializar paso a paso la cooperación entre los países de la región. Un ejemplo de proyecto podría ser la puesta en marcha de algún medio de comunicación conjunto.

Shirin Akiner

Creo que hay que diferenciar más claramente entre cooperación e integración, porque en la región ya se da una estrecha cooperación en diferentes áreas, como la lucha contra el narcotráfico.

También quiero identificar otro obstáculo para la integración regional, y es la preferencia de los países de la región por emplear mecanismos bilaterales para resolver sus problemas, frente a los mecanismos multilaterales. Un caso claro es de la problemática del mar Caspio. Tampoco puede obviarse que en la zona la política la deciden las élites, no la población.

Saymumin Yatimov

En primer lugar quiero expresar mi satisfacción, porque ésta es la primera vez en la que veo a España tomar un papel tan activo en relación con Asia Central.

Yo quiero enfatizar la existencia de factores que favorecen la integración en nuestra región. Por ejemplo, contamos con una base cultural y lingüística común, de la que se carece en Europa, que puede favorecer una mayor integración económica y política. En la arena económica existe un potencial enorme, en cuestiones tan relevantes como el agua o el transporte. El agua es particularmente importante en una región con notable escasez de agua y que tiene concentrados más de la mitad de sus recursos hídricos en Kirguistán y Tayikistán. Éste es un recurso común que nos obliga a evitar conflictos y que puede ser la base de una mayor integración.

Cambiando de tema, las extensas fronteras de Tayikistán con Afganistán son motivo de inestabilidad, con amenazas tan graves como el narcotráfico o el terrorismo. Tayikistán no puede enfrentarse sólo a estas amenazas y agradece la ayuda de otros países en esta tarea. Éste es otro de los factores que obligan a nuestra integración. Agradecemos especialmente a Kazajistán que sus soldados hayan patrullado esta frontera, lo que ha costado la vida a 23 de ellos.

A pesar de lo dicho hasta ahora, tengo la sensación de que en algunos aspectos estamos retrocediendo en nuestra integración. Es lamentable y absurdo que se estén minando las fronteras y que tengamos 500.000 minas separando nuestros países. También ha disminuido el número de vuelos entre nuestros países. Esto se debe en gran parte a un problema de autocracia y personalismo. No puede ser que una sola persona controle la política exterior de un país, porque esto hace que las relaciones entre nuestros países sean muy dependientes de los caprichos de determinados líderes. Ésta es la principal cuestión política que debemos resolver, y tenemos que resolverla ahora, no podemos limitarnos a dejar que sean las futuras generaciones quienes se encarguen de ello. Estamos en una situación donde se obvian la voluntad de nuestros pueblos, que se benefician de unas relaciones fluidas entre los diferentes Estados. Esto llega hasta el punto de que hay familias que no pueden visitarse porque no se les conceden visados para cruzar al otro lado de la frontera.

Creo que la parte europea tiene un papel importante que desempeñar para ayudar-

nos a convencernos de que nuestros países tienen que buscar una mayor integración entre sí.

Aurelia Mañé

“ En mis investigaciones sobre Argelia he aprendido que los procesos de construcción nacional a partir de la identidad nacional suelen ser contrarios a los procesos de integración con sus vecinos. Para superar esta dificultad, aquí se han planteado dos opciones. Una sería el enfoque más funcional de la CECA. Una diferencia fundamental entre la CECA y la situación actual en Asia Central es que los intereses externos que existen hoy en día sobre los recursos de Asia Central son mucho mayores que los que existían sobre Europa a inicios de los años cincuenta. Esto dificulta la integración económica en Asia Central y hace que sea la existencia de amenazas comunes el vector más prometedor a la hora de impulsar la integración en la zona. Sin embargo, para que esto sea realmente posible es necesario que las grandes potencias de fuera de la región acepten tratar con una Asia Central integrada y perciban esta relación en términos de todos ganan y no como un juego de suma cero.

En este sentido, el agua es un asunto de interés común y que podría ser percibido desde fuera en términos de todos ganan. Sin embargo, hasta ahora este asunto se plantea en términos de agua por hidrocarburos, lo que está dificultando que se llegue a un acuerdo, ya que esos hidrocarburos tienen más valor fuera de la región que dentro y, por consiguiente, los países proveedores tienen más incentivos para

vender sus hidrocarburos en el mercado internacional. De ahí que, para desatascar esta situación, podría ser positivo desvincular el tema del agua de las transferencias de hidrocarburos y centrarse en proyectos de promoción de energías alternativas en los países proveedores de agua. Esto no sólo ayudaría a satisfacer las necesidades energéticas de Kirguistán y Tayikistán, sino que también contribuiría a dinamizar su sector industrial.

Otro asunto que podría articular la integración regional sería el corredor de transporte, siempre que éste se entienda de dos maneras. Una, que da acceso a todos los países de la zona al mar, o a donde a ellos les interese. Dos, que conecte Europa Occidental con China.

Nicolás de Pedro

“ Me gustaría profundizar un poco más en dos de los asuntos que ya se han planteado: la Organización de Cooperación de Shanghái (OCS) y el agua. Coincido con Shirin en que la OCS es una organización muy dinámica y con gran potencial de desarrollo, pero, como apuntaba Rasul, sigue siendo necesario que se establezca una organización que sólo aglutine a las repúblicas de Asia Central. No conviene perder de vista que la OCS es la plataforma que utiliza China para proyectarse en Asia Central y para dirimir su potencial rivalidad con Rusia en esta región.

No debe obviarse que existe una rivalidad entre Rusia y China y que, al igual que sucedió con la rivalidad entre Gran Bretaña y Francia a inicios del siglo XIX, esta rivalidad podría dirimirse fuera de sus fronte-

ras. Como comprobó España entonces, no hay nada peor que las dos potencias del momento se enfrenten en tu territorio. Yo no digo que éste vaya a ser el caso en Asia Central, pero de crecer la rivalidad entre Pekín y Moscú, desaparecerían las ventajas que hoy perciben las élites de Asia Central en que exista competencia entre China y Rusia.

Con respecto al agua, quiero enfatizar la dificultad que supone el que este asunto sea percibido en la región como un juego de suma cero y que no se asuma que es imprescindible tomar en consideración los intereses nacionales de todas las partes implicadas para dar una solución duradera a este problema. Un ejemplo ilustrativo de esta problemática es la presa y posterior central hidroeléctrica de Rogun. Esta presa es considerada a la vez como un proyecto prioritario de interés nacional en Tayikistán y como una amenaza en Uzbekistán. Si no se pone en marcha un mecanismo que pueda gestionar estas discrepancias, se incrementará la tensión en la zona y nos podríamos encontrar con escenarios muy peligrosos para la región. Esto nos muestra que una mayor cooperación entre sí para los países de Asia Central es más un imperativo para evitar conflictos que una mera opción con potenciales efectos beneficiosos.

Jyrgalbek Azylov

“ Quiero subrayar que el asunto del agua no puede separarse de la energía, ya que para Kirguistán y Tayikistán el agua no es vital sólo para la irrigación, también para proveer energía en invierno. Las repúblicas de Asia Central seguimos siendo rehenes de la herencia de la Unión

Soviética. Por ejemplo, el sistema de energía que se estableció entonces sigue jugando en contra de las repúblicas centroasiáticas y debemos ponernos de acuerdo entre nosotros para superar estas dificultades.

Shirin Akiner

“ No creo que haya que exagerar la similitud de las mentalidades en Asia Central. Sirva de ejemplo las diferentes actitudes que existen en la región ante la firma de un contrato. Los kazajos firman rápidamente el contrato y luego discuten el contrato. Los uzbekos leen detenidamente el contrato y consensuan hasta la última coma antes de firmarlo. Por su parte, los turkmenos no firman absolutamente nada.

También quería poner sobre la mesa que aquí estamos hablando de asuntos como el del agua y el del clima en Asia Central, pero también debemos reconocer que nosotros no podemos resolver estos asuntos, como ha quedado constatado en la cumbre de Copenhague.

Santiago Ruiz

“ No deberíamos exagerar la capacidad de la lengua como aglutinante, como evidencia el caso de América Latina y el de los países árabes, que no se caracterizan precisamente por avanzar en sus procesos de integración, a pesar de contar con un idioma común.

También quería preguntar si el ferrocarril seguía funcionando como un elemento integrador en la región.

Rassul Zhumaly

“ El transporte terrestre, y el ferrocarril en concreto, sigue desempeñando un papel clave para los intercambios entre los países de la región. Lamentablemente no se están modernizando a la velocidad que sería deseable, pero está habiendo avances.

Quiero volver de nuevo a un asunto que considero central y es que las repúblicas centroasiáticas están siguiendo políticas de cierres de fronteras y de autosuficiencia que les aíslan de sus vecinos. Esto contrasta con los intereses de la población por comerciar y relacionarse más allá de las fronteras del Estado en el que viven. Esta dinámica aislacionista es negativa para todos, porque cercena posibilidades de riqueza y favorece el desarrollo de la economía sumergida, con el consiguiente menoscabo para la hacienda pública de estos países. Si los líderes locales fuesen más proclives a favorecer los intercambios con sus vecinos, podrían incrementar sustancialmente la riqueza de sus países regularizando estas actividades económicas.

Raquel Montes

“ Se ha mencionado en varias intervenciones que grandes potencias como Rusia y China tienen interés en frustrar una mayor cooperación entre las repúblicas centroasiáticas. A mí me gustaría preguntar a los especialistas qué factores podrían empujar a estas potencias a tener una actitud más positiva hacia un eventual proceso de integración entre los países centroasiáticos. ¿Qué incentivos podrían tener estas potencias para que se materializase este proceso?

Shirin Akiner

“ Yo no veo confrontación entre China y Rusia, sino cooperación entre estos dos países dentro y fuera de Asia Central. China y Rusia se necesitan, igual que China necesita a Estados Unidos, por lo que no veo confrontación entre estos países.

En cuanto a los corredores de transporte, no sólo hay que mencionar los que puedan cruzar Asia Central con destino a Europa Occidental y Asia Oriental, sino también los que pueden comunicar a Asia Central con el Océano Índico, con el puerto de Gwadar en Pakistán. La importancia de este puerto podría llegar a provocar una guerra entre China y Estados Unidos. Tampoco hay que olvidar los que pasan por Irán. Estas nuevas infraestructuras, en gran parte financiadas por China, cambiarán la geoestrategia de la región.

Aurelia Mañé

“ Parece que ha podido haber cierta confusión con lo que dije anteriormente, así que quiero aclarar que no he querido sugerir que la cuestión del agua deba resolverse en Asia Central al margen de la energía, sino que esta vinculación no debería hacerse con los hidrocarburos, sino con energías alternativas.

Nicolás Sartorius

“ Desearía hacer un comentario para cerrar esta sesión. En Europa el primer paso para la integración se hizo abordando un tema que era central para

los países involucrados. En Asia Central, dado que el idioma no es suficiente, habría que buscar cuáles son los intereses comunes que pueden poner en marcha el proceso de integración. En el caso de Asia Central, este punto de interés común podría ser el agua.

En Europa también hemos tenido el problema de tener que conciliar el distinto peso que tienen los países grandes y los países pequeños en el proceso de integración. No es realista pretender que todos los países tengan la misma influencia en estos procesos. Lo importante es que todos los países salgan ganando con dichos procesos y que, en ciertos temas sensibles, los acuerdos se tomen por consenso. Igualmente, en Europa el proceso de integración regional ha sido impulsado fundamentalmente por las elites políticas. De hecho, en muchas ocasiones se ha comentado el déficit democrático del que adolece el proceso de integración europeo.

En cuanto a la relación de Europa con otras regiones y su actitud hacia los procesos de integración regional en otras partes del mundo, a diferencia de Estados Unidos, China y Rusia, la Unión Europea prefiere relacionarse con otras regiones como conjunto en vez de relacionarse bilateralmente con los Estados que las componen. Pero para que la Unión Europea pueda establecer este tipo de relaciones birregionales, dichas regiones deben estar constituidas como tales, de lo contrario, hay que recurrir a las relaciones bilaterales con los países de la zona. Por consiguiente, un incentivo para la integración regional en Asia Central podría ser la mayor fuerza que tendrían las repúblicas de la zona a la hora de negociar con las grandes potencias, si lo hiciesen de

forma conjunta en vez de por separado. Además, la Unión Europea tiene un gran interés en el éxito de estos procesos de regionalización, porque la gobernanza global solamente sería posible con grandes unidades regionales que puedan relacionarse entre ellas. Europa está dispuesta, por tanto, a intervenir en este proceso, pero sin injerir ni imponer, ya que cada uno debe encontrar su propio camino.

Timur Dadabaev

“ Presenta su artículo titulado “Discourses on Integration in Central Asia: From Rhetoric to Practice”, que está reproducido íntegramente en la primera parte de este documento.

Shirin Akiner

“ Ahora quiero hablar de la Unión Europea más que de Asia Central, porque debemos tener una visión más realista de lo que es la Unión Europea. La Unión Europea debe cambiar su actitud hacia Asia Central para aproximarse a la región como un socio, no como un mentor. A inicios de los años noventa había grandes expectativas tanto en Europa como en Asia Central sobre la relación entre estas dos regiones; sin embargo, dichas expectativas no se han materializado y tenemos que preguntarnos la razón. Unos de los motivos ha sido la diferencia de percepciones. Asia Central se ve exclusivamente como una región problemática en Europa, donde no se reconocen sus logros. En segundo lugar, hay que reconocer la gran dificultad de las amenazas que enfrentamos. El terrorismo, el narcotráfico,

no se solucionan exclusivamente con integración. Es más, la intervención occidental en Afganistán ha intensificado estos problemas. En tercer lugar, existe un resto de espíritu colonial en Europa. Buscamos sus recursos naturales y queremos mostrarnos superiores a ellos. En cuarto lugar, la intervención de la Unión Europea está fuertemente ideologizada y sus inversiones son insuficientes. La escasez de estas inversiones hace que la Unión Europea deba tener objetivos más realistas, porque hay un fuerte contraste entre sus objetivos y los medios invertidos para alcanzarlos. Por último, no se ha generado un espíritu de confianza, porque hay quien considera en Asia Central que la Unión Europea promueve los intereses de algunos países de la región, especialmente de Kazajistán, en detrimento del resto.

Yergali Bulegenov

“ Es de gran importancia que esta reunión se esté celebrando en Madrid, ahora que España asume la presidencia de la Unión Europea.

La problemática que aborda esta reunión es de interés mundial por la atracción internacional que generan los recursos energéticos de Asia Central y por el potencial de sus redes de transporte, que históricamente se materializó en la Ruta de la Seda.

El temor de las élites locales a perder soberanía se ha mencionado como posible obstáculo a la integración regional en Asia Central. Creo que estos temores son exagerados, pues la soberanía de las repúblicas centroasiáticas ya está consolidada.

A mediados de los años noventa se sentaron unas bases perfectas para la integración regional en Asia Central y estuvimos a un paso de lograr un acuerdo económico que hubiese sido muy beneficioso para todos nuestros países. Nuestro presidente fue quien promovió esta unión económica entre nuestros países, que nos habría permitido competir de manera más eficiente con otros bloques económicos. Esto se habría logrado sin perder soberanía, como evidencia el hecho de que Kazajistán trata estos asuntos con Rusia y China sin perder un ápice de su soberanía. Esta falta de integración económica entre nosotros hace que comerciemos mucho más con actores de fuera de la región que entre nosotros, y eso que el potencial comercial entre nosotros es prácticamente ilimitado. En 2008 nuestros intercambios con Rusia alcanzaron los 20.000 millones de dólares y con China los 12.000, mientras que con Uzbekistán no llegaron ni a los 1.000 millones de dólares.

Otros problemas que debemos resolver conjuntamente son la migración irregular, los recursos hídricos y la delimitación y gestión de fronteras. Este último tema es de gran relevancia para nuestro país, ya que es el noveno más extenso del mundo y comparte extensas fronteras con grandes potencias como Rusia y China. Kazajistán ha encarado de forma decidida este asunto y uno de sus logros más importantes es la Unión Aduanera entre Bielorrusia, Rusia y Kazajistán.

No hay que olvidar que hay temas sobre los que existe un gran entendimiento entre las repúblicas centroasiáticas. Un caso claro es el de la seguridad nuclear. Al independizarse, Kazajistán tenía el cuarto

mayor arsenal nuclear del mundo y el polígono de Semipalatinsk, que fue la principal instalación de pruebas nucleares de la Unión Soviética. Kazajistán renunció a esta herencia y este polígono de pruebas fue cerrado. En la misma línea, Asia Central en su conjunto ha suscrito un acuerdo declarándose zona desnuclearizada, que entró en vigor en marzo de 2009.

Otro problema común, esta vez de toda la comunidad internacional, es la situación en Afganistán. Kazajistán ha puesto en marcha un programa de 50 millones de dólares para que jóvenes afganos puedan estudiar en nuestro país. Además, Kazajistán preside la OSCE en 2010 y esto es un logro de las cinco repúblicas centroasiáticas. Esperamos que esta presidencia sirva para impulsar la agenda de la OSCE y para que la comunidad internacional sea más sensible a la problemática de nuestra región. Para ello, el presidente Nazarbayev ha propuesto la celebración de una cumbre de jefes de Estado de la OSCE, que lleva 11 años sin reunirse.

Sería de agradecer que todas estas ideas fueran trasladadas a la Presidencia de la Unión Europea, que es España.

Quiero finalizar volviendo al concepto de soberanía, que nosotros entendemos de manera distinta. La visión de Kazajistán es poder llegar a contar con un órgano supranacional para nuestra unión regional. Ello nos permitiría afrontar eficazmente las amenazas comunes que enfrentamos.

Norberto Nebot



Me gustaría aclarar que la Unión Europea nunca ha pretendido ser

el mentor de ningún país de Asia Central. La relación entre la Unión Europea y la región siempre se ha basado en el respeto mutuo, como queda recogido en numerosos documentos oficiales. Este principio del respeto mutuo es seguido por la Unión Europea en todas sus relaciones, aunque esto le haya valido algún reproche desde el otro lado del Atlántico.

Cuando la Unión Europea comparte su experiencia de integración no lo hace con la intención de imponer su liderazgo o una visión del mundo unilateral, sino desde la certeza de que cada caso es diferente y que ello no implica que sea inútil intercambiar experiencias y puntos de vista. Sólo queremos mostrar que una integración ambiciosa es posible y que ello no implica renunciar a la soberanía.

La Unión Europea siempre se ha caracterizado por felicitar los avances que se puedan producir en ámbitos como el de la gobernanza y los derechos humanos, por lo que no me parece preciso decir que Asia Central es vista sólo como un problema por la Unión Europea.

No cabe duda de que existe corrupción en Europa, pero los estándares de gobernanza pública en Europa son de los más altos del mundo y, aunque siempre se puede mejorar, no creo que deba distorsionarse el contexto.

Una vez aclarados estos puntos, quería repasar la estrategia de relación que tiene la Unión Europea con los países centroasiáticos. El documento más reciente y relevante es *La Unión Europea y Asia Central: una estrategia para una nueva asociación*, que ha logrado asegurar intereses comunes en

derechos humanos, democracia y bienestar social. La Unión Europea refuerza su compromiso con Asia Central desde enero de 2009, cuando las relaciones entre dos países ajenos a la Unión Europea pusieron en riesgo el suministro energético en Europa. El hecho de que la Unión Europea tenga interés en diversificar su suministro energético no significa que éste sea el único punto relevante. Desde la ampliación a 27 Estados, la Unión Europea está mucho más cerca de Asia Central a todos los niveles. En este sentido, hay que subrayar el valor de la presidencia alemana en 2007 para estrechar las relaciones entre ambas regiones y la extensión del mandato del Banco Europeo de Inversiones a Asia Central para que pueda financiar grandes operaciones de infraestructuras en la región. Todo ello es prueba de que se concibe la relación en términos de todos ganan.

Esta relación basada en el respeto mutuo y el beneficio mutuo es positiva y Europa debe aprender a transmitir su experiencia de integración, basada en la dimensión económica, sin dar sensación de tener una mentalidad neocolonial o de pretender imponer su modelo.

Rassul Zhumaly

“ Quiero seguir hablando del papel de Europa, porque la participación de Europa tiene que estar presente en Asia Central para atajar los múltiples problemas que tenemos en Asia Central. Lamentablemente, por la parte europea hay muchas declaraciones solemnes, pero éstas no llegan a concretarse sobre el terreno. Por ejemplo, cuando el presidente de Francia, Nicolás Sarkozy, visitó Kazajistán

en octubre de 2009 se le preguntó por la relación de la Unión Europea con Asia Central, y su respuesta fue que las prioridades de Europa en la región son “economía y energía, y lo secundario nos preocupa mucho menos”. Creo que esto nos muestra que, aunque algunos países de la Unión Europea tienen intereses en Asia Central, la Unión Europea no tiene una estrategia consensuada para la región.

Además, la Unión Europea ha estado demasiado pendiente de las repercusiones de su actuación en la región sobre su relación con Estados Unidos y Rusia, lo que le ha llevado a perder la iniciativa en la zona. Esto ha hecho que, a pesar de que el modelo de liderazgo flexible y tolerante de la Unión Europea sea atractivo para la región, hayan sido otras potencias las que han ganado más influencia en la zona. Esta pasividad europea nos ha defraudado. La Unión Europea debe aclararse sobre cuál es su visión de Asia Central, que debería ser la de un socio de largo recorrido, y sentar unas bases duraderas sobre las que articular la relación bilateral. Si Europa quiere recuperar el tiempo perdido, debe darse prisa y adaptar su estrategia a la creciente influencia de Rusia y China en la región.

Natividad Fernández

“ A mí no me agrada el papel de la Unión Europea como mentora, ni siquiera como actor que tenga que dar ejemplo de nada, porque nuestra experiencia no tiene por qué ser extrapolable a otros contextos.

Aquí se ha dicho que las inversiones europeas en Asia Central son escasas, lo que

es cierto si se compara con las inversiones rusas o chinas, pero no con las de otros actores. Además, igual o más importante que el monto de la inversión es la elección adecuada de proyectos que tengan un elevado interés estratégico para las partes involucradas. Creo que ésta debe ser la gran prioridad de la Unión Europea, encontrar este tipo de proyectos.

Rusia y China tienen intereses nacionales en la región, pero también los tiene la Unión Europea, en el ámbito comercial, en el energético y en el de la seguridad (especialmente en relación con la situación en Afganistán). El hecho de que un país como España, que no tiene especiales intereses económicos y energéticos en Asia Central, esté impulsando las relaciones con esta región durante su presidencia de la Unión Europea, es un ejemplo sintomático de cómo los intereses de Europa en Asia Central se van diversificando e intensificando.

Timur Dadabaev

“ Quiero hacer un apunte en referencia al tema de la soberanía para subrayar que mientras Kazajistán sí contempla positivamente la creación de estructuras supranacionales que impulsen el proceso de integración regional en Asia Central, Uzbekistán no quiere oír hablar de esta posibilidad. En este sentido, no creo que sea obligatorio que todos los países de Asia Central participen en los procesos de integración que puedan darse en la región. Una determinada iniciativa puede estar impulsada por un determinado número de países, y si tiene éxito puede que otros se vayan uniendo a ella. Un caso claro que

ilustra esta idea fue la incorporación de Uzbekistán en 2001 a la Organización de Cooperación de Shanghái.

Jyrgalbek Azylov

“ En este mundo global, los países de Asia Central y la Unión Europea se necesitan mutuamente. Un escenario que evidencia esta necesidad mutua es Afganistán. Igualmente importante es el deseo de la Unión Europea de diversificar su suministro energético.

Pero, siendo importante esta relación con otros actores de fuera de Asia Central, esto no es suficiente. ¿Qué va a pasar una vez que la OTAN abandone Afganistán? Si las repúblicas centroasiáticas no terminamos por integrarnos en un único estado fracasaremos. Es imprescindible que nos integremos en el medio plazo si queremos hacer frente eficazmente a los retos que se nos plantean.

Shirin Akiner

“ La Unión Europea podría realizar inversiones en Asia Central equivalente a las de China, pero para ello tendría que actuar de forma coordinada y no como lo hace en la actualidad.

Discrepo con los que piensan que Asia Central es vista por China como una fuente de recursos. La política de China en la región debe entenderse como una nueva política de buena vecindad orientada a buscar aliados en la comunidad internacional. China no sólo busca hidrocarburos y mercados en la región, sino

también votos y apoyos en los organismos internacionales.

Ravshan Usmanov

“ Coincido en que originalmente las repúblicas centroasiáticas teníamos grandes esperanzas en la Unión Europea, que se han moderado con el tiempo. Por ejemplo, la mayor parte de los fondos que destina la Unión Europea a la cooperación con Asia Central están destinados a sufragar los gastos de los trabajadores de la Unión Europea en la región. Sólo un 5% de dichos fondos llegan al país en cuestión. Por eso, nosotros preferimos las inversiones directas en nuestra región, ya sea desde el ámbito público o desde la empresa privada. China es el actor que mejor entiende esto.

Quiero matizar lo dicho antes por la señora Akiner: fue la Unión Europea, no Uzbekistán, quien propuso el incremento de la cooperación entre la Unión Europea y la Organización de Cooperación de Shanghái. Paradójicamente, este asunto no se ha concretado y parece que es por las propias dudas de la Unión Europea.

Coincido en que afrontamos tremendos problemas ecológicos, como el del mar de Aral, que conllevan un gravoso coste para nuestros países. Sólo Uzbekistán ha invertido 1.000 millones de dólares en este asunto. En este problema de escasez de agua, provocado en gran parte por los países que controlan la cuenca alta de los ríos que desembocan en el mar de Aral, Rusia y la Unión Europea podrían colaborar con una labor de investigación y peritaje imparcial. Nos interesa especialmente

la experiencia de España y Portugal en este campo.

Uzbekistán apoya totalmente la integración en Asia Central como un proceso inevitable, pero tiene que ser sobre una base práctica. Ya existen muchas organizaciones sobre el papel, lo que hay que hacer es pasar a la acción.

Saymumin Yatimov

“ No hay que interpretar la soberanía en términos absolutos, porque todos somos interdependientes y nos necesitamos mutuamente para prosperar. Tenemos que reconocer públicamente que tenemos intereses de carácter económico, energético, de seguridad, que nos impulsan a estrechar nuestros lazos. Y ya que todos tenemos intereses en esta relación, la misma debe establecerse en términos de igualdad.

Tampoco debemos olvidar que la pobreza es la base de muchos conflictos y la Unión Europea debería ayudar a combatirla con inversiones. Si no conseguimos incrementar el nivel de vida de nuestra población, no habrá estabilidad.

Nicolás de Pedro

“ Estoy de acuerdo con Shirin en que la Organización de Cooperación de Shanghái represente una potencial fuente de cooperación para Asia Central, pero no debemos olvidar que también es utilizada por China para hacer valer sus intereses en la región. Por ejemplo, en este marco China ha propuesto varias veces la crea-

ción de un área de libre comercio en la zona, que es rechazada por Kazajistán, porque considera que sería perjudicial para su economía.

En cuanto a la relación entre Rusia y China, me gustaría remarcar que está llena de contradicciones y problemas. No es coincidencia que Putin propusiese la creación del Club Energético justo cuando Kazajistán comenzó a bombear petróleo a China. De hecho, su amistad se define en términos negativos. Es decir, lo que les une es su rechazo común a la presencia de Estados Unidos en la región.

Respecto a las raíces del terrorismo, coincido con que muchas veces está vinculado a la pobreza, pero también debemos tener presente que la institucionalización del pluralismo político ayuda a prevenir esta amenaza. Un ejemplo claro es el del Partido del Renacimiento Islámico en Tayikistán.

Nicolás Sartorius

“ Estoy seguro de que la Unión Europea puede reforzar su presencia en Asia Central y que será un socio importante para la región, pero no debemos olvidar que la Unión Europea no funciona como un Estado.

Claro que la Unión Europea tiene intereses de diversa índole en Asia Central, lo importante es que esos intereses confluyan con los de los actores locales. Y esto último es más fácil si las repúblicas centroasiáticas se integran y no tienen que interactuar con Europa una por una de forma aislada.

Santiago Chamorro

“ El Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores quiere agradecer a la Fundación Alternativas por la celebración de este seminario, que se ocupa de un asunto de gran importancia para nosotros. Asia Central está bajo la competencia de la presidencia rotatoria española de la Unión Europea en gran parte gracias al importante capital humano con el que contamos. Su majestad, el Rey Don Juan Carlos, es probablemente el jefe de Estado europeo que más ha viajado a la región y que mejores contactos tiene allí. Asimismo, el ministro Moratinos es un gran conocedor de la zona y la ha visitado en diferentes ocasiones.

En cuanto a la Organización de Cooperación de Shanghái, quiero decir que tenemos el proyecto de que la Unión esté por primera vez representada en la reunión que se celebrará en Tashkent del 10 al 13 de mayo de 2010.

Aquí se ha hablado tanto de la cooperación regional interna como de la externa y, en este último sentido, creo que también es importante que se promueva con más énfasis desde la región una política de buena vecindad.

Coincido plenamente con lo dicho anteriormente por Nicolás Sartorius respecto a que Europa ni puede ni debe dar lecciones, pero sí compartir experiencias. También comparto que el proceso de integración de España en la Unión Europea es el mejor negocio que ha hecho este país en su historia y que este proceso demuestra que no se cede soberanía, sino que se comparte, y en ese proceso se gana soberanía.

¿Cuál es la situación del proceso de integración regional en Asia Central? No es una situación muy boyante debido a los problemas que se han señalado anteriormente (conflicto de Afganistán, rivalidades personales entre líderes, rivalidades interestatales, el narcotráfico, el terrorismo, la mala gestión del agua, el mal reparto de la energía, disputas fronterizas, el mal funcionamiento de pasos fronterizos, aduanas y redes de transporte), pero la situación tampoco es muy mala. En primer lugar, porque desde la guerra civil tayika no ha habido ninguna otra guerra en la región. En segundo lugar, porque no hay fuertes tensiones interétnicas o interreligiosas. En tercer lugar, porque, a pesar de la mano de Stalin al dibujar el mapa de la región, los Estados creados no son artificiales y tienen vida propia. En cuarto lugar, porque no hay un riesgo inminente de que triunfe el islamismo radical en la región. En quinto lugar, porque el desmontaje de la Unión Soviética fue suave y gradual, incluyendo el reparto de activos entre los países de la región.

En cuanto a los incentivos para la integración, está el reforzamiento de la soberanía, el incremento de la capacidad negociadora frente a países de fuera de la región y la mejora del clima de inversión.

Respecto a las propuestas, yo destacaría a modo de extracto:

1. Seguir un modelo funcionalista e ir haciendo las cosas de forma gradual a partir de temas como la gestión de fronteras, la gestión del agua, la educación. En cualquier caso, son los países de la región los que deben decidir cuáles podrían ser estos temas.

2. Promover el comercio intrarregional en Asia Central, que apenas supone el 10% del comercio exterior de las cinco repúblicas centroasiáticas.
3. Mirar al corto plazo, no sólo al largo plazo.
4. Desarrollar la cooperación regional externa con la Unión Europea, con Rusia, con China. Desde Europa no se considera que los intereses de Moscú y Pekín en la región entren en conflicto con los nuestros, de ahí que se busque una mayor relación con la Organización de Cooperación de Shanghái.
5. No se debe pretender que Asia Central adopte todos los valores europeos, pero

sí que adopte valores universales como los derechos humanos, las libertades fundamentales y el Estado de Derecho.

Otra idea que quiero comentar es que la estrategia de la Unión Europea sobre la cooperación y la integración regional en Asia Central va a ser revisada. A la luz de esa revisión deben establecerse objetivos realistas y alcanzables. La cooperación y la integración regional son la mejor manera de asegurar la estabilidad, la independencia y la prosperidad de los Estados centroasiáticos. Y estamos dispuestos para acompañar en este proceso, evitando cualquier protagonismo.

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