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THE ROLE OF THE EAEU AND THE "ONE BELT – ONE ROAD" IN CENTRAL ASIA

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ABSTRACT

The article shows how a new, powerful "players" appears in Central Asia and its relationship with the People's Republic of China and Russia, in the world economy and politics. In particular, the expanding economic interaction and intensification of trade, investment, production, technological and other exchanges between the countries and territories of Central Asia play a significant role in the dynamics of world economy development, the importance of which will increase in the near future. Besides, the role of Central Asia countries in the BRI, which passes through the majority of CA countries, is considered. The article shows how the CA countries relate to the BRI and EAEU, and what are the chances of this initiative to take a more significant role than other projects offered by European countries.

KEYWORDS: *BRI, EAEU, Trade, Investments, SCO.*

INTRODUCTION

David Kerr as «warm politics, cold public» aptly described the relationship between China and Central Asia. Given the no strings attached assistance offered by Beijing, the political elites of the Central Asian republics enthusiastically welcome Chinese investment and real assistance for the development of the region. Compared to the EU or other Western donors who demand burdensome and lengthy reforms, China has impressed Central Asia with its practical focus on building infrastructure and achieving results quickly, as well as its consistent non-interference in the internal affairs of Central Asian countries. As Sebastian Peyrouz noted, «the pragmatism of Chinese businessmen is often praised by Central Asian elites» The Chinese have proven that they can be a reliable supplier and partner that political elites can bring together at the right time. Not only does Beijing share the political elites' concerns about stability, but the influx of Chinese money also provides the elite with more political resources to consolidate their rule. As the shadow of the color of the revolution continues to loom over the authoritarian regimes in Central Asia; CA's political elites naturally emphasize the importance of stability before criticizing the record on human rights and democracy. It is precisely because of the Chinese principle of non-

interference in domestic affairs that they respect first, so local elites tend to be more receptive to aid provided by China than to aid provided by OECD and EU donors.

Along with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan is one of the economic locomotives of Central Asia. Even during the years of isolationist policies under former President Islam Karimov, Uzbekistan sought to deepen trade and economic ties with China. In 2015, the volume of trade reached almost 3 billion US dollars, which exceeds the total volume of trade between Tashkent and Russia. In 2016, the volume of trade reached \$ 4.2 billion. The two countries agreed to increase bilateral trade by \$ 10 billion by 2020. Energy is an important component of bilateral cooperation, and in 2013, the two countries signed deals worth \$ 15 billion for the development of oil, gas and uranium deposits in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan is an attractive economic partner for China, as it has one of the most diversified economies in Central Asia. In total, Chinese firms have invested about \$ 8 billion in Uzbekistan's economy since 1991. China also acted as a donor, providing grants of \$ 285 million. More than 700 companies, both Chinese and joint ventures, are engaged in the exploration of oil and gas fields, the construction of pipelines, transport infrastructure, telecommunications, textiles, irrigation and new energy sources in Uzbekistan.

China also sees the security model it has created in cooperation with Russia within the SCO as an important aspect of the Belt and Road initiative, considering that most of the SCO's members, observers and dialogue, partners are located along the ancient Silk Road. As an extensive multi-stakeholder scheme involving more than 120 States and 30 institutions and involving related investments in more than 80 countries, OBOR needs a peaceful environment conducive to regional development. Cooperation and interaction with Russia within the framework of the SCO contributes to the strengthening of security and stability in Central Asia, which contributes to the viability and sustainability of various initiatives, including the "One Belt, One Road" initiative, special economic zones, rail and road links, electricity networks and other infrastructure. Thus, it can be argued that the SCO and the Belt and Road initiative are mutually complementary, since their security and development goals are mutually complementary.

Russia's approach to Central Asia over the past two decades can be divided into three phases: in the first phase, which runs from the collapse of the USSR to the mid-1990s, Moscow did not have a clear policy on Central Asia - or at least one to deal with the rest of the former Soviet countries. The lack of interest and attention to Central Asia was ideological, political, economic, and even cultural. The second stage, in the second half of the 1990s, was marked by a shift and was based on the precepts of the «Primakov Doctrine», which sought - partly successfully, partly not - to return Russia to the role of a center of influence in its «district».

The third stage is associated with the coming to power of President Vladimir Putin in 2000 and the special attention paid, especially after September 11, to the intensification of Russia's participation in Central Asia in all aspects of relations. However, in an economic area that has a belated effect, Russia-Central Asian trade tripled between 2003 and 2007, from \$ 7 billion to \$ 21 billion, which has reached Russian investments up to the hydrocarbon sector.

Since the end of 2012, Moscow has written off significant amounts of debt from each of them, partially tied to Russia's agreement on military bases and facilities in each case. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, for their part, are seen as hard-to-control countries. Uzbekistan's withdrawal from the CSTO in June 2012 was a special catalyst, coupled with other security factors that suggested a shift in Russia's approach. Turkmenistan, with its debts and gas export promises, has become more dependent on China since 2010. However, Tashkent and Ashgabat also receive

considerable attention from Moscow, despite the numerous tensions that permeate both sets of relations with their northern neighbor. However, the ambitions in relations here are inevitably more modest than with other countries in the region. However, it should be noted that the true extent of Russia's bilateral relations with each of the Central Asian countries is also largely hidden from prying eyes, and it is difficult to capture it in full. This probably implies a desire for deeper ties with a narrower group of states, especially those that gravitate towards Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, mainly in the economic and security spheres, as well as relying on soft power tools (the Russian language, cultural influence, including through the media, etc.).

CONCLUSION

Russia is no longer the number one trading partner for the five Central Asian states as a whole, and China has pushed it out of that role. At the same time, Russia's economic cooperation with the Central Asian countries is more multifaceted, covering such sectors as mining, construction, military-industrial complex, telecommunications, transport and agriculture.

In fact, the «Declaration on the Integration of the Development of the Eurasian Economic Union and the Chinese Silk Road Economic Belt» adopted in May 2015 gives Russia a unique chance to extend and give a multilateral character to its Eurasian strategy, formulated within the framework of the extensive strategy of the Eurasian Partnership. Therefore, in his address «The state of affairs in the country» in February 2019, the President of Russia V. V. Putin stressed more active participation in the «One Belt – One Road» initiative, including strengthening the external relations of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) by establishing ties with the OBOR. Recognition within the framework of development that covers the whole of Eurasia and beyond is certainly a political incentive for the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union.

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