EURASIA AMIDST THE SPIRIT OF SHANGHAI AND A COMMUNITY OF SHARED FUTURE¹

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The disintegration of the USSR and the end of bipolarity led to a new rearrangement in the international system. Since then, two outstanding objectives were at the heart of the world socialist debacle: the reorientation of the bipolar order towards a multipolar one, and the search for alliances between emerging powers in order to modify the functioning of the system of international relations. Even more, the emergence of important economies and the convergence of interests in strategic alliances and diverse integration frameworks at different levels became evident. In this system, undoubtedly, areas of influence not only continued to exist in the logics of power, but also had reached greater importance. In this context, the return of Eurasia to maps and to the debates on geopolitical competition had a great significance.

In History and Political Science, numerous references place Eurasia as a great enclave of world power. From the ancient Silk Road, commercial and cultural long-distance bridge, which changed the way of understanding trade on an international scale and led to encounters and disagreements of all kinds between different regions; to until centuries later when the British Halford John Mackinder (1861-1947), also took the region as an object of

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reflection in the work *The Geographical Pivot of History* (1904), in which he raised his theory about the *Heartland or Heart of the Earth*, conformed by the center of Eurasia. Mackinder said that whoever dominates Eastern Europe will dominate the heartland; then, whoever dominates it, will dominate, in turn, the *World Island* and whoever dominates the *World Island* will finally dominate the world. This theory had as an essential objective to warn British politicians and diplomats of the Russian power and, above all, against a potential Russia-Germany alliance. On the other hand, the nationalized Dutch American Nicholas John Spykman (1893-1943) defended the opposite thesis: who controls the *Rimland*, that is to say the powers whose force resides in the control of the seas and surrounding spaces, will rule Eurasia and the one that governs in Eurasia will control the destinies of the world. However, both agreed on the importance of winning Eurasia to gain global control.\(^3\)

These debates were deeply recovered in the work of the prominent ultra-conservative political scientist Zbigniew Brzezinski. In *The Grand Chessboard*, *Grand Failure*, *Game Plan* and *The Premature Partnership*, important reflections on US foreign policy are made and the important role that is assigned to the countries of the Middle East and Central Asia in the US strategy is pointed out, while recovering the theory of Mackinder’s *Heartland* to affirm that the global primacy of the United States depends directly on how long and how effectively they can maintain their preponderance in the Eurasian continent. At the same time, emphasis is placed on the Cold War policy carried out by the White House and the Kremlin and the policy planning the United States should have thought to project after the disintegration of the USSR to disconnect the post-Soviet space from the Russian orbit, and to try to contain the advance of China towards the West in the context of its Reform and Opening.

For its part, the strictly Eurasian conceptions developed from Russia, present Eurasianism as an intellectual current, with important geopolitical borders that has gone through different stages and brought up serious debates about Pan-Slavism or the idea that Eurasia is a separate continent both from Europe and Asia or with the notion of making Eurasia coincide with the borders of the USSR. Its main exponents were Prince Nikolai Trubetsko and

\(^3\) Created at a time when the main powers turned to an imperialist course, these elements have determined that Geopolitics was considered by many specialists as the rationalization, on geographic support, of the expansionism of those States. That is why, most of the time, this concept is permeated with a strong ideological load of an imperialist nature. However, this research allowed us to understand that the study of Geopolitics is also fully valid and necessary for understanding and interpreting the influence of geographical factors (physical, economic and sociocultural) on the actions and interactions of States at a regional level, and in its extra regional projection, as a basis for the adoption of political strategies.
Piotr Savitski⁴.

The Eurasian revival was promoted by the historian and anthropologist Lev Gumilev and his theory of “ethnogenesis”, which established that the determining factor of the great changes in history was not race or social class, but a particular type of “ethnic and emotional passion” capable of bringing together people of diverse origins. Eurasianism would represent, in his opinion, an injection of this passion that would allow creating a “superethnos” over phenotypic or cultural differences. Gumilev criticized the equation between Russians and Soviets as a stumbling union in the formation of a future union of nations, which would be worth criticism of the most conservative Russian nationalism, which defended the purity of the race and was unwilling to admit their Mongol, hun or tartar ancestry⁵.

The most radical and current version of Eurasianism has been present in the political debate at the hand of Alexander Dugin. Since the presidency of Vladimir Putin, these assumptions have been hyperbolized and radicalized by the followers of Dugin, taking into consideration that the Russian president took up the idea of traditional Russian values and pride for the historical greatness of Russia, as support of its policy of great Eurasian power, in line with a certain recovery of the original Eurasianism intimately linked to the

⁴ According to Trubetskoï, it would include the Russians along with Ugan-Finnish and Turkish peoples of the Volga, Siberia and Central Asia. This coincides with the territory of the former Russian Empire, leaving out its more western and “European” regions, such as Finland, the Baltic or Poland. Other Eurasian theorists such as Piotr Savitski, identified Eurasia with the borders of the USSR. However, unlike the pan-slavists, Trubetskoï rejected a restoration of the tsarist empire, since it considered that the Eurasian civilization is multicultural, this is the reason why the Russians cannot arrogate the role of dominant nation.

⁵ Other important elements to consider are the results of the investigations of the Turkmen anthropologist and historian Shohrat Kadyrov who affirms that the Central Asian societies are composed of second-generation tribes, sub-ethnos. They are not similar to the tribes of the primitive community, but they use the ideology of tribal solidarity for political purposes, they are ethnic substrates. The tendency of polygenesis in these societies (communities) is initially based on the organization of the direction according to the principles of tribal kanatos and amorphous confederations, while the cultural antithesis us or them direct it basically towards the interior of the ethnos, unlike what is done by nation-societies. The tribes lived concentrated for centuries in relatively isolated areas. The cohesion of the population competes with the territorial cohesion and for this reason it is common that within each area intertribal integration is reduced to incorporation. Inbreeding and ethnoracial prejudices are used arbitrarily to explain the origin of the old elites and as an instrument to organize their hierarchy. General ethnic self-identification is combined with tribal self-consciousness. The old legends about the age of the tribes (read the subordination of one to another), not only reestablished, but are tendentiously written adapting to the conjuncture of the political market. See: Kadyrov Shokhrat: A special Report for the Conference “The Turkmenistan: not on Orange revolution but Regional?”. 
Eurasia Amidst the Spirit of Shanghai and a Community of Shared Future

Eurasianism was a trend that, historiography with the end of the Cold War, had been reduced to a mere geopolitical reference. However, this conception officially started to be recognized as an ideology in Kazakhstan from the moment of its independence and one of the main universities of the same country is the National Eurasian University in Astana, which acquires its name from the famous Eurasian ideologist, Lev Gumilev. From those early days, the Kazakh president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, understood that the CIS was no more than a first step in the transition to a stronger integration process. This criterion was the opposite of that of several CIS partners, with attitudes of dispersion, resulting from the introduction of the most divergent national regulations.

To overcome such difficulties, Nazarbayev proposed the idea of integration at different levels and at different speeds. This idea was gathered in the project of the Eurasian Union, raised by him, at the Moscow State University, in 1994, based on the historical experience that in any integration process there are countries more reluctant than others to move towards a common goal, which does not have to stop the most dynamic members. In the EU this is called enhanced cooperation. In this line of proposals and action, Nazarbayev’s highest bet had been within CIS and the creation and advancement of the Customs Union, similar to the European Union beginnings.

In general, the following basic characteristics of the “Eurasian concept” can be distinguished, according to Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev, the main promoter of this trend:

1) Realistic character; absence of the “primacy of ideology”;
2) Trend to firmly connect the idea of “Eurasian integration” in the post-Soviet space with the aims and objectives of modernization;
3) Attention to the priority of the interests of the Republic of Kazakhstan as

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6 At this point we must take into account the influence of Russian nationalism on this trend. The existence of the “Russian world” which is a very broad concept from the cultural, ethnic, nationalist point of view, impossible to be addressed in its entirety in this framework. However, it can be defined in a very general and short way that refers to the division of Eastern Slavs into Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians. This was the Russian world that existed during the empire, and later was divided into “Great Russian” (Russians), “Little Russian” (Ukrainians) and “White Russians” (Belarusians). The preponderant factor in that world was the religious, that is, orthodox Christianity. That “Russian world” to the Russians was necessary because with him they were a majority within the empire, and therefore, they could be who decided in the empire. But if the Ukrainians, e.g. the little Russians, and the Belarusians or white Russians were taken away, then the great Russians were a minority within the empire.
an independent and sovereign State;

4) Current realist criticism of the “post-Soviet space” and the main trends of its development.

5) Review of the perspectives of “Eurasian integration” in the context of a multi-directional strategy adopted by the government of Kazakhstan.

6) Propensity for close coordination of economic and political integration.

7) Consultation not only of the Kazakh and Russian interests within the “Integration Project”, but also of the interests of the Central Asian States.

As it can be seen, this Eurasian doctrine is based on the idea to enhance Kazakhstan interests in the integration process, which makes evident the obvious limitations of these projects in the Central Asian environment, due to the characteristics of these societies where the perception of leadership has a transcendental importance, even ancestral. The development of this Nazarbayev proposal was strongly inspired by the evolution of the Republic of Kazakhstan as the heir of a millenarian nomadic culture, therefore it had a lot to do with that return to the origins that was proposed as a trend towards the beginning of the disintegration in the search for the rescue and re-articulation of the Aryan unit, the Islamic world and the Turkish world, conceptions that coexist in the region intimately related by the historical complexities. Modern Kazakhstan had become one of the most dynamic states in the CIS territory, while serving as an example of inter-ethnic and religious tolerance, as it is a moderate Muslim country, which has become a kind of a “bridge between East and West”.

That is why it has always been considered that in Kazakhstan the development of the Eurasian idea has been made with a more generalizing-integrating character, but without reaching extremes. The Eurasian construction was conceived as a broad international collaboration, with the participation of all the ethnic groups that have historically been present in the Eurasian continent. Hence, it is important to point out the panturkist direction that also contains the Eurasian idea.

On October 12, 2012, the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, in his speech at the Kazakh-Turkish Business Forum held in Istanbul, made a sound statement:

[...]

7 Ramón Tamames: Ob. Cit.
influential State all over the world... To this he added: We live in the homeland of all the Turkish people. After they killed the last Kazakh Kan in 1861, we were a colony of Russian Zarate, after the Soviet Union. In 150 years, the Kazakhs almost lost their national traditions, ways, language and religion. With the help of God, we proclaimed our independence in 1991. Your ancestors, leaving their historical lands of Turkish Kaganato, have taken with them the name of the Turkish people. Until now the Turks call the best yığit [dzhigit] ‘Kazakhs’. Well, we are those Kazakhs.

These words were accompanied by a ritual raising of the flag of the Turkish Council, consolidated in October 2009, at the IX Summit held in the city of Nakhichevan, capital of the autonomous republic of the same name in Azerbaijan. This kind of Turkish alliance arose in its beginnings in response to the Slavonic origin of the CIS and materialized in the creation of the Council of Cooperation of the States of Turkish Speech, an initiative that was matured in the Summits of Turkish Speaking Countries, which were carried out from 1992 to 1996 when it was proposed by Nazarbayev, with a strong cultural, ethnic and religious orientation.

The internal political strategy of Kazakhstan had been based on Eurasian imperatives of this type, especially in the field of political constructions of the nation. For centuries, the destinations of several peoples with different cultures, religions and traditions have crossed the historical territory of Kazakhstan. This same situation had been recreated in the inner countryside, when the representatives of one hundred and forty ethnic groups and forty confessions coexist with the Kazakhs. Meanwhile, a long-term coexistence among different ethnic groups had led to a strong tradition of tolerance in society.

In this conception, the geopolitical position of Kazakhstan plays a fundamental role. On the other hand, as the Kazakh experts have emphasized, President Nursultan Nazarbayev has a strong political will in this regard. It must be remembered that the Kazakh leader was one of the main promoters of the unity and safeguard of the USSR, until the last moments when disintegration was a fact. According to Nazarbayev, in terms of Eurasian integration, there must be a set of major interstate projects: a Customs Union, an oil and gas pipeline systems, a program for the best effective use of water resources. This ties with the idea of creating an axis to increase interregional cooperation, to a qualitatively new limit. This requires the construction of “a China / Western Europe transport corridor”; from the coasts of the Pacific Ocean to

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8 Centro de Prensa Internacional: “El panturquismo ayer y hoy”.
9 Ibídem.
Although this Kazakh conception of the Eurasian integration had a centered perspective, that privileged the place of Kazakhstan in Central Asia, it is also true that it had a pragmatic vision of the Central Asian capacities and its development potential at a regional level, conceiving Russia and China as fundamental parts in this dynamic of integration, which constitutes a kind of continuity and rupture with the traditional conception of the Eurasian, because China is incorporated into the regional dynamics in the new scenarios and the main postulates of Eurasianism are maintained.

This is why that in the case of Putin’s Russia, these projects were considered particularly attractive. His geopolitical projections were also focused on the Russian repositioning in this important area and the displacement of the West in this space. However, in this new chapter of international relations, it did not make sense to try to recover old methods or repeat old mistakes trying to rescue the Soviet past. The return of Eurasia to history as an important board of geopolitical competition began to take place in a different international context, in which the trends towards multipolarity and multilateralism were becoming more evident, as a result of the emergence of important economies and the concertation of interests in strategic alliances and diverse integration frameworks at different levels.

Another element to take into account to address the Eurasian question is the reference to the term Great Central Asia proposed by the academic S. Frederick Starr. He envisions the conceptualization of a broader region linking Central and Southern Asia and the promotion of infrastructures and trade as a way of stabilization and prosperity, with Afghanistan as an outstanding regional core. This proposal was perceived with suspicion by specialists when it is understood that “bringing” the region to the south implies “moving it away” from the north (Russia) and the east (China).

These debates, certainly polarized, have reshaped the Eurasian scenario, highlighting the importance of the interconnection links that this great continental mass had developed throughout history. In the new circumstanc-

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10 Another flagship project would be the construction of the new navigation channel for cruise ships and, which would carry the name “Eurasia”, between the Caspian and Black seas; a thousand kilometers shorter than the current “Volga-Don” of limited capacity. The Russian territory would thus be crossed, to give life to the most powerful product exit corridor from all Central Asia to the Mediterranean. Another idea he proposed was the creation of an Euro-Asian Bank, to contribute to the financing of the expansion of commercial and economic relations and to the realization of investment programs and projects in the Central Asian space.

11 See: Nicolás de Pedro: “Eurasia emergente y evanescente: Identidades y rivalidades geopolíticas en Asia Central”, in Notes Internationals CIDOB.
es, the Eurasian world had acquired other shades. One cannot ignore the closer relations between the Turkish and Persian worlds in which border separations are practically impossible. The same happens with China, in which these legendary peoples, during the Mongolian wave between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, had their center in Beijing and shared cultural and religious influences.

Undoubtedly this scenario, which is characterized by some sort of return to the origins in search of an Eurasian re-articulation through the recovery of its most legendary past, national built, the nomad spirit of the region, the search for a common ethnical, clinical, tribal, religious, philosophical and mystical, tints and broadens a traditional concept. This had been made more complex as part of an historical evolution of geographical boundaries, in which physical frontiers are often questioned and overthrown by history.

Russia and China in restructuring Eurasia: “The spirit of Shanghai”

The Central Asian environment presupposes a chessboard of extreme uncertain geopolitical competition. In this board, great powers compete, setting forth what is known as the New Great Game. In this context of confrontations and struggles for primacy, the evolution of Russian-Chinese relations is particularly interesting. Both powers share the Central Asian geopolitical environment, disputing this area as a sphere of historical and natural influence.

However, some fundamental issues turned this situation of rivalry into an alliance. It is about the confrontation towards the Western powers, namely the United States of America and the European Union, both poles of power have disputed the positioning in the area, mainly focusing on the total disconnection of Russia from its historical area of influence, and in efforts for containing the rise of China.

On the other hand, the arms embargo imposed by the West had a counterproductive effect on the United States and its allies: it contributed to a closer relationship between Beijing and Moscow, by tilting China towards the arms market of Russia and the CIS. In 1992, the summit held in Beijing, inaugurated a speech in bilateral relations characterized by the condemnation of unipolarity in the international system, the need to implement concerted actions against US hegemonism, the condemnation of the expansion of NATO to Eastern Europe and the rejection of the Atlantic alliance, considering that it lacked a mission in the reality of the post-cold war.

In this context, the tightening of diplomatic relations between China
and Central Asia became evident. It is important to bear in mind that the
neighborly relations between the Central Asian countries and the rest of the
area were strongly marked by the strengthening of the currents of thought
and the extreme nationalisms of the end of the Soviet period. Hence, dealing
with China’s neighborhood was one of the central elements of that moment.

Beijing’s willingness to include the Central Asian republics in a mul-
tilateral dialogue with a view to fostering cooperation was mediated by eco-
nomic and geopolitical interests. The economic rise of China required the
consolidation of its influence in a nearby territory, rich in natural and energy
resources, with a market of more than sixty million people, which Russia was
unable to attend. In this way, two pressing issues for China’s strategic priori-
ties were settled: first, access to new sources of natural and energy resources;
and second, the search and consolidation of new routes, safer and cheaper, for
the expansion of its trade and the input of raw materials from abroad.

On the other hand, one of the objectives pursued by Beijing with this
rapprochement was to prevent the Central Asian and Afghan conflicts from
spreading to the autonomous region of Xinjiang\textsuperscript{12}, since many of its inhabit-
ants share a common ethnic and religious origin. The border between Xin-
jiang and the republics of Central Asia threatened to become a major factor of
instability in Chinese territory, since from Afghanistan, and sometimes since
from the West, terrorist groups of the Uyghur ethnic group, who is originate
from Xinjiang, began to infiltrate.

In the first half of the nineties, given this scenario, Kazakhstan, Kyrgy-
zstan and Tajikistan joined China and Russia in a multilateral dialogue
on border, economic and security issues. Soon this forum was renamed the
Group of Five or the Shanghai Five, because the first summit of presidents
was held in this city on April 27, 1996. The entry into force of the agreements
signed between the Five of Shanghai was a milestone in Beijing’s foreign
policy towards Central Asia. These agreements had as fundamental objectives
the dismantling of obsolete arsenals after the end of the Cold War, the fight
against illegal trafficking - mainly of people, weapons and opiates - and keep-
ing under control the multiple extremist and separatist organizations that
proliferated in the territory of the member countries\textsuperscript{13}. Also, demilitarize the

\textsuperscript{12} Also known as Eastern Turkestan or Chinese Turkestan.

\textsuperscript{13} In detail, the Shanghai Group made important contributions to reducing tensions between
the Central Asian States and their neighbors. Documents such as the Treaty for the Construction
of Confidence in the Military Area of the Border Zones, of 1996, and the Agreement of Mutual
Reduction of Armed Forces in Border Areas, of 1997, established the demilitarization of
borders and the creation of mutual controls and other confidence building measures. Thanks
to the latter, the border line between China and Kyrgyzstan, as well as between China and
border line, until then one of the most heavily militarized in the world.

Thus, in June 2001, the annual summit of presidents of the Shanghai Group took place, in which the special entry of Uzbekistan took place. In this framework, the creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was proclaimed, and a new stage in regional dynamics was inaugurated. In that Summit, the Shanghai Convention against Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism - jointly referred to as the “Three Evils” - became one of the guiding documents of the organization and expression of the commitment of the Member States to regional security. The SCO established, as the primary objectives of its existence, the promotion of cooperation in the political, commercial, economic, scientific-technical, cultural, educational, energy, environmental, tourism, communications and transport areas; the strengthening of mutual trust and good neighborly relations between the Member States; the maintenance and assurance of regional peace, security and stability, through joint efforts, in order to establish a just, democratic and rational international order, both economically and politically.

Therefore, the “spirit of Shanghai” was born as a set of strict compliance rules for member states in their relations with each other, that was reflected in the ruling documents of the organization as a basis for its international projection. These norms include the principles of non-alignment, non-hostility towards other States or groups of States, transparency and political openness, in line with the guiding principles of Chinese foreign policy. This would be the beginning of a path for the construction of trust, security, and reduction of uncertainties.

Thus, the SCO linked the mechanisms and levels of political conciliation to the primary function of the organization: regional stability and the maintenance of security, also granted the Council of Heads of State the power to create new structures depending on the international and national conjunctures and regional needs. This was adjusted in a consistent manner with the idea of fostering a future of expansion towards other activities not related to the notion of National Security, but with the prospects for economic, social, energy and cultural cooperation that this regional bloc could develop.

In this context, it should be noted that since 2004 the SCO had defined the status of possible observer states, given the interest shown by some countries such as Afghanistan, India, Mongolia, Pakistan and Iran to join the organization, which gave it a resizing of its regional and international capabilities. Observer status means a prelude to integration as a full member. This distinction relates fundamentally with the premise raised by the SCO on Tajikistan, was permanently delimited. See: Oscar Villar: Ob. Cit.
the relations between the members that should not maintain conflicts among themselves. However, the recent entry into the Organization of India and Pakistan is a sample of the spirit of cooperation of Shanghai and the possibilities of expanding the SCO.

Although from the beginning the SCO was not defined as a counter-hegemonic bloc that represented a geopolitical counterweight to the centers of Western power and the predominance of the United States, it can be argued that by incorporating emerging regional powers as observers and recent members such as Iran and India (who recently joined Pakistan), the former with a large productive capacity in the technological and financial field, and the later with high hydrocarbon reserves, the SCO increased its capacity for influence and its strategic projections, in consonance with the regional interests of Russia and China, which perceived in the participation of those countries relevant markets for economic expansion and a more efficient linkage of its trade networks to productive chains highly linked to the Western economy, such as in the case of the Indian economy.

In addition, this process gave a multiregional character to the SCO due to the participation of Iran and this represented a foundational stone for the entry into the Middle East region and therefore to its energy resources. Although it was not stated at the time, one of the main purposes of this regional be signed to give observer status to Iran was to establish a boundary or to greatly slow the progress of the project of the *Petroleum Arc* developed as a strategic interest of the United States, Israel and the allied monarchies of the Middle East. In addition, for Iran it represented a valuable opportunity considering its clashes with the United States due to the development of its nuclear program.

In fact, the academic consensus on this issue converged on the fact that Iran perceives the SCO as a guarantee for its security and as protection against international pressure against its uranium enrichment program. Even so, the main concern regarding the observer status of this country was the possible frictions with other countries with different status that were within the organization such as the cases of Pakistan and India, traditional allies of the United States. However, one could notice that the pragmatism brought

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14 *Petroleum Arc* is the denomination granted by the United States to the entire area between the Extended Middle East and Greater Central Asia. This geopolitical space has notable energy resources, so the predominance in it is vital for the center of power interested in achieving global dominance.

15 See: Carlos Akira de la Puente Abreu: *Neorrealismo político vs multilateralismo democrático: un estudio comparado entre las organizaciones alternativas ALBA-TCP y la Organización de Cooperación de Shanghái.* P. 101.
by these two countries in their projection of entry into the SCO was based on not generating confrontations with Iran, and even less on strengthening bilateral differences between the two over the historical conflict in Kashmir.

Both Russia and China, by accepting Iran as an observer, were aware that this strengthened the SCO, making it one of the main energy markets worldwide; they also included one of the main members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which granted them greater geopolitical relevance in the control of the oil and gas pipelines projected towards the Middle East, the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea, and the Mediterranean. In 2016 the entry of India and Pakistan would reinforce this position.\(^\text{16}\)

Since then, the intent of the SCO to develop economic cooperation policies was manifest, without showing that it renounced the main goal of maintaining security, but agreements were signed aimed at improving the human development index in Member States and an action plan was also created for the implementation of an interstate financial mechanism, which would project the organization and diminish external dependency of Western funding sources.

At the summit held in Kazakhstan, during 2006, objectives such an educational intergovernmental cooperation agreement of the SCO member states, a resolution of the Business Council of the SCO and a plan of action of the member banks of the Interbank Association of the SCO for the support of the regional economic cooperation were set.\(^\text{17}\) Also, the organization underwent a restructuring in its executive apparatus, by the decision of the Member States to grant greater power to the Executive Secretary, that from the 2006 was named Secretary General. The SCO goal was to avoid an imbalance within the bloc with this structural reform; in this sense, the need for a more efficient rotation of authorities was raised so that all member states were represented within the decision-making bodies, which promoted the democratization and strengthened the institutional consensus.

The improvement of the SCO functionality had, as its main goal, to promote trust among its members in the face of new circumstances, which required an adaptation of the bloc only as an efficient security instrument, but also as an alternative for regional development, and a multilateral entity that could respond to the multiplicity of phenomena present in an area of vital strategic interest for the Western centers of power.

China’s approval of a $ 900 million fund to promote investment and

\(^{16}\) Now there are 8: China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan; Tajikistan, India and Pakistan.

\(^{17}\) See: Carlos Akira de la Puente Abreu: Ob. Cit. P. 103-104.
enhance the new financial architecture not only demonstrated a commitment to regional progress, but also reinforced the complex interdependence in trade terms between the Central Asian economies with the economic system of China. The implementation of the Multilateral Economic and Commercial Cooperation Program began with these initiatives.

During this period, the bloc also acquired greater regional relevance in terms of its recognition by other international organizations. The SCO signed cooperation agreements with the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Eurasian Economic Community (EEC). This logic of articulation with other multilateral blocs, was not only favored by the membership of Russia and China to one or another organization, but fundamentally because of the effectiveness demonstrated by the SCO to solve conflicts arising from problems related to security, by the broadening of its geopolitical area of influence with the incorporation of new observer states and the economic potential put forward by China’s economic growth during the first decade of the 21st century, the advance in industrial infrastructure related to the energy sector by part of the Central Asian economies, and Russia’s ability to concentrate the main hydrocarbon routes under its control.

In this way, at this stage the organization deployed a set of actions that solidified its presence in Central Asia, which influenced the decrease of other multilateral proposals with clear pro-Western trends and which sought to incorporate the region organically into the strategic interests of the United States and the European Union. It should not suggest that Central Asians consider Russia and China as centers of power without pretensions to expansion, quite the opposite. But the truth is that they are counterparts less uncomfortable, at least in the medium term, with which the issues of human rights, democracy and trade relations are less complex than with the Western powers.18

18 For Russia, this context turned out to be an instrument of fundamental geopolitical weight, which allowed it to implement the strategic objectives that Putin had proposed since its first mandate to reconfigure relations with the other former Soviet republics included in the organization, signing political, economic, energy and security agreements, which within other multilateral institutions such as the CIS had proved to be not very functional. For China, the positive balance was even higher. The SCO allowed it access to an area in which the United States and Russia had competed for geopolitical dominance for years. In addition, a new market has opened to the investments of Chinese transnationals interested in the raw materials sector as its demand had increased for this emerging power. Likewise, it allowed security to be reinforced, terrorist threats diminished and a space for political conciliation to be established with governments that consider that public diplomacy exercised by China conforms to the rules of the new regional order and that it practices values of a common political culture in many aspects.
In his article “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: promises and disappointments”, Cuban professor, researcher and diplomat Juan Sánchez Monroe explains the following:

With the emergence of this problem [the economic one], we have begun to speak of the SCO as an integration organism. Something that does not seem so true, because the volumes of exchanges within its members are lower or have rates of development lower than those of its different members with States that are outside the organization. (...) The problem is that the projects that boost the organization, more than economic, are the ones of economic security: energy, food, water, communication, information, financial. So economic projects reinforce the character of the SCO as a security organization in the broadest sense

In fact, this economic dimension not only consolidated the organization as an important instrument of regional security and Eurasian cooperation in the face of Western competition in the region, but also led to the development of other regional projects that had been deployed outside the SCO and others, that soon they would be embodied in this framework and that, far from competing, they would learn to coexist and would lean on those converging points, giving greater strength and coherence to strategic alliances, integrational components and associations.

Thus, in the “Spirit of Shanghai” the SCO confronted different regional challenges and surpassed them. Even if its origin was as a security mechanism, it came to be understood as a project of cooperation and association, a mediator of rapprochement, and to diminish the perception of threat. But, above all, it is important to highlight the basis of this construct based on an essential and inspiring approach: the rapprochement of two Asian countries that historically had been in conflict: Russia and China in terms of regional stability. That is the essence of the spirit of Shanghai and the basis in which it had deepened trust and is building peace.

Its principles are framed by the guidelines of an open regionalism, more coherent in the region than other models of integration. It is about building a relationship of mutual interdependence-dependence, as well as respect for differences and asymmetries in search of complementarity between countries. Thus, in this way economic issues address asymmetries with a diverse treatment, with the understanding that all must receive and earn benefits. In this framework, a multipolar international order is advocated, where security and defense issues are analyzed and resolved in a spectrum that transcends and goes beyond the purely military sphere. There are spaces

19 Juan Sánchez Monroe: Ob. Cit. (2012).
for interstate relations, but also for other types of actors such as professional organizations, youth, NGOs and other entities. Public and private companies also participate. Emphasis is placed on the respect for international law and dialogue and negotiation are assumed as the only way to resolve conflicts between the parties. It is not exclusive, so it does not oppose the coexistence of different regionalization schemes and that a specific country participates in two or more of these mechanisms. Everyone participates without losing their own identity and projects and programs are not binding, so full freedom is guaranteed.

A community of shared future for all humanity

The New Silk Road (also known as the Belt and Road, or One Belt, One Road-OBOR) is a project promoted in the structure of the SCO, however it can be said that it supposes a superior and transcendental stage, not only in regard to the consolidation of the SCO, but also as a new chapter that opens for international relations and for the Eurasian re-articulation itself. Thus, OBOR has been defined as “a community of shared future for all humanity.”

This concept is supported on a broad Chinese conception of the harmonious functioning and destiny of mankind. This definition embodies the hope of the Chinese people for a harmonious world and is a creative development of the traditional spirit in the new era of globalization, where all countries around the world share prosperity and losses, and are increasingly interconnected with each other. China has offered a new possibility, which is based on abandoning the law of the jungle, hegemonism and the “zero sum” political power replacing it with the “win-win” formula. “The Belt and Road” articulates this concept, and within that project Central Asia has an important place, because it is “the heart of Eurasia”, its center, the land bridge, a historic bridge between civilizations, a commercial bridge, cultural, that is the first element of continuity. From it, the region relevance for China can be defined: for the maintenance of its border, regional security, the possibility of cooperation in these borders as well as in the economic, commercial, cultural areas, as proposed by the Shanghai Group and then the SCO.

It can be said that with this spirit the peoples of the region have the possibility of rearticulating Eurasia as a concept, of recovering the significance that the region once experienced in the historic Silk Road, and now as nations that are part of a new type of global strategy, in which the expression of a shared future for humanity has a highly important meaning since its assumption is to change the rules of the economic and political games, that embody from trade till culture. Building this community of shared future in-
volves fostering the development of a fair international human rights govern-
ance system and promoting this global cause, as well as sovereignty equality
is the basis, for which multilateralism is an important means. Inclusiveness
and mutual learning are of vital importance. It is about a lasting peace and
sustainable development.

These objectives are not without challenges, just as this is not a ro-
mantic vision of regional relations. The influence of Russia and China on the
dynamics of the integration of the Central Asian republics should be assessed
separately, considering their specific objectives towards the region, from dif-
ferent conceptions, from different projections.

China has given an economic boost to the regional dynamism but
there are many misgivings among the local populations of the Eurasian envi-
ronment, especially Central Asian in terms of what they call, especially from
the Western media, Chinese expansion. The Chinese action is perceived as
much more invasive in the world and in its closest neighbors. For its part,
Russia has strong historical ties with the region, but continues to see it as an
area of influence, as a periphery dependent on a center, and continues to priv-
ilege the Slavic side, which also leads to some level of distrust.

Certainly, China’s rapprochement to Central Asia raises certain mis-
givings in Russia and among the Central Asians themselves due to issues
such as the purchase of land, property, the energy sector, and which kind
commitment the development of regional infrastructure with Chinese capital
will mean. That is why some experts consider that the difficult situation of
the Russian economy had caused Moscow to adopt a position of cooperation
rather than rivalry towards Beijing.

Undoubtedly, these negative elements have been very present in the
development of Eurasian projects. Nevertheless, their advance is fairly based
on this extremely singular Russia-China alliance. These powers have learned
the art of connivance and peaceful coexistence, in which the principles of
multilateralism and multipolarity prevail, to achieve a win-win relationship
in a region of so much geopolitical competition. Central Asians have learned
to interpret this art and the possibilities it offers them at the regional level. It
come to terms, that such of these projects, far from being antagonistic, have
generated a capacity for articulation and important mutual support. These are
principles highly valued amongst Central Asians due to their nomadic spirit
and tribal solidarity or the mysticism shared for centuries with magnificent
cities and traditions within the legendary Persian world. The SCO is proving
to be a school in this regard.

Therefore, the Russian-China union generates trust among the Cen-
tral Asians and in general in the regional environment, it generates security,
decreases uncertainties and the perception of threat in the face of the elements of rivalry and regional competition, because the cooperation between both, under the Win-win formula serves as a regulator of these desires, in favor of a common space. Both parties agree that a conflict of interest in the area would only cause them to lose and encourage the rise of other powers.

Both Russia and China share the principles of multipolarity and economic concepts where the rules of the game are not dictated from the West. Undoubtedly these issues have made them act on many occasions as allies in terms of regional scope. All these issues are part of a debate on whether the relationship between Russia and China can be defined as a strategic alliance or a society. The truth is that they are powers that have learned to live in the region and to build a different conception of Eurasia and international order in general, becoming a real counterweight to the Western powers.

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**ABSTRACT**

The article is based on the analysis of the integrationist trends that have evolved in Central Asia between 1991 and 2015. It deals with how the historical reality of the Central Asian republics conditioned them to search for centers of reference to guide the construction of their political and economic systems. This situation caused these countries, since their independence, to begin to interact with important international relations players, with whom they built a series of interdependent relations that were tracing two integrationist conceptions that became trends: Western and Eurasian. The latter one is the one that has most advanced in the period studied, promoted by Russia and China with the implementation of important mechanisms of association, cooperation and consensus, among which the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Eurasian Economic Union and the New Silk Road project. In this sense, the Chinese megaproject One Belt One Road is supported by a series of conceptual bases as a result of the progress and evolution of the Eurasian trend understood in its broader meaning.

**KEYWORDS**

Central Asia, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Eurasianism, Integrationist Trends, New Silk Road.

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