"Our Common Home – Altai": international ecological-economical and humanitarian integration in the Altai region

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Abstract. Cooperation of the border regions of the four countries, whose territories are located in the Altai mountain system, the so-called "The Great Altai", contributed to the establishment of the International Coordination Council "Our Common Home – Altai" (ICC "Altai") in 2003. The ICC "Altai" includes representatives of the legislative (representative) and executive powers of the Altai region and the Republic of Altai (Russian Federation), East Kazakhstan Region (The Republic of Kazakhstan), Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (People's Republic of China), and Khovd, Bayan-Ulgii aimags (Mongolia). The main objectives of the ICC "Altai" are the development and strengthening of trust, mutual understanding and good neighborliness among representatives of states, cultures and nationalities in the strategically significant Eurasian region of the Great Altai, as well as ensuring sustainable social and economic development of the border areas. In the conditions of geopolitical splits and geoeconomic rivalries that have become more complicated and openly manifested in international relations, the processes of consolidation of border regions and actions to create cross-border economic actors are updated in a new way. The need for joint measures and steps to stimulate the competitiveness of local economies in the territories of the Great Altai makes it necessary to develop common governance and coordination structures.

1. Introduction
The challenges of our time in the sphere of international cooperation at the beginning of the third millennium force us to make a choice: to seek new ways of cooperation or to improve the ones already created. In recent years, there has been an increase in changes in international relations related to both the establishment of a polycentric world order and the strengthening of regional and cross-border centers for economic development [1]. Against a backdrop of emerging models of cooperation, such as "Eurasia", "The Great Asia", "One Belt. One Road", "The Silk Road Economic Belt", new prospects for strengthening international relations are opening up, in particular, in the Altai region unique from the natural, geopolitical and geocultural aspects [2].

Since its inception, the ICC "Altai" has really helped to restore the broken links of the Great Altai’s regions. It is not a decision-making body, but an advisory one and considers issues of mutual interest, sends recommendations to the ICC "Altai" participants, and also interacts with the central legislative and executive authorities. One of its functions is to initiate processes of convergence of national laws of the four countries in the field of environmental security, taxation, foreign trade and customs regulation.

A significant and important positive feature of the ICC "Altai" activity is the interest of the leaders of the border regions in maintaining friendly formal and informal contacts, which in some cases
accelerates the solution of emerging issues not only of a commercial and humanitarian nature, but also interstate interaction in the border areas. Not infrequently these issues are not within the competence of the regions, and can be dealt only at the state level, but joint lobbying at the federal level ensures the achievement of the necessary results [3].

2. Highlights
The ICC "Altai" was initially created as a communication platform, as an international regional association for cross-border cooperation to enhance the efficiency and coherence of actions in common interterritorial interests, and build confidence and good-neighborliness in the region. In the framework of its activity, topical issues of trade and economic cooperation, the development of transport, recreational, social infrastructure and others are also discussed and resolved (figure 1).

![Figure 1. "The Great Altai".](image)

The activity of the ICC "Altai" does not substitute for interstate agreements, but promotes their implementation. The issues considered within the framework of the ICC "Altai" activities are most often aimed at assisting to establish inter-human and humanitarian ties, develop direct contacts between people, and overcome often artificial interstate barriers, in scientific discussion and solving problems common to the Altai region: nature protection, environmental safety, preservation of historical heritage, cultural traditions, etc.

Figuratively speaking, the ICC "Altai" is the roof of the Altai house, where the main goal of the participants is to provide comfortable and creative cohabitation of its residents and instill in them a sense of pride and responsibility for their region, with friendship and mutual assistance being objectively beneficial to everybody.
Over the years, multi-year continuing projects have been developed under the auspices of the ICC "Altai": International Conference on Scientific and Technical Cooperation, International Summer School for Students and Young Scientists "Our Common Home - Altai", Children's Public Ecological Expedition "Start From Your Home", and also newer projects at the start-up stage: the Council of Rectors of the Universities of the Great Altai, the Trans-border Tourist Route "Altai - Golden Mountains", and the Tourist-Sports Festival "The Great Altai". The list of the continuing projects of the ICC "Altai" reflects the demand for the development of the humanitarian sphere of international activity and shows that great importance is attached to raising the younger generation, strengthening youth cooperation, education, preservation of historical and cultural heritage and natural values, support to international research, building a favorable image of a neighbor and good-neighborly relations (the "neighborhood belt") [4].

The new mission of the ICC "Altai" is considering it as a regional representative of the activities of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). In 2012 and 2014 the Altai territory became the venue for the SCO Youth Forums, in the preparation and conduct of which the ICC "Altai" took an active part, presenting experience of cross-border cooperation in the region of the Great Altai. The SCO Youth Forums held in the Altai region allow to count on the fact that the projects unfolding under its auspices will change the regional status to the global one and attract participants from other regions of Eurasia and the world. So, today the proposal on participation of ICC "Altai" representatives in the activities of the SCO Business Union is already being considered.

Annually the ICC "Altai" meetings are held in one of the border regions of the Great Altai. At the 12th meeting of the ICC "Altai" held in October 2014, Governor of the Altai region A.B. Karlin called "the most significant level of trust between regions" to be the most important achievement of cooperation and drew attention to the fact that the heads of the agencies of foreign affairs of Russia, Kazakhstan, China and Mongolia attach this unique experience great importance, considering it as one of the best practices of interregional interaction. His opinion was supported by Akim of the East Kazakhstan region.

B. Saparbayev, noting in his speech, that through the work of the ICC "Altai" the border regions managed to achieve a great degree of integration on many issues. Among the main goals of cooperation within the ICC "Altai" was the need to intensify trade and economic cooperation.

3. Results and prospects

In June 2018, the 16th ICC "Altai" meeting was held in Khovd (Mongolia). The key point in the work of the ICC "Altai" was the consideration and approval of the draft Concept of development of work of the ICC "Altai" until 2025. The ICC Secretary Boris Larin noted that "The Concept defines the development priorities and the main directions of the Council's work. The decision to create a strategic document of international status is driven by the need to update the goals, objectives and key areas of long-term socio-economic and humanitarian cooperation of the member regions of the Great Altai".

The purpose of the ICC Concept of development of work is to strengthen multi-level cooperation and mutual understanding among peoples in the strategically significant Eurasian region of the Great Altai.

The objectives of the Concept are:

- strengthen the ICC "Altai" as an effective regional organization of the Great Altai, in which cooperation is built on mutual trust and friendship of the administrative members of the ICC "Altai";
- develop trade, economic and investment cooperation, environmental and economic security, joint projects in priority areas of cooperation to improve the well-being, the standard of living of the population and the sustainable development of the ICC member regions;
- develop and strengthen trust, mutual understanding and good-neighborliness among representatives of states, preserve national identity of ethnic groups and peoples inhabiting the Altai region;
- coordinate efforts to preserve the natural, cultural and historical heritage of Altai;
• expand socio-cultural and humanitarian ties using different levels of interaction;
• institute common approaches of the ICC member regions to the initiative "One Belt and One Road", aimed at creating favorable conditions for promoting cooperation, including the Great Altai;
• popularize the uniqueness of the territory of the Great Altai in the world space and use its potential for the development of cross-border tourism;
• discuss specific cross-border projects, identify cross-border cooperation issues and prepare recommendations of the ICC "Altai" to intergovernmental commissions.

The main areas of cooperation within the framework of the Concept are:

Economic and trade development. Expansion of mutually beneficial trade and economic interaction. Contribution to greater efficiency of existing trade and economic ties. Discussion of the structure of exports and imports of goods, as well as coordination of efforts to optimize them. Facilitation of the improvement of the efficiency of existing mechanisms of trade and economic cooperation with a view to enhancing their effectiveness. Assistance in solving issues of giving international status to border crossing points; cancellation of the restriction on the passage of transit vehicles between Russia and China, the possibility of improving customs administration and trade facilitation, etc. Creation of “The Economic Council of the Great Altai Regions”. Support to business initiatives, implementation of projects in priority areas of cooperation. Encouraging participation in the project activities of government agencies and business leaders. Facilitation of the development of business cooperation in industry and agriculture. Attending to providing financial support to project activities.

Support to the establishment of cross-border economic and technical cooperation centers.

Development of mutually beneficial cooperation in the creation of projects in the energy sector, including wind and solar energy.

Development of the practice of regular holding of joint forums, exhibitions and seminars in order to enhance the interaction of small and medium-sized businesses, as well as research institutions.

Promotion of competitiveness of agriculture and creation of a civilized market of agricultural products, covering the territory of the Great Altai. Support to the implementation of joint projects for the development of the agro-industrial complex, processing of crop production and livestock, with particular emphasis on the development of organic agriculture.

Support to the creation of cross-border production clusters, promotion of cooperation of organizations providing equipment, components, specialized services, and research and educational organizations.

Development of infrastructure, including transport networks. Facilitation of the development of transport corridors, creation of favorable conditions for international road transport, cooperation in the field of infrastructure and logistics modernization, support to the development of a network of industrial clusters along the transport highways. The possibility of synchronizing the largest Eurasian transport projects "Trans-Siberian Railway", "NurlyJol" ("Bright Way") and "The Silk Road Economic Belt" with participation of the regions of the Great Altai. Assistance in the creation of a list of priority joint infrastructure projects [5].

Cultural and humanitarian interaction. Contribution to the development of joint projects and programs to preserve the traditions and cultural heritage of the nations and nationalities inhabiting the Great Altai.

Support to activities related to joint cultural events in the Great Altai, the exchange of artistic groups, the development of commercial cultural events and the promotion of joint concert programs, holding days of culture of the cooperating regions.

Promotion of the development of cultural and ethnic centers, language learning centers, in particular, by type of "ethnic villages". Activation of cooperation in sports at the level of border areas. Facilitation of the implementation of the project of the International Tourist and Sports Festival "The Great Altai", declared as "Altai Games in the Natural Environment".
Rational use of natural resources and protection of the environment. Promotion of the development of environmentally oriented planning and coordination of environmental and ecological and economic activities in the Great Altai. Support to joint projects for the rational use of natural resources in the field of water and land use, energy, etc. Development of interregional cooperation in the field of ecology and environmental protection [6].

Substantiation of new territories of natural and cultural heritage, expansion of UNESCO nominations. Promotion of the development of a unified system of specially protected natural territories in Altai [7].

Cooperation in the sphere of territorial planning. The creation of the transport and engineering infrastructure of the Great Altai should be based on the development of coordinated schemes for the territorial development of the border areas [8].

Science and education. Revitalization of the Council of Rectors of the Great Altai in the field of educational and scientific and technical cooperation. Development of academic and student exchange. Development of joint educational programs with included education, as well as double diploma programs. Organization of international conferences on scientific, technical, economic and socio-cultural cooperation in the Great Altai. Support to information and publishing projects of the Great Altai (scientific and social almanac "Altai Bulletin", online edition of "Grand Altai Research & Education", etc.) [9].

Tourism development. Cross-border tourism in the Great Altai – world brand [10].

Cooperation in the field of security. Support to cooperation in the field of prevention of emergencies, natural disasters and catastrophes and combating them.

Information interaction. Creation of an international cartographic web resource – the Atlas of the Great Altai. Assistance in the development of the Atlas "The Great Altai: Nature, History, and Culture".

4. Conclusion
One of the decisions of the 15th meeting of the ICC was the creation of the Economic Council of the Regions of the Great Altai. Its goal is to coordinate cooperation, promote economic progress and create conditions for further development of the regions.

Interregional integration helps the bordering territories of the Great Altai to more effectively solve urgent problems of development, actively involve representatives of business, scientific and artistic circles and expand the range of partnership relations. Whatever the political situation, the universal issues of international cross-border cooperation remain the priority without losing their relevance. The mission of the International Coordinating Council "Our Common Home - Altai" is regarded to be an important interregional aspect of international cooperation.

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