



Research Article

A new security architecture in Central Asia: The necessity of a unified approach to shared threats within an emerging regional structure

Mirzobek Abdullayev Norbek ugli ¹

¹UzSWLU, international journalism faculty, political science major

ABSTRACT:

At a time when the global order is undergoing significant transformation, states are facing considerable challenges in adapting to the processes of globalization. This has, in turn, increased the importance of regional structures and cooperation frameworks. A similar dynamic is serving as a driving force behind the integration of Central Asian states. Although the initial steps in this direction were taken in 2017, the process did not initially develop into a fully institutionalized mechanism due to certain interruptions. However, the Consultative Meetings of the Central Asian Heads of State have now reached a stage where only the final steps remain toward attaining the status of a formal institutional structure. The acceleration of this process has been further reinforced by various emerging risks and threats, which increasingly demonstrate that regional challenges can no longer be effectively addressed without coordinated regional mechanisms. As these developments continue to evolve, there is growing confidence that such issues can be resolved through regional agreements. Ultimately, the completion of this process is expected to open new and broader opportunities for the Central Asian states in the future.

Keywords: Central Asia, globalization, regional structure, integration, institutionalization, United Nations (UN), General Assembly, European Union, hydropower, border, delimitation, demarcation, transport corridor, multimodal transport, transport logistics, C5+1, geopolitics.

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, while developed states continue to expand their capacities and strengthen their international influence, developing countries increasingly face structural and systemic challenges in adapting to global processes. Moreover, there exist a range of issues that are confined to specific geographical regions and require regionally tailored solutions. In this context, addressing challenges collectively through structured and coordinated mechanisms proves significantly more effective than isolated national approaches. Against this backdrop, the deepening integration of Central Asian states represents a promising trajectory for the future. Historically, the countries of the region share common cultural, religious, and linguistic characteristics, which in principle should facilitate a smoother integration process. However, due to differences in governance models and political priorities, this process has encountered various obstacles. Despite these

challenges, recent developments indicate a notable and positive shift in regional cooperation dynamics. The emergence of political will has been a crucial prerequisite for this transformation, and the Consultative Meetings of the Central Asian Heads of State have served as an important institutional expression of this will. The origins of this platform date back to 2017. In this regard, at the international conference on regional cooperation held under the auspices of the United Nations in Samarkand, the President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, emphasized that addressing pressing regional challenges requires a shared sense of responsibility among Central Asian states. He further noted that this necessitates continuous mutual consultation among the countries of the region.

As stated by the President of Uzbekistan, "Our approaches in this regard stem from the recognition that there is a real need today to jointly seek solutions to common regional challenges. This

Corresponding author: Mirzobek Abdullayev Norbek ugli

Received: 07 Feb 2026; **Accepted:** 16 Feb 2026; **Published:** 20 Feb 2026

Copyright © 2026 The Author(s): This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution- Non-Commercial-No Derivatives 4.0 (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) International License

approach was also reflected in the statements of the foreign ministers of Central Asian countries during the 72nd session of the United Nations General Assembly” [1]. Subsequently, the Consultative Meetings commenced their activities, with Kazakhstan assuming the role of the first host country. To date, seven such meetings have been held, with the most recent two laying the foundation for unprecedented opportunities in the region. In recent years, amid the escalation of environmental, economic, border, and energy security challenges, the significance of this platform has further increased. While some issues have already found partial solutions, the long-term objective of establishing Central Asia as a coherent and influential region in global affairs makes deeper integration essential. The current era of geopolitical turbulence simultaneously presents both risks and opportunities; in such a context, states that act swiftly and decisively are more likely to achieve strategic success. Therefore, the transformation of the Consultative Meetings into a more formal political structure is increasingly necessary. For this platform to evolve into an effective regional mechanism, it must first undergo institutionalization, followed by inclusive reforms. In this regard, democratic transformations in Central Asian states—such as the separation of powers, judicial independence, and freedom of the media—are of critical importance for ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of regional integration processes.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design based on descriptive and analytical approaches to examine the process of regional integration in Central Asia, with a particular focus on emerging security and cooperation structures. The research is primarily grounded in secondary data sources, including academic literature, policy papers, official reports, international conference materials, and statistical data provided by regional and international organizations. A comparative-historical method is applied to analyze integration processes by drawing parallels between Central Asia and other regional organizations, such as the European Union, in order to identify key drivers and stages of institutional development. In addition, a geopolitical analysis framework is used to assess the influence of external actors and global power dynamics on regional cooperation

mechanisms. Content analysis is employed to examine official speeches, declarations, and policy documents of Central Asian states, particularly those related to consultative meetings and regional summits. This allows for the identification of dominant narratives, political intentions, and strategic priorities within the integration agenda. Furthermore, the study adopts an interdisciplinary approach, combining elements of political science, international relations, and regional studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of integration dynamics. The research does not rely on primary field data; instead, it focuses on systematic interpretation and synthesis of existing scholarly and institutional sources. Overall, this methodological framework enables a structured evaluation of Central Asia’s integration process, highlighting both its achievements and ongoing challenges within a rapidly changing global and regional environment.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Integration is a complex and multidimensional process that requires the fulfillment of several essential stages and conditions in order to be effectively translated into practice. Among these prerequisites are political will, economic necessity, and ideological underpinning (i.e., the human factor), all of which serve as fundamental pillars of integration. The concept of integration emerged in academic discourse in the late 19th century and is inherently subjective, as states retain the sovereign right to choose their partners for cooperation and unification. In this context, the size, level of development, or economic capacity of states is not of decisive importance. As Charles-Louis Montesquieu noted in *The Spirit of the Laws*, integration is fundamentally a process of unification in response to shared threats, and therefore implies equality among participating states.

From a historical perspective, integration processes within international organizations have typically been driven by specific material interests. For instance, the formation of the European Union was initially based on cooperation in coal and steel industries. Similarly, in Central Asia, a comparable resource-based integrative dynamic is currently emerging, particularly in relation to water resource management. In the modern world, water can either divide or unite a region, and in the case of Central

Asia, it increasingly serves as a factor of unification. Through equitable water distribution, regional water security can be ensured. Cooperation in the water-energy sector, including projects such as the Rogun Hydropower Plant, the joint utilization of the Kambarata HPP-1, and the rational use of the Chashma spring between Tashkent and Bishkek, is beneficial not only for Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, but for the entire region. This reflects a shift in perception from “ours” and “theirs” to a shared regional identity — “this belongs to all of us, the Central Asian community.” In this sense, Central Asian states are not merely neighboring countries; rather, they constitute a single regional structure, while external neighbors include countries such as China, Russia, and Iran. Such a conceptual shift is essential for deeper regional consolidation. Another major environmental challenge in the region is the Aral Sea disaster. The Aral Sea, once one of the largest inland water bodies in the world, is now rapidly disappearing. Its ecological degradation negatively affects not only the environment but also the political, economic, and tourism sectors of Central Asia. In the 20th century, this tragedy became a consequence of excessive resource exploitation, and today it represents a shared regional ecological crisis.

Furthermore, the Consultative Meetings of the Central Asian Heads of State have played a crucial role as a political driver of integration. In his recent article, the President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, stated: “The large-scale transformation of the world order, increasing risks aimed at fragmenting the global economy, and the intensification of challenges related to climate change, food security, and energy security strengthen our aspiration to unite efforts” [2, p. 1]. In the modern world, economics is the leading sphere of development, and this is equally true for Central Asia. A key question in the integration process is how economic unification can be achieved. Empirical evidence suggests that countries with high levels of mutual trade face fewer barriers to integration. However, historically, intra-regional trade among Central Asian states has remained relatively low. According to economic theory, geographically proximate states are expected to maintain strong trade relations; the absence of such dynamics in the region has largely been attributed to previously closed governance systems. Nevertheless, in the last two to three

years, a significant increase in trade turnover has been observed. For instance, over the past eight years, the GDP of Central Asian countries has grown nearly 2.5 times, reaching approximately 520 billion USD, while total foreign trade has more than doubled, reaching 253 billion USD. Intra-regional trade has also doubled to nearly 11 billion USD, and mutual investments have increased by 5.6 times. In the case of Uzbekistan alone, trade with Central Asian countries increased from 2.4 billion USD in 2016 to 7.2 billion USD in 2024, while the number of joint enterprises exceeded 1,800 [3, p. 2]. This economic progress has been facilitated by improvements in border relations across the region. Although territorial and border delimitation issues have historically been a source of tension, including armed conflicts, recent developments have significantly improved the situation. Notably, similar processes occurred in the United States and the European Union, where internal conflicts preceded integration. Since 2017, border relations in Central Asia have gradually improved, with systematic progress in delimitation and demarcation processes. In particular, during the international conference held in Samarkand on 10–11 November 2017 under the auspices of the United Nations, agreements were reached regarding disputed border issues between Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. The delimitation process with Kazakhstan had already been completed, while agreements with Turkmenistan were initially signed in Ashgabat in 2000 and later reinvigorated in 2017 through renewed intergovernmental negotiations. Discussions with Afghanistan in February 2018 addressed the strengthening of border areas along the Amu Darya River. Agreements with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have significantly improved economic cooperation, increased trade turnover, and facilitated the free movement of citizens across borders [4]. A particularly notable achievement was the ability of citizens to cross the Uzbekistan–Kyrgyzstan border using only ID cards, which became a model for regional cooperation. Furthermore, the resolution of border disputes between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in March of this year marked a major milestone in regional stability. In addition, on March 31, the President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, participated in a trilateral meeting in Khujand with the Presidents of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. During the meeting, he congratulated both parties on the final resolution of

all outstanding issues and the signing of the border delimitation agreement. It was emphasized that these documents, along with the agreement on the junction point of the three state borders, will contribute to ensuring stability, sustainable development, and strengthening the international standing of the region. The ceremonial unveiling of the “Friendship Stela” symbolizes the strengthening of good-neighborly relations, trust, and strategic partnership among the fraternal nations [5]. These positive border developments are also crucial for the development of transport corridors that significantly enhance the regional economy. Given that Central Asia is a landlocked or semi-landlocked region, rail transport remains the most efficient and cost-effective mode of logistics. The development of such infrastructure is further supported by China’s “Belt and Road Initiative,” which aims to connect China, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan through railway networks, creating significant economic opportunities. This initiative allows Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to benefit from transit fees, customs revenues, and increased foreign direct investment. Moreover, Chinese companies are relocating parts of their production facilities to Central Asian countries to reduce production and export costs, particularly for European markets. For example, Chinese firms may process Uzbek cotton locally and export finished goods directly to Europe, thereby creating joint ventures that generate tax revenues and employment opportunities in Uzbekistan [6]. In addition to these developments, the inclusion of Kyrgyzstan in multimodal transport corridors linking Uzbekistan–Turkmenistan–Iran–Turkey–Europe further demonstrates the strengthening of regional connectivity. The existing Wakhan Corridor also represents a potential strategic opportunity for enhancing trade and logistics cooperation in Central Asia.

REFERENCES

1. Mirziyoyev, Shavkat. (2017). Mirziyoyev: Markaziy Osiyo rahbarlari maslahat kengashi tashkil etaylik. Amerika Ovozi. <https://www.amerikaovozi.com/a/uzbekistan-international-forum/4110951.html>
2. “Yangi O‘zbekiston” va “Правда Востока” gazetlari tahririyati. (2025, November 13). Newspaper issue No. 234 (1560). Sharq Publishing House, Tashkent.
3. Ibid.
4. Markaziy Osiyoda chegaralarni delimitatsiya va demarkatsiya qilishdagi asosiy muammolar. (2018, August 16). Kun.uz. <https://kun.uz/news/2018/08/16/markaziy-osieda-kegaralarni-delimitatsiya-va-demarkatsiya-qilishdagi-asosiy-muammolar>
5. O‘zbekiston Prezidenti davlat rahbarlarining uch tomonlama uchrashuvida ishtirok etdi. (n.d.).

Regional integration not only reduces external geopolitical pressures but also creates opportunities for constructive engagement with major global powers. A clear example is the C5+1 format, which has become an important platform for Central Asian states in global diplomacy. The C5+1 mechanism is not merely a consultative forum but a manifestation of collective political will aimed at addressing globalization challenges while preserving national sovereignty and identity. Uzbekistan plays a leading role in this architectural framework and is increasingly consolidating its position within the process [7]. To date, approximately ten high-level C5+1 meetings have been held with major powers such as Russia, China, and the United States, seven of which were formalized at the official level. This demonstrates the growing geopolitical consolidation of Central Asia and its strengthening position in the international system.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the integration of Central Asia represents a long and complex process, the final stages of which are now gradually taking shape. Moving forward, the region is expected to increasingly present itself on the global stage as a more cohesive and unified community. This development, in turn, may serve as a foundation for Central Asia’s transformation into a politically mature, economically advanced, and culturally interconnected region. In this process, the role of societies is as crucial as that of political actors. Beyond state-level initiatives, public engagement, mutual trust, and societal cooperation among the peoples of the region are essential drivers of sustainable integration. As trust between societies continues to strengthen, the process of integration is likely to accelerate, ultimately enabling Central Asia to emerge as a significant and well-developed regional actor in the international system.

- President of the Republic of Uzbekistan.
<https://president.uz/uz/lists/view/8001>
6. “Bir makon, bir yo‘l” O‘zbekiston uchun qanday foyda keltiradi? (2023, October 15). Daryo.
<https://daryo.uz/2023/10/15/bir-kamar-bir-yol-ozbekiston-uchun-qanday-foйда-keltiradi/>
7. Xidirov, Abduaziz. (n.d.). C5+1 Markaziy Osiyo diplomatiyasi tarixida muhim bosqich. Uzbekistan National News Agency (O‘zA).
https://uza.uz/oz/posts/c5-1-markaziy-osiyo-diplomatiyasi-tarixida-muhim-bosqich_779777