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Emerging demands and new
answers: the experiment of
SCO in the Central
Asian Region

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Abstract

Questo lavoro si pone l'obiettivo di esplorare genesi, scopi e riverberazioni di un'organizzazione diretta a garantire sicurezza e stabilità in Asia Centrale: l'Organizzazione di Shanghai per la Cooperazione.

Fondata il 15 giugno 2001 da un patto stipulato tra Cina, Russia, Kazakistan, Kirghizistan, Tagikistan e Uzbekistan, questo organismo si pone l'obiettivo di preservare la sicurezza nel territorio dell'Asia Centrale e nei singoli stati suoi membri, seguendo un modello totalmente nuovo di cooperazione.

La SCO, può considerarsi un organismo sorto dalle macerie del crollo dell'Unione Sovietica, ed ha segnato un punto di svolta nelle relazioni tra Cina e Russia, deterioratesi sin dagli anni '60. In particolare, essa è il risultato diretto dei negoziati intrapresi dagli stati citati, ad eccezione dell'Uzbekistan, a partire dal 1991. All'indomani del crollo del regime sovietico, infatti, la Cina si ritrovò a dover risolvere annose dispute di confine non più con una singola controparte, ma con le repubbliche di nuova indipendenza confinanti, Kazakistan, Kirghizistan, Tagikistan e Russia. Il contenzioso riguardava 4600 km² di frontiera e risaliva al periodo zarista. In alcuni casi, il più eclatante nel 1969, esso aveva portato Mosca e Pechino sull'orlo di un conflitto armato. Il 1990 diede il via ad un riavvicinamento tra i due giganti dell'est, che da quel momento intrapresero negoziati per avviare politiche di buon vicinato e disarmo sulle linee di confine.

Il primo motivo per cui la Cooperazione di Shanghai richiama l'attenzione su di sé, è l'entità delle sue dimensioni, poiché essa ricopre tre quinti dell'intero continente Eurasiatico. Da una prospettiva più ravvicinata, la SCO, com'è comunemente chiamata con il suo acronimo, offre un caso di studio d'eccezione anche per via dei membri che la compongono, e soprattutto per le due potenze, Russia e Cina. La partecipazione di quest'ultima rende la SCO l'unico caso di organizzazione per la sicurezza al mondo a cui gli Stati Uniti non prendono parte, al contrario di Pechino.

La SCO potrebbe essere candidata a giocare un ruolo di rilievo sulla scena internazionale, sia per il ruolo geopolitico che Russia e Cina giocano a livello re-

gionale tanto quanto globale, sia per la centralità delle problematiche presenti in Asia Centrale per la comunità internazionale. Inoltre quest'area geografica riveste un'importanza preponderante per le ricchezze del suo territorio, che offre accesso a cospicue riserve energetiche e materie prime, a basso costo e facilmente reperibili.

La prospettiva di un'eventuale adesione in qualità di membri a pieno titolo di Mongolia, Pakistan, India e Iran, nazioni che allo stato attuale godono esclusivamente dello status di osservatori, offre nuove prospettive e chiavi di lettura relativamente a questa organizzazione. Con l'ammissione di questi ultimi, il suo equilibrio risulterebbe modificato per la rilevanza sia economica che politica che tali stati hanno e per la loro crucialità all'interno delle dinamiche mondiali.

Inoltre la SCO costituisce un caso speciale, in paragone ad altre organizzazioni a carattere regionale che operano nell'ambito della sicurezza, affondando questa specificità nella base stessa dei suoi principi. La SCO, infatti, propone una interpretazione non tradizionale in tema di sicurezza, poiché non tradizionali sono le sfide che è chiamata ad affrontare nel complesso humus su cui deve operare.

Comunemente concepita in termini di protezione militare contro minacce esterne ai confini statali, la sicurezza assume per questo organismo connotati unici, dati dalla transnazionalità delle questioni afferenti alla sfera etnica, religiosa, dalla struttura ancora in prevalenza clanica di buona parte della sua popolazione e dal contesto che si è affermato con la dissoluzione dell'Unione Sovietica. Nel complesso tessuto centro asiatico i confini appaiono sfuocati, labili e facilmente valicabili. In un contesto tanto intricato, dove ad uno stato non corrisponde una singola identità nazionale, né alle moltitudini di minoranze etniche i confini circoscritti di uno stato, dove le molte risorse naturali ed energetiche sono mal distribuite sul territorio, le minacce non sono esterne, ma interne.

Lo "Spirito di Shanghai" detta le linee guida di una cooperazione che richiama l'antico "spirito della seta", dove la diversità culturale era motivo di scambio e ricchezza e i rapporti commerciali, veicolo di idee e tradizioni. Allo stesso modo, l'Organizzazione per la Cooperazione di Shanghai rappresenta le diversità etniche, economiche e politiche degli stati di cui si compone, come un ele-

mento di vantaggio. In quest'ottica i membri della SCO stabiliscono il principio di sovranità nazionale quale punto cardine insieme al rifiuto di qualsiasi forma di ingerenza da parte di stati terzi all'interno delle singole politiche nazionali, compresi gli interventi umanitari. L'accordo di Dushanbe, prima, e la dichiarazione di Shanghai, dal 2001, sancirono il diritto e la titolarità dei singoli stati a scegliere la propria via per lo sviluppo e i propri mezzi, sulla base della specificità del loro retaggio storico e culturale. Questo principio si pone in netta antitesi con la formula occidentale di promozione della democrazia e dei diritti umani, in quanto standard universalmente validi e irrinunciabili.

La tutela dell'integrità territoriale e la rinuncia all'uso della forza nella risoluzione delle controversie furono adottati quali capi saldi per il raggiungimento dell'obiettivo finale, la pace e la stabilità. Inoltre il gruppo che si costituì formalmente con status di organizzazione nel vertice del 2001, fondò il rapporto tra i partecipanti su basi egualitarie, come si può riscontrare nel processo decisionale che vede tutti i membri titolari di diritto di veto, oltre ad attribuire preponderanza al dialogo e al consenso. Nonostante ciò, va riconosciuto che la partecipazione al budget su base proporzionale condiziona la realizzazione dei programmi, ponendo i membri più potenti e i loro interessi in una posizione di favore rispetto a quelli più deboli.

Il principio dell'eguaglianza fa capo ad una visione di più ampio respiro abbracciata dall'organizzazione stessa, per la quale lo scopo finale è lo ottenimento della “democratizzazione delle relazioni internazionali”, dove nell'ordine mondiale gli stati possano ricoprire ruoli paritari, ambire indistintamente a difendere i propri interessi, contrariamente alla visione di un ordine unipolare.

Per portare a compimento questo programma nella difficile area dell'Asia Centrale, i membri della SCO si sono prefissi l'obiettivo primario di eliminare i fattori non tradizionali di rischio alla stabilità stessa della regione. La lotta al terrorismo, estremismo e separatismo fu dichiarata quale prerogativa della sua agenda nel 2001, prima ancora degli attentati dell'11 settembre, in risposta al crescere nella regione della minaccia talebana e del crimine organizzato, e al richiamo che il terrorismo islamico esercitava sui gruppi terroristici, estremisti e separatisti locali.

Zone particolarmente turbolente come la valle di Fergana, divisa tra Kirghizstan, Tajikistan e Uzbekistan, la Repubblica Autonoma dello Xinjiang per la Cina, e il Caucaso del Nord per la Federazione Russa, costituiscono una spina nel fianco per le leadership nazionali, poste al cospetto del pericolo di spinte secessioniste e attentati, che possano minare la loro integrità territoriale e sicurezza. Con lo scioglimento del regime sovietico, molte dinamiche sino ad allora contenute sono esplose in Asia Centrale. In realtà, occasioni di disordine si erano già verificate durante il periodo gorbaceviano, quali manifestazioni di un crescente malcontento della popolazione per motivi connessi al declino economico di questa periferia meridionale ed al deteriorarsi del suo rapporto con il centro politico. Durante l'ultimo ventennio sovietico, il sottosviluppo combinato al cattivo sviluppo delle risorse naturali della regione, l'assenza di aiuti economici, nonché la percezione di essere considerati inferiori culturalmente da Mosca, hanno alimentato la nascita di risentimento e correnti di opposizione al regime comunista.

L'islam giocò un ruolo fondamentale in questa fase. Represso per un settantennio da persistenti politiche di secolarizzazione della società, visse nell'ultimo periodo una fase di riscoperta. Nonostante la dipendenza economica che legava le repubbliche del "Vicino Oriente" russo al centro del regime, diventò sempre più pregnante la convinzione che questi territori fossero considerati da Mosca come secondari al resto della Unione Sovietica. L'improvvisa fine del regime accentuò le difficoltà nella regione, che ne fu colta impreparata, e le sue debolezze, come l'inconsistenza dei nuovi stati indipendenti, alla ricerca di basi ideologiche per assicurarsi legittimazione e durabilità. Intanto l'Asia Centrale diventava sempre più teatro di azione per gruppi terroristici, legati ai loro vicini dell'Afghanistan, tra i quali è possibile annoverare il Movimento Islamico dell'Uzbekistan e l' Hizb-ut-Tahrir. Nati con l'obiettivo di sovvertire il potere in carica e riportare in auge la purezza dei fondamenti originari dell'islam, ambiscono alla costituzione di uno stato islamico. A causa dell'alta concentrazione di uiguri - un'etnia che da tempo reclamava il diritto all'indipendenza dal territorio cinese nel vicino Xinjiang - nelle repubbliche confinanti e del loro coinvolgimento comprovato in Afghanistan, Pechino riscontrò ragioni solide per prendere parte alla tutela della stabilità in Asia Centrale.

Garantire la sicurezza regionale equivalse pertanto a preservare lo status quo contro ogni forma di sovversione del sistema vigente. La SCO fa eccezione, rispetto alle altre organizzazioni incentrate sulla sicurezza, nella concezione stessa di difesa: essa è infatti riscontrabile non nel ricorso alle armi, bensì nella realizzazione di un ambiente favorevole agli scambi di tipo culturale ed economico, allo sviluppo e al confronto. La formula messa in atto dalla SCO non prevede una lotta armata contro quelli che essa definisce i “tre mali”, ma piuttosto ambisce ad estirpare le radici stesse di questi fenomeni, attribuendo priorità alla cooperazione economica in quanto funzionale a minare il malcontento sociale, sebbene essa si svolga prevalentemente su basi bilaterali.

La cooperazione in campo economico volta a dotare la regione di infrastrutture e collegamenti è la seconda anima della SCO, strumentale al mantenimento dello status quo. Dal 2003 essa si è dotata anche di un altro ambito di intervento finalizzato alla difesa, quello militare, attraverso esercitazioni antiterroristiche su larga scala e su base annua, in forma preventiva. Gli stati membri hanno allargato la cooperazione anche alla sfera culturale, avviando una serie di accordi di scambio per favorire e la conoscenza delle diverse realtà culturali dell'area centro asiatica.

Tuttavia la lotta al terrorismo è stata condotta su vari fronti, e in alcuni casi il modello adottato dall'organizzazione di Shanghai è stato contestato per aver fatto ricorso a metodi poco rispettosi dei principi fondamentali annoverati tra i diritti umani.

Funzionando come organismo interstatale e in assoluta opposizione all'ingerenza nella sovranità nazionale, la Cooperazione di Shanghai si è rivelata impassibile di fronte all'uso di brutali metodi di repressione, in risposta ad insurrezioni etichettate come terroristiche, ma che spesso erano manifestazioni di opposizione ai regimi dittatoriali. Casi come la Rivoluzione dei Tulipani in Kirghizistan e le rivolte di Andijan del 2005 segnano punti cruciali nell'analisi di questo organismo regionale. Gli stessi metodi antiterroristici adoperati dalla Russia nella prima e seconda guerra cecena, e le operazioni speciali odierne su cui gravano cospicue denunce di violazione dei diritti umani, nonché le sanguinose repressioni cinesi in risposta alle occasioni di rivolte separatiste in Xin-

jiang, gettano un'ombra sul labile confine tra sicurezza e diritto all'autodeterminazione, sovranità nazionale e rispetto dei diritti umani.

La natura di questa organizzazione è per via di questo e di altri fattori poco chiara agli occhi di chi dal mondo occidentale si avvicina al suo studio.

I percorsi che hanno portato la Russia post-sovietica e la Cina verso questo terreno comune sono stati diversi. La prima fu spinta prevalentemente dalla volontà di continuare a far rientrare il limes centro asiatico all'interno della sua sfera di influenza, essendo ad esso storicamente legata, e con lo scopo di mantenere il monopolio del controllo delle risorse energetiche a basso costo. Oltretutto, la Russia costituiva inizialmente, per le deboli repubbliche di nuova indipendenza, l'unico punto di riferimento a cui rivolgersi durante la difficile transizione.

La politica cinese in Asia Centrale fu inizialmente più cauta e meno invasiva, prevalentemente improntata alla sicurezza dei suoi stessi confini nazionali e al contenimento dello Xinjiang. La Cina era intenzionata innanzitutto a procurarsi uno sbocco nei vicini mercati di quelle repubbliche, allo scopo di avviare una politica di riqualificazione economica della sua arretrata provincia occidentale, passaggio considerato indispensabile all'annullamento dei disordini sociali.

Ma Russia e Cina non sono le uniche potenze ad essersi affacciate sul panorama centro asiatico. L'espressione "Nuovo Grande Gioco" è stata ripresa per descrivere la fitta trama di intrecci segnata dagli interessi perseguiti dai diversi attori presenti nella regione. Gli attacchi dell'11 settembre 2001 al World Trade Center hanno portato l'Afghanistan e l'Asia Centrale in generale al centro delle dinamiche geopolitiche mondiali.

La frenetica ricerca di risorse energetiche a livello internazionale, la concentrazione in Asia Centrale dei centri nevralgici del terrorismo, e la competizione aperta che vede essenzialmente i tre colossi Russia, Cina e Stati Uniti contendersi sfere di influenza tradizionali e nuovi territori da far gravitare attorno alla propria orbita, fanno di questo territorio un punto di attrazione per molti stati, vicini e non.

Sotto questo profilo lo studio della SCO è stato spesso sottovalutato e viziato dal paragone con altre organizzazioni stabilitesi in Asia Centrale nel periodo

post-sovietico. In più casi esse sono state elogiate all'interno di vertici e dichiarazioni, rivelandosi però in seguito fortemente burocratizzate ed inoperative.

Esistono senza dubbio varie debolezze al suo interno, frutto soprattutto dei diversi interessi perseguiti dagli stati membri e dalla limitatezza delle risorse finanziarie stanziata per i progetti, oltre che della competizione che tuttavia sussiste tra le due potenze principali, Cina e Russia, evidente su vari fronti.

Al contempo, la SCO è temuta come una bomba ad orologeria soprattutto dagli USA e in particolare a partire dalle prime esercitazioni militari su larga scala e dall'avvio di discussioni sulla possibilità di avanzare programmi regionali di cooperazione energetica, che potrebbero trasformare questa organizzazione in una nuova OPEC.

Il possibile ingresso di India, Pakistan e Iran chiama in gioco ulteriori dispute internazionali e rischia di alterare l'equilibrio di potere che ha permesso sinora agli attori regionali di giocare ognuno il proprio ruolo, senza attentare realmente alla loro coesistenza pacifica. Argomenti di massima attualità come quelli riguardanti i rapporti con Iran e Stati Uniti, il dibattito sullo scudo missilistico e il ritiro delle truppe americane dall'Afghanistan aprono nuove scenari sui possibili sviluppi futuri di questa organizzazione. Pertanto molto dipenderà dall'approccio dei suoi membri verso le suddette ed altre questioni e se verranno affrontate su base bilaterale, come ancora spesso accade, o nel quadro di una risposta coordinata a livello regionale.



Source: http://www.eastlinetour.net/uzbekistan-mappa-centrale_asia_political.html

Introduction

The end of the Cold War period saw the rise of a large number of organisations in the ex-Soviet heartland with a multitude of tasks. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, composed of Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, was one of them.

The SCO, as it is more often referred to by its acronym, has its ancestor in the “Shanghai Five” group, a consultative group, which negotiations started in 1996 and were undertaken to find a definitive solution to the disputed 4600 square km border running along China, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. It was a table for China and Russia to move steps forward in ascertaining their own security on the borders, for the former, and their positions within the region, for the second. But surely it marked a milestone in their rapprochement, as they issued from a freeze in their relations that lasted since the '60s, and put them at strenuous, until risking open armed confrontation on the shared borderline in 1969.

The evolution of this round table of discussion into a structured organisation in 2001, with Uzbekistan joining it, marked an important turning point for security in the Central Asian region and for the protagonists involved.

Aiming at enforcing security among them and within the single states, the SCO members embarked in measures of good-neighbourliness, confidence-building and arm-reduction, and pledged to wage war on non-traditional threats in the region. What they put under the banner of “three evils” was to be identified in terrorist extremist and separatist boosts across the continent. For the sake of mutual benefit, encouraging economic development was the other side of the medal, functional to assist the new states in the transition process.

It is worth to be remarked that the newly independent republics were caught unprepared by the collapse of the Soviet Union, especially for their economies hanging in the balance. Besides, the seventy years of Soviet rule had impeded them to stay on their feet also on a cultural point of view, as nations, since none

of the weak Southern Muslim republics was heterogeneous on the point of view of ethnicity, after the modifications imposed on their demarcations line by Stalin since 1924. Religion was another critical element: overall, the people of the republics professed Islam, but the Soviet regime had made numerous efforts to secularise society, crippling their freedom of religion. The USSR demise flood in the exigence of reviving it and in some cases also of making it occupy a cardinal position in the every-day life and politics.

The internal unsteadiness, the transnational nature of regional issues related to ethnicity or to the unfair distribution of resources, together with the rising of fundamentalist Islam, aggravated by the closeness to war-torn Afghanistan, were relevant concerns for the new established republics.

As a response, the SCO ushered a new model of conceiving regional security, providing an interesting case study for international relations. Indeed the SCO applied a new philosophy inspired by "Asian values". Resuming the "Silk Road spirit" and cultural heritage, it focused on the richness embedded within multicultural milieux, the advantages coming from mutual exchange, and the benefits of cultural diversity. The distinguishing characteristic that makes the SCO an exception in the universe of regional organisations in the world, is its foundation on the respect of state sovereignty and total opposition to interference of various nature on domestic affairs, including humanitarian and democratisation-like missions.

Probably this would not be so impressive, if the states involved as full members were not ranked as they are although at different levels, as dictatorships. Preserving the integrity of their territories against separatist boosts, stability in the region against extremist activities and the terrorist-led so-called "non-traditional" threats, like drugs, arms, human and other illicit smuggling, are the overriding points listed on the SCO agenda. But what also differentiates SCO from other security organisations in the world, is its holistic approach to security. As a matter of fact it is conceived not in terms of traditional military defence against threats of external origins, but more as an integrative process that aims at creating the bases for a harmonious coexistence among the states through a multidisciplinary approach, covering economic development, military integration and cultural exchanges, albeit at different degrees.

The SCO is a special case of interstate body, compared to Western examples provided for instance by the European Union. Indeed the logic of security held by the SCO members is the one, according to them, that fits the specificity of that particular environment, as Western model of regional cooperation can not be suitable as a unique standard. The safeguard of the status quo, the defence of elites authority and the annihilation of any form of internal threat to their government is a main concern to the SCO members, and terrorism, extremism and separatism are addressed as a main source of problems. Hot regions such as the Ferghana Valley, Northern Caucasus, the Xinjiang are for the states involved an urgent threat to manage, and a prior challenge.

During its up to now eleven years of life, the SCO has went through some changes. Firstly, it underwent a process of institutionalization, that endowed it with institutional offices and bodies, secondly its agenda was widened and its methods of operation, and thirdly it opened to the collaboration with other agencies present in the Central Asian region, and other actors desirous of operating by its side. Security is by them considered as principally an internal matter, rather than external.

The 2001 events put the limelight on the complexity of the Central Asian heartland, the cross-border pattern of its features, the lingering clan society, the multifaceted hallmark of Islamic religion and the core position it hold within society. The centrality of Afghanistan for the world politics, and its incidence on the stability of the region and the preservation of steadiness, attracted the attention on this stretch of the Eurasian landmass, despite it was the fulcrum of the foreign policy of a certain number of states, as Russia, China and the U.S., already since the end of the Soviet Union.

The interplays involved in the region are generally dubbed with the expression “New Great Game”, recalling the race in which Russia and Great Britain faced each other for supremacy in the XIX century. Today this play is even knottier, as at stake there is a more conspicuous number of interests, and a larger number of stakeholders.

Under this light, the SCO appears as an instrument in the hands of great powers, that are involved in an open competition for sway over Central Asia. Undoubtedly it is an important mechanism for Russia to preserve its historical

influence, for China, to contribute to its ambition of economic self-sufficiency, and for the Central Asian republics to stabilize their domestic situation, after the difficulties issued from the USSR implosion. But in the time, SCO has also posed itself as a possible threat for players as the U.S., which presence through NATO is assessed to be mutually fruitful both for itself and its Central Asian counterparts.

SCO has also envisaged in its agenda to enlarge membership to new neighbouring countries such as Mongolia, India, Pakistan and Iran, what would duplicate its weight and could make it appear as a bomb waiting to explode, face to the American stakes.

The aim of this work is not to provide an answer about the future development of such an organisation, but simply it is an attempt to analyse in detail what renders it special in front of other bodies, its background, the paths that drove its member states towards it and other players to draw close on it.

The first part lays its attention on the steps that brought to its foundation and the most important stages it went through, that in a way marked its building. A particular reference in the first chapter will be made on the period that preceded the Soviet lashing, for what relates the ups and downs in Sino-Russian relations upon the disputed borders, that after 1991 became constitutive part of the new independent republics. The chapter is structured on three main phases: the SCO constitution, institutionalisation and enlargement.

In the second chapter the focus is stressed on the SCO's area of intervention and its complexity: Central Asia. In particular It will be explored the origins of the current problems, through a brief study of the main prerogatives resumed from the Soviet legacy and what persisted in the society, what there existed prior to the Soviet Union as a traditional heritage, what was forged by the Soviet rule, and how the new reality of transition and nation-building was faced by the local leaderships. Moreover the "three evils" will be approached in details and three of the most critical cases interested by this phenomenon will be explored, Uzbekistan, North Caucasus and Xinjiang.

The third part will shed the light on the greater powers in the region, Russia and China. In special way they will be examined in the links that connected them with Central Asia before, during and after the collapse of the Soviet Uni-

on. China and Russia appear in this analysis as stakeholders of great relief, that nurture their relations within the area both under the umbrella of multilateral cooperation and through enhancing bilateral exchanges.

The fourth and last chapter will envisage to provide a balance sheet on the SCO perception, looking at it from a bird's eye and within the framework of the strategic interest other actors cultivate in the region and what this area and the SCO itself means to international relations. Namely, the attention will be addressed on the U.S. presence and the regional interplays and gears, its activity put in motion. In the first part the SCO will be treated from the point of view of the elements that render it a possible enemy or a rival for the Western world. In the last part, on the contrary, it will be scrutinized through the lens of its weaknesses and internal divisions and competitions, that do not make it possible for SCO to become a dreadful bomb ready to subvert the system.

This work has not the pretension of providing a final response to the questions opened on the SCO, but instead it aims at understanding the importance of its activity, through the study of the motivations that led to its formation, and especially the reasons at the basis of its unique model of security cooperation.

I Chapter

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Three Steps Towards Cooperation



Source: <http://esreport.wordpress.com/2011/06/23/sco-lanti-nato>

1 The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is a security organisation composed of the People's Republic of China, Russia and four of the Central Asian Republics Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Nowadays this organisation covers over 32 million square km¹, is extended on 3/5 of the Eurasian region, counts about one billion and a half people, about 1/4 of the world population, and is the only case of security organisation including as a member China but not U.S.². It was inaugurated in June 2001 with the adoption of its Declaration, but this act was the culmination of a structured process started in 1992, in which the Soviet Union, China and the ups and downs in their relations played a main role. At the early beginning, in fact, the target was for the two sides to solve old suspended questions, pertaining demarcation and armament and starting good-neighbourliness policies, by implementing confidence-building measures³.

Later the contact group evolved in a more complex mechanism of consultation for the cooperation and development of the Central Asia territory, with the long-term objective of building a stable and secure environment. The project included an eclectic programme covering different spheres of the geopolitical and cultural life of the states committed to it. Indeed the mission of the SCO ranges from the struggle against what are mostly perceived as the worst menaces in the region, terrorism, extremism and separatism, economic cooperation, with a particular stress on the energetic resources, and cooperation in the cultural and educational sphere, aimed at allowing a constructive exchange among the many different cultures⁴.

¹ Loredana di Placido, *Shanghai Cooperation Organization: un modello di cooperazione regionale in Asia Centrale*, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici, giugno 2006 n.6, p. 9

² Ingmar Oldberg, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Powerhouse or Paper Tiger?*, FOI Swedish Research Defence Agency, Stockholm, June 2007

³ Jing-dong-Yuan, *Sino-Russian Confidence Building Measures*, Working Paper n.20, January 1998, p. 3 www.ligi.ubc.ca/sites/liu/files/Publications/webwp20.pdf

⁴ Pan Guang, *The Tashkent Summit Meeting: the Steady Advance of the SCO*, CEF Quarterly, The Journal of China-Eurasian Forum, October 2004, p.8
www.chinaeurasia.org/images/stories/isdpcefq/CEFQ200502/CEFQ200502.pdf

1. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

What is particular about the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is that it is a unique case of “organisation”, that is not likely to be found in other cases in the world: the SCO sets as its guidelines an idea of cooperation and a series of principles, inspired to a philosophy which is far from being associable to that of the Western-type-organizations⁵.

In this chapter we will go through the steps in the organization's background, constitution, consolidation, and completion.

The first part will discuss the conditions and events that, since the decline of the relations between China and USSR - living the apogee in frictions and clashes on lines in 1969 - brought to the formation of the contact group - in the wake of the split of the Soviet Union, until arriving at the institutionalization of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2001-2. The evolution will also be read through the lens of the embryonic and later agreements that the members signed, and the changing of the actors' perspectives, strategies, and common ambitions.

The second part will be devoted to the phase of the implementation of the agenda, in the period going from 2003 to 2004, focussing on the departments which compose the SCO and allow its functioning. A particular attention will be devolved to the struggle against “the three” evils and to the challenges to regional security, and their centrality the SCO activity.

The last part will examine the third phase in the SCO building process, in the light of the external relations with countries and organizations that have expressed their interest in the organisation's destiny. The birth of the status of observer will be treated as well as that of the dialogue partner, with a particular focus on the disputed possibility of a future enlargement.

⁵ Stephen Aris, *Eurasian Regionalism., The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2011, pp.15, 41

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when the Russian legions penetrated in the northern part of Mongolia, Nerchinsk and Yakasa. A century later, the Russian forces had entered the area close to the Northwest Xinjiang, the lake Balkash area, on the Western frontier with China⁷. The miles gained, together with some other kilometres seized during the early XIX century, were registered through a number of treaties signed with the Qing Chinese dynasty, that were considered unequal by most part of Chinese historians⁸.

The issue arose again in 1963, in the frame of the Cold War, and the deteriorating relations between USSR and China, that reached their lowest point at the end of the '60s.

It became more and more evident to the Chinese politburo in the wake of 1964, that the Soviet Union was adopting an excessively expansionist policy, like some military agreement with Mongolia witnessed, and that among its plans there was the possible near occupation of Xinjiang, the external Western province of China⁹. On Mao's part the urgency emerged of a new treaty that could render the still hill defined delimitations stable, not by negotiating their conditions anew, but simply basing it on the status quo and so, on the past agreed terms¹⁰. The years between 1966 and 1969 viewed an escalation in the frictions causing continuous clashes and casualties on the Eastern borderline, on the little-sized Zhenbao (or Damansky) and Qiliquin islands on the Ussuri river. Those islands had been claimed by the Soviets to be under their control and ownership, as stated in the “unequal treaties”, violating the international law on the division of the rivers and waterways¹¹. In the climax of the opera-

⁷ idem

⁸ Jyotsna Bakshi, Russia-China Boundary Agreement: Relevance for India, Strategic Analysis, Monthly Journal IDSA, Vol.24, No.10, January 2001, www.idsa-india.org/an-jan-4-01html.html

⁹ Neville Maxwell, *How the Sino-Russian Boundary Conflict was Finally Settled: From Nerchinsk 1689, to Vladivostok 2005, via Zhenbao Island 1969*, in Iwashita Akihiro “Eager Eyes Fixed on Eurasia”, Vol.2 “Russia and its Eastern Edge”, Slavic Research Centre, University of Hokkaido, Sapporo, 2007.

¹⁰ Yang Kuisong, *The Sino-Soviet clash of 1969: From Zhenbao island to Sino-American rapprochement*, p.24, *Cold War History*, Vol.1, n.1, 2000

¹¹ Apart from the Chinese label assigned to those treaties the International Law provision is objectively differing from what Soviet Union was implementing with China, by stating its governance on these islands. In fact the International Law in force on this issue, decrees that, in accordance with the “thalweg doctrine”, “boundary watercourses must be divided by the point of greatest depth, if navigable, or the median line in the other cases.”

Carlo Focarelli, *Lezioni di Diritto Internazionale Privato*, Morlacchi Editore, Perugia, 2005,

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tions, the apogee was reached in the early days of March 1969 along the Ussuri¹², and again in August, when USSR dispatched about 300 units on the Soviet side of the frontier with Xinjiang¹³, who faced and immediately defeated the 30 soldiers deployed by the Chinese defence. The breaking up of an open conflict seemed to be more than a possibility, as the Chinese propaganda of that period demonstrates. The possession of nuclear warheads by both parts was frequently evoked when speaking about possible attacks¹⁴.

In the end, the '69 clashes did neither escalate into an all-round open war, nor the issue found an ultimate end, in spite of an informal meeting held by the two states foreign ministers. It coincided with Ho Chi Min's funerals, in the early days of September 1969, when Kosygin, the Russian minister, on his way back to Moscow, resolved to pass from Beijing. The meeting was informal due to Mao and his entourage's strong suspicions that it was no more than a pitfall, and for the same reason it was held in Beijing airport, rather than in the city centre. This was the chance for the two parts for having a frank conversation on the trouble spots (the alleged Chinese rejection of the unequal treaties, the Soviet threat of an armed attack), in a moment in which relations were at their poorest and worst, and both felt their national security jeopardized. It did not lead to a final official treaty, nor determined any definitive resolution on the disputed demarcations because of the sharp distrust between the two, but surely it contributed avoiding any kind of open conflict¹⁵.

Nevertheless, the road to negotiations was opened between the '69 and the '80s, but, due to the lack of a real interest on both parts in finding a compromise on some issues and a new fall in the relations, the question stalled until the beginning of the '80s, and even worsened as far as military units build-up was

p.259

¹² Neville Maxwell, *How the Sino-Russian Boundary Conflict was Finally Settled: From Nerchinsk 1689, to Vladivostok 2005, via Zhenbao Island 1969*, in Iwashita Akihiro "Eager Eyes Fixed on Eurasia", Vol.2 "Russia and its Eastern Edge", Slavic Research Centre, University of Hokkaido, Sapporo, 2007, p.63

¹³ Yang Kuisong, *The Sino-Soviet clash of 1969: From Zhenbao island to Sino-American reprochement*, p.24, *Cold War History*, Vol.1, n1, 2000

¹⁴ Jing-dong-Yuan, *Sino-Russian Confidence Building Measures*, Working Paper n.20, January 1998, p. 2 www.ligi.ubc.ca/sites/liu/files/Publications/webwp20.pdf

¹⁵ Yang Kuisong, *The Sino-Soviet clash of 1969: From Zhenbao island to Sino-American reprochement*, p.24, *Cold War History*, Vol.1, n1, 2000

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concerned, along the frontier¹⁶. It was indeed in the first years of the '80s that a relaxation of the tense atmosphere started, beginning with a refresh of bilateral relationships, and an initial opening to their normalization¹⁷.

July 1986 and September 1988 inaugurated a new direction for their declined relations and opened the path to a new Soviet policy towards Asia and Far East Asia, and the beginning of a confidence building process. On those dates, Mikhail Gorbachev, elected president of the Soviet Union in 1985, held two discourses, in Vladivostok in 1986 and in Krasnoyarsk in 1988, announcing his willingness to embark in a new policy towards the South Eastern region and China. Above all the initiative included the willingness of wielding the “thalweg doctrine” in line with the international law - as a solution to the age-old quarrel related to the administration of the Amur-Ussuri river. Its jurisdiction was later assigned to both countries, since it was split along the median line of the channel, and the Russian president decided the withdrawal of a large number of troops from multiple Eastern fronts, as part of his unilateral reduction international agenda¹⁸. According to some Eastern researchers, at this initial stage, while planning the confidence building measures to endorse, the primary objective was not properly cooperation, but the achievement of a “friendly relation”, leading to a “normalization”, which had to culminate with a recovery of the demarcation issue and arms reduction¹⁹.

In 1990, China and USSR endorsed an agreement that committed them to the reduction of military units on both sides, on an equal bases, and to the deepening of mutual trust, namely the “*Agreement on the Guidelines of Mutual Reduction Forces and Confidence-Building in the Military Field in the Area of Soviet-Chinese Border*”.

¹⁶ Jing-dong-Yuan, *Sino-Russian Confidence Building Measures*, Working Paper n.20, January 1998, p.3

www.ligi.ubc.ca/sites/liu/files/Publications/webwp20.pdf

¹⁷ As Jing-dong-Yuan states in his paper, this result implied for China three preconditions: the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, the reduction and departure of troops from Mongolia, and Sino-Soviet , and interrupting the Soviet support of Vietnamese forces occupying Cambodia. The aim for China was, at a regional level, to protect its political ambitions and domestic security, while stemming the encirclement drown by the Soviet policy.

Idem

¹⁸ ibidem

¹⁹ ibidem

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This act initiated a new good-neighboreliness policy and opened the path to a large amount of agreements and treaties implementing confidence-building measures that from 1990-1996 would shape another era in the relations between the two, and within the whole Central Asian region²⁰.

The decisive turning point was marked by the implosion of the Soviet Union that introduced new challenges and dictated new roles for the global as well as for several regional scenarios, included the Central Asian one. Doubtless security matters were at the centre of all future plans and evolving dynamics. The environment in Central Asia revealed completely different: if on the one hand the threat posed to China by the Soviet leadership's policy was over, on the other, older, and not less dangerous threats were about to re-emerge in the area, deriving from the fact that from that moment on, the existing nationalist groups in some parts of China, as for instance the West Northern part and Xingjiang, could count on radical Islam, which was living a revival in the adjacent former Soviet Union states. Furthermore the newborn states represented a hindrance to the prosecution and finalization of the common decision making process relative to debated questions: Chinese negotiators had to deal no more with the only Soviet interlocutor, but with three new (and unstable) states, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan²¹. For the priority of the security environment sake, China felt fostered to encourage the work on good-neighboreliness policies towards Russia, increasing the interaction on those subjects, advantageous to the achievement of a secure environment.

There still were 4600 km on which a definitive resolution had not been taken yet. The meetings that covered the period going since 1991 to 1994, saw the participation of China, the three new republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, with which the discussed delimitations were entailed, and Russia. The reason for Russia to be included in this consultative group for a subject that directly pertained only the first four actors, originates in the major influence role it had plaid throughout history, and from the project handed out with

²⁰ *ibidem*

²¹ *Idem*, pp. 3-7

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China of including this procedure in the larger confidence-building plan between the two²².

In the years lasting from 1991 and 1994, compromises on the undefined frontiers were outlined, through a series of meetings, parallel to the implementation of confidence-building measures.

With the endorsement of the “*Agreement on strengthening the confidence building measures on lands*”, simpler known as “*Shanghai Agreement*”, signed in Shanghai on 26 April 1996, the consolidation of the group known as “*Shanghai Five*” was ordained. The creation of this *interstate* consultative body initiated the first phase in the formation of what developed in 2001 in the Shanghai Organisation.

Its specificity was that it established an original model of cooperation, founded on regular meetings held on an annual basis and periodical consultations on subjects of shared interest²³. As a matter of fact, fundamental steps were moved towards the shaping of a stable and secure environment, in which putting at the centre of economic development mutual trust, demilitarization, arms reduction and military cooperation, through concrete confidence-building measures and initiatives among the actors, functional to the new Central Asian states, but above all advantageous for Russia and China's territorial stability. After more than twenty meetings²⁴, the '96 act decreed non-aggression, notification of the military manoeuvres on the lands and the reduction of military activity on 100km borderline, on both sides.

Actually, a year later, on 24 April 1997, the “*Shanghai Five*” summit in Moscow resolved in the “*Agreement on military forces reduction on the areas*”, confirming and reasserting the limitation to the sole scope of defence of the forces themselves, promotion of transparency on military policies, and of joint military activity on the frontiers. Furthermore an official body was instituted for controlling the achievement of the targets on the agenda²⁵.

²² Thierry Kellner, *L'Occidente et la Chine- Pékin et la Nouvelle Asie Centrale (1991-2001)*, Presse Universitaire de France, Paris, 2008, p.170

²³ Loredana di Placido *Shanghai Cooperation Organization: un modello di cooperazione regionale in Asia Centrale*, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici, June 2006 n.6, p.7

²⁴ Jing-dong-Yuan, *Sino-Russian Confidence Building Measures*, Working Paper n.20, January 1998, p.10 www.ligi.ubc.ca/sites/liu/files/Publications/webwp20.pdf

²⁵ Idem

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The third summit amongst the Shanghai Five in Almaty, dating 3 July 1998, dealt with a new threat in the region posed by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the related narcotics trafficking, illegal immigration, the rise of religious extremism, aggressive nationalism and separatism. They decided to put together their strengths in order to fight those emerging problems, which were destabilising the security equilibrium of the region. The discussion also went through economic cooperation for the first time in a group which concentration was put until that moment exclusively on the defence sector²⁶.

The first point pertaining the menace constituted by religious extremism was the central topic of the meeting carried on 24 -25 August 1999 in Bishkek. The concern was the increasing relevance the Islamic militants played in an area extended from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, to the Russian Caucasus. Fostered by the gravity of those matters, in December of the same year and in the same city, the Justice and Security departments summoned in order to focus on finding a solution to the afore mentioned themes. They concluded the “*Bishkek Memorandum*”, institutionalizing a group, the “*Group of Bishkek*”, composed of the highest representatives of the two departments, from each member state.

The “Shanghai Five” vertex in Dushanbe, run the 5 July 2000, was a crucial moment in the process of the consolidation of the group. It was the first time the President of Uzbekistan, Karimov took part as an observer²⁷. But especially, the act issued from the meeting decreed a big evolution: the members expressed the intention of transforming the Shanghai Five into a “regional entity of multilateral cooperation in various spheres”²⁸, with the objective of continuing on the satisfactory achievements already fulfilled, carrying an even more structured and coordinate response to the rising demands and transnational challenges in the region and widening the agenda to include interaction also in the diplomatic, economic, trade, techno-military and cultural domains²⁹. From

²⁶ Loredana di Placido, *Shanghai Cooperation Organization: un modello di cooperazione regionale in Asia Centrale*, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici, giugno 2006 n.6, pp.7-10

²⁷ This fact was quite significant for the relations between Uzbekistan and Russia. Indeed in the previous years, they were linked by a feeble relation, as demonstrated by the Uzbek close approach to the U.S., and by its membership to GUUAM and other organisations that did not include Russia. The participation to the 2000 meeting constituted a watershed also in this sense.

²⁸ Dushanbe Declaration, 4 July 2000, 1st article, www.in.mid.ru/B1.nsf/0/A69BB7197B47EC174325699C003B5F9D?OpenDocument

²⁹ idem

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that moment on, the “Shanghai Five” decided to meet on a regular bases, being assigned the appellative of “*Forum*”.

The premise of the Dushanbe agreement says that “the Shanghai Five corresponds to the formation of a multi-polar world and the creation of a new, just and rationale international political order”³⁰. The agreement, introduces at the 6th point, the cornerstones that dictated the inspirations and guidelines of the SCO for what the intent of non-interference into the internal affairs of the single states is concerned, founding it on the right of each state of choosing its own means to reach political and economic development. For the same reasons the sides advanced a denounce against “humanitarian intervention and protection of human rights”, used, in their opinion, as a pretext to violate state sovereignty³¹. The member states declare their sustain to Chinese leadership in its struggle against the separatist movements threatening the Chinese territorial integrity, referring namely to the province of Xinjiang, and the Russian strains to stabilize Chechnya, defeating religious extremism and separatism. It is also been highlighted the importance of the “historical specifics of each state in applying human rights, (which by the way) should not contradict the international law” and the recognition of the UN as the unique universal mechanism legitimated to make decisions related to peace-keeping and stability³². The proposal addressed on the part of Kyrgyzstan, of creating an anti-terrorism centre, based in Bishkek, encountered the enthusiasm of the other sides, that decided to charge a competent group for its realisation. Consultations were disposed amongst the ministers of Defence and of Foreign Affairs, and the states governors, in order to further harmonize the foreign policies in the region.

The principles listed below would be the new ideals guiding the activity of the group at a regional as well as at a global level, and celebrated their new model of cooperation, in a way the group destiny, as it will be below analysed.

The shift from the *Shanghai Five Forum* to the *Shanghai Cooperation Organization* was celebrated in Shanghai, on 15 June 2001, with Uzbekistan's membership joining the group, and the adoption of the “*Declaration on Estab-*

³⁰ ibidem

³¹ ibidem

³² Ibidem

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lishment of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation”, enacting the accomplished creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as an official institution. The SCO Declaration stands for the birth certificate of the SCO, displaying its goals and inspiration principles, anticipated above with regard to the Dushanbe Declaration. It introduces the “*Shanghai Spirit*”, asserting the philosophy including those values and principles drafted during the Five's confidence-building process on the military domain and good-neighboreliness policies, since 1991. The Declaration states that it “should be carried forward so that it will become the norm governing relations among the SCO member states in the new century”³³. It avows the abiding of the principles inspiring the UN Charter, affirming respect for independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, renouncing the use of force against each other and enabling a cooperation based on “mutual consultation”, consensus and equality, also in the military field³⁴, for the protection of peace and development in the region and for the international balance purpose³⁵. In the 7th point of the Declaration, it is delineated the peaceful aspiration of the six members and their unwillingness to undergo confrontation with other countries or regions, oppositely granting openness to the outside and the possibility of extending membership to those countries interested in acting in accordance with the aims and principles of the organisation. The SCO Declaration set out the creation of a National Coordinators Council charged of coordinating the SCO departments, under the initial supervision of the foreign ministers of the member states. The Council is also charged of drafting the SCO Charter, definitely enunciating the “purposes (...)and tasks of future cooperation, the principles and procedures for the admission of new members (...)”, that will be signed in 2002³⁶.

A big relevance is invested by the adoption of the “*Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Extremism and Separatism*”, adopted by the six members in the same location, stressing on the group first target of combating terrorism, separatism and extremism, as constituting “threats to international

³³ *Declaration on Establishment of Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, Shanghai, 2001, point 4. www.ecrats.com/en/normative_documents/2006

³⁴ *Idem*, point 5

³⁵ *Idem*, point 10

³⁶ *Idem*, point11

peace and security”³⁷ and enabling the anti-terrorism centre in Bishkek. In the first article, the Convention provides quite interesting definitions of the “three evils”, as they are called by the SCO members:

1) "terrorism" means: any act recognized as an offence in one of the treaties listed in the Annex to this Convention (hereinafter referred to as "the Annex") and as defined in this Treaty; any other act intended to cause death or serious bodily injury to a civilian, or any other person not taking an active part in the hostilities in a situation of armed conflict or to cause major damage to any material facility, as well as to organize, plan, aid and abet such act, when the purpose of such act, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, violate public security or to compel public authorities or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act, and prosecuted in accordance with the national laws of the Parties;

2)"separatism" means any act intended to violate territorial integrity of a State including by annexation of any part of its territory or to disintegrate a State, committed in a violent manner, as well as planning and preparing, and abetting such act, and subject to criminal prosecuting in accordance with the national laws of the Parties;

3)"Extremism" is an act aimed at seizing or keeping power through the use of violence or changing violently the constitutional regime of a State, as well as a violent encroachment upon public security, including organization, for the above purposes, of illegal armed formations and participation in them, criminally prosecuted in conformity with the national laws of the Parties³⁸.

During the summit, prominence is given to the means for cooperation in this pivotal sphere, to the manner in which exchanging confidential interaction and the following procedures. It is equally underlined the non-contravention of other possible international treaties signed by the member states and connected to the subjects listed in the first article of the Convention, being it not in contradiction with the international asserted law upon it.

The fact that Uzbekistan, one of the countries in the Central Asian zone were there is the highest risk provided by extremist Islamic groups decided to join at this stage of the process the Organisation is emblematic: it conveys that the SCO was attracting external or non participating actors since the beginning of its activity, and probably, that the ones involved in concerns related to extrem-

³⁷ *Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism*, June 15 2001, art.1, www.sectsc.org/EN/show.asp?id=68

³⁸ *Idem*, art.1

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ism saw it as a possible multilateral channel for defeating it. More possibly they were also interested in the organisation for the perspectives of economic and commercial growth, and for the investments it was enhancing in the area, which meant, amid others, amelioration of the routes of communication and transportation³⁹. The economic aspect was gaining evident further importance within the group for the sake of stability, embodying it in the persecution of “mutual benefit”. The raw materials enriching the area were (and are) perceived as a useful instrument, advantageous for all the parts involved: a strengthened partnership on their development was keenly useful for refurbishing Russia and China at a lower price, for Central Asia for having certain incomes, umpteenth investments on infrastructures, and great energy consumers, and for the Western Chinese area, characterised by militant separatists movements, to be requalified, supposedly as an attempt of boosting govern legitimation and weakening discontent with separatists⁴⁰.

To conclude, this first moment in the SCO life is important owing to the guidelines it outlined, issued from the confidence-building process started early after the Soviet Union fall out. The first and probably predominant step was moved, the institutionalization of a group originally born to solve old-age demarcation problems. It is already noticeable the peculiarity of this organization which is not possible to study, as many experts in international relations do, in light of the up-to-now known international organizations.⁴¹ The Shanghai Spirit, is the keystone on this view's account: the organisation is endowed with neither a list of codified fixed norms, nor limitations to the members domestic space of action. Oppositely, it is regulated by a set of principles, which are not bright new, but which implement a new classification of priorities, laying down the bases themselves of the cooperation: members with their different cultures, backgrounds, political systems, possibilities and instruments are fostered in special by those principles to cooperate, putting together their single strengths,

³⁹ Loredana di Placido, *Shanghai Cooperation Organization: un modello di cooperazione regionale in Asia Centrale*, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici, giugno 2006 n.6, p.9

⁴⁰ Loredana di Placido, *Il Ruolo della Sco nella Cooperazione Regionale in Asia Centrale*, Centro di Studi Strategici e Militari, 2009 p.7

⁴¹ Stephen Aris, *Eurasian Regionalism*,. *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2011, pp.10-12

ideologies and domestic potentials for the fulfilment of stability, economic development and security, having their sovereignty respected and untouched.

The absolute urgency for SCO are development and stability, no matter the level of democratisation of the involved governments, or the means internally used to obtain legitimisation – what is definitely *the* priority for Western states. Instead of being useful, democratisation process, in its Western significance, could be a main obstacle to or slow down the development in the Asian geopolitics, which has no historic background in this sense. In the perspective of some SCO officials, SCO is focussed on “Asian values”⁴², and embodies the 1955 Bandung Conference ideal of “building solidarity between the weaker states of international system”⁴³, starting from ameliorating living conditions, as a base on which building the rest. It is worthy noting the applications of the equality principle among the sides, allowing the states to be all in the conditions of putting a veto or expressing a disagreement about a subject.

To sum up, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation inaugurates a new manner of granting and providing security through disarmament, non-aggression, non-interference, cooperation, economic, cultural, and environmental improvement, harmonization of foreign policies, peaceful means of confrontation, equality (also testified on the financial layer by the cost-sharing principle employed in the budget decisions, according to which each state contributes in accordance with its capabilities), and decision-making process founded on consensus, and not on vote.

1.2 The agenda development and the consolidation process against the three evils.

The span of time going since 2002 to 2004 was devolved to the institution-building of the organization and the definition of the aims and administrative departments composing it.

⁴² Idem, p.41

⁴³ ibidem

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On 7 July 2002, in the St. Petersburg summit, the six states underwent the adoption of the *SCO Charter*, reasserting the layers outlined in the 2001 Declaration, and setting forward in a clearer and more solemn way the organization's scopes, tasks, principles, areas of cooperation and its constitutive official bodies. The Charter draws the picture of a new way of conceiving cooperation and security itself: the creation of a stable environment passes through cooperation on multidisciplinary subjects, strengthening peace, stability and security in the region, combating terrorism, separatism and extremism, narcotics and arm trafficking; fostering exchanges in spheres relating to defence, investments, communication, energy, environment protection, management of water resources, and cultural growth; promoting human rights “in accordance with the international obligations of the member states, and their national legislations”⁴⁴. What is noticeable of the SCO and what differentiate it from other organisations is that those aims are planned in the light of the respect and implementation of national sovereignty, non-interference in domestic affairs, equality amid the members⁴⁵, as already specified above, while speaking of the Shanghai Spirit; the first layer of their tie is the acceptance of the single states identities, histories, cultures and opinions; the members pledge peaceful resolution of any controversies, and “prevention of attacks directed against SCO”⁴⁶.

The Charter evokes the eventuality for the members of being suspended, or expelled if their behaviour contradicts its provisions, as asserted in the part about membership.

The article 4th enumerates the administrative structures composing the organisation and its seven bodies:

- the *Council of Head of States*, which occupies the vertex position and is composed by the leaders of the member states. It is a non permanent institution, responsible for determining the activities and areas of cooperation of the SCO, and accounts for the

⁴⁴ *SCO Charter*, 7 June 2002, St. Petersburg, art.1 “*Goals and Tasks*”, www.sectsco.org/EN/show.asp?id=69

⁴⁵ *Idem*, art. 2 “*Principles*”

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*

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relations with other states and organisations; its annual summit is the most important event in the SCO agenda⁴⁷.

- the *Council of Head of Governments*, dealing with financial issues and other major domains, particularly connected with economics. It is presided by the member states Prime Ministers.
- the *Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs*, which deals with the “day-to-day activities of the Organisation”⁴⁸ and prepares holdings and consultations on issues of international relevance.
- *Meetings of heads of Ministers and/or Agencies*, disposed on the Heads of State and the Heads of Government willingness, is of significance for gathering the relevant national bodies in order to enact active and effective policies.
- the *Council of National Coordinators*
- the *Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure*, introduced as a permanent department of the SCO, it has its headquarters in the Uzbek town of Tashkent. In line with what stated by the Charter, its activation was undertaken through the adoption of a separate treaty by the members.
- the *Secretariat*, set in the Charter as a SCO administrative permanent body, is charged of copying with the bureaucratic aspects entailed by the subjects in which the SCO operates.

The last two permanent organs became operative in 2004 and their architectures and role will be forward deeper analysed, because of their centrality to the SCO, as an international multifaceted complete institutional dimension.

This moment in the SCO history, marked a shift to a more operative level of activity. In this framework, a particular relevance is played by the actions convened against the three evils, the highest target on the agenda: on 6-11 August 2003, five of the six member states embarked in the first of a series of large-scale joint military exercise, labelled “*Cooperation 2003*”. It was run on both Kazakh and Chinese sides, in two sections, the first under the aegis of the

⁴⁷ Stephen Aris, *Eurasian Regionalism*,. *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2011, p.22

⁴⁸ *SCO Charter*, 7 June 2002, St. Petersburg, art.4 “*Goals and Tasks*”, www.sectsc.org/EN/show.aspx?id=69

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Kazakh Eastern Military District, and the second under the Chinese one. Most of the exercise concentrated on implementing an arm response to a terrorist attack, and its joint coordination of the two sides facilities, intelligence and equipments; the second stage took place under the aegis of the Xinjiang Military District, in the homonym region, simulating a penetration of separatists⁴⁹.

The military manoeuvres annually run, and in particular the 2006 *Peace Mission* exercise, where more than 10.000 units were despatched, sounded as an alarm clock to the Western world ears and the U.S. in particular, as Western leaders became practically acquainted with the risk that SCO could develop into a potential military block, thus possibly becoming an alternative and a rival in the security provision in Central Asia⁵⁰.

If on the one hand this was the chance for improving a concrete cooperation in the military field and giving a demonstration of the organisation's capabilities, on the other it also revealed more than a weakness in the SCO as an organisation: the absence of Uzbekistan was for instance unjustified⁵¹, and the media gave a divergent resonance to the event in China and Russia, being sounder in the former⁵². The subsequent military exercises were held on an annual basis: in 2005, "Peace Mission" on the Chinese border, in 2006, "Vostok Anti-Terror", in Uzbekistan, and in 2007 in Kyrgyzstan.

On 1 January 2004 the Secretariat and the RATS entered into force determining the completion of the institutional building project. Both the Secretary officials and the RATS ones are expected to act independently from their national

⁴⁹ Malia K. Du Mont, *Cooperation 2003: Style, Substance and some Surprises*, China Eurasia Forum Monthly, September 2003, www.chinaeurasia.org/images/stories/isdpc-cefq/CEFM200309/CEFM200309.pdf

⁵⁰ Axel Berkofskj, Serena Giusti, Tomislava Penkova, *Le Relazioni Sino-Russe e il Caso dell'Organizzazione per la Cooperazione di Shanghai*, n.14- May 2010, Osservatorio di Politica Internazionale, p.10

⁵¹ It is noteworthy the fact that some uncertainties rose, due to the participation, only a week before, to an exercise with the GUUAM states, buttressed by the fact that Uzbekistan had welcomed U.S. bases on its territory, in the past years.

⁵² The Chinese media gave a strong relevance to the exercise and the leaders were in favour of attending likely exercise on a regular basis; oppositely, the Russian media's description of the drill revealed downhearted. The same Kazakh Foreign Minister Toqaev declared, in a meeting held two months later, that being antiterrorism exercise a question of "law enforcement agencies", and, if "carried out by military, give a negative impression of the SCO goals". This behaviour could be possibly interpreted as the fear of a cooling-off of relations with the Western world, as a comeback for a perceived challenge.

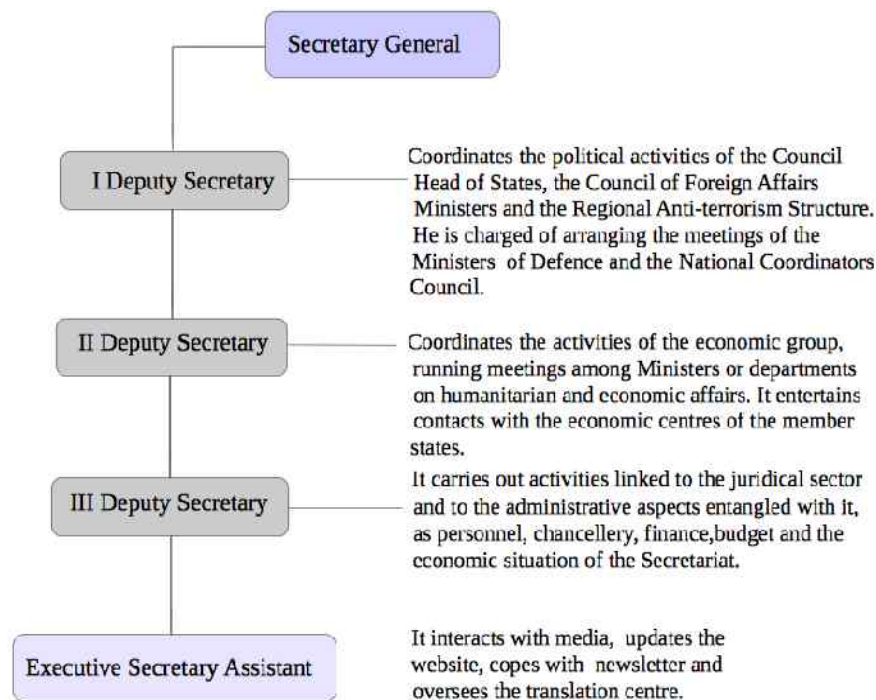
Malia K. Dumont, *Cooperation 2003: Style, Substance and some Surprises*, China Eurasia Forum Monthly, September 2003, www.chinaeurasia.org/images/stories/isdpc-cefq/CEFM200309/CEFM200309.pdf

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governments, rather their work reports uniquely to the SCO to preserve neutrality⁵³.

Since that moment, the Secretariat is based in Beijing and is “the main permanent executive body of the SCO”⁵⁴. It copes with providing bureaucratic, technical, organisational and legal assistance, fundamental for the SCO activity; it drafts documents, treaties and official papers circulating them among member states, and in collaboration with other organs; it interacts with dialogue and observer partners and non-governmental institutions, under consent of the member states; it is moreover charged of recruiting experts in accordance with the Council of National Coordinators, in case of necessity. In a way, the secretariat is responsible for those procedures unnoticeable, but vital to the functioning and advancement of the organisation itself⁵⁵.

The Secretariat structure is featured as follows:



The Secretary General is appointed by the Council of Heads of Government on a rotational bases, in the Russian alphabetic order. He is in charge for three

⁵³ *Eurasian Regionalism*,. *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, Stephen Aris, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2011, p. 126

⁵⁴ www.sectSCO.org

⁵⁵ Idem

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years and representatives of all member states can be elected for this position, despite their number is dependant on the single budgetary portion.

In opposition with the principle stated in the Charter that the members participate on an equal basis, this feature is evidently discriminatory for the weaker states, putting in an advantageous position China and Russia, and the same location of the Secretariat headquarters in Beijing, causes the staff being above all of Chinese origins⁵⁶, provoking disproportion in the states cooperation.

The second organ that became fully operative in 2004 was the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure, known with the acronym RATS. It was set up as an intelligence hub for security cooperation in the organisation, as a centre in which coordinating strategies and non-military decisions and provisions for immediate reactions to events connected to the three evils in the region. The significance of this organ stands in the fact it demonstrates the centrality that engagement in security-related questions has for the SCO and the emergency they constitute for the single nations and the region, firstly, and the international panorama, secondly⁵⁷. Moreover it enjoys a fairly good reputation, thanks to the concrete steps moved towards a real merger of national approaches and resources invested on security issues. Its headquarters was relocated in Tashkent, rather than in Bishkek, as formerly convened, after the request addressed in early August 2003, by the Uzbek president Karimov. He motivated this choice with the prominence that, presently, terrorism had in Uzbekistan, and the parallel alleviation of the terrorist threat in Kyrgyzstan, after the US military intervention⁵⁸.

The RATS is composed of a total amount of 30 officials -7 each from Russia and China, and 16 from the Central Asian Republics-, resembled in an execut-

⁵⁶ According to the cost-sharing method adopted by the six members to establish the quotas to be paid by each member state, Russia contributes for the 24% together with China, Kazakhstan for the 21%, Uzbekistan for the 15 %, Kyrgyzstan for the 10%, and Tajikistan for the 6%. The total amount is not satisfactory for an international organization of this size, hence the members finance collaborative projects themselves on a single basis.

Stephen Aris, *Eurasian Regionalism., The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2011, pp. 24; 36

⁵⁷ Idem, p. 124

⁵⁸ In fact it is argued that this was a pretext for the Russian governance to draw Uzbekistan closer to its sphere of influence.

Lorena di Placido, *Il Ruolo della SCO nella Cooperazione Regionale in Asia Centrale*, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici, Ricerca Cemiss 2009, p.25

Malia K. Dumont, *Cooperation 2003: Style, Substance and some Surprises*, China Eurasia Forum Monthly, September 2003, <http://www.chinaeurasia.org>

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ive and a legislative body. The first one embodied by the *Executive Committee*, is a permanent element, committed to the informative support of the activities, supervision and the implementation of the agreed instructions. The Executive Committee is composed of the senior officials of the RATS. The legislative body is the *Council*, made up of the ministers committed in national counter-terrorism policies, together with the Director of the Executive Committee and became active already in October 2003. It is the decisional engine of the structure, gathering twice a year, apart from holding non-fixed meetings and forums in which discussing the agenda and activities of the organ, in line with the Convention on Combating Terrorism, adopted as the constitutive act.

It was fundamental for the accomplishment of the informative task, the publication in 2006 of a database containing all information about the 400 criminals and a list of terrorist, extremists and separatist groups active in the region⁵⁹.

It is worth noting that the implementation of the dispositions endorsed within the RATS in the states internal affairs is inhibited and slowed, due to the lack of a juridical organ charged of checking the enforcement procedures - in clear accordance with the SCO principle of non-intervention -, as showed by its subsequent dependability on the national governments. Nonetheless the RATS has achieved important effects on the harmonization of the regional safeguard of a secure environment, as it will be further observed, and on the ideology about the three evils perception, above all through young people⁶⁰. The RATS acquired sounder relevance in the following years, thanks to the documents and agreement endorsed by its member states, intent on establishing common legal basis, standards and prosecution regional and international criminals across boundaries.

The concept of security has evolved through time, as demonstrated by the fact that the SCO first brick, the question linked to the squabbled boundaries, had finally been settled. Indeed it slipped to undertake a steadier consolidation as an institution and proceeding towards a multi-level cooperation, oriented at tackling the 3 evils threats, that had already had occasion during the past to dis-

⁵⁹ Lorena di Placido, *Il Ruolo della SCO nella Cooperazione Regionale in Asia Centrale*, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici, Ricerca Cemiss 2009, p.25

⁶⁰ Stephen Aris, *Eurasian Regionalism*,. *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2011, p. 126

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close, as happened in 1999 and 2000 in Uzbekistan. Those events reasserted the straight connections terrorists' finances has with a neighbouring unsteady state: Afghanistan⁶¹.

The Afghan situation was the bulk of the 16th June 2004 Tashkent meeting - together with discussions on a closer cooperation on the the economic and humanistic fields -, constituting a concern that mainly interests the SCO members, and the whole Central Asian region for its destructive effects on security and health in the area. Indeed terrorism is the direct outcome of the unsteady situation in Afghanistan, in that arms and narcotics trade is a source of profit for the refunding of terrorist and extremist movements, a major income in the terrorists cashes across the whole region, since their activity amounts to one third of the world production and world exportation of heroin⁶² - a data that even increased after the collapse of the Taliban regime.

The recent impending emergency of creating a regional road map for the stabilization of Afghanistan founded its roots in the revival of radical Islam, Talibans and the Al-Qaeda movement, after U.S. war in Iraq, which had weakened the anti-terrorist troops in Central Asia⁶³; particularly significant were the growing smuggling of drugs - and the connected raising of funds for terrorist groups -, the recent new terrorist insurrections in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, and the attacks against Chinese workers in Afghanistan. The time was ripe in 2004, to take decisive actions against those defiances⁶⁴, enlarging the horizons, and making figure the Afghan geopolitical situation high on the agenda.

The meeting in Tashkent was a milestone in the second phase of the SCO life, hence its foremost exigence was waging a concerted struggle to those challenges as a prerogative, as it was proved by the attendance of the Afghan president Karzai to the event as an observer.

With an aim to coordinate the post war reconstruction and conduct joint initiatives to stabilize the socio-economic situation and striving against the illegal

⁶¹ Idem p.105

⁶² Idem p.126

⁶³ Ibidem

⁶⁴ Pan Guang, *The Tashkent Summit Meeting: the Steady Advance of the SCO*, CEF Quarterly, The Journal of China-Eurasian Forum, October 2004 www.chinaeurasia.org/images/stories/isdpcfefq/CEFQ200502/CEFQ200502.pdf

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traffics of drugs, arms, ammunitions and people, on the old Silk Road route, from and throughout Afghanistan, president Putin addressed the proposal of creating a SCO-Afghanistan contact group, in the framework of the adopted “*Cooperation Agreement among the SCO Members on fighting against Narcotics, Psychotropic Drugs and their Precursors*”. With the same aspiration, Uzbekistan propounded and was avowed to strengthen the meetings amidst the Security Council Secretaries, in order to address a joint systematized struggle against terrorism-related crimes⁶⁵. The declaration emphasizes the need of carrying new military exercises, “with the participation of law enforcement bodies and special services”, in a manner to “work on prevention”⁶⁶ on the front of the exploding international terrorism - which for the SCO is by the way referable to separatism and extremism, differently from the international assumed conception⁶⁷.

The Tashkent vertex was a significant opportunity for a host of targets, not less important the advancement in the economic sphere and the formalization of economic structures. As mentioned in the Declaration, “what counts here is to take systematic steps and adopt modern means for promoting economic and trade cooperation; coordinate laws and regulations; and gradually create desirable conditions for a free flow of commodities, capital, services, and technologies⁶⁸”. On that account, the re-evaluation of the regional economy was a pivotal issue besides counter terrorism, directed at meeting the needs of the populace, defeating poverty, thus creating favourable peaceful circumstances. The discussion was oriented towards the amelioration of trades across the region, the realization of a modern economy, and the launching of an *Entrepreneurs Committee* and an *SCO Developing Fund*, a sort of bank conceived for subsidizing projects in favour of economic growth⁶⁹. In addition it was also advocated, with the support of competent teams of experts, the creation of programmes involving the protection of environment and the rational exploitation

⁶⁵ Tashkent Declaration, 17 July 2004, www.ecrats.com/en/normative_documents/2008

⁶⁶ idem

⁶⁷ Stephen Aris, *Eurasian Regionalism*,. *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2011, p. 113

⁶⁸ Tashkent Declaration, 17 July 2004, www.ecrats.com/en/normative_documents/2008

⁶⁹ It will be supported by the creation in 2006 of a *Business Council*, directed to the enhancement of the private sector, and an *Interbank Association*.

of water resources. This last point is a delicate issue, in that it requires an adequate management, in order to avoid a bad evolution into a trigger for the region, as already happened in the past⁷⁰. Apart from being a central issue for the stability of the region, a breakthrough offered by the SCO to this fundamental question, would lead to a sound reverberation in the world panorama, and play as a chance for facing the growing economic challenge posed by U.S., Europe and Japan, who were increasing their interest and presence in Central Asia, and had already offered their assistance also for what environmental protection was concerned⁷¹. Undoubtedly, it would be also the base to entangle future joint economic projects, such as, for instance, transportations, communications, and transmission of electricity⁷² and other supplies, and to expand the agenda forth, to new areas of cooperation.

Besides, the Tashkent Declaration, put in relief the importance of humanistic cooperation, accordingly with the need for the inter-cultural dialogue. The objective was the research of a common route, unfolding and uniting the various ethnic groups common history and values, in the name of the Silk Road tradi-

⁷⁰ The already low amount of water supplies, is even worsened by the progressive desertification of the territory, the average scant rainfalls, the very dry atmosphere and the pollution followed to the sudden industrialization and exceeding exploitation of the soil for the cotton cultivation and the improper use of pesticides. Those phenomena interests the Central Asian zone as a whole, but in specific the territory in proximity of the disappearing Aral Sea, and the two main rivers, the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya, ever more contaminated. Doubtless, it constitutes a serious issue, for the water demand is dismissed by the water provision, and it is even going to increase, in a scenario of accomplished modernized economy, hence creating risky disappointment in the populace and generate conflicts. This could be a practical case in which economic stagnation caused by an environmental crisis could trigger discord, above all in a such social, political and cultural unsteady context, thus impacting on security. In fact the possibility was already a reality in the late '90s, when a dispute broke out, due to the disagreement between the higher located countries, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and the lower Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, claiming the former their right to use the water resources for their own purposes, a view that was obviously non shared by the other two states. The controversies handed out with tensions and an interruption of the trade contacts between the two, for what was finalized to the Kyrgyz goals. China is equally involved in this argument, due to the Xingjiang overuse of the lake Balkash, that is provoking a sharp lowering of its water level, and subsequent agitations. Thierry Kellner, *L'Occidente et la Chine-Pékin et la Nouvelle Asie Centrale (1991-2001)*, Presse Universitaire de France, Paris, 2008, p.164

Li Lifan and Liu Jingqian, *Central Asian Water Resources and the Future of the SCO*, in the special Edition "The SCO at One", China Eurasia Forum Monthly, July 2005, pp.34-36

⁷¹ Pan Guang, *The Tashkent Summit Meeting: the Steady Advance of the SCO*, CEF Quarterly, The Journal of China-Eurasian Forum, October 2004, p.6

www.chinaeurasia.org/images/stories/isdpcfefq/CEFQ200502/CEFQ200502.pdf

⁷² Negotiations were and are in progress for the furnishing of electricity to China from Kyrgyzstan.
Idem, p.35

tion and spirit⁷³. In this direction is necessary to enhance inter-cultural exchanges, joint programmes involving arts, sport, tourism and other aspects related to the cultural sphere. This is also perceived as a prerogative for reinvigorating bilateral and multilateral relations in a globalized world, as it had been formerly assumed, in previous meetings - starting from Dushanbe in 2000.

The last point advocated in the meeting constitutes an important manifestation of the profile the SCO had assumed in 2004, and put a light on the organisation's future perspectives. Indeed, the six members approved an act, the "*Regulations for SCO Observers*", referring to the rules guiding the admittance of others states as observers, independently from their geographical locations⁷⁴.

During the Tashkent meeting, the six stressed the importance of international cooperation and commitment, in an aim, first of all, to striving against international terrorism and stabilizing Afghanistan, in the name of multilateralism and the respect of the international law, both considered the backbones for the persecution of stability and peace in a globalized and multipolar-conceived world. The *Regulations* constitute the formalization of the always proclaimed openness the SCO had towards entities and forums outside the Central Asian context, by condition of sharing the Shanghai Organisation's same world views.

The endorsement of this document determined the advance to the third phase of the SCO.

1.3 The third phase: enlargement

The SCO had elicited attraction and willingness to a full participation to the organisation's life in surrounding and outsider protagonists, early since its birth, a phenomenon that increased proportionally with the growing in its size, spheres of influence, geopolitical relevance, and so stakes.

⁷³ With the expression "spirit of the Silk Road" we intend the complex of values such as amity, openness, equality and cultural vivacity that was established around 200 B.C., thanks to the route of trade named "Silk Road" and expanding from Asia, through Persia, to the Mediterranean. On this trajectory, trading was not only of goods, but also of cultures, religions and ideas, and all peoples involved retrieved benefits of it.

⁷⁴ A cooperation based on such principles is deemed sustainable for Eurasia.
⁷⁴ Pan Guang, *The Tashkent Summit Meeting: the Steady Advance of the SCO*, CEF Quarterly, The Journal of China-Eurasian Forum, October 2004, p.8

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However 2004 did not mark the first time in which SCO addressed a response to the states willing to contribute to its life, as witnessed by the 2002 “*Scheme of the relations of SCO with other states and international organisations*”, approved for installing a mechanism of invitation as guests to the meetings of the Council of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and diplomatic consultations⁷⁵.

The years 2004-2005 constituted a crossroads in that it formalized a status allowing another manner of taking part to membership: being admitted as “observer” states or “dialogue partners”.

In order to go through the third stage in the SCO activity, it is important to deeper analyse the regulations convened and passed about the status of observer and to understand what this role implies, which subjects are allowed to adhere to it, and which clauses or limitations it comprehends.

The document decrees that the bodies that can apply to obtain the status of observer are “states or intergovernmental organisations (forums)”⁷⁶, which demonstrate a genuine interest towards the basilar principles encompassed in the Shanghai Spirit, such as “respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and equal rights of the member states, recognition of the main objectives, principles and actions of the Organisation”⁷⁷.

The application should be forwarded in form of a letter to the Secretary General and evaluated by the Heads of State Council, that in the end deliberates a decision.

Besides the admission procedure, this act sets up the observers' rights and obligation. Notably it asserts their right to take part to meetings organised by the Head of States Council, as well as the Council of Foreign Affairs Ministers, and the permission to “participate in discussions over issues lying within the competence of the SCO institutions without the right to vote and with advance consent of the chairperson, to circulate through the SCO Secretary-General

⁷⁵ Lorena di Placido, *Il Ruolo della SCO nella Cooperazione Regionale in Asia Centrale*, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici, Ricerca Cemiss 2009, p. 53

⁷⁶ Regulations on the Status of Observer, 16 July 2004 www.sectSCO.org/EN/show.asp?id=65

⁷⁷ idem

statements, written in the working languages of the SCO”⁷⁸. They were also admitted to take part to the military counter terrorist exercises.

Moreover the document expresses the desire that “international organizations and forums in the Asia-Pacific region, by way of signing mutual agreements, including granting the status of observers to one another on the basis of the principle of parity, gradually build up a partnership network for multilateral organizations”, as a tantamount to heightening the cooperation on fundamental issues - economic perspectives included - of the Pacific region as well as global interest, in the meanwhile⁷⁹.

The Tashkent annual meeting paved the path for what concerns strengthening contacts with actors others than the SCO, as demonstrated by the invitation of the Afghan president Karzai as a guest to this and other annual round tables, and the related creation of a contact group for Afghanistan. Above all, it was the location where the inauguration of the first status of observer was allocated, the state in question being Mongolia⁸⁰.

The process was brought forward during the 5 July 2005, at the fifth annual meeting in Astana, where the membership expansion programme reached a new goal: the organisation had encompassed from the consolidation of the grouping, to an amelioration of its image endowing it with institutional bodies, capable of making decisions and preparing to action, and presently the time was ready to concentrate on entailing closer relations with countries desirous since long time of entering a full membership⁸¹. Actually, after Mongolia, 2005 marked the turn for the conferment of the status of observer to Iran, India and Pakistan, a

⁷⁸ ibidem

⁷⁹ Pan Guang, *The Tashkent Summit Meeting: the Steady Advance of the SCO*, CEF Quarterly, The Journal of China-Eurasian Forum, October 2004, p.6
www.chinaeurasia.org/images/stories/isdpcfeq/CEFQ200502/CEFQ200502.pdf

⁸⁰ Stephen Aris, *Eurasian Regionalism*,. *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2011, p.157

⁸¹ This is tightly connected with the U.S. interventionist strategy, and the related importance of democratization processes in change of financial support. Consequently China declared early after its intention of subsidizing Uzbekistan herself. It happened just the opposite with Kyrgyzstan, that according to official Kyrgyz sources, renegotiated the financial compensation with the U.S., because of its fable economic situation, and allowed American forces to station on its soil until the end of the state-building operations in Afghanistan. On the other hand it did not refrain Russian offer of furnishing it with military and technical assistance, nor of restoring Kant infrastructures.

Loredana di Placido, *Shanghai Cooperation Organization: un modello di cooperazione regionale in Asia Centrale*, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici, giugno 2006 n.6, p. 16

process facilitated by the attempts of the two of putting old resentments apart and reapproaching to each other⁸².

It was not the first contact they had with SCO, in fact, even before this event, those states had been permitted since 2002 to take part as guests to the conferences held by the Council of Foreign Affairs Ministers and entertaining diplomatic consultations with the SCO officials.

Parallel to this process, the report issued during the Astana summit registered a request directed on the part of the coalition to the U.S., of determining a deadline for the termination of the use of the regional facilities, the Uzbekistan air space, and the withdrawal of the American troops deployed in Kyrgyzstan, bases exploited for the operations in Afghanistan, in the framework of the agreed agenda on supplying Afghanistan with economic and social assistance. In particular the request came from Uzbekistan, with whom relations had been at their best during the '90s, but that at the present time were quickly declining, also due to the harsh criticism expressed by the U.S. to Karimov's repressive response to the Andijan upheavals in 2005. Uzbekistan gave the U.S. an ultimatum of 180 days to retreat about 800 American units stationing in Khanabad⁸³.

Anyhow, it is possible to say that 2004-2005 symbolized for the SCO a leap forward into the international web of relations with international organisations and the most prominent post-soviet-originated organizations.

Markedly, in December 2004, SCO was recognized the observer status within the United Nations, where Russia and China already possessed a permanent full membership. As already stated above, SCO had expressed respect and entailed correspondences with the UN since its first breaths, later developing it in a special relation, figuring a reciprocal praise on the two parts. In January 2004 Kofi Annan had pronounced a discourse during the ceremony held for the inauguration of the Secretary General in Beijing, expressing his congratulation for the goals fulfilled in fighting terrorism in the Central Asian region, and defined the

⁸² Pan Guang, *The new SCO Observers: making a leap forward in cautious augmentation*, in "Special Edition: The SCO at One", Chinese-Eurasian Quarterly, The Journal of China Eurasian Forum, July 2005, p.20 www.chinaeurasia.org/images/stories/isdpcefq/CE-FQ200502/CE-FQ200502.p

⁸³ idem

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SCO as a “strategic partner”. In the years to come SCO participated to forums themes of common interest with the UN, and the UN held personal meetings with the then Secretary General, Zhang Deguang⁸⁴. In 2003 SCO had already been convoked to UN Security Council special sessions run by the Committee for anti-terrorism⁸⁵ and in the same year it had taken part to the OSCE meeting in Wien, to the fifth meeting between UN and Regional organisations, in New York, and to the conference on the prevention and struggle against terrorism, in Lisbon⁸⁶.

In April 2005, the SCO Secretary General Deguang visited his ASEAN⁸⁷ counterpart in Jakarta where they endorsed a memorandum⁸⁸, based on the contiguity of their regions and the common interests they had on the Pacific area. Therefore the ASEAN secretary took the chance to voice his desire of being bestowed with the status of observer, that, to the moment of writing (March 2012) has not been conferred yet.

The other relations the SCO entertained gave the pace to even more frequent meetings and accords. On 12 April 2005 another memorandum was signed with the Commonwealth of Independent States⁸⁹ Executive Committee, and even in

⁸⁴ Loredana di Placido, *Shanghai Cooperation Organization: un modello di cooperazione regionale in Asia Centrale*, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici, giugno 2006 n.6, p.14

⁸⁵ idem

⁸⁶ idem

⁸⁷ The ASEAN was created in 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, with the aim of coordinating actions and strengths, and providing assistance to its members, in the name of economic improvement and stability. More recently, other states joined it, such as Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Birmania, Cambodia.

⁸⁸ Pan Guang, *The new SCO Observers: making a leap forward in cautious augmentation*, in “Special Edition: The SCO at One”, Chinese-Eurasian Quarterly, The Journal of China Eurasian Forum, July 2005

www.chinaeurasia.org/images/stories/isdpcefq/CEFQ200502/CEFQ200502

⁸⁹ The CIS was born in 1991, in the wake of early aftermath of the Soviet Union collapse, with the scope of bringing stability to the ex Soviet hemisphere. The CIS institute a Peace-keeping military force, which played a crucial role during the Tajikistan civil war, preventing the conflicts to extend outside the national borders. In 2000 it was established an anti-terrorist centre, with the double aim of combating regional and international terrorism, by collecting forces from the single states and join the annual South-anti-terror exercise in Central Asia. Unfortunately the organisation revealed inactive, as demonstrated by the discrepancy between the number of the formal documents approved and high sounding meetings, and the low amount of concrete actions undertaken. An exception is embodied by the Central Asian section of the ATC, probably because of the stronger interest the theme constitutes for the region. In the other cases the assumed stagnation and incapability in creating an active security system, is possibly caused by the different levels of involvement on the part of the actors to the topic of terrorism.

Vladimir Paramanov, *Russia in Central Asia: Politics, Security and Economy*, Aleksej Stokov, Oleg Stopovski, Nova Science Publisher, New York 2009, p. 30

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the following years their cooperation centred on the most urgent international issues, including economic and cultural interaction, common threats and deficiencies. Few days later RATS participated with 31 countries and a total amount of 70 participants, included observers from the UN, to a meeting organised in Almaty from the Interpol security agency for the cross border surveillance and defence and the Minister of the Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The event was run for the inauguration of a joint project labelled “Kalkan”, that centred on sharing methods for fighting against terrorism and on the Interpol support in investigating on terrorist, separatist and extremist cells in Central Asia. It was the chance for a first approach between Interpol and RATS after the last's founding, and reference was made to the need of strengthening cooperation between the two organisations on their common sphere⁹⁰.

In the subsequent years SCO started cooperating on common projects with other organisations willing to become member in the SCO, EurAsec, in 2006, and CSTO, in 2007, and ECO, with whom new memorandums were endorsed.

The cooperation with the first one stressed principally on economic-related programmes, noticeably concerning transportations and routes of transit, as the interstate project that went under the name of “Development of Transit Potential⁹¹”. EurAsec was an organisation of noteworthy relevance for the Central Asian region, because it succeeded in reaching an agreement on the Custom Union, a project previously launched by the CIS, on which it had failed⁹².

The memorandum with CSTO was signed in 2007 and touched points relating to security and the war on the challenges jeopardizing the area, including narcotics, arms, and illegal trafficking in general, criminal organisations⁹³. Also the 2006 and 2007 SCO military exercises in Kyrgyzstan were arranged jointly with this organisation. CSTO had been created in the '90s and revived from Russia in 2002, as a military-centred organisation, with a military command in Moscow and a rapid reaction force located in Central Asia, to manage the ter-

⁹⁰ International Contacts, www.ecrats.com/en/international_contacts/2001?lang=en&month=9&year=2001

⁹¹ Lorena di Placido, *Il Ruolo della SCO nella Cooperazione Regionale in Asia Centrale*, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici, Ricerca Cemiss 2009, p. 54

⁹² In January 2012 it was implemented under the name of “Single Economic Space”, by Russia, and Kazakhstan, with the pledge of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan joining it in the short future.

⁹³ idem

rorist threat in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and South-Eastern Europe. In spite of the afore mentioned aspects shared with the SCO, CSTO presents itself with an agenda limited to military action, and so characterised by a simpler configuration. But there exist also other dissimilarities between the two to be overcome: while the former does not possess a military potential, the second endowed itself with operational and defence forces (CORF and CRDF), hence making of intervention its backbone, a feature that substantially put the two organisations afar from one another. Moreover the two are in part overlapping in their scopes: even though the CSTO has never developed into something more complex than a regional military organisation - whether the SCO can actually be defined a suprastate organisation implementing a region-wide approach to grant the effectiveness of anti-terrorist measures, merging several facets of a regional composition and being capable of standing up threats both coming from the outside, either domestic ones -, and although their two counter terrorism bodies⁹⁴ cooperate, their relations is partially featured with frequent competition on some matters, due to their mainly common agenda⁹⁵. Nevertheless, even though the importance of the CSTO as a security organisation is recognised, it is equally noticeable for its inactivity, that makes it resemblant with other examples of post-soviet forms of aggregation⁹⁶.

Besides, this arch-time marked the occasion for the SCO of an initial opening dialogue with the European Union too. The last one had discussed that year an

⁹⁴ The CSTO anti-terrorism centre was founded in Bishkek in 2001, by members of the security services from Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

ibidem

Eurasian Regionalism, The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Stephen Aris, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2011, p.150

⁹⁵ idem

⁹⁶ The CSTO stagnation is equally explainable with the absence of complete policies related to conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction, as it was demonstrated after the disorders in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in 2005, even though some processes of building of such structures were started in 2007. Moreover the participation of the states to the rapid deployment contingent is very far from being proportionate to the Russian more substantial contribution. This obviously endows Russia with a leading influence role in the region, especially, in this case for what defence is concerned. Russia provided training in its establishments for the reaction forces, sold its military equipment at internal prices, planted a base in Kant, in Kyrgyzstan in 2003, and held exercises, called "Rubezhk", "frontier". Vladimir Paramanov, *Russia in Central Asia: Politics, Security and Economy*, Aleksej Stokov, Oleg Stopovski, Nova Science Publisher, New York 2009, p. 30

1. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

European plan for Central Asia, and the SCO had declared itself willing to maintain opened the dialogue with Europe on Central Asia and Afghanistan⁹⁷.

For the fifth anniversary of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the six states gathered in Shanghai, at the presence of the new observer states' representatives: the Indian Minister of Oil and Gas Shri Murli Deora, the president of Mongolia Nambary Enkhbayar, the Iranian president Ahmadinejad, the president of Pakistan Pervez Musharraf, and Hamid Karzai, the president of Afghanistan. Two official documents were signed in the summit: a “*Fifth Anniversary Declaration*”, stating the missions accomplished and reminding the principles inspiring the organisation, and the “*Joint Report*”, enunciating all the points advocated and the decisions made for what concerned new Secretaries for the next couple of years, new tasks in the war against the three evils -with reference to the “fourth”, narcotics trafficking – and a report with a list of the related organisations in the area⁹⁸; another core issue was economic and energetic cooperation, with new financial resources announced to be allocated by China, and, to conclude, the admission procedures for new memberships, which favourable conditions were decided to be set out by the Council of Coordinators⁹⁹. Furthermore, the Russian president Putin addressed the proposal to form an “Energy Club”, a forum gathering uniquely the members of the SCO, assembling providers and consumers countries and putting at the centre energetic resources, thus giving birth to a system of coordination between the demand and the offer and giving a strong boost to the regional economy. This club, if realized in practice, could shape a strategic fulcrum for the economy in the region, particularly for the economic growth of the two biggest participants, China and Russia, but for the Central Asian republics too, that would be granted certain consumers and incomes¹⁰⁰.

⁹⁷ Lorena di Placido, *Il Ruolo della SCO nella Cooperazione Regionale in Asia Centrale*, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici, Ricerca Cemiss 2009, p. 55

⁹⁸ During the RATS Council meeting in 2006 a list of about 400 terrorists searched by the police was issued. The accuse was of having organised, taken part, or being suspected for international crimes. Besides this a list of the terrorist, extremist and separatist organisation operating in the region was also set out.

Lorena di Placido, *Shanghai Cooperation Organization: un modello di cooperazione regionale in Asia Centrale*, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici, giugno 2006 n.6, p.18

⁹⁹ Ibidem

¹⁰⁰ At the moment the project still appears unrealisable because of the different levels of economic growth of its candidate members.

An action forward in the process of enlargement was moved in the Ekaterinburg summit on 16 June 2009. The Russian president Medvedev advanced proposals in the economic sector, such as realising a mechanism for the protection of the investments in the area, creating a common supranational currency for money transitions among the SCO states and with outer countries, but besides this, in this meeting the six institutionalized a new partnership figure, the “dialogue partner”. Belarus and Sri Lanka were - and at the moment of writing, March 2012, are - the only two countries that were invested with this status.

This mechanism of the “concentric circles”¹⁰¹ made it possible to avoid taking decisions about the controverted question of enlargement, about which the cons were many and of particular geopolitical weight. It was indeed questionable that, with a deeper involvement of those actors, many equilibriums would break, either on a regional and on an international level. Taking into account the observer states, for example, a full membership would mean including India and Pakistan, two countries which contrasts are assumed and rooted, despite the recent attempts of ameliorating them; on the other hand the admission of Iran as a member is even more compromising, in several respects. First of all, a likely admission of Iran would oblige the organisation to award with full membership also the others desirous actors, countries and OI included; as a consequence the sphere of influence of the organisation would result significantly enlarged, disproportionately for a time which was not yet mature for it and exposing it to the possible explosion of old tensions¹⁰²; last, but not least, a further opening to Iran would create bias in the eyes of the Western world, especially in a moment were the Theran nuclear programme is harshly debated around the world¹⁰³. The relationship that linked Iran to the SCO members, was already object of sharp critics on the part of the Western world, wary of the potential a possible full membership could bring, and America in particular blamed the SCO of having entangled relations with a “terrorist state”,

Axel Berkofskj, Serena Giusti, Tomislava Penkova, *Le Relazioni Sino-Russe e il Caso dell'Organizzazione per la Cooperazione di Shanghai*, n.14- May 2010, Osservatorio di Politica Internazionale, pp.12-13

¹⁰¹ Lorena di Placido, *Il Ruolo della SCO nella Cooperazione Regionale in Asia Centrale*, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici, Ricerca Cemiss 2009, p. 15

¹⁰² Loredana di Placido, *Shanghai Cooperation Organization: un modello di cooperazione regionale in Asia Centrale*, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici, giugno 2006 n.6, p. 21

¹⁰³ Idem, p.12

something that went on the opposite direction to the organisation's anti-terrorist agenda itself¹⁰⁴.

Apart from the cooperation with organisations such as CSTO, CSI, ASEAN and EurAsec, the system of creating the status of observer and the dialogue partner was evidently a way for the SCO for opening to the European sphere (with Belarus), to the Great Middle East (with Iran and the involvement of Afghanistan) and to the Asian-Pacific region (with Mongolia, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka), circumnavigating the problems internal to the relations and internal circumstances of those states, and maintaining its reputation unchanged, not to compromise it on the international panorama. Thus the strategy ordered to pose the interaction on “open regionalism”¹⁰⁵, on mutual benefit on the commercial point of view (extending its field of action to the Pacific, with EurAsec and ASEAN, for instance), and on the terrorist struggle (through the cooperation with CSTO, CSI, Afghanistan and Iran too), rather than on deeper involvement¹⁰⁶.

¹⁰⁴ Ibidem p.21

¹⁰⁵ The “Regulations on the status of observer” itself, presented the evidence of the interest the organisation has in expanding its web of contacts, while at the same time, conferring a very limited power of action, safeguarding the decision making role belonging and depending uniquely from the original effective members, and preserving a cautious attitude towards the hypothesis of enlarging membership.

Ibidem, p. 22

¹⁰⁶ Ibidem, p.13

II Chapter

Inside Central Asia



Source: <http://www.centralasiatravel.com>

2 Inside Central Asia

When the “Shanghai Five” leaders first met in 1991, short time before the end of the Soviet Union, the question of the borders contended with China was not the only issue to be solved. Despite the negative memories linked to the Soviet system, its split had certainly put an end to a period of unity and stability, opening to a new one of uncertainties and risks to be eluded, of old phantoms re-emerging besides new features, old and new groups and exigences that could easily transform in monsters for the national leaderships, as well as for the Russian Federation hemisphere, either for the entire world order. It has been advocated that this moment in history re-lunched a “New Great Game”¹⁰⁷ in Central Asia, making of it a theatre for the appetites of old bosom friends, namely Russia, foreign actors more or less geographically close such as Turkey, Iran, China and the U.S., which felt attracted from that political and influential vacuum to be filled and the many resources available in the Caspian region¹⁰⁸.

The disappearance of the Soviet regime left uncovered the feeble economies of the Central Asian republics and their particular socio-political configuration, as countries that were abruptly imposed to start their individual separated path towards modern economy¹⁰⁹. This addressed a new question related to the security defence of these states: it is a case of “failed states” in which security is not merely bound to external actors ambitions and perspectives, nor it is solely indissolubly intertwined with military defence, but depends to a greater extent upon the leverage of internal resources distribution, domestic pressures and the functioning of the new states and rules, emphasising above all internal factors¹¹⁰, thus considering security itself under a more holistic perspective.

¹⁰⁷ The term recalls the competition that involved the empires of Great Britain and Russia for the supremacy over Central Asia, in the XIX century.

¹⁰⁸ Stephen Blank, *Rethinking Central Asian security*, China Eurasian Forum Quarterly, Vol.6, No.2, 2008, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Silk Road Studies Program, p.24
Thierry Kellner, *L'Occident et la Chine- Pékin et la Nouvelle Asie Centrale (1991-2001)*, Presse Universitaire de France, Paris, 2008, p.162

¹⁰⁹ Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia. The Creation of Nation*, I.B.Tauris Publisher, London, 2000, p. 183

¹¹⁰ In Central Asia, as demonstrated by the reverberations of the Afghan unsteadiness on the whole region, the demarcation line between all the aforementioned features involved is fuzzy, since a crisis within a state can become relevant and produce effects also in the

In this light, it is mandatory, when speaking about the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation to take into account the equilibrium of the Central Asian system, above all by virtue of the former primary commitment with security, stability and development prosecution, and the aspects that they involve, such as the struggle against the three evils and the other blackmails in the region.

A top position in the analysis should be occupied by the indispensable study of the Central Asian environment, at the time of the USSR dismemberment, on what this demise affected, produced, left as a legacy, in order to comprehend the reason at the basis of the measures undertaken by the SCO and other organisations within this arena, which focus is security.

Differently from a western-conceived society, the substratum of the Central Asian one, appears fluid and *in fieri*. Ethnos, the clan structure, this last connection to the leading elites and the government, economy, religion, all together compose a very complex patchwork¹¹¹, and contemporaneously a basic start point for those who try to approach this subject.

This chapter wants to try to furnish an insight to this all-in-merged scenario without purporting to provide a full exhaustive presentation, but at least attempting to go through some of the main characteristic aspects, looking at how they can constitute decisive watershed or compromising conditions for the actual asset.

In the first part we will have a general glance at the post-Soviet panorama, on the ethnic and socio-political point of view, paying attention to the dynamics there involved.

The second part will be devoted to those issues crucial for security in Central Asia and for the SCO agenda, scopes and perspectives.

In the last part three critical example will be investigated of the instability originating from the above mentioned questions, in the regions of Uzbekistan, Northern Caucasus and Xinjiang, with special reference to the problem of terrorism, extremism and separatism there.

adjacent ones.

Stephen Blank, *Rethinking Central Asian security*, China Eurasian Forum Quarterly, Vol.6, No.2, 2008, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Silk Road Studies Program, pp.21-25

¹¹¹ Valeria Piacentini, *La disintegrazione dell'Impero Sovietico. Problemi di Sicurezza Nazionale e Collettiva in Asia Centrale*, Rivista Militare, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici CeMiss, Roma, 1995, p. 27

2.1 Soviet and post-Soviet Central Asia: the unstable legacy in modern society.

The Central Asian republics, as state entities, have quite a recent history. They have not been five separate entities since ever, but rather they are the result of a resolution approved on 27 October 1924 by the Communist Executive Committee envisaging the implementation of a new strategy, according to which the geopolitical map had to be reorganized. As a result, the new lines drawn drastically changed the existing geographical conformation, replacing the equilibrium in force among the plentiful ethnic groups, with particular incidence for the multi-ethnic regions of Central Asia.

This disposition gave issue to the dissolution, among others, of the area that was under the name of “Turkestan”, and of the Bukhara and Khorasmia Republics, thus tracing the current borders enclosing the five republics of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, formerly part of the Western Turkestan. As far as Bukhara and Khorasmia was concerned, these centres were extremely important for their cultural vivacity. Geographically, they belonged for three quarters to the Tajik ethnic sphere, thus being culturally linked to the Iranian world. From this moment they were annexed to Uzbekistan. Another effect was the division of the Ferghana Valley, since then enclosed part in Uzbekistan, part in Tajikistan and part in Kyrgyzstan. This had crucial consequences on the socio-ethnic tissue, as demonstrated by the '89 outbursts, as it had constituted a fulcrum for the region's culture and economy since ancient time. A further example is provided by the case of Kazakhstan, that practically transformed its ethnic balance after the acquisition of the Semipalatinsk and Akmolinsk *oblast*, largely inhabited by Russians¹¹².

It is argued - among other theories on it - that the lens through which this policy was adopted, was not that of ethnic, cultural or geographic homogeneity persecution, but oppositely it carried the clear scope of unfolding the integrity

¹¹² Yangjin Zhang, Rouben Azizian, *Ethnic Challenges Beyond Borders*, St. Antony's college, Oxford, 1998, p. 59

of the region, on behalf of the exigence of governing such a wide empire¹¹³. The newborn states were named after the major ethnic group living on their soils, which was not, by the way, the only one, also due to the relocations of minority groups and Russians in the years to come¹¹⁴.



Source: http://www.grida.no/graphicslib/detail/population-groups-in-central- asia_d7ec#, updated to 2006

This measure provoked a two-fold effect: on the one hand it fragmented ethnic groups, splitting them through the neighbouring republics with critical future repercussions; on the other the drawn borders ordained an unequal repartition of water and energetic resources, raw materials and all those impetus important to build a national economy, thus creating shattered and non self-sufficient economies¹¹⁵. Prevalently the scope of this arrangement was to defend stability, averting any kind of formation possibly endangering the existence itself of the Soviet Union. This project implied avoiding ethnic concentrations, dis-

¹¹³ Idem, p.26

A similar policy would be applied during 1941-'44 in Caucasus and other regions that were blamed with the accusation of collusion with the Nazis during the occupation. As a matter of fact people here were subjected to deportations and the territory modified. In Caucasus, due to its multi-ethnic and tribal social structure, which has common tracts with the Central Asian one, this brought to feelings of hatred towards the Russians, and quarrels upon the new demarcations among the population. The subject will be forward delved into.

¹¹⁴ In particular this caused a dangerous stratification in the society, for the distribution of labour, as, for instance, Russians covered the best position in the social ladder.

¹¹⁵ As demonstrated by the non egalitarian distribution of resources between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, that heightened repeated clashes and brought to the missed signature of the "common border" agreement.

Ibidem, p. 27

elling their cultural heritage, resources and so impoverishing their strengths, against the eventual rise of ethno-cultural territorial claims. Henceforth the five republics lived on economies interdependent among them and with the Soviet centre¹¹⁶.

The confused situation installed in 1991 and the connected earthquake brought in this area, in the wake of the Russian, Belarus, Ukrainian decision of declaring the demise of the Soviet regime the 8 December 1991, is the direct outcome of seventy years of Soviet domination, and of the Stalinist administration layout imposed to the Soviet landmass, particularly in this Southern stretch, characterized as an ethnic maze.

In fact, in the early aftermath of the USSR collapse, in Central Asia a third consequence emerged, bound to the Soviet “policy of nationalization”: the new independent states lacked the basic platform on which to build up their new status, since they had never experienced the sharing of a common ideology, nor a common aspect that at a higher level could be defined as a “national identity”. For the first time ethnic groups were faced with the condition of having their citizenship often not corresponding with their nationalities, a concern that was not in evidence during the Soviet Union existence, were they felt bound to a “supranational identity”¹¹⁷.

It is worthy noting that, anyway, it was not the first time in Soviet history, in which this Southern periphery of USSR tasted the difficulties brought by a crisis in the relationship with the central power. The heyday of their relations, for what economy is concerned, is in fact considered by the Central Asian states to be coincident with the Brezhnev era, when the Central Asian Republics were tied to Moscow by a mutually beneficial relation¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁶ Ibidem

¹¹⁷ Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia. The Creation of Nation*, I.B.Tauris Publisher, London, 2000, p.174

¹¹⁸ It was part of the policy undertaken by the Brezhnev establishment, willing to recentralize the decision making process in the economic sector, differently from what Khrushchev had implemented, providing a small space for autonomous action in this sense. By the way the everlasting regrets towards Russians and central chauvinism, already perceived in the region, persisted.
Idem, p.129

Negative sentiments towards Russians were already visible¹¹⁹, but a further devolution in this sense was nurtured by the accession to power of Andropov in 1982, and his denounce of the scandals of the Brezhnev era and frequent collusion of groups belonging to mafia with local authorities. A determinant case was, for instance, the accusation moved against the Uzbek leaders, for the fallacious figures of cotton harvest provided in order to gain illicit profits. This is an example of how the Southern republics constituted the spectre of mafia and corruption in Moscow imagery. This deterioration lasted almost until 1987¹²⁰.

The advent of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, with Mikhail Gorbachev presidency drifted the USSR and Central Asian Republics further apart. Indeed, the newly introduced transparency-oriented policy found a real enemy in the still predominantly rural-based societies, and the linkages of their traditionalist clientage and clan norms with politics. This aspect was labelled “*Rashidovism*” by the elites in Moscow, from the name of a well-known Uzbek mafioso. Russian concern about transparency in Central Asia was even exacerbated by the stress provoked to the former by the growing promotion of indigenous appointed as leaders in the Muslim Republics¹²¹. Thus the attack on that part of USSR was not directed only to the political sphere, but reflected also in the cultural domain¹²².

The Central Asians bitterness was aggravated by the fact that they felt abandoned by the central authority, on the economic layer too: Moscow investments in the region had dropped in this area, also in relation to those in the whole Soviet Union. In addition, those republics had to cope with growing ecological problems, particularly due to the uncontrolled use of fertilizers and defoliants, with a consequent elevated infant mortality rate – one of the highest in the world, because of the high presence of infected milk in the mothers – and other

¹¹⁹ Yangjin Zhang, Rouben Azizian, *Ethnic Challenges Beyond Borders*, St. Antony's college, Oxford, 1998, p.77

¹²⁰ Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia. The Creation of Nation*, I.B.Tauris Publisher, London, 2000, p.174

¹²¹ Idem, p.126

¹²² This is testified for example by the closure of some universities in Central Asia, with the pretext that the number of job posts did not match that of the graduates and that it was too frequent the habit of paying for ones diploma, an issue that sound as a racist exotic offence to the Muslim public opinion.

Ibidem

health problems among the entire population, particularly spread in rural areas¹²³. This context was made even worse by the high birth rate meeting with low living standards, a strong insufficiency in jobs and the lack of financial supply¹²⁴. The area was thus subjected not only to underdevelopment, but also, if we consider the bad use of the agricultural resources, to “ill development”¹²⁵. The local intelligentsia was always explicitly sensitive about issues relating to pollution deriving from industrial complexes, nuclear firing range, but was left unheard¹²⁶.

Two were the ways to disentangle the issue: fostering agriculture and ameliorating the industrial sector, either enhancing mobility. The first option had been endorsed by the Brezhnev administration, eager to divert Siberian rivers towards the Central Asian region. Notably, the project was discarded by the following presidencies due to financial deficiency. The second alternative was endorsed, when Moscow's experts began arranging the displacement of Muslim people to Siberia, causing oppositions in the Muslim population loath to moving from their homeland¹²⁷.

The principal aim on the part of the Soviet ruling class since '83, was reforming local cadres disposing the parts that had for long time been cast away from the political scene, against the personalities in charge, that in Moscow's opinion where the expression of the power of clans and mafia in Central Asian societies. It was widespread the opinion that this move would find a sound support in those communities¹²⁸. Arguably, by replacing the local political apparatchiks between 1983-'87, the Soviet president had an opposite effect: the decision was taken on the bias that the traditional mechanisms endogenous to Central Asian

¹²³ Here a problem for the ecological and socio-economic equilibrium in the region is the high presence of large families. When policies of family planning were proposed to be introduced by authorities, they were accused of saying “blasphemies”, or of acting “against patriotism and with lack of respect of traditions”, above all in Uzbekistan.

Talib S.Saidbaev, *Nationalism in Central Asia: its Forms and Historical Conditions*, in Marco Buttino, *A Collapsing Empire. Underdevelopment, Ethnic conflicts and Nationalism in the Soviet Union*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1993, pp.306, 311

¹²⁴ idem

¹²⁵ Thierry Kellner, *L' Occidente et la Chine- Pékin et la Nouvelle Asie Centrale (1991-2001)*, Presse Universitaire de France, 2008, p. 164

¹²⁶ Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia. The Creation of Nation*, I.B.Tauris Publisher, London, 2000, p.128

¹²⁷ idem

¹²⁸ Ibidem

societies, hampered the development of a national political space, but in fact, it was not so. This was an enormous mistake for Moscow, since instead of reforming society it educated dissatisfaction, the fear of aggressive “Russification”¹²⁹, the wisdom of a betrayer nationalist Soviet Union and brought to the rise of nationalist and anti-Moscow sentiments and coalitions of elites even belonging to different ethnic communities, sharing their disappointment with Moscow new approach to Central Asia¹³⁰ - despite the persistence of regional factions on the background. Leaders choose to play the national card to force Moscow to re-equilibrate the situation, while notably, never taking into account the possibility of independence. Yet the Muslim public opinion was well aware of the loss of the economic protection that Soviet Union had been providing for seventy years, and this, doubtless, contributed to their approval of the August 1991 putsch in Moscow¹³¹.

The last period was for the Soviet Union very turbulent, caused to the recurrent conflicts among minorities - except for what Slavic ones was concerned-, as demonstrated by the bloodsheds exploded in Ferghana, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, in the arch period between 1989-90,

¹²⁹ The Central Asian people had been for all that time the scapegoats of an aggressive Russian policy, disdainful towards their culture, languages and religion. Many mosques were closed, several feasts were forbidden and the abandonment of the Arabic script put apart, for its being considered an allusion to the Muslim tradition. Neither native literature and history was stressed in education institutions. An example of Russification can also be found in the use of “small-numbered nationalities” to indicate minorities, in the place of “indigenous people”, since the second was, in Russian opinion to indicative of a colonial circumstance that in fact was not real.

Talib S.Saidbaev, *Nationalism in Central Asia: its Forms and Historical Conditions*, in Marco Buttino, *A Collapsing Empire. Underdevelopment, Ethnic conflicts and Nationalism in the Soviet Union*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1993, pp.306-7

Joseph Zajda, *Minorities, Indigenous Groups and Identity Politics in Education and Policy: Central Asia*, Australian Catholic University, Melbourne, 2005, p.3

¹³⁰ An important manifestation of this resentments were the uprisings broken out in the Kazakhstan capital of Almaty, in 1986, known as the “Almaty Incidents”. The two-day event followed the decision of the Soviet central power of subverting the president in force, Kunayev, blamed of corruption, by appointing in his place a Russian exponent, Kolbin. This action encountered fierce resistance and riots exploded in the town. Subsequently Nursultan Nazarbayev came into power, supported by the influence of the clan which he belonged to. This was the last time the Soviet president interfered in Central Asian internal politics. This event is seen by many experts as the real “starting point” for the Soviet Union demise.

Yangjin Zhang, Rouben Azizian, *Ethnic Challenges Beyond Borders*, St. Antony's college, Oxford, 1998, pp.13, 78

Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia. The Creation of Nation*, I.B.Tauris Publisher, London, 2000, p.129

¹³¹ Idem, p.129

that were deemed ethnically motivated, even presenting clear nationalistic claims and, from a closer perspective, visible political dissatisfaction¹³². In fact they found their motivation in the coexistence of a national geographical borders besides an ethnically mixed society. Hence ethnic consciousness of belonging to a specific group, clan or tribe and the connected interests on the hegemony over water resources, lands and pastures justified by historical reasons, deeply affected the inter-ethnic relations and the political life. Those motivation had been even previously at the bases of spread clashes and conflicts and were not definitively settled in this occasion.

The Soviet Union operated the last variation in the Central Asian republics leaderships, replacing the first secretaries in charge, with the personalities that would be almost everywhere also elected after August 1991 as presidents¹³³.

Despite the long time assumed misunderstandings between Central Asian republics and the Soviet Union, August 1991 caught the former unprepared for independence towards which they were forced. The failed *coup d'état* attempted by some military exponents as Yanayev between 19-21 of that month was openly condemned only by the Kyrgyz president Akayev, who by the way declared the independence of Kyrgyzstan on 31 August, in correspondence with Uzbekistan¹³⁴, and was later followed by the other republics. It is remarkable that the actions undertaken by the Kazakh leader Nazarbayev are very indicative of the sentiments related to the inherited fuzzy scenario and the dramatical circumstances the new states were about to face. While the other republics declared their independence almost immediately, Kazakhstan claimed it only on 16 December 1991, after repeated attempts of avoiding the final termination of USSR. Nazerbayev posed himself as a mediator, trying to preserve both his state's kinship with Moscow and the status quo, for the sake of preserving stability. Notably, his behaviour was due to internal and broader circumstances: at stake there was the domestic security and that of the whole region. For what

¹³² Talib S.Saidbaev, *Nationalism in Central Asia: its Forms and Historical Conditions*, in Marco Buttino, *A Collapsing Empire. Underdevelopment, Ethnic conflicts and Nationalism in the Soviet Union*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1993, p.301

¹³³ Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia. The Creation of Nation*, I.B.Tauris Publisher, London, 2000, p.130

¹³⁴ Valeria Piacentini, *La disintegrazione dell'Impero Sovietico. Problemi di Sicurezza Nazionale e Collettiva in Asia Centrale*, Rivista Militare, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici CeMiss, Roma, 1995, p. 18

concerned its specific case, the scare regarded the Russian minorities living in the Northern part and amounting to about 40% of the entire population, and the consequent possibility of secessionist claims; he also tried to prevent a further decline in the economic sphere, and sufferings originating from the fact that the Soviet economic protection veil had now utterly been taken off¹³⁵.

The Soviet Union breakdown was a shock for the five republics, as they were deprived of the warranty of a stable internal order, which had been nonetheless assured for seventy years, and the transition for them was not painless, even though their membership to the Commonwealth of the Independent States made them hopeful about possible boons and assistance during this process¹³⁶.

It was compulsory for the ruling circles of the new independent states to give a fresh coat of paint to their front door. In practice this consisted in creating the basis for statehood, and stabilizing the republics economic, political and cultural order, slackening the side-effects brought by this premature and unwanted independence.

In order to achieve this aim, two were the prerogatives to accomplish: defining a nationhood, in which the people could reflect a shared cultural substratum, thus limiting as much as possible the risk of disorders connected to ethnic cohabitation; sort-out a plan to recover the economic sector, striving to issue from the geographical - above all for the most land-locked republics, as Kyrgyzstan - and political - due to the seventy years dependence upon Moscow

¹³⁵ Those reasons were at the bases of Nazerbayev visits to Moscow, striving to demonstrate his loyalty to the central power, and, parallel to close new economical agreements, advantageous for the region. It was thanks to his role played as a spokesman if on 15 August 1991, that the Council for Central Asian Affairs gathered in Tashkent, establishing the Area of economic Caspian Cooperation. He was also the promoter of a common Initiative Involving all Central Asian Republics to put together their strengths in the name of economic recovery, a project led to failure because of the first emerging frictions among the participants and their inactivity.

Idem, p.18

¹³⁶ When speaking about possible advantages there have to be included also those regarding the military domain. On 20 March 1991 ten members of the CIS endorsed the the creation of a formation of "military observers and forces to maintain peace within CSI community". This agreement which went no further than the formal signature, was by the way encompassed in the new Russian military doctrine announced in November 1993, and sealing the new strategy Russia was enabling, f intervention in Central Asia , on account of Russian minorities and of Russian defence itself, being Central Asia its most external extension.

Ibidem

– isolation, facing the departure of numerous Russian cadres of expertise¹³⁷, and thus attracting new investments in the region. This was the base on which moving on to the second step, in the direction of problems referring to borders, nationalities and minorities, state-building, domestic security apparatus, transports, education.¹³⁸

The prerogative of “inventing” a national culture to be encompassed in the creation of a nation-state is strictly related to the problem of identities and their cross-border characteristic. This does not imply only a mixture of those tenets conceived by the Western world as absolute for the realization of a democratic state, nor is it a need innate in the Central Asian reality: these communities had no experience with such assumptions, being boundaries a western introduction implanted during the colonisation period. Oppositely those exigences rose as the only solution to acquire full ownership and control of the independent realities that had just affirmed, their territories and resources, in a word, to invent fully-fledged modern states¹³⁹.

The great challenge of those leaders which mandates were not permeated of deep ideologies, was to find a compromise between this urgency for modernity and the way in which society was organised, its perdurable influential rural and clan structure, the plurality of cross-borders ethnic communities claiming historical ownerships or willing to organise in new state conformations and the growing nationalism related to it, especially among young people¹⁴⁰. Not least there is the ambiguous instrumentalist use of Islam, and its being a genuine cornerstone in the cultural life of the area, but even an element of instability, as far as its radical expressions are concerned. Those features recall the pre-soviet history, are deeply intermingled with the traditional pastoral lifestyle of many

¹³⁷ One of the most relevant causes for the subsequent de-industrialization, as they were particularly skilled industrialized employees living in the urban centres.

¹³⁸ *idem*, pp. 20-21

¹³⁹ *idem*

¹⁴⁰ An example of it was already enabled by the Communist party in Kirghizia who, in order to overcome local dissatisfaction, decided to consider the clan tradition of the society. Later a proposition was advanced on the part of local groups to split the state into two parts, the Northern and the Southern, with the aim of averting disputes, declaring two independent republics, giving rise to a federative state, or annexing the Southern Kirghizia to any other state, being it Russia or other neighbouring.

Talib S.Saidbaev, *Nationalism in Central Asia: its Forms and Historical Conditions*, in Marco Buttino, *A Collapsing Empire. Underdevelopment, Ethnic conflicts and Nationalism in the Soviet Union*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1993, p.309

groups in the region, and are accountable as the unique *identity* in which regional groups recognize themselves¹⁴¹. Their interdependence and patterns will be forward analysed in more detail.

Anyhow, in the very first part of the transition procedure, one of the main concerns was legitimization: the leaders felt in duty to justify the birth of those independent states and affirm a *national identity*¹⁴².

The first deed in this direction was testified by the official disappearance of the Communist parties, at least of their flags, as in fact they were still in power under other names, and the subsequent inclusion in the political frame of opposing voices, providing the image of an open and democratic new environment, including a multilateral political sphere.

After the prompt dismissal of the Communist parties in Central Asia, the 1991 elections presented an opposition front mainly composed of the democratic party, proposing the introduction of parliamentary democracies, the nationalist party, defender of the nationalities individual rights, but devoid of a solid ideology, and a third branch, the Islamic one, which found deeper consent in Tajikistan than in other republics. The first two groups resulted to lack substantial support, certainly due to the prominence stability covered in the classification of the priorities for those recently independent states: the exponents of the old *nomenklatura*, who were in the end elected, would preserve the existing borders and the status quo, deemed to be “inevitable”, since, being international frontiers not coincident with ethnic boundaries, the outburst of irredentist and revisionist claims in a territory could lead to domino effects in other parts of the region¹⁴³. Oppositely, an affirmation of the other parts, with the exception of the democratic wing, would introduce the risk of drastic changes also to the territorial integrity, and possibly give rise to new ethnic or religious territorial claims¹⁴⁴. Nationalists gained the elections in Tajikistan, in the context of re-

¹⁴¹ idem

¹⁴² Valeria Piacentini, *La disintegrazione dell'Impero Sovietico. Problemi di Sicurezza Nazionale e Collettiva in Asia Centrale*, Rivista Militare, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici CeMiss, Roma, 1995, pp.29,30

¹⁴³ Yangjin Zhang, Rouben Azizian, *Ethnic Challenges Beyond Borders*, St. Antony's college, Oxford, 1998, p. 59

¹⁴⁴ The preservation of existing borders and the status quo was considered by the local leaders to be “inevitable”, since, being international frontiers not coincident with ethnic-based boundaries, the outburst of irredentist od revisionist claims in the region could lead to dom-

gional tensions being under way, and led by the Islamic Renaissance parties¹⁴⁵. Tajikistan was subjected to a heavy transition, caused to the civil war broken out in 1992, after the election, and leaving its traces until 1997. It was fundamental and emblematic¹⁴⁶ at the same time, in this perspective, the intervention of the Russian Red Army for thwarting the expansion of clashes in the bordering states. Another particular example was Uzbekistan, that presented a case in which leaders were reluctant to involve dissonant voices, but on the contrary, they took legal actions against them, as it still happens nowadays.

In Central Asia the transition was smoothed by such internal measures promoted to enhance consensus, which gave an image of democracy that was to a large extent praised abroad¹⁴⁷, and had the effect of attracting external investments in the economy too. It was even useful for the persecution of internal stability, since, as soon as slightly contrasting voices, the more moderate exponents of Islam, and the Slavic representatives – where needed as in Kazakhstan-, were included in the political life or co-opted at least formally, some disappointment or resentments were averted¹⁴⁸.

Nevertheless, stability and the related issues of ethnic minorities and integration were never settled as a regional concern and the risk of new turmoil re-

ino effect

Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia. The Creation of Nation*, I.B.Tauris Publisher, London, 2000, p.131

¹⁴⁵ Its members came from the Southern province that had never enjoyed active part to politics, since governors were historically elected from the Northern province of Leninabad. Muslims, despite being described and called radical, did not demand the installation of an Islamic state, but rather claimed their rights of taking active participation to the national reconstruction and recovery. In fact this conflict has been dubbed by Adeeb Khalid as facing “Neo-Soviets” to the “Opposition”, because the aim was strictly political and went in the opposite direction of preserving the status quo. The war officially terminated in 1992 with the military intervention of Russia, but turmoil continued until 1997.

Idem

Adeeb Khalid, *Islam After Communism*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2007, pp. 148-50

¹⁴⁶ It was still Russia the only actor capable of ensuring stability in the region.

¹⁴⁷ The independent republics took different political trajectories, and Kyrgyzstan emerged as the most democratic state and was particularly appreciated abroad for the introduction of free market, gender equality policies, free press and the spread out of a copious number of NGOs. The other states choose more authoritarian inclinations, as in Uzbekistan, or were elected from disorders as in Tajikistan Rakhmonov, the new president supported by Russia. Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 4

¹⁴⁸ Valeria Piacentini, *La disintegrazione dell'Impero Sovietico. Problemi di Sicurezza Nazionale e Collettiva in Asia Centrale*, Rivista Militare, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici CeMiss, Roma, 1995, pp.29,30

mains current and serious. The Central Asian weave is tight and complex, so it deserves further analysis to comprehend to what extent stability is put in danger by endogenous elements present in its society.

2.2 The nexus among nationalism, radical Islam and power

As already announced in the introduction to this chapter, Central Asia is endowed with a society that could be metaphorically represented as a fluid substratum, where layers merge into one another, and trajectories are not defined, nor inevitable.

The intricacy of the Central Asian background is considered since the end of the Soviet Union, to simplify, the most direct motivation for the various forms of terrorism and irredentist sentiments to rise up. The aim is now to dig into three fundamental socio-ethnic-cultural spheres, which combination and salient hallmarks are important to try to give an explanation to the basis of the threats posed to the equilibrium in the region¹⁴⁹: ethnicity, religion and local tradition. Nonetheless the elements brought here are undoubtedly not enough to provide a clear frame, since many assumptions which are valid for a Western scenery, are not equally well-grounded in the Central Asian context, wherein a proper approach requires to overcome the schemes of nation, boundaries, languages and cultures determining of a people¹⁵⁰.

a) *Ethnicity and Nationalism*. The ethno-demographic mixture in Central Asia has an important weight on the stability of the region. Since ancient history these territories have been inhabited by a brew of ethnic communities and political borders have never been a tantamount to ethnic circumscription. It is

¹⁴⁹ Valeria Piacentini, speaks of “*Islamic District Paradigm*” while referring to the co-incidence of administration, local traditions and Islam..

Idem

Marco Buttino, *A Collapsing Empire. Underdevelopment, Ethnic conflicts and Nationalism in the Soviet Union*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1993

¹⁵⁰ Adrienne L. Edgar, Identities, Communities, and Nations in Central Asia: A Historical Perspective, University of California Santa Barbara, discourse held on 29 October 2001 during a panel labelled “Central Asia and Russia: Responses to the War on Terrorism”, p. 2
http://seesee.berkeley.edu/articles/edgar_2001-1029.pdf

so far indispensable to note that the Central Asian republics ethnic richness is very knotty, having always in its history intermingled nomadic to sedentary ways of life, different religions, accounting Islam as the most spread - but not the unique as witnessed by the presence of Christians and Buddhists, and also being professed in diverse manners -, and several cultures that exerted their influence, as the predominant Turko-Perisan and Islamic¹⁵¹. Thus languages, historical myths and identities appeared all blended into each other, and were not possible to be circumscribed in an area. In the different conceptions relating to ethnic identity it is possible to find many character of cohesion and separation as well, for the cultural association it involved¹⁵².

As a matter of fact the first demands for further autonomy, advanced after the 1917 Russian revolutions, were carried under the auspices of pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic terms, thus not referring to territory but to a common cultural ground and inheritance.

The first approach the Central Asian peoples had with the interrelation between state and ethnicity was marked by the year 1924, and the dismemberment of Turkestan, which gave issue to the five republics¹⁵³, posing a new dichotomy between national interest and historical belonging and ownership. By the way clashes did never broke up openly, keeping undercurrent.

Apart from the titular ethnic groups, it is possible to say that four out of the five republics had Russians as their second largest national group, as a result of a migration process started since the Tsarist conquest, in the XVIII century, intensified by agricultural migrations of the beginning of the XX century¹⁵⁴ and

¹⁵¹ Adrienne L. Edgar, *Identities, Communities, and Nations in Central Asia: A Historical Perspective*, University of California Santa Barbara, discourse held on 29 October 2001 during a panel labelled "Central Asia and Russia: Responses to the War on Terrorism", p. 2 http://isees.berkeley.edu/articles/edgar_2001-1029.pdf

¹⁵² Edgar provides the explanatory example of the Tajiks and the Uzbeks, commonly associated to the Farsi and the Turkik linguistic groups. It is bewildering the fact that a good proportion of the peoples in this region spoke both languages and could not identify themselves as belonging to an ethnic group or the other. This gives a clear idea of how ethnic identity in Central Asia is impossible to be determined through our Western standards, making it dependable on territorial, linguistic, historical parameters. It is, oppositely an aspect especially blended with the way of life or genealogy.
ibidem

¹⁵³ Yangjin Zhang, Rouben Azizian, *Ethnic Challenges Beyond Borders*, St. Antony's college, Oxford, 1998, p. 57

¹⁵⁴ Due to an agricultural reform passed in Russia that favoured rich peasants and obliged the others to sell their lands and live. Many of them converged to Central Asia.
Idem, p.74

later by the Second World War, and the implantation of manufacturing plants. The Russian stream was henceforth encouraged by, and beneficial to the project of Central Asian economic recovery endorsed by the Soviet Union in the '20s, when new industries were dislocated in Central Asia, relocating qualified Russian manufacturer and educated figures¹⁵⁵. The presence of the Russian group provoked an evident stratification and polarization in the society: they occupied the highest and best-waged job positions, and converged towards the urban areas, for the 94% out of 97% over the entire Central Asia¹⁵⁶. Therefore stratification, reflected not only the cleavage in the living standards, but also the widened gap between rural indigenous and industrialized Europeans. This, together with a developing cognition of an ongoing “Russification” attempt, nurtured increasing vexation on the part of the autochthonous *intelligentsia* toward the Russian intervention in all its facets, and even though open upheavals were never addressed against Slavic people under Soviet rule - apart from sporadic events -, resentments manifested in the form of emerging nationalism and the revival and search of a “native identity”, already since the '60s and at a higher level, in the wake of the gained independence¹⁵⁷.

To this complicated frame, had contributed also the fact that Central Asia was treated as an “ethnic dumping ground”¹⁵⁸ under Stalin in particular, and in general during the Soviet dominion: during the Second World War, for example, many Russians escaped here from the German invasion; in the aftermath, Stalin deported here ethnic groups suspected of connivance with the Nazis (Tatars, Chechen and Caucasians in general). In any case migration towards this region, organized by the Soviet establishment or not, has never stopped, from all parts of the Soviet Union.

As a result, the ethnic brew became even more dense. The extreme case of the largest Central Asian republic, Kazakhstan, serves as an example of the ethnic

¹⁵⁵ Idem, pp.74-77

¹⁵⁶ Idem, p. 58

¹⁵⁷ Idem, pp. 78-9

¹⁵⁸ It must also be considered the fact that Central Asia was used as such, not only on an ethnic point of view, as testified by the over-industrialization, or by the nuclear testing, that were tackled during the Cold-War period, causing irremediable ecological disasters and heavy health consequences among the population.

Yangjin Zhang, Rouben Azizian, *Ethnic Challenges Beyond Borders*, St. Antony's college, Oxford, 1998, p.77

mixture, as it counts more than one hundred ethnic groups. Uzbekistan is the only state where the titular group consists of a big majority, being the 71% of the total population¹⁵⁹ and granting a certain homogeneity.

The seventy years under the Soviet rule proved a test-bed for the development of a more rooted sense of belonging to the territories that the ethnic groupings were assigned in 1924. This conformation fostered national models, languages and traditions (even if forbidden) that became the channel for inter-ethnic communication, replacing dialects, and besides Russian used as lingua franca. Entrenchment among the ethnic groups had succeeded in creating a thin harmony, obviously without erasing hot issues in the area, as represented in the inter-ethnic riots arisen around '89, which by the way were localized and did not involve any form of supranational ethnic hatred¹⁶⁰.

In light of these frame, we can attempt to scrutinize the emergence of “ethno-cracies”¹⁶¹ among the intellectual circles, during the final stage of the Soviet Union and the post-independence problem of nation-state and ethnogenesis building, directed with the task of “de-Russification”. Many sources date germs of nationalist and anti-Russian sentiments back to the mid '60s, when many teachers alleged the theories that the national language was being spotted with too many “foreign terms”, with reference to Russian lexicons, and there were cases in which they refrained the government disposition according to which they were called to better the teaching of Russian¹⁶². From being initially a non ethnic-determining mark, language became a political instrument of the de-Russification process enabled in the last stage of the USSR life: around '89 all the republics had decided to establish the languages of the national main ethnic group as “national”, against the “language of the coloniser”¹⁶³, transforming it

¹⁵⁹ Idem 75

¹⁶⁰ Adrienne L. Edgar, *Identities, Communities, and Nations in Central Asia: A Historical Perspective*, University of California Santa Barbara, discourse held on 29 October 2001 during a panel labelled “Central Asia and Russia: Responses to the War on Terrorism”, p. 5 http://isees.berkeley.edu/articles/edgar_2001-1029.pdf

¹⁶¹ Yangjin Zhang, Rouben Azizian, *Ethnic Challenges Beyond Borders*, St. Antony's college, Oxford, 1998, p.58

¹⁶² Idem, p.78

¹⁶³ This strategy was particularly successful where the population was more homogeneous. On the opposite, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan had to maintain Russian as a second language to defuse dissatisfaction by the Russian group, and, especially in the first state, the risk of secessionist demands.

in a discriminatory characteristic for having accession to higher position, not only to Russians, but also to other minorities¹⁶⁴.

In the early post-Soviet period, language policies were passed and applied above all in those rural areas with particular concentration of local peoples who had been object of the long-time Russification with the scope of defusing that, perceiving marginalization, they could find active answer in the emerging radical Islamic groups.

Notably, these initiatives were incorporated in the new policies applied to all the spheres of society by the the governors - apart from the formation of Nationalist movements -, devoted to the mainstay of developing a unitary national awareness that could serve as the only reference for those ethnically-mixed societies¹⁶⁵. Hence language policies went hand in hand with a new revisionist tendency, applied to history and the hitherto sustained theory of the Central Asian accommodating reaction to the Russian annexation, reported in the newly adopted flags, which depicted symbols from the Turk tradition - sun, skies and stars- and reference to Islam – the green on the Tajik flag -, and finally to streets, public places and newspapers names. Great preponderance had in this circumstance the exploitation of memory: the search for (or invention?) a shared common identity was deemed an essential requisite for the affirmation of ethnic harmony, for maintaining a stable and secure nation-state¹⁶⁶ and for effectively dealing with Soviet legacy in the region, as far as it could potentially give rise to inter-ethnic outbursts.

Memory became functional for the building of a secure independent state, thus a compromise was found with the past: the Soviet period could not be suit-

Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia. The Creation of Nation*, I.B.Tauris Publisher, London, 2000, p.169

¹⁶⁴ Yangjin Zhang, Rouben Azizian, *Ethnic Challenges Beyond Borders*, St.Antony's college, Oxford, 1998, p. 87

¹⁶⁵ Idem

Talib S.Saidbaev, *Nationalism in Central Asia: its Forms and Historical Conditions*, in Marco Buttino, *A Collapsing Empire. Underdevelopment, Ethnic conflicts and Nationalism in the Soviet Union*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1993, pp.306-7

¹⁶⁶ By the way many traditions introduced during the Soviet regime persisted, as visible in the feasts that meshed together religious and Persian and Soviet ones, or names of the founding fathers, retained important for the national history. Ethnic harmony became a target high in the agenda of the leaders in the region, as in some states National Congresses of nationalities were also established to foster dialogue.

Yangjin Zhang, Rouben Azizian, *Ethnic Challenges Beyond Borders*, St.Antony's college, Oxford, 1998, pp.58,80,162

able for the recognition of a shared identity, as the independence itself went against the communist regime under which they were created; parallel the shared ideology previous to the Russian colonisation did not match present requirements and it also was interlinked with supranational or external currents - pan-Turkism and Jadidism¹⁶⁷, i.e.-, that were now totally refrained. Thus the élites proceeded with the rehabilitation of old models from the pre-modern past, which were detached from the individual memory, but legitimated a common national cause, sustained by a sound resonance within the media¹⁶⁸. Moreover Russian role was reinterpreted under a negative perspective, as coloniser, and the republics foundation was justified as issued by a victory achieved despite Moscow's repression, in the '30s¹⁶⁹. The revolutions against the central establishment were exalted, and old heroes rehabilitated. The problem of justifying the presence of a predominant group was instead solved by historians with the annexation of the minorities' history.

This national reorientation of politics was imagined to avoid the insurgence of separatist demands creating a common ground, and also protecting nationalities rights by Constitution¹⁷⁰, but they presented also a dark side: "European" minorities felt rejected by those initiatives expressive of a spreading ethno-nationalism, and outcast from the political life, decided in big masses to move from Central Asia, causing heavy consequences to the latter economy, and where they remained, they lived on lower salaries and less advantageous conditions (Tajikistan, Kazakhstan¹⁷¹).

Despite legal provisions made by the states against the creation of extreme nationalist aggregations, aiming at stirring hostility among nationalities, and

¹⁶⁷ It was born under the Russian empire and promoted a modernization of Islam. Under the Soviet rule, it created a bridge connecting communism with Islam and after a first moment of acceptance, it was repressed.

P. Sartori, *Altro che seta. Corano e progresso in Turkestan (1865-1917)*, Campanotto Editore, Udine 2003

¹⁶⁸ Talib S.Saidbaev, *Nationalism in Central Asia: its Forms and Historical Conditions*, in Marco Buttino, *A Collapsing Empire. Underdevelopment, Ethnic conflicts and Nationalism in the Soviet Union*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1993, p.311

¹⁶⁹ Idem, p.163

¹⁷⁰ Yangjin Zhang, Rouben Azizian, *Ethnic Challenges Beyond Borders*, St.Antony's college, Oxford, 1998, p.82

¹⁷¹ In Kazakhstan they remained in big percentages, causing a serious demographic disproportion as the gap between Kazakhs and Russians became dangerously thinner and could jeopardize the integrity of the state.

the prohibition of the suspected associations to register and being asserted legal recognition, this kind of activities were quick to come out, in the aftermath of the USSR collapse. An example is the Alash in Kazakhstan, advocating the birth of a “Great Turkestan” run by pan-Turkist, Islamic and democratic principles¹⁷², but the creation of a “Great Uzbekistan” was advanced too.

It is by the way worthy noting that, despite the efforts in installing a common identity in the single states, the collapse of the Soviet Union left an “ideological hole”¹⁷³, that national policies were not able to utterly restore, as the reference for it was not old literature and values, but a folklorist cluster of reinterpreted myths.

b) *Islam and Extremism*. Islamic faith has arguably historically been the fundamental *trait d'union* in Central Asia, the strongest ideology enforcing the consciousness of a belonging that overcame the distances between nomadic and sedentary peoples, bridged nationalities, clan, tribes, and formed a wider self-conscious group united in common values and background. Notwithstanding the permanence of clan-structured societies and controversies between tribal groups, Islam played as a stabilizer and a homogenization factor, and certainly permitted a more peaceful coexistence than if it did not exist in Central Asia¹⁷⁴.

Islam spread in Central Asia in the VIII century, first amongst the sedentary and more civilized peoples in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan – in Bukhara and Samarquand, important Salafis, fundamentalist schools developed -, and later among the nomadic ones in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan – that always remained linked to Sufism¹⁷⁵. It was the Sunnite Islam that mostly prevailed across the region, and the *Hanafite* school in particular, that promotes tolerance between the religious community and the State, and declares openness towards local traditions. Islam was professed undisturbed under the Russian empire, and thanks to this it continued to mesh with ethnic traditions, folklores and lifestyles¹⁷⁶, and even acquired some tenets of the *Sufi* school. The

¹⁷² Idem, p.83

¹⁷³ Idem, p.181

¹⁷⁴ Talib S.Saidbaev, *Nationalism in Central Asia: its Forms and Historical Conditions*, in Marco Buttino, *A Collapsing Empire. Underdevelopment, Ethnic conflicts and Nationalism in the Soviet Union*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1993, pp.304-5

¹⁷⁵ Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia. The Creation of Nation*, I.B.Tauris Publisher, London, 2000, p.144

¹⁷⁶ It has been designated the term “folk Islam” to indicate this trend present across the five re

Shiite Muslims correspond to only the 1% of the total amount, are particularly concentrated in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan main towns, and profess mostly a fundamentalist form of Shiism¹⁷⁷.

During the Soviet period Islam had to face a strained asphyxiation under an imposed state atheism that digressed it to the level of folklore, and repressed many of its expressions - at least until the affirmation of Gorbachev. This resulted in the creation, after the World War II of an official group charged of checking the religious activities of the different Islamic schools and aggregations and the disappearance of numerous mosques, notably under Krushchev¹⁷⁸. The attentive repression exerted had as a consequence that some forms of this religion were practised in conceal: Islam was too entrenched in its followers activities, values, every-day life and dictated, in a way, the totality of their *modus vivendi*¹⁷⁹. The Soviet Union did not abolish Islam as a whole, wary of the impossibility of likely a provision and of the turmoil it could bring, but on the contrary it allowed the profession of the most moderate Islamic expression. On this account *Spiritual Directions*, the “*Nazarat*”, were installed: they were establishments created with the special aim of diffusing a moderate form of Islam, Sunni, and deemed convenient to the political establishment in power. It was a form of “*Official Islam*”, embodied by the Sufi brotherhoods dislocated on the region, but it was directed from above, in that Soviet rulers channelled Islamic wisdom towards this moderate form, supportive of the political apparatchiks. It survived to the demise of the USSR, in support of the independent states' governments¹⁸⁰.

publics, and with particular reference to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

Talib S.Saidbaev, *Nationalism in Central Asia: its Forms and Historical Conditions*, in Marco Buttino, *A Collapsing Empire. Underdevelopment, Ethnic conflicts and Nationalism in the Soviet Union*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1993, pp.304-5

Emmanuel Karagiannis, *Political Islam in Uzbekistan: Hizb-ut-Tahrir al-Islami*, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol58, no.2, March2006, p. 261

¹⁷⁷ Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia. The Creation of Nation*, I.B.Tauris Publisher, London, 2000, p.148-9

¹⁷⁸ Which particularly affected Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
Idem, p.150

¹⁷⁹ Talib S.Saidbaev, *Nationalism in Central Asia: its Forms and Historical Conditions*, in Marco Buttino, *A Collapsing Empire. Underdevelopment, Ethnic conflicts and Nationalism in the Soviet Union*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1993, pp.304-5

¹⁸⁰ Valeria Piacentini, *La disintegrazione dell'Impero Sovietico. Problemi di Sicurezza Nazionale e Collettiva in Asia Centrale*, *Rivista Militare*, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici CeMiss, Roma, 1995, p. 153

The Official Islam had to cohabit with a “Parallel Islam”, practised in conceal in the kolkhoz, where the rituals were maintained. There existed brotherhoods – *tariqas* - of great relevance in Central Asia, that served to the diffusion of this ideology¹⁸¹. They have in history been a thorn in the side for the establishments in power¹⁸².

During the '70s, a large group of students in the Ferghana Valley rebelled to these preachings, calling themselves “*mujadidiya*”, “renovators”. They had an objectified fundamentalist view, recalling the “pure” Islam, which they aimed at restoring, against the Sufi practices, including visits to Saints, and visits to the shrines. The *tariqa* to which they opposed – the *Hinduistani*, from the name of the itinerant preacher who was one of the most relevant exponent of the non-official Islam -, dubbed them “Whahhabis”, from the Indian name of their counterparts. They spread across all Central Asia and the Northern Caucasus and lived a politicization probably due to the war in Afghanistan, which they interpreted as a conflict against the Islamic world and places, to which it was necessary to respond with *jihad*, instead of the moderate tones that the *tariqas* were adopting¹⁸³. They claimed the creation of a new political apparatus, bearing the objective of cleaning Islam off the forms of “corruption” firstly brought by the mixture with local customs and traditions, secondly by modernity, and

¹⁸¹ To mention the most important, the radical and xenophobic *Qadiriyyah*, active since ancient times across the Ferghana Valley, and brought during the Stalinist deportations of Caucasians also in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, the *Yasawiyya*, wherein a sub-category struggles for the creation of a rigid theocratic Islamic state, and the *Naqshbandiyya*, the most revolutionist activist brotherhood, both under the Czar and the Soviet rule.

Idem

¹⁸² According to Bennigsen and Quelquejay, two of the most important experts on this subject, support the theory that probably the *tariqa* constitutes the only real threat to the Communist establishment, since “Sufi groups form small decentralized, closed societies, bound by a rigorous discipline” and represent the “core of the anti-Communist sentiments”, in that it offers an alternative model to the Communist one, based on Islam and that finds large consensus and propagates nationalistic precepts. By the way the practices of the “parallel Islam” have not yet been all figured out, not it has its relation with the official Islam. It is rather been acknowledged that there were preachers who travelled illegally, particularly throughout the Ferghana valley to diffuse the Islamic doctrine, in reaction to the close up of the madrasa in the '30s.

A. Bennigsen Ch. Lemercier Quelquejay, *L'Islam Parallelo. Le Confraternite Musulmane in Unione Sovietica*, tr. Marietti, Genova, 1990

Paolo Sartori, *L'Islam in Asia Centrale: tra Recupero della Tradizione e Movimenti Radicali: il Caso Uzbeko*, ISPI Working Paper, Programma Caucaso e Asia Centrale, No.20, September 2007, p.15 http://www.ispionline.it/it/documents/wp_20_2007.pdf

¹⁸³ Idem, pp.146-7

particularly by the secularization during the Soviet state¹⁸⁴. Progressively, in the following years and together with other groups, they started claiming the state application of the *Shariah* - or *Shariat*, from the Turko-Persian term used in Central Asia -, and the constitution of a theocratic state that responded to the precepts of the original Islam.

Under Gorbachev, although more tolerance was addressed towards the profession of Islam, the pursuit of a secular rhetoric persisted, stressing on the importance of ousting religion from public life and education, as a fundamental platform on which install democracy¹⁸⁵. By the way a compromise was achieved between the growing discontent of Muslims and the Official Islam: in 1990 educated Muslim mainly from the Northern Caucasus and the Southern part of USSR summoned in Astrakhan. The Islamic Renaissance Party viewed the light, uniting “Muslims over the entire Soviet territory”¹⁸⁶. Islam was from that moment authorized to voice the claims of this category, demanding freedom of expression and profession in accordance to the Koran rule and proposing unity among nationalities. In Tajikistan and Uzbekistan it was accused of extremism, and thus registered as an association, instead of a party. In general its members define themselves “fundamentalists”, with the meaning of “conservators” of the original dictates and they refrain violence and the creation of an Islamic state¹⁸⁷.

The aftermath of the Soviet Union collapse saw the reopening of mosques and international Islamic networks, the foundation of new *madrasa*, the Islamic schools, the circulation of religious printed material, missionaries arriving in the region from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Saudi Arabia, new copies of the Koran openly published and sold.

Nevertheless like the Soviet establishment, the new governments of the ex-Soviet republics, handled by the old nomenclature personalities, were filled with mistrust towards all Islamic movements spreading across the ex-Soviet

¹⁸⁴ Adeeb Khalid, *Islam After Communism*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2007

¹⁸⁵ Idem, p.131

¹⁸⁶ Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia. The Creation of Nation*, I.B.Tauris Publisher, London, 2000, p.154

¹⁸⁷ Valeria Piacentini, *La disintegrazione dell'Impero Sovietico. Problemi di Sicurezza Nazionale e Collettiva in Asia Centrale*, Rivista Militare, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici CeMiss, Roma, 1995, p. 157

territory, in their view likely perils posed to the status quo which they want to preserve. For the sake of consensus and legitimization, they respected Islamic rituals, but at the same time, they canalised towards a type of moderate Islam, comfortable to the existing environment¹⁸⁸. For the same reason, the nationalism they were propagating, was a secular one, detached from Islam, and so, continuing, in a way, the operation of marginalization of religion that had been under way along the Soviet period. Although, the promotion of national values had innate conceits deeply bound to the Islamic doctrine and heritage¹⁸⁹.

Current militant Islam in Central Asia, manifested in the aftermath of the Soviet Union through diverse aggregations - secret societies, such as the Hizb-ut-Tahrir al-Islami and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan –, radicalised demanding the formation of Islamic states, and received the half of their strengths from the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The *mujahidin* who embraced their guns to defend their motherland against the atheist Communist ideology, promoting new rights for women and a very distant agenda from what original Islam promulgated, drew the attention of the Muslim world over the centrality of preserving religion and protecting it from “unbelievers”, by combating a war against its antagonists. During the ten years war in Afghanistan they thrived thanks to the U.S., that used it as a deterrent and an antidote to cherish the rising of an internal force able of defeating Communism, together with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan¹⁹⁰. This aspect bears great importance, as it constituted a chance for Islamic groups to proliferate and, militarise themselves, being joined by many new followers, educated in the presently opened schools and survived, even after the end of the war¹⁹¹. Moscow external policy and wariness about Islam was motivated by those irredentist groups, merging extremist Islamic demands with separatist boosts, as they were aggressively sprouting among the Tatars and Chechen. The Soviet establishment's behaviour towards Islam, Islamic eth-

¹⁸⁸ The fear was that, free of the Soviet loop, fundamentalist Islam could profit to take power and create an Islamic state, drifting into the Iranian sphere of influence or taking inspiration of the Iranian revolution of 1979. The secular Turkish model was rather preferred, but in stead, the real detrimental influence was exerted by war-torn and stateless Afghanistan, where mujahidin continued receiving supplies from Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

¹⁸⁹ Adeb Khalid, *Islam After Communism*, University of California Press, Berkely, 2007, pp.129-30

¹⁹⁰ Idem, p.18

¹⁹¹ Idem, p.16

nic groups, and the states wherein they are concentrated has been profoundly forged by this problematic phenomenon¹⁹².

By the end of the Cold War, a new rhetoric became common to many states in the world: the war on terrorism and fundamentalism. Islam came to embody the principal source of danger in this sense, and became the protagonist of numerous conflicts of the new established world order. In Central Asia the authoritarian leaders were keen at connecting the internal opposition jeopardizing the status quo - mainly Islamic -, to the International Terrorism in a way to internationalize and justify the strained and repressive methods implied to fight them. The war on terrorism became, as witnessed by the case of Uzbekistan, a means to quell dissidents and subjugate many expressions of Islam, thus, oppositely, encouraging radicalism that also mixed with other regional and separatist causes¹⁹³. Two examples of fundamentalists groups, that will be treated below, are the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Hizb-ut-Tahrir, active since the end of the '90s especially in the Ferghana Valley and the South of Tajikistan¹⁹⁴.

c) *Clan and politics*. Clan networks are expression of informal socio political actors, parallel to official governments. In Central Asia they survived transition, with positive and negative effects, constituting an important component of the regional identities. Clans are based firstly on kins of fatherhood, are than extend to the family, - which in Central Asia means a large amount - and its alliances with other close people, and often is interlaced with Islam and religion. They are based on patronage and hierarchy inside them, and outside in the networks with the other clan groups, and practice informal coercion to punish disrespected loyalties. Their assumed norms of trust and hierarchy exert a strong pervasiveness on society, and this enables law to be stronger at a local narrow level than at a national one¹⁹⁵.

The political science literature relating to clan or tribal societies is divided: on the one hand it is supported the thesis that they are detrimental to the fulfil-

¹⁹² Idem

¹⁹³ Idem, pp.169-170

¹⁹⁴ Lorena di Placido, *Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: un Modello di Cooperazione Nazionale in Asia Centrale*, Centro militare di studi strategici, p.28

¹⁹⁵ Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, pp. 23-30

ment of political development and they cause the failure of regime transition; other scholars argue that they can be encompassed in the modern states affirmation of nationhood, allowing ties of loyalties to pass “from the family, village, tribe, to nation”, in the words of Samuel Huntington¹⁹⁶.

By the way, in Central Asia clans endured the USSR collapse, as a surrogate of the state power, even though their role and form acquired different aspects. They succeeded in it thanks to their bonds and the cultural and economic implications they carried, sometimes resorting to patronage and clientage traditional clan instrument. They did not disappear probably thanks to the fact that nation and national identity were late attempts, together with capitalist economy introduction and the correspondent persistence of shortages, whether their dynamics and system was rooted in the society since pre-modern times and successful in covering the gaps and political and hole left by the Soviet departure¹⁹⁷.

Often clans are described as all-in-package with corruption, mafia and crime. In fact those aspects are frequently present in their activities, but, as Kathleen puts it they are first of all “social identity organisations” with the aim of seeking resources for accomplishing the interests of their group of belonging, and their weight on the state power is not only embedded in the previously mentioned illicit actions, but is mainly to be found in the role they play locally, thanks to the bonds on which they are erected¹⁹⁸ and their leading role in economy. This also explains why they are so fundamental in politics, being the legitimization of the leader dependant on his belonging to a clan, more than to his party, ideology or agenda. Clan structure can be perceived at the same time as an element of stability and not: on the one hand this system has prevented many conflicts to break out, softened the transition, and contributed to the inter-ethnic stabilization during the transition, as witnessed by the situation in Tajikistan during the civil war; moreover, when clans are tied up in balance with the official power by pact, they enjoy participation in politics, although in-

¹⁹⁶ Valeria Piacentini, *La disintegrazione dell'Impero Sovietico. Problemi di Sicurezza Nazionale e Collettiva in Asia Centrale*, Rivista Militare, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici CeMiss, Roma, 1995, pp. 12-3

¹⁹⁷ Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, pp. 48-50

¹⁹⁸ Idem, pp. 42-56

formal, thus confining the risk of flowing into formations in contrast with the government in power, and enhancing consensus; on the other, this consensus can be estimated as volatile and vulnerable, due to its being completely based on the personalistic cults of the “charismatic leader”, thus endangering the durability itself of mandates and the prosecution of implemented strategies after it. On this account it is possible to read the discrepancy between the assertion of a “democratic” and a “durable” regime, as these two patterns are not inseparably assumed in central Asia, as it happens in the Western world, where the first factor is touted as a certain condition for the second one¹⁹⁹.

This groundwork was fundamental for the election of the newly independent Central Asian states, founding their motivations in clan networks and economic power, on which making leverage. The fact that leaders did not stabilize cross-border problems is an example on how the fuzziness of demarcation can easily be manipulated for mechanisms of power: limits become a means likely to put at risk the peaceful cohabitation of ethnic communities for economic as well as political reasons, and leaders are in this ambiguity legitimized to advance demands and policies in accordance with their present personal ambitions²⁰⁰.

The influence of clans on state, was for instance witnessed by the privatisation of the kolkhoz, in the transition period. These shared lands which peasants cultivated were privatised carrying almost everywhere with the same effects: this process left undefended the feebler classes, that were there engaged, and at the same time it was an illusory transformation, as their control was non-transparently prevalently attributed to solidarity groups in the various states, with profit for the mafias. This was a case in which stability was put at risk by patronage relations, but it was not the only one²⁰¹.

Clans are an important frame on which local leaders make reference for their consensus and legitimization, and the collapse of the Soviet Union, to which no immediate decision of adopting national governments were made, demon-

¹⁹⁹ Idem, p.13

²⁰⁰ Valeria Piacentini, *La disintegrazione dell'Impero Sovietico. Problemi di Sicurezza Nazionale e Collettiva in Asia Centrale*, Rivista Militare, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici CeMiss, Roma, 1995, pp.29,30

²⁰¹ Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia. The Creation of Nation*, I.B.Tauris Publisher, London, 2000, p. 190

strated that the enforcement of local security was more probable to be effective on a clan level: the Central Asian autocratic leaders reinforced the number of their police, providing them with adequate equipment in large quantity, as for exerting coercion for personal aims. The local militias were recruited among the clan group of reference and belonging, or from outside as mercenaries, while heavier and extra-national security issues were delegated to Russia, as soon as it was interested to keep a foothold on Central Asia, for assuring not only its influence, but in the very first moment of transition, when nationalism lived a rebirth, also for protecting the Russian minorities living in central Asia²⁰². Local security forces share privileges with the governor in power and with his clan. The high ranking entourage is mostly recruited through kin relations and patronage, among its allegiances. They became even more preponderant in the post-Soviet period, as it was considered a system that allowed a more trustworthy defence of resources, being based on local interests. These endemic structures saw frequent and numerous confrontations in history and their causes mixed with Islamic and nationalistic ones.

Paradoxically this contributed to maintain stability, as clan networks provide in the most part of the cases an assumed consensus over important state decisions and for what internal security is concerned, because a governor supported by a large quantity of people and which fidelity is granted by clan members, can be considered safe from strained uncontrollable opposition.

²⁰² As in many other post-colonial cases, the fact of avoiding providing themselves with national armies, was also planned in order to avert a possible coup d'état, given the diffused discontent and crisis persisting in diverse spheres, to which at a local levels, had to be added the privileged position of those who enjoyed patronage relationships, who were more isolated from the concrete problem of the transition period, as unemployment or shortages. Valeria Piacentini, *La disintegrazione dell'Impero Sovietico. Problemi di Sicurezza Nazionale e Collettiva in Asia Centrale*, Rivista Militare, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici CeMiss, Roma, 1995, pp. 40-6

2.3 Some examples of challenges to security: Uzbekistan, Northern Caucasus and Xinjiang.

The end of the Cold War and the subsequent disappearance of the Communist ideology hastened the commitment against fundamentalism, that came suddenly to be associated with Islamic extremism, in the international rhetoric.

The 1992 government collapse in Afghanistan at the hand of the mujahiddin and the incumbent civil war, laid a stress on the powerful position the fundamental Islam had reached, thanks to the arms and finances that had been flowing to their caches; 11 September 2001 allowed a further zoom in the question, posing the Islamic universal threat as a new targeted monster to be overthrown, and the Central Asian region as one of the principal lairs where it hide. From this moment onwards, the usage of the “international terrorism threat” in many governmental discourses became frequent to justify oppressive means and explain domestic insurgencies.²⁰³

As deductible by the definitions of terrorism, extremism and separatism provided by the SCO Declaration of 2001, the characteristics of these threats are vague and intermingled, they are not approachable as watertight compartments.

Hereinafter, it is reported an overview of the principal looming threats posed to the region stability, and gazed at in the gun sight of the SCO, as well as of other previous regional organisations and the individual leaderships of Uzbekistan, Russia and China.

Uzbekistan, like the rest of the Central Asian region, saw the penetration of the most radical of the Sunnite schools, the *Salafite Wahhabbi* doctrine, during the last period of the Soviet rule, although it is not certain whether it was introduced from abroad or it was an endogenous trend. Surely the first aggregations appeared in the Ferghana Valley in the '90s, determined to achieve the realization of an Islamic state, under the *Shariat* law²⁰⁴.

²⁰³ Adeeb Khalid, *Islam After Communism*, University of California Press, Berkely, 2007, pp.168-170

²⁰⁴ Valeria Piacentini, *La disintegrazione dell'Impero Sovietico. Problemi di Sicurezza Nazionale e Collettiva in Asia Centrale*, Rivista Militare, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici CeMiss, Roma, 1995, p.27

In December 1991, Tahir Yo'ldoshev and Jumbai Ahmadzhanovich Khojiyev, known as Juma Namangoniy - the former a 24 year-old radical Muslim militant university student, the latter a 22 years-old²⁰⁵ ex-Soviet soldier committed in the invasion of Afghanistan -, assaulted the Communist party seat in the Uzbek town of Namangan. The motivation was to be found in the prohibition on the part of the mayor of building a mosque in the place of the palace housing the Communist party, but also in the unattended demand of legalizing the Islamic party and even proclaiming the Islamic state of Uzbekistan²⁰⁶. The two were radical Muslim militants and in the following year they both converged in the Islamic Renaissance Party of Uzbekistan, an experience that viewed a short life, because of its presumed "moderateness". Indeed the two men did not recognize in this political participation the proper background to achieve their aim: the constitution of an Uzbek Islamic state. On that account they set up an organization named *Adolat* (justice)²⁰⁷.

A year later a protest broke out in the Tashkent University. It was held by students who claimed not having received the ticket that allowed them to receive basic food, on the background of a strained economic crisis. The recently elected president Karimov sent the police to interrupt the rally and, as they did not obeyed, officials first shot into the crowd, later closed the university. From that moment on, the government took an authoritarian position, reminding Soviet times, and started a hunt to opponents, that caused the ban of plenty of groups, including *Adolat* that was disbanded, and exile to many others for the protection of "stability"²⁰⁸. Apparently, Karimov's policy was successful: the '90s were characterised by a relative calm.

²⁰⁵ Sheel K. Asopa, Moulama Abul Kalam Azad, *Religious Extremism and Terrorism in Central Asia*, in Mahavir Singh "International Terrorism and Religious Extremism. Challenges to Central and South Asia", Institute of Asian Studies, Kolkata, Ananika Publisher and Distributors (P)LTD, 2004, Dheli, p.166

²⁰⁶ Adeeb Khalid, *Islam After Communism*, University of California Press, Berkely, 2007, p.140

²⁰⁷ Sheel K. Asopa, Moulama Abul Kalam Azad, *Religious Extremism and Terrorism in Central Asia*, in Mahavir Singh "International Terrorism and Religious Extremism. Challenges to Central and South Asia", Institute of Asian Studies, Kolkata, Ananika Publisher and Distributors (P)LTD, 2004, Dheli

²⁰⁸ Adeeb Khalid, *Islam After Communism*, University of California Press, Berkely, 2007, pp.155-6

After these attempts the two Islamic militants, afore quoted, joined the IRP cause in the Tajik civil war, were many outcasts of the autocratic Uzbek regime fled, together with people escaping poverty, whom later many were trained in jihadist madrasas in Pakistan. 1998 marked the birth of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), created by Namangoniy, once the Tajik war had come to an end, and financed and supported by Islamic states where the jihad cause was at the core of their initiatives, as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the Caucasus and the Gulf, the Taliban and al-Qaeda²⁰⁹. Shortly after its foundation, it was blamed of attacks in Tashkent. This year meant the beginning of the life of one of the most dreaded organisations operating in Central Asia, which strategy aimed at the creation of an Islamic state, with the application of the Shariat, and the marginalization of any other political expression. They explicated a sharp hatred towards Karimov's oppression of the Muslim spirit, his being a "puppet" of the Western power, and his comparison with American, Israeli and Jewish policies towards Palestine, in their rhetoric²¹⁰.

The main part of its activities are handled on the mountains of the Ferghana Valley, on the border with, and in the Southern part of Kyrgyzstan and from its basis in Tajikistan. Within the IMU attacks, it was soon discerned the traces of a linkage with the trafficking of opiate substances across the region. It is estimated that the 70% of the drug trafficking routes were controlled by IMU, a figure important to comprehend the motivation beyond some of its incursions, as it was the case for Kyrgyzstan in 1999, in reaction to the successful attempts of the government in taking control over the Khorog-Osh highway, one of the major smuggling trajectories²¹¹.

Afghanistan constituted the element of destabilization in this new emergence, because its farming of opium poppies stood for, and still does, an important income for the terrorist organisations funds, and in the mid of the '90s their new Central Asian republics route preference was heightened by the low level of stability and internal corruptibility of the latter. The network of activity

²⁰⁹ Idem, p.156

²¹⁰ Emmanuel Karagiannis, *Political Islam in Uzbekistan: Hizb-ut-Tahrir al-Islami*, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol58, no.2, March2006, p. 273
Svante E. Cornell and Regine A. Spector, *Central Asia: More than Islamic Extremists*, *The Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2002, p.197

²¹¹ Idem

between narcotics smuggling and terrorism became ever more intrigued, and IMU faced the anti-terrorist campaigns started in 2001, on the side of Afghanistan. This obviously provided Islamic militants to be harboured and trained, from the entire Muslim world, in Afghanistan²¹².

Evidently, at the core of these exchanges there were the fuzziness of the borders, and all together the sources of discontent mentioned above, the ethnic claims, the Islamic rebirth and its most extremist expressions, but above all the Afghan events.

Despite its overestimation on the part of the Karimov, who also created a new category for it, that of the “independent Muslims”, which is explainable as a means to implement even stricter laws on the freedom of religious expression, IMU did never meet a large support, probably for the effect that secularization had had on people, and because religion was interpreted as no more than a mainstay of their cultural heritage. It found large sustain among above all young people upset about the growing unemployment and spreading disillusionment²¹³.

Doubtless the attacks were very violent, as if we look to the accident of the 16 February 1999 in Tashkent, where six bombs exploded in less than an hour causing a consistent number of casualties also in the government building, but it is broadly suspected among the town inhabitants that it was a stratagem exploited by the ruling class to launch a sounder alarm on the terrorist threat, and subsequently inaugurate a new wave of suppressive policies.

IMU became publicly known in 1999 for this event, but also for the kidnapping of four Japanese hostages in Kyrgyzstan, an anecdote that was useful to them for declaring war to the government of Uzbekistan. Moreover, the summer of that year they took American hostages, and in spite of their escape, U.S. Put them on the slate of the terrorist organisations, and was the second with al-Qaeda to be cited after the 9/11 attack, for its fight on the side of Taliban²¹⁴.

²¹² Idem
Adeeb Khalid, *Islam After Communism*, University of California Press, Berkely, 2007,
p.28

²¹³ Idem, p.170

²¹⁴ Idem, pp.158-60

If IMU is feared for the violence it uses on its launched menaces, the other group active in the region, the Hizb-ut-Tahrir, founded in 1952 by Palestinian diaspora in Saudi Arabia, strives to bring back to life the Caliphate, renouncing violence, under which transnational jurisdiction, all Muslim would be united. So they have common target, but HT officially wards off guerilla²¹⁵, and its rhetoric is soaked with counter-infidel and anti-American ideology – also deductible from the anti-Karimov discourse -, due to the capitalization of Uzbek bases by the Americans to endanger the Islamic position and faithful in the area.

Kharimov blamed it of the riots broken up in Andijan in 2005, but no evidence was provided of it, and besides, this organisation is neither present on the US list of the terrorist organisation²¹⁶. HT is anyhow touted as an extremist secret society active on the whole Central Asian soil - and playing a role even in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict²¹⁷-, because in its provisions there is to topple the leader in power, although not by violent means.

Extremism has even been combated from the inside, and through the means of the SADUM, that changed in Muslim Board of Uzbekistan (MBU) in 1993, an official institution aimed at defining the “true” Islamic religion in Uzbekistan, that was actually put under the control of the regime. It makes use of fatwas, laws and proclamations, limiting the will of the imams²¹⁸, in order to convey the “right form of Islam”, inspired exclusively to the hanafite tradition, and firmly condemning fundamentalism. MBU is no more than one of the results and instrument of the declared “war on extremism” launched by Karimov.

²¹⁵ Idem pp.165-167

²¹⁶ Emmanuel Karagiannis, Political Islam in Uzbekistan: Hizb-ut-Tahrir al-Islami, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol58, no.2, March 2006, p. 264

²¹⁷ Idem

²¹⁸ As Khalid points out, even sermons are not of their production, but they can only use those furnished by the MBU. Hanafi tradition is prized as promoting the cultural and historical inheritance of Uzbekistan, thus depicting as “bad Muslims” those who do not follow it, or scramble for the creation of an Islamic state. MBU is also charged of supervising the education provided by the few survived madrasas (about ten), which should be focused on history, culture, and were the students political orientation is gauged.

Adeeb Khalid, *Islam After Communism*, University of California Press, Berkely, 2007, p.168-172

Paolo Sartori, *L'Islam in Asia Centrale: tra Recupero della Tradizione e Movimenti Radicali: il Caso Uzbeko*, ISPI Working Paper, Programma Caucaso e Asia Centrale, No.20, September 2007, p. 10 http://www.ispionline.it/it/documents/wp_20_2007.pdf

Even though scaled down and weakened following to the counter-terrorism initiatives undertaken at an international degree in Afghanistan, where Noman-goniy himself lost his life, and the alleged defeat of the Taliban regime, IMU operations are still registered across the borders, and in 2004 it was renamed “*Islamic Movement of Turkestan*”, giving relief to its trans-ethnic²¹⁹ composition and enlarging its goal to the release of Xinjiang and the Caspian Sea. In fact it is not even clear the number of the jihadists militating in the IMU, but it is likely that they were and are confined in not enormous amounts, to a few thousands followers²²⁰.

Northern Caucasus presents a very similar situation for its instability, and complex scenery. It does not geographically belong to Central Asia, but its history of conquer and deportations, its multi-ethnic configuration, clan-based society and Islamic religious tradition draw it very close to it. Northern Caucasus, and in particular the Chechen resistance movements are a basic landmark in order to figure out the strategy policy implemented by Russia towards the war on terrorism, and for its being the Russian most painful thorn in the side²²¹.

In Northern Caucasus, as it was at the time of the Russian empire, the Soviet rule was more rigid than elsewhere: this peoples appeared indomitable, with their nomadic traditions and recognition of the most prominent institutions in their family, village and tribe. It was neither possible to co-opt them in the local governments, for their societies missed an aristocratic class. In this framework the history of the relationship between the centre and this periphery, or Russian “near abroad”, was featured with repression and subjugation - that passed also through forbidding Islam and brotherhoods -, on the part of the Soviet regime, and hatred on the part of the indigenous population, also motivated by the harsh cohabitation with the numerous Russian minorities sent by the Soviets to

²¹⁹ It is supported the thesis according to which Islamic revival in its most extreme and militant form is not an indigenous invention, rather that it has been bought from the outside and never sustained shouldered not even by the Islamic revivalism of the post-Soviet Union. The war in Tajikistan served to dampen the enthusiasm accorded to Islamic revivalism. Sheel K. Asopa, Moulama Abul Kalam Azad, *Religious Extremism and Terrorism in Central Asia*, in Mahavir Singh “*International Terrorism and Religious Extremism. Challenges to Central and South Asia*”, Institute of Asian Studies, Kolkata, Ananika Publisher and Distributors (P)LTD, 2004, Dheli, p. 167

²²⁰ Svante E. Cornell and Regine A. Spector, *Central Asia: More than Islamic Extremists*, The Washington Quarterly, Winter 2002, p.194

²²¹ G.D. Bakshi, *The War in Chechnya: a military analysis*, <http://www.idsa-india.org/an-aug-300.html>

occupy their urban areas and being appointed to the most privileged positions in the administrative and economic sectors²²².

The worst of the actions moved in this region, as far as concerned to the recent history, were the deportations ordered by Stalin since 1944, of entire groups of minorities, hold responsible for connivance in the Nazis invasion, registered in the collective memory as a genocide for the huge number of people who lost their lives in the inhumane transportation conditions and illnesses²²³. When with the advent of Krushchev to power they were allowed to return to their homeland, they found changed frontiers and lived an extreme polarization between them and the Russian groupings, which exerted the implicit role of civilizing the autochthonous people, through Russian education and rule.

The final twenty years of Soviet government and the post-independence period, was marked by the same trends characterising Central Asia: economic disease, the disappearance of many industrial job posts, national rediscovery, and above all serious anti-Moscow sentiments. Whether the transition in Central Asia was softened by the affirmation of the old nomenklatura regimes, in Northern Caucasus, the deeper unpreparedness of the indigenous population in the field of politics and administration, besides the multifaceted plight on an ethnic point of view and the turbulent interlink with the Moscow power, did not allow it.

Chechnya was the fulcrum of the explosion of dissatisfaction. Dzhokhar Dudayev, an ex general in the Red Army, seized the helm of the government in 1991 embodying an fundamentalist nationalist ideology. The core of his tasks was secession from the Russian Federation, the creation of a Chechen state and a strengthened relation with the other republics in Northern Caucasus, gathered under a united federative state. His means to reach consensus was to elicit resentments for Moscow, making leverage on the rights indigenous people had, due to the past and present sufferings, and conveying the fear for new deportations. The independent state was proclaimed in 1991 elections, accompanied by severe turmoil in the capital of Grozny, carried by ragtag units, armed with

²²² Marco Buttino, *Cecenia. Una Guerra e una Pacificazione Violenta*, Silvio Zamorani Editore, Torino, 2009, pp. 15-25

²²³ Svante E. Cornell, *The War Against Terrorism and the Conflict in Chechnya: a Case for Distinction*, The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs, vol.27, n.2, Autumn/Fall 2003, p.169

equipment left by the Russian Army or arrived through illicit smugglings. Yeltsin responded first by arming the opposition, and later, in 1994, with an heavy military intervention and carpet bombings, convinced that it would be a blitzkrieg²²⁴. In fact, many experts categorize it even as a “Limited War” for the hallmark massive use of force necessitated by Russian units, especially air-force, to counter Chechen resilience²²⁵.

Eventually, in 1996 the truce was finally declared and independence was *de facto* accorded, but not officially recognized, with the pledge on the part of Russia of providing Chechnya with the time to endow itself with the suitable economic and political apparatus, required for the viability of an independent state. In fact the money allocated by Russia for the post-war reconstruction did never reach the addressee and the recovery was hence prevented to go on.

What was not taken into account by the Russian leaders was the fact that their gruesome counter-offensive had meanwhile instilled greater bitterness in the minds and actions of the reactionaries. As a matter of fact the fighters' rhetoric changed in the second half of the '90s, devolving their sacrifice in the name of the Islamic *jihad*, and they associated in “*jamat*” on the mountains, to train many young boys, who often found in it an answer to unemployment and subjugation. Apart from Chechens, the most part was composed of Daghestani, but there were also Afghan veterans, Chirkessians and Balkarians and they organised a guerilla, addressed as the “Islamic Brigade” and headed by the warlords Shamil Basaev and the Jordanian emir Khattab²²⁶. They gave start to a series of terrorist reprisals, even in Daghestan, with the aim of demonstrating the trans-border pattern of their struggle, and because of it, did not enjoy large popular support.

In 1999 the *shariah* was applied by the new president Maskhadov, who moderately advocated for the establishment of an independent state of Chechnya, but acted also as a mediator with Russia, after the high pressure posed by the

²²⁴ Idem, p.170

²²⁵ G.D. Bakshi, *The War in Chechnya: a military analysis*, <http://www.idsa-india.org/an-aug-300.html>

²²⁶ Mairbek Vatkhagaev, *Il Fattore Ceceno nel Movimento di Resistenza del Nord del Caucaso*, in Marco Buttino, Alessandra Rognoni, “*Cecenia. Una Guerra e una Pacificazione Violenta*”, Silvio Zamorani Editore, Torino, 2009, pp. 81-96
Svante E. Cornell, *The War Against Terrorism and the Conflict in Chechnya: a Case for Distinction*, *The Fjetcher Forum of World Affairs*, vol.27, n.2, Autumn/Fall 2003, p.16

extremists. He advanced some attempts to moderate this latter, even including it in the government, but they devoted to jihad, and the radical Islam position they had adopted could not be restrained.

Following to new terrorist attacks, and especially to the invasion of Daghestan in August 1999, a new conflict broke up. It was even of greater entity, since instead of the Sufi separatist militants of the first confrontation, Putin forces had to face Wahhabbi jihadist, trained and refunded from abroad – Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Saudi Arabia -, and fighting for the creation of the creation of an Islamic state²²⁷.

Eventually, there was no peace treaty signed to definitely end up this war, but on the contrary, in 2003-4 the conflict was “Chechenized”, in the sense that the duty of re-bringing order and normalcy was assigned to the local police, with the support of Russian special forces. Moreover it is worth noting the police connections with the local solidarity groups, that implied personal interests intertwining with national ones, what frequently put them at odds with each other. In the same year, a new pro-Russian ruler was designated, Akhmad Khadirov, charged of coordinating the counter-terrorist operations.

This strategy did not thrive in normalizing the situation, but conversely, in the meantime the jamat and their guerillas had endowed themselves with new technological instruments and had become even more radical: their rhetoric has become more centred on the war against Moscow leadership for revenge, and they recognized the institution of the Caucasian Emirate, an Islamic fundamentalist state, in which the original Islamic tenets were legalized and endowed with juridical power and coercion on the base of shariah could be exerted in case of violation, in the frame of the “war to infidels”. Their reprisals, and suicide bombings arrived at the heart of Russia, in Moscow in 2002, in Beslan in 2004, and frequent are still nowadays the suicide attacks in the name of Allah. In numerous cases it was alleged that Russian secret services played an active role in orchestrating those aggressions in a way to fuel support against Chechen fighters²²⁸. Simply identified as “terrorist” since 2001 World Trade Centre at-

²²⁷ Idem

²²⁸ Idem, p.177

tack²²⁹, when they were included in the list of the terrorist groups, they are regarded as the worst internal foe to Russia. In 2007 the leader and spokesman of this design became Dokka Umarov, who followed Basaev in the command of the rebels, adopting stricter views and media communication as a backbone of his project²³⁰.

On the other hand even the Russian-led local forces retaliation and operations carried in order to unearth the militants became fiercer: it has frequently been documented news about indiscriminate shelling on Chechen villages, unjustified abductions and arrests, tortures and mutilations imposed in secret prisons around Northern Caucasus, unfair trials and the arbitrary “mopping up operations”, the “*zachistki*”²³¹ carried out to chase civilians suspected of terrorism, a series of cases of violation of human rights and war laws infractions of which Russia is considered responsible also from the Western world and the European Court for Human Rights²³².

Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region is the most Western and widest province of China, covering one sixth of its total territory, and shares 3300km border²³³, history, and not few common features with Central Asia. Even though the most salient cases of secessionist urges in China are provided by Taiwan and Tibet, that of Xingjiang Uyghur is not a minor case, in its cluster of ethnic questions, Islamic religion and political dissatisfaction.

Taking into consideration the figures issued by the census of 2000, this region is inhabited by 47% of Uyghur, the titular Muslim Turkic-speaking nationality, by the 38% of Han, the ethnic group of the Chinese “coloniser”, that has al-

²²⁹ In addition the way Russia portrays the two wars and its current commitment in Chechnya in the “war on international terrorism” has contributed to provide an imagery of the people from Northern Caucasus that was detrimental for the lives of those of them who live in Russia too.

Idem, p. 167

²³⁰ Through you tube, as well as through their well-upgraded website www.kavkazcentre.com

²³¹ Svante E. Cornell, *The War Against Terrorism and the Conflict in Chechnya: a Case for Distinction*, *The Fjetcher Forum of World Affairs*, vol.27, n.2, Autumn/Fall 2003, p.172

²³² Lidiya Yusupova, *La corte Europea dei Diritti dell'Uomo: una Speranza di Giustizia*, Marco Buttino, Alessandra Rognoni, *Cecenia. Una Guerra e una Pacificazione Violenta*, Silvio Zamorani Editore, Torino, 2009

²³³ Yangjin Zhang, Rouben Azizian, *Ethnic Challenges Beyond Borders*, St. Antony's college, Oxford, 1998, p.89

ways been charged with ruling positions²³⁴, and to a relative lesser extent by Hui, typically Muslims, and Central Asian nationalities²³⁵.

Great relevance is invested by the frequent contacts and migrations across the Chinese-Central Asian republics borders, which demarcation, particularly formerly to the Soviet Union collapse, was regarded as unsafe by Xinjiang, for the constant threats posed by China and Soviet Union rivalries on the supremacy over questioned stretches along it. Besides advantageous economic accomplishments, the contacts across the frontier, brought other types of implications through history: it is stated that the rising of ethno-nationalism and fundamentalist Islam and the 1991 independence in Central Asian republics have served as call for those resentments cultivated underground in the neighbouring Xinjiang²³⁶.

This area was conquered by the Qing dynasty in 1759. Xinjiang was institutionalized and ruled by the Chinese Empire with relative little interference on the part of the emperor, as soon as stability was overall granted, despite the recurrent Muslim revolts that often subverted the authority for short periods²³⁷.

Later, the stance of the Manchu towards Muslims, even if decided on short terms, was of rebuttal with regards to conversion to Islam, its profession, pilgrimages to holy places, and building new mosques: Islam had to be enclosed within the places where it was already assumed as a religion, but not fostered or proselytized. Beyond these provision there existed also the will of limiting the frequent mass migration towards the Soviet Union²³⁸.

The Republican era, between 1911 and 1949, was characterised by the nominal power of the warlords and a spread factionalism that involved Muslim up-

²³⁴ Chris Hann, Mathjis Pelkmans, *Realining Religion and Power in Central Asia: Islam, Nation-state and Post-Socialism*, Europe Asia Studies, Vol.61, No.9, 2009, p.1520

²³⁵ Ildikò Bellér-Hann, *The mobilization of Tradition. Localism and Identity among the Uyghur of Xinjiang*, in Robert Canfield, Gabriele Rasuly-Paleczek, "Ethnicity, Authority and Power in Central Asia. New Games, Great and Small", Central Asian Studies, Routledge, Oxon 2011, p.40

²³⁶ K.A. Bogatirev, *Etnokonfessional'niy Konflikt v Sinczyan-Uygurskom Avtonomom Rayone Kitaya. Chast' II*, in "Politika I Obshestvo" "Konflikt I Konsensus", No.1, 2011, p. 40

²³⁷ Kulbushan Warikoo, *Ethnic Religious Resurgence in Xinjiang*, in Tauroj Atabaki, John O' Kane, "Post Soviet Central Asia", international Institut for Asian Studies, Tauris Academic Studies, New York, 1998, p.270

²³⁸ Ildikò Bellér-Hann, *The mobilization of Tradition. Localism and Identity among the Uyghur of Xinjiang*, in Robert Canfield, Gabriele Rasuly-Paleczek, "Ethnicity, Authority and Power in Central Asia. New Games, Great and Small", Central Asian Studies, Routledge, Oxon 2011, p.40

roars, ethnic riots between Uyghur and Han, and within and amongst each ethnic, religious and political category within the region. This period remains vivid in the memory of local people and the pain that left, is possibly a deterrent for really thwarting the unity of the province itself²³⁹.

The annexation to the People's Republic of China marked a redirection towards the central power. The years that went under the label of “Great Leap Forward” and even more those of the “Proletarian Cultural Revolution²⁴⁰” - which repercussions lasted until 1969, despite its ending in 1963 -, were designated by alternated repressive policies that went against backwardness, considered to be rooted in localisms and nationalisms. This agenda aimed at re-educating the population providing it with literacy in the path towards modernity on a multi-disciplinary asset, thus shattering pre-socialist legacy, feudal and cultural customs, including Islam: religion was legally tolerated, but practically declassified or even persecuted in some forms, as state atheism had to be pursued²⁴¹. Parallel, a mass Chinese transfer ordained by Beijing, from inner China brought in Xinjiang a large number of Han Chinese, convinced of an alleged superiority, due to their higher degree of civilization and to the fact that historically Chinese used to consider themselves as the sole nationality in the whole China, despite minorities²⁴². Taking into account also the fact that they came to constitute a majority in a number of districts and cover leading economic and political positions²⁴³, the relation between the two main nationalities became increasingly sharpen. In this respect, Chinese political approach alternated from “enhancing national consciousness, proclaiming the absence of the idea of nationalism under socialism, and encouraging ethnic integration”, according to what was the most appropriate provision to preserve territorial integrity²⁴⁴. The

²³⁹ Idem, p.212

²⁴⁰ As Idikò Bellér-Hann puts it, an ideological war was undertaken against the “Four Olds: ideas, culture, customs and habits”, leading, for what Xinjiang was concerned, to anarchy and uprisings against Beijing.

²⁴¹ While religious places were closed in large numbers, some religious festivities and celebrations continued to be domestically or openly respected, the authorities classifying them as “traditional”, or turning their back.

²⁴² K.A. Bogatirev, *Etnokonfessional'niy Konflikt v Sinczyan-Uygurskom Avtonomom Rayone Kitaya. Chast' II*, in “*Politika I Obshestbo*” “*Konflikt I Konsensus*”, No.1, 2011, p.36

²⁴³ Chris Hann, Mathjis Pelkmans, *Realining Religion and Power in Central Asia: Islam, Nation-state and Post- Socialism*, Europe Asia Studies, Vol.61, No.9, 2009, p.1520

²⁴⁴ K.A. Bogatirev, *Etnokonfessional'niy Konflikt v Sinczyan-Uygurskom Avtonomom Rayone Kitaya. Chast' II*, in “*Politika I Obshestbo*” “*Konflikt I Konsensus*”, No.1, 2011, p.36

conservation of the status quo has always been a cornerstone of the Chinese policy towards Xingjiang, as it was bestowed the role of buffer state, against incursions and moreover it allowed China to maintain a foothold over Central Asia, on its commercial and cultural spheres²⁴⁵.

As it was for Central Asia, also in Xinjiang this brought the effect of enhancing nationalist sentiments from below, since people, officially deprived of the possibility to freely practice their pre-modern traditions, deeply belonging to their identity, felt the urgency of rediscovering them. As in Central Asia this has surely been possible because of the Nationalities policy endured by China on the model of the Soviet Union, in 1954, that fostered the emergence of a consciousness that linked ethnic groups and their circumscribed territories²⁴⁶.

With the death of Mao, the religious sphere lived a resurgence, even if it is not possible to speak of a real opening, and in Xinjiang this process was particularly vivid. In this perspective, Islam was a dominant distinctive character, and even nowadays, when many young people perceive this religious heritage as obsolete and warding off from the modern world, in rural areas it still tells a great deal of the sense of belonging to a national identity.

The problem to China's territorial integrity with reference to Xinjiang is posed by the separatists Muslim Uyghurs, a group with a multifaceted configuration, that includes many non-Uyghur representatives and people from the diaspora. Since the beginning of the '90s, they concertedly envisage to institutionalize a “free Uyghurstan²⁴⁷”, to which they claim their right on the basis of their ancestors alleged original belonging to the ancient Tarim basin, the territ-

²⁴⁵ Kulbushan Warikoo, *Ethnic Religious Resurgence in Xinjiang*, in Tauroj Atabaki, John O' Kane, “*Post Soviet Central Asia*”, international Institut for Asian Studies, Tauris Academic Studies, New York, 1998, p.271

²⁴⁶ In this occasion Xinjiang was renamed “Uyghur Autonomous region”. The case of Xinjiang Uyghurs acquisition of identity consciousness and affiliation with their territory is witnessed, among others tracts, by the double names, according to the Uyghur or the Chinese version, assigned to some locations.
Idem, p.270

K.A. Bogatirev, *Etnokonfessional'niy Konflikt v Sinczyan-Uygurskom Avtonomom Rayone Kitaya. Chast' II*, in “*Politika I Obshestbo*” “*Konflikt I Konsensus*”, No.1, 2011, p.44

Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan is not the Balkans. Central Asia ethnicity and its political consequences*, in Robert Canfield, Gabriele Rasuly-Paleczek, “*Ethnicity, Authority and Power in Central Asia. New Games, Great and Small*”, Central Asian Studies, Routledgr, Oxon 2011, p.98

²⁴⁷ K.A. Bogatirev, *Etnokonfessional'niy Konflikt v Sinczyan-Uygurskom Avtonomom Rayone Kitaya. Chast' II*, in “*Politika I Obshestbo*” “*Konflikt I Konsensus*”, No.1, 2011, p. 41

ory, where prior to the affirmation of the Chinese empire was under their kingdom and that nowadays corresponds to Xinjiang. Their supremacy on the territory was taken over by the Qing empire, under which the territory took the name of “Xinjiang”, “new dominion”, in 1884. Some attempts of creating a self-ruled state, was moved in 1933, after the bloody rebellion of the Muslim separatist Tungans and the Uyghurs, with the establishment of the Republic of Eastern Turkmenistan, that lasted one year, and later, in 1944, but they revealed a failure, as nationhood was premature for a nationality that was recognized only in 1921²⁴⁸. As a matter of fact the republic of Eastern Turkestan came eventually to an end in 1955, when the Autonomous Republic of Xinjiang was inaugurated by the People's Republic of China²⁴⁹. By the way, this two historical moment of independence from the Chinese rule and the Russian expansionism, are periods to which they make reference for their project of self-determination.

It is worth noting that separatist demands express an increasing disappointment with the Chinese stance, growing and ever-lasting environmental problems and connected health problems and high mortality rates - which responsibility is attributed to the Chinese nuclear testing -, over-taxation and the policies to limit childbirth, introduced under Deng Xiaoping²⁵⁰. Not less important is the fact that one of the most important reasons for the rising of the Uyghur separatist movement is the fact that the cohabitation with the Han Chinese has always been controverted and filled with hostility, and whereas in Central Asia ethnic groups were to a large extent integrated among them, in Xinjiang this never happened, and they live apart from one another and do not know the other's language and culture. On its part, the Chinese rule has made a large use of violence to put down the frequent uprisings exploded in the last

²⁴⁸ Dru C. Gladney, *Islam in China: Beijing's Hui and Uighur Challenge*, in “*Global Dialogue*”, Vol.9, No.1-2, Winter/Spring, 2007
<http://www.worlddialogue.org/content.php?id=403>

²⁴⁹ K.A. Bogatirev, Etnokonfessional'niy Konflikt v Sinczyan-Uygurskom Avtonomom Rayone Kitaya, in “Politika I Obshestbo” “Konflikt I Konsensus”, No.12, 2010, p.33

²⁵⁰ Idem

K.A. Bogatirev, Etnokonfessional'niy Konflikt v Sinczyan-Uygurskom Avtonomom Rayone Kitaya, *Chast' II* in “Politika I Obshestbo” “Konflikt I Konsensus”, No.1, 2011, p.38

forty-fifty years - starting in the early '60s, and covering ethnic hatred, Muslim rights, and demands addressed to the Chinese government²⁵¹.

Despite the presence of a large Muslim minority in China, Uyghur separatists are not properly equipped and neither receive great support among the Islamic community, not even on the part of the largest Muslim group in China, the Hui²⁵², but rather are divided from the inside among those who are mostly motivated by religious sentiments, and those who support a more open Muslim worship, admitting modernity and laity²⁵³. In addition, they are a splinter group since, whereas the epicentre are the cities of Kashgar and Urumqi, to a large extent is also directed from centres outside Xinjiang – with particular reference to Turkey, but even Europe and the U.S. -, with numerous divisions among them, also with reference to the belonging to the Sunni school, whether Sufi or otherwise, language, territorial or political ties.

Besides this, many of them, being sedentary since ancient times, are particularly attached to their homelands, something that prevents them from creating significant interlinks with other farer influential terrorist groups, as the Afghans, and thus enjoying further supplies. On the other hand, it is undoubted that the Uyghur in Xinjiang hold close relations with the near abroad, according to their position in the region. Indeed the Islamic separatist movements existing in Ferghana Valley, on the Western border, have a sound influence and constitute an important network with the Islamic Uyghur separatist group from the South Xinjiang, and is one of the reasons for the presence of a great number of the latter in the former territory: they found a common ground both in religion and in the willingness of creating a new entity, separated from the central power; the Uyghur from Northern Xinjiang instead, which opposition to the central Chinese government respects is heated and more detached from the reli-

²⁵¹ Kulbhushan Warikoo, *Ethnic Religious Resurgence in Xinjiang*, in Tauroj Atabaki, John O' Kane, "Post Soviet Central Asia", international Institut for Asian Studies, Tauris Academic Studies, New York, 1998, p.274

Idem p.36

²⁵² In the past times under this name went all Muslim groups.

Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan is not the Balkans. Central Asia ethnicity and its political consequences*, in Robert Canfield, Gabriele Rasuly-Paleczek, "Ethnicity, Authority and Power in Central Asia. New Games, Great and Small", Central Asian Studies, Routledge, Oxon 2011, p.98

²⁵³ K.A. Bogatirev, Etnokonfessional'niy Konflikt v Sinczyan-Uygurskom Avtonomom Rayone Kitaya, *Chast' II* in "Politika I Obshestbo" "Konflikt I Konsensus", No.1, 2011, p. 42

gious cause, entail closer ties with the Northern stretch of Central Asia, and a relevant amount of them live in the Central Asian republics, especially Kazakhstan²⁵⁴.

In the decades after the Soviet Union breakdown, together with other agreements, China signed with the five Central Asian republics in '96, and Russia in '99 protocols committing the ex-Soviet partners to pledge not shouldering separatists group -due the large presence of Uyghurs on their territories.

Since 1997 bombs exploded in Beijing, even if not often spoken about, terrorist activities have happened with more frequency, what brought to the execution of a large number of Uyghurs²⁵⁵.

From these three examples it emerges an ambiguous scenery: on the one hand such diverse claims can be considered very dangerous for their endogenous characters and their roots originating from historical and traditional factors that appear easy to be exploited and shaped according to single groups aspirations. This context is compounded from the dis-homogeneity of the ethnic distribution and their trans-border relations pattern, all aspects that unfold the relevance they occupy in the SCO war against the three evils, and the peril these three all-in merged bowls evidently pose to the territorial integrity of their states of belonging. On the other it is also clear from the above descriptions that their fuzzy identification make it arduous to really draw the profile of who is the enemy to be defeated, and the apparent limited rate of consensus within the population hampers the evaluation of the entity of the terrorist problem itself, resulting in an issue with blur contours.

²⁵⁴ The separatist mainly Uyghur-composed “Vostochnyi Turkestan” is rooted in Kazakhstan and since the '90s, when the state loosened the grip on it, have developed in great autonomy.

K.A. Bogatirev, Etnokonfessional'niy Konflikt v Sinczyan-Uygurskom Avtonomom Rayone Kitaya, *Chast' II* in “Politika i Obshestvo” “Konflikt i Konsensus”, No.1, 2011, pp.40, 43

²⁵⁵ Dru Gladney reports that Amnesty International Report of 1999 counted 190 executions and 210 capital sentences of Uyghurs in two years.

Dru C. Gladney, *China's Interests in Central Asia: Energy and Ethnic Security*, in Robert Ebel, Rajan Mensu, “*Energy and Conflict in Central Asia and the Caucasus*”, The National Bureau of Asian Research, Rowman and Little Field Publisher, Oxford, 2000, p. 210

III Chapter

The bear and the tiger: Russia and China's stakes on the Great Game scenario



Source: <http://www.centralasiatravel.com>

3 The bear and the tiger: Russia and China's stakes on the Great Game scenario

It has already been mentioned in the previous chapter a reference to the “New Great Game” incepted at the end of the Soviet Union in Central Asia, a region that became a chess-board for old and new players confronting each other with their own ambitions and potentials. In this part of my work, the stress will be laid on the two greater powers leaning on the Eurasian heartland, China and Russia, those that have been enjoying an influential position since long time, and that, with the end of the Cold War, had to reshape it, a project also framed within the new world interplays going through after the end of the Cold War.

Remarkably, on the eve of the institutionalization of the Shanghai Cooperation organisation, the negotiations undertaken in 1991 marked a watershed in the relations between them, which up until then had been embarked in an open competition on what concerned the shared borderline and even broader ideological issues pertaining to the global geopolitics at large. Considering the fact that the last honeymoon in their relations dates back to '49-'59, we can say that, at least apparently, the situation has completely inverted after the collapse of the Soviet Union, that registered growing trade, especially of arms from Russia to China²⁵⁶, flourishing bilateral interchanges with the five new Central Asian republics, across the ex-contested borders, and measures to normalize the Sino-Russian approach to one another, until becoming “strategic partners” in the multilateral and multidimensional frame of the SCO²⁵⁷.

The SCO can be even read as a mirror reflecting all the facets, light and dark sides of their new interaction, and the limits posed to the extension of this good fraternization.

²⁵⁶ It is frequently advocated that the relations between these two giants lives mostly on the mutually beneficial arms trafficking, as it provides a certain consumer to Russia and a chance to China to widen its military furnishing. This thesis is accompanied by the hypothesis that there is not enough political ideological common foundation.

Yiu Bin, *In Search for a Normal Relationship: China and Russia into the 21st Century*, in *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, Volume 5, No. 4, November 2007, p.54

²⁵⁷ Ingmar Oldberg, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Powerhouse or Paper Tiger?*, FOI Swedish Research Defence Agency, Stockholm, June 2007, p.25

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The fulcrum of this reconciliation is well visible on their commitment in Central Asia and the individual impetus that motivate such a decision. At the end of the Soviet Union Central Asia was characterized by a political vacuum that served as a hook to a number of states hungry of its natural resources and raw materials, and eager to occupy a place in their markets: it acquired a geo-strategic relevance that attracted the appetites of many closer and farer actors, with diverse motivations.

In particular, China and Russia, even if at different degrees, became progressively acquainted with the advantages that were at stake in the region and decided not to renounce them, through keeping their role strong and granting their reliability for what security and stability is concerned.

As it will be later argued, China and Russia are not the sole powers wielding their hold on Central Asia, and the constraints moved by them against the Western - more specifically the US and NATO- advances on this large territory tells volumes about the competition undercurrent on this pitch, the real and less evident targets of the organization and the relevance of its stakes.

The aim of this chapter is that of understanding the reasons that have pushed Russia and China to guard their presence in the region, the evolution of their approaches in this sense, and the channels through which they have maintained their role at an individual and cooperative level. Moreover a more detailed insight on this matter is certainly useful to catch the orientation and long-term objectives of the SCO, beyond the struggle against terrorism, and to comprehend its light and dark sides²⁵⁸.

In the first part, the topic will be treated from the Russian point of view, with a particular eye on the evolution of its outbound policy towards its ex-Soviet provinces.

The second part will be instead devoted to the Chinese perspective and to its interests and traces on the Central Asian landmass.

²⁵⁸ Thierry Kellner, *L' Occidente de la Chine- Pékin et la Nouvelle Asie Centrale (1991-2001)*, Presse Universitaire de France, 2008

3.1 Russia's approach towards Central Asia

Although Russian interest towards Central Asia has never totally stopped since its conquest in the XIX century, it is also fundamental to highlight that Russian attitude passed through many phases depending on the historical moment and the inner Russian situation.

The function of Central Asia as a buffer state to protect the Southern flank of Russia and as an inter-land between the Western and Eastern extremities of the empire, facilitating transfers, is an inheritance of the geopolitical asset issued from the confrontation of the Russian and British empire during the XIX century, which gave issue to the delimitation of the two powers' sphere of influence running along the Curzon Line²⁵⁹.

At that time, even though integrated in the Russian empire for the latter the cultural division that separated it from its Southern periphery was already too evident, something Russia was never successful in profoundly assimilating it, due to its cultural diversity and diversification. As a consequence it soon felt charged with the role of “civilizer” in the area²⁶⁰.

During the Soviet period, the Communist leadership applied a “stick and the carrot” policy. Moscow was the centre towards which a thick web of services, facilities, economic activities and interlinks wound, to reach the fifteen republics and particularly the feeble and mainly agricultural Central Asia. The latter received annual subsidies from Moscow for almost 20 billion a year, communication routes as well as oil and gas pipelines stretched northwards and the Soviet protection was warranted to the republics economies and the local people living conditions, in change of a tight grip, concretely limiting the singular states' freedom and choices²⁶¹. Anyhow, as already observed, Central Asia became a too heavy bargain for the Soviet still economy, in the last decade prior to the USSR breakdown, which reverberations affected the five republics single

²⁵⁹ Lane Johnson, *Russia and Central Asia: a New Web of Relations*, the Royal institute of International Affairs, Russia and Eurasia Programme, Washington, 1998, p. 16

²⁶⁰ Idem

²⁶¹ Jyotsna Bakshi, *No Single Power or Power Centre Can Have Exclusive Sway Over Central Asia: A Geo-Political Analysis*, Strategic Analysis IDSA, Vol.22, no.1, April 1998, p. 3

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economic machines, that were deprived of their most important sustainment. Gorbachev reformist policy included also the duty of departing from all onerous engagement Russia held beyond its national frontiers²⁶².

From this moment, the layout of the Russian attitude with respect to Central Asia became clear, building the bases for the henceforth policy.

The immediate post-Cold War period can be indeed described as one in which, if on the global table cards were melted anew, local priorities, interests and perspectives changed too. For what Russia was concerned, its orientation transformed radically.

In 1992, the new Russian Prime Minister, Yegor Gaidar and the Foreign Minister, Andrei Kozyrev, welcomed an *Atlanticist* strategy, aimed at disengaging from the ex-Soviet states -and from Central Asia backward region in particular, reckoned to curb Russian economic growth-, while putting at the top position of the agenda an utterly new orientation towards the Western hemisphere. Central Asia was no more than an appendix²⁶³. Implicit in this strategy there was the reason itself that had determined the collapse of the Soviet Union: the economic weakness for which the Soviet system had become too burdensome. Russia, once the Soviet Union had left, was free of healing its economic sector, implementing a strategy of *indifference*, or as it has also been defined “*withdrawal and confusion*” - coinciding with the first phase that will last up until 1995 more or less -, towards those states that until less than a year earlier were constitutive part of the broader system to which Moscow served as a control tower²⁶⁴.

To a larger extent, this came from the aspiration of continuing preserving a high status in the international equilibrium, despite the dissolution of the Soviet block, thus bearing on the new world order. This question tells a great deal of

²⁶² Lane Johnson, *Russia and Central Asia: a New Web of Relations*, the Royal institute of International Affairs, Russia and Eurasia Programme, Washington, 1998, p. 17

²⁶³ Vladimir Paramanov, Aleksey Stokov, Oleg Stolpovski, *Russia in Central Asia Politics, Security and Economics*, Nova Science Publisher, New York 2009, pp. 1, 2

²⁶⁴ *Idem*

Yangjin Zhang, Rouben Azizian, *Ethnic Challenges Beyond Borders*, St. Antony's college, Oxford, 1998, p.15

Lane Johnson, *Russia and Central Asia: a New Web of Relations*, the Royal institute of International Affairs, Russia and Eurasia Programme, Washington, 1998, p. 18

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the Russian vision of the world politics and polarity since the end of the Cold-War era: the post-Cold War resulted , in the new leadership's view, in a multi-polar order, and therefore questioned the U.S. assessed unipolarity²⁶⁵.

Starting from this tenets, Russia openly hailed and cherished regional co-operation under the banner of CIS, created in 1991, through the numerous bilateral treaties of friendship and mutual assistance envisaged since 1992²⁶⁶, the Tashkent Treaty of Collective Security, signed in Tashkent in May 1992 – that however remained a paper policy -, as instruments to avoid the outburst of conflicts and basically shouldering the members in their divorce from the centre. A joint military command was created within the CIS, but due to the process undergoing in the individual newly independent states of military build-up, military cooperation was not seriously treated by the constituting states, and in 1993 it was lashed and replaced by a Joint Military Coordinating Council²⁶⁷.

Overall, in practice, Russia slackened the reins of Central Asia, indirectly maintaining its influence, without committing in excessively costly military or economic responsibilities. Certainly those strengths were required for the institution and state-building of the five republics.

A plain example was the early underestimation of the consequences the Afghan unsteady situation could provoke, destined to cause future damages on the entire area, as it has been already touched on. With the departure of the Soviet troops in 1989, a harsh civil war broke up and the government of Mohammad Najibullah encountered little support on the part of Moscow in tackling the emergence²⁶⁸. Little time later, the fear about Afghanistan increased drastically, when the consequences of this destabilization were affecting the whole region. This recalls the relevance of the Islamic problem, that was one on which Central Asia made leverage to be granted the assistance of Russia in

²⁶⁵ Axel Berkofskj, Serena Giusti, Tomislava Penkova, *Le Relazioni Sino-Russe e il Caso dell'Organizzazione per la Cooperazione di Shanghai*, Osservatorio di Politica Internazionale, n.14- May 2010

²⁶⁶ The first signatory was Kazakhstan, with which the mutual use of bases and facilities were agreed, even if it never materialized.

²⁶⁷ Lane Johnson, *Russia and Central Asia: a New Web of Relations*, the Royal institute of International Affairs, Russia and Eurasia Programme, Washington, 1998, p. 29

²⁶⁸ As already shown, Afghanistan became the basis for the terrorist activities of the Talibans and Al-Qaeda, among which the most evident were drugs and arms smuggling and the spread of new fundamentalist-inspired groups across the Central Asian hemisphere.

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preserving the status quo, and to be shouldered in its troublesome transition²⁶⁹. On the other hand, Kozyrev doctrine, did not make distinction amongst the different expressions within the Muslim world and to him this was a foe to be defeated on a common ground with the West²⁷⁰.

On the economic point of view the detachment from Central Asia translated not only in a drop in the financial supplies, but more drastically in the interruption of the rouble zone on the part of Russia in 1992, aimed at ending the advantages that for such a long time had been alleged to weight on Russian shoulders, just in a moment when the path towards privatization was opening at diverse speeds. The five republics tried their best to preserve the rouble as their currency, but the pressure posed by the Russian banks, the economic crisis, and the haste imposed by IMF and the World Bank for adopting a privatized economy, obliged them to adopt national currencies²⁷¹.

Besides this, the volume of trade dropped to 1/10, as the privileged internal prices of the Soviet Union disappeared and Russia did not maintain them, as it had been calculated that it constituted a loss by 5 and 10 per cent in profits²⁷².

Consequently Russia lost share and trust from the Central Asian states that deemed it a betrayer and a subject on which they could rely no more.

Nonetheless, it has to be underlined the fact that Russia continued fostering bilateral relations with the single five republics, which were less high-priced and risky for the Russian new soft approach, and which have not yet been abandoned at the time of writing. This especially regarded the military defence

²⁶⁹ Sergei Gretskey, *Russia's Policy Toward Central Asia*, CA&CC Publishing House, Carnegie Moscow Center. Moscow. 1997. <http://www.ca-c.org/dataeng/GRETSKY.shtml>

²⁷⁰ Jyotsna Bakshi, *No Single Power or Power Centre Can Have Exclusive Sway Over Central Asia: A Geo-Political Analysis*, Strategic Analysis IDSA, Vol.22, no.1, April 1998, p. 5
Lane Johnson, *Russia and Central Asia: a New Web of Relations*, the Royal institute of International Affairs, Russia and Eurasia Programme, Washington, 1998, p. 30

²⁷¹ Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia. The Creation of Nation*, I.B.Tauris Publisher, London, 2000, p.183

²⁷² In the former Soviet system had been established a mechanism through which Central Asia exported raw materials at low fares to the rest of the Soviet space, and imported back finished merchandise, thanks to the funds supplied by the Central power, so at advantageous tariffs. With the loss of the division of labour, for such it was under the USSR, the Central Asian purchasing power was not sufficient to satisfy the demand.

Vladimir Paramanov, Aleksey Stokov, Oleg Stolpovski, *Russia in Central Asia Politics, Security and Economics*, Nova Science Publisher, New York 2009, pp. 2-10

Jyotsna Bakshi, *No Single Power or Power Centre Can Have Exclusive Sway Over Central Asia: A Geo-Political Analysis*, Strategic Analysis IDSA, Vol.22, no.1, April 1998, p. 4

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of external borders, the training of a great amount of military personnel in Russian military structures, the upgrading of the military apparatus and armaments, a long slate of more or less effective agreements²⁷³, of which the most part was signed with Kazakhstan - on the mutual use of military spaces in case of aggression - and Uzbekistan - for a total amount approaching 200 accords. Even in this field cooperation was not plain and without problems: disputes emerged, for example, on the part of Kazakhstan on the lack of patrols on their common borders, which allowed illegal trafficking and migrations. Kazakhstan as the other Central Asian states did not refrain entertaining relations with other powers in the region, in special way with China since 1996, when the negotiations that preceded the birth of the SCO brought to fix the disputes about the shared borders²⁷⁴.

Certainly, the crumbling situation - political, economic, social and military - in those recently independent republics, contributed to push them to look for other sources of procurement, and so they too started to diversify their links and especially count more on Western powers. For instance, it is indicative the case of Kazakhstan, that after repeated attempts of rescuing its special links with Moscow, started a policy directed to attract foreign investments and sold a large part of its metallurgical and hydrocarbon industry to the West and to Japan, or that Kyrgyzstan sold its biggest gold mine to a Canadian holding, the "Caneco". It is of the utmost relevance the relation that those states inaugurated with the Atlantic community for what related the security sphere: in 1994 Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan adhered to the NATO-led Partnership

²⁷³ Notwithstanding the fact that often they were at the centre of ineffective and fallacious pledges, as it happened for Kyrgyzstan, that, anyhow, enjoyed assistance more than the other states during the post-Soviet period. Indeed here Russia deployed almost 5000 units along the 1000km border with China, and on the border with Tajikistan, to patrol the frontier at the time of the civil war in the latter. This divisions were sent with the objective of containing the disorders and averting illegal trespassing of refugees. Discontent was manifested for the suspicion of complicity of the Russian soldiers with the drug traffickers. Vladimir Paramanov, Aleksey Stokov, Oleg Stolpovski, *Russia in Central Asia Politics, Security and Economics*, Nova Science Publisher, New York 2009, pp. 47-69

²⁷⁴ Lane Johnson, *Russia and Central Asia: a New Web of Relations*, the Royal institute of International Affairs, Russia and Eurasia Programme, Washington, 1998, p. 33-34

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for Peace Programme, which allowed them to share their strengths on security issues²⁷⁵.

Obviously, the loss was not uniquely suffered on the Central Asian republics side. In fact, in the mid of the '90s the Russian leaders decided a shift in their policy, since they became wary and scared of the exorbitant liberty of action that they were permitting to the Western actors in the region. Russian presidency became acknowledged with the evidence that the Western policy towards the region had caused the latter to forsake the idea of Russia as the sole trustworthy protagonist to make reference to, in the bad as in the good times. Above all there were national groups in the Russian governmental asset that started to claim the ties with Central Asians as a pre-eminent aspect to preserve “Eurasian unity” and keep safe the range of issues, related to minorities, commerce, energetic interests and the Western hold²⁷⁶.

In light of this, Kozyrev had emphasized in 1994 the need for a new boost for cooperation among the CIS countries, actually using the word “integration”, intending it as a new federation, more than a commonwealth. With its new incipient role of peace-keeper, Russia made leverage on the new independent states interest in preserving the status quo and, parallel, on the debt that the CIS members had towards it to stress the exigence of a stronger union amid themselves²⁷⁷.

Along with other factors, Russian revived interest in the Southern republics was widely justified by the mission of defending the rights of the Russian minorities within the Central Asian borders, which were facing some discriminations due to the national reorientation underway in the single states, a circumstance that particularly concerned Kazakhstan for the massive presence of Slavic minorities and that could trigger new conflicts²⁷⁸. The new rhetoric

²⁷⁵ Vladimir Paramanov, Aleksey Stokov, Oleg Stolpovski, *Russia in Central Asia Politics, Security and Economics*, Nova Science Publisher, New York 2009, pp. 47-69

²⁷⁶ Yangjin Zhang, Rouben Azizian, *Ethnic Challenges Beyond Borders*, St. Antony's college, Oxford, 1998, pp.15-17

²⁷⁷ Sergei Gretskey, *Russia's Policy Toward Central Asia*, CA&CC Publishing House, Carnegie Moscow Center. Moscow. 1997. <http://www.ca-c.org/dataeng/GRETSKY.shtml>

²⁷⁸ Here the Slavic portion of the population formed the “Lad”, protesting against the nationalist policies that were outcasting them from the cultural and political life. Russia intervened to calm the situation with requests addressed to Kazakh government.

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voiced with alarm themes as the illegal migrations and trafficking across the borders, and the dangerous rising importance of Islamic sentiments in the Central Asian political sphere.

Besides, Yeltsin and his administration realized that caused to the entrance of the Western countries into the area and consequently to Russia's relaxed grip on Central Asia, their government was loosening the possibility of wielding a monopoly over the raw materials there present, leaving an attractive vacuum. But above all the Russian ruling class started to look with disenchantment to the Atlantic community, that expressed no intention to accept Russia as a member state, nor to involve it in its decision making, in spite of the former efforts²⁷⁹.

Such conceits was certainly behind the decision of '93-'94 of dispatching troops in the “near abroad”, as it was labelled in the new parlance, officially to ascertain a sufficient degree of stability, in the frame of a refreshed military doctrine that charged Russia with a new peace-keeping role²⁸⁰.

In 1995-6, the turning-point announced a couple of years earlier in Russian strategy towards Central Asia became manifest. Basically, this second phase coincided and was determined by the election of Yeltsin for a second term, and that of a new Foreign Affairs Minister, Yevgeny Primakov, appointed Prime Minister in the '98-'99 arch time.

“Primakov doctrine” revealed decisive, firstly because he had had the chance during his previous charge as chief of the Foreign Intelligence Services of inquiring into the unwillingness on the part of the West of integrating Russia into its system, that instead was capitalizing on the hole that the Soviet Union had left in Central Asia. In one of his reports he had compared the Western attitude

Vyacheslav Ya. Belokrenitsky, *Russia and Former Soviet Central Asia: the Attitude towards Regional Integrity*, in Tauroj Atabaki, John O' Kane, “*Post Soviet Central Asia*”, international Institut for Asian Studies, Tauris Academic Studies, New York, 1998, p.55

²⁷⁹ Vladimir Paramanov, Aleksey Stokov, Oleg Stolpovski, *Russia in Central Asia Politics, Security and Economics*, Nova Science Publisher, New York 2009, p.10

²⁸⁰ According to Jyotsna Bakshi, the Russian nuclear shield was extended to protect the CIS delimitations and Russia abandoned the Soviet pledge of no-first-use of the nuclear weapon as a deterrent to any possible attack to its nation and its neighbours.
Idem, p.5

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to the Islamic advance in the region, availing on the current instability²⁸¹. Hence, the focus of Russian policy in general was transferred from the “far” to the “near abroad”, and the prerogative was that of building Russia as a powerful pole for the region, and to hold a sway over its economic potential. Secondly the accent over integration amongst the CIS was even stronger, as demonstrated by the displacement of CIS headquarters to Moscow and by the creation of a new directorate that facilitated the exchanges among the states²⁸². In addition, in quality of expert of the Islamic world and the Middle East, Primakov outlined a clear definition of the “dangerous Islam”, identifying it with its “extremist” expression, and not the “fundamentalist” one, on which a lot of confusion had been done hitherto²⁸³.

The seeds of the *Near Abroad policy* were already visible during the outburst of the Tajik civil war, that awakened Russian elites, calling their attention on the abrupt rupture with the Soviet past that was taking place in that state²⁸⁴. As a matter of fact, it has to be recognized that the civil war in Tajikistan was stemmed particularly thanks to the Russian deployment of the 201st Motor Rifle Division - although Uzbek contribution was meaningful too - and patrols on the border with Afghanistan. Russia had cherished, in a CIS meeting in May 1993, the deployment of an integrated peacekeeping force intervening in Tajikistan, but the Central Asian members were loath to accept this proposal. A large number of troops were maintained even at the

The Russian establishment wanted to assure a monopoly on the corridors of transportation and exportation of oil and gas, as testified by the total coverage of the expenses held to build the pipelines, the agreements endorsed with Kaza-

²⁸¹ Lane Johnson, *Russia and Central Asia: a New Web of Relations*, the Royal institute of International Affairs, Russia and Eurasia Programme, Washington, 1998, p.18

²⁸² The question of integration can also be interpreted as an instrument for Russia to exercise its weight on the geopolitics of the area, practically interfering also in the states regimes, when necessary.

Sergei Gretskey, *Russia's Policy Toward Central Asia*, CA&CC Publishing House, Carnegie Moscow Center. Moscow. 1997. <http://www.ca-c.org/dataeng/GRETSKY.shtml>

²⁸³ Lane Johnson, *Russia and Central Asia: a New Web of Relations*, the Royal institute of International Affairs, Russia and Eurasia Programme, Washington, 1998, p. 30

Idem

²⁸⁴ Idem

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khstan and Turkmenistan on oil and gas transfer, and the limitation in some occasions imposed on the quantity that had to be bargained.

Even with regards to military cooperation, the sharpening of the situation in Afghanistan, gave a new boost to the Russian ambition of military integration with the Central Asian republics. In 1995 a document on collective security was signed, but it presented some substantial divergences in the perception of security itself: Russia deemed Central Asia to be threatened from the outside, whether the republics feared internal factionalism, ethnic uproars and other sources of instability. The fear for Russia belonged to the actions led by the Western actors in the region and their strains of affirming “new centres of power”, clearly hiding the lure NATO was exerting on the new independent states. On the other hand, the latter were not filled with disdain in respect to NATO expansion East-wards, on the contrary they welcomed its interest. A commonly perceived concern to Russia and its Central Asian partners was instead the smuggling of ammunitions and narcotics throughout the region – but also of other merchandises -, an issue that deserved a joint military response²⁸⁵.

Arguably, Russia and Central Asia had not yet reached the necessary conditions for a strengthened confidence: many of the Russian military and economic initiatives of cooperation with Central Asia had not been accomplished, with the consequence that the letter resulted more and more sceptical about Moscow. In fact Russian ambitions over Central Asia appeared aimed solely at granting a strategic presence in the region, without managing long-term initiatives: troops were left in Kyrgyzstan on the border with China, in Turkmenistan on the border with Iran and in Tajikistan, even after the war, on the border with Afghanistan²⁸⁶; the Kazakh Baikonour cosmodrone was rented together with other measures as such and today almost 70% of the Russian space rockets are launched from this site, but no preponderate project was implemented for economic reconstruction in the region²⁸⁷. Some domestic questions carried their

²⁸⁵ Vladimir Paramanov, Aleksey Stokov, Oleg Stolpovski, *Russia in Central Asia Politics, Security and Economics*, Nova Science Publisher, New York 2009 p.30

²⁸⁶ The control of the border with Afghanistan was utterly attributed to Tajikistan only in 2005.

²⁸⁷ Dmitry Trofimov, *Russian Foreign Policy Objectives in Central Asia*, Russia Regional Perspective Journal, Vol.1, Issue 3, 2012

Marlène Laruelle, *Russia's Central Asia Policy and the Role of Russian Nationalism*, Silk Road Paper, April 2008, p.9

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weight too: the economic crisis brought Russia to dispose of limited finances to be invested elsewhere from the national boundaries. Another obstruction was posed by the Chechen crisis of 1994, that drained a large quantity of energies and economic resources and laid bare the restrained Russian capabilities, apart from affecting negatively its own prestige – the Russian establishment thought it would be a blitzkrieg, instead a strained resistance was opposed. It was equally evident that Russia did not dispose of the supplies needed for a more concrete engagement in Central Asia and for realizing a superpower policy. Once again, its influence was ascertained only by means of bilateral ties, particularly relevant in the military training, equipment and re-equipment supply²⁸⁸.

For what concerned Central Asia, the transition and its effects were not over, aggravated by the insurgence of radical organizations, and social discontent. Russian inconsistency and immobility resulted in a persisting research of independence on the part of the Central Asian republics, that intended to diversify their ties, a situation that manifested in all its aspects in the second half of the '90s. Indeed, unsatisfied with the CIS economic insolvency and afraid of renewed coercive policies or blackmails on the part of Russia on the one hand, and eager of becoming addressee of foreign investments on the other, the Central Asian states embarked on inter-state cooperation, and memberships to Western or Western-supported supra-national organisations: the OSCE²⁸⁹ in 1996, Kyrgyzstan adhering to WTO in 1998, and Uzbekistan to GUUAM in 1999²⁹⁰. A positive attitude towards the West was rising in the overall regional mental-

²⁸⁸ Vladimir Paramanov, Aleksey Stokov, Oleg Stolpovski, *Russia in Central Asia Politics, Security and Economics*, Nova Science Publisher, New York 2009, pp.49-69

²⁸⁹ All Central Asian republics, exception made for Turkmenistan, that decided to stay out of all the initiatives concerning collective security and regional cooperation.

²⁹⁰ This last provision on the part of Uzbekistan was motivated with the immobility and non-intervention of CSTO in occasion of the risk posed by the IMU on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border. It impressed Russia, that was already perceiving in those years to what degree a pro-Western spirit was developing in some parts of the former Soviet space, as the Caucasus, Central Asia and Ukraine. From the rhetoric it was clear that military integration had to remain a mainstay of the Russian policy, together with economic internal maturation, in order to attracting these republics into its orbit.

Idem, p.15

Lane Johnson, *Russia and Central Asia: a New Web of Relations*, the Royal institute of International Affairs, Russia and Eurasia Programme, Washington, 1998, p. 23

Marlène Laruelle, *Russia's Central Asia Policy and the Role of Russian Nationalism*, Silk Road Paper, April 2008, p.18

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ity. Oppositely, it became clear that Russian traditional means to hold its sway over Central Asia did not work any more, that it was risking being replaced and so, that the foreign policy towards this region had to be rethought.

The phase that opened in 2000 with the Putin election to the presidency was a crossroad between the Yeltsin era and the new one.

Firstly, the Kremlin pointed at improving the relations with the CIS states and the five Central Asian republics in particular, that Putin himself visited in 2000, in order to elicit them to collect their strengths against the regional Islamic threat and to get control over the resources present nearby the Caspian Sea²⁹¹.

A refreshed enhancement to regional integration was crowned, through the creation of new organisations, thanks to which Russia had the possibility to return to wield its influence over various spheres of the Central Asian life, by means of a renewed *soft power*, pointing at reasserting its position meanwhile eschewing the responsibilities it would have if it behaved as an imperialist power²⁹². Whether the CIS stressed more on the foreign affairs with its satellite states, in 2000 the EurASec was the first institution to be established with a particular economic orientation. Listing as signatories Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Belarus, it was born with the task of favouring economic exchange throughout the region and in 2006 it was joined by Uzbekistan and merged with another economic organisation, the CACO, solely made up of the Central Asian states²⁹³. Preponderance was given in 2002 to the constitution of a Council for Transport Policy, charged of supervising the safety of the transit of goods and people and enhancing economic correspondences through the application of unified tariffs, and the creation of corporations for trans-national transports. In 2002 it was merged with the CACO (Central Asia Cooperation Organisation), established 4 years earlier and joined in 2003 by Russia. New

²⁹¹ Idem

Arbakhyan Magomedov, Ruslan Nikerov, *Caspian Energy Resources and the "Pipeline War" in Europe in the 21st Century: Energy Geopolitics in Northern Eurasia*, Central Asia and the Caucasus, Vol.11, No.3, 2010, p.8

²⁹² Marlène Laruelle, *Russia's Central Asia Policy and the Role of Russian Nationalism*, Silk Road Paper, April 2008, pp.10, 61

²⁹³ In fact, it had failed to achieve economic integration.

Ingmar Oldberg, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Powerhouse or Paper Tiger?*, FOI Swedish Research Defence Agency, Stockholm, June 2007, p.35

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relevance was also attributed to the Collective Security treaty that had been endorsed in 1992: under the auspices of Moscow, in 2002 it was revived as an international organisation, the CSTO, with the pledges on the part of the member states of non-aggression, non-use of force, peaceful resolution of controversies and harmonization of the defence policies²⁹⁴. In fact until that moment it had been in force as a paper organisation. This stagnation, together with frictions emerging towards Russia, caused Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan to suspend their membership to the group, until being rejoined from Uzbekistan in 2006. In 2001 it was empowered with a Collective Rapid reaction force formed of 1500 units coming from all the states involved and buttressed by the Russian Air Force, which base was installed in 2003 in Kyrgyzstan, in Kant. The division was incremented in 2004 up to 4000 men and the same year the first exercise - "Rubezh", which means "frontier" - was organised in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan together with the Russian border troops, and in 2007 it was joined by the SCO. This reaction force has been particularly important for the operations conducted to counter narcotics trades in the area, and its numerous operations succeeded in confiscating about 48 tons of narcotics, within 2006²⁹⁵.

The SCO was a special outcome of this groundswell, which utmost importance was determined by the participation of the Chinese power, in a regional security project.

The new century dynamics were worldwide decided by an event of international resonance: the terrorist attack to the World Trade Centre in New York on 11 September 2001. If it is certain that the eyes were all directed towards that terrible event, it is equally sure that, on the Russian perspective, it was used as a weapon to retry playing the Western card. Putin was the first political authority who communicated his support to the then American president, George

²⁹⁴ Yangjin Zhang, Rouben Azizian, *Ethnic Challenges Beyond Borders*, St. Antony's college, Oxford, 1998, p. 20

²⁹⁵ Although the potential importance this organisation could have for the repositioning of Russia as a main power in the region through a process of deep integration, CSTO revealed once again inactive, due to its scarce political projection for what concerned confidence-building, conflict prevention, and post-conflict reconstruction when it was necessary as after the disorders that interested Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in 2005. Moreover still the military apparatus was mainly composed of Russian forces. Vladimir Paramanov, Aleksey Stokov, Oleg Stolpovski, *Russia in Central Asia Politics, Security and Economics*, Nova Science Publisher, New York 2009, pp.34-37

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Bush, on behalf of the national struggle against terrorism Russia itself conducted inside its borders and nearby. In the name of the anti-terrorist American-led bandwagon, in the early aftermath of the tragic event, president Putin paid a visit to the German Bundestag, in which occasion he voiced the idea of uniting their strengths, as an academic of the Valdai Club put it, to “join in a Greater Europe, in which the share of Russian resources and Western technologies could correspond to the achievement of common and mutual benefits”²⁹⁶. Mainly the long-term objective was to create an alliance with the West, addressing a joint war on international terrorism, a problem dubbed as a main internal Russian concern, thus returning playing a role on the international panorama and coming out of the isolationism resulted from the early-post-Cold War failed attempts of strengthening the interconnections with the West.

The span of time between 2001-2002 was characterised by a special interest demonstrated by Russia with respect to U.S.-led war in Afghanistan, as testified by the governments offer to use Russian airspace, and above all, by the agreement provided with the installation of American bases in the Russian “backyard”, namely Karshi-Khanabad in Uzbekistan and Manas in Kyrgyzstan. In turn the United States did not reciprocate with the warm appreciation president Putin had expected, but on the contrary, it reacted as if it was the natural course of events²⁹⁷.

In the years between 2002-2005 Russian sentiments were filled with disillusionment and suspicion towards the U.S. The intervention in Afghanistan in 2001, and in Iraq in 2003, stirred in the Russian counterpart a certain destabilization caused predominantly by the advent of the NATO military presence in the area, that was not accompanied to an involvement of the Russian power²⁹⁸.

Having been forbidden this possibility, Putin administration understood it was time to concentrate on its own interests, despite it continued defending the

²⁹⁶ Arbakhan Magomedov, Ruslan Nikerov, *Caspian Energy Resources and the “Pipeline War” in Europe in the 21st Century: Energy Geopolitics in Northern Eurasia, Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol.11, No.3, 2010, p. 9

²⁹⁷ Idem

Marlène Laruelle, *Russia’s Central Asia Policy and the Role of Russian Nationalism*, Silk Road Paper, April 2008, p.13

²⁹⁸ Thierry Kellner, *L’Occident de la Chine- Pékin et la Nouvelle Asie Centrale (1991-2001)*, Presse Universitaire de France, 2008, pp.176-178

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cause of the international counter-terrorism war, to grant itself global consensus, especially for what the violent strategy led in Chechnya was concerned²⁹⁹. This change was influenced, together with the above mentioned Iraqi war, by the Russian internal public opinion disappointment with the Western behaviour in the 1999 Kosovo war, and with regards to their criticism of the Russian response to the Chechen crisis³⁰⁰. In addition, the wave of the *Coloured Revolutions* that invested Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan in 2003-2005 and the connected bid for democratization, frightened the other Central Asian republics, that found in Russia a shelter for the preservation of the status quo³⁰¹. An evidence of the Russian new role for the Central Asian authoritarian regimes was provided also by the 2005 Andijan insurgencies in Uzbekistan, which brutal repression was harshly accused by the U.S. Following this severe condemnation, Uzbekistan turned decisively to Russia and China, regretting the Western interference and asked the United States to dismantle the military bases in Karshi-Khanabad³⁰². Arguably the opposition to the Western interference well combines with the growing prestige of the model embodied by the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in the region.

Moreover, U.S counter-terrorist operations in the region well interlaced with its energetic ambitions of diversification and plans of interrupting the too heavy European dependence on Russia, which made the energetic refurbishment vulnerable in large measures, and all the western balance sway³⁰³. Arguably those

²⁹⁹ Idem

³⁰⁰ Marlène Laruelle, *Russia's Central Asia Policy and the Role of Russian Nationalism*, Silk Road Paper, April 2008, pp.9-12

³⁰¹ Presumably the reapproachment with Russia was further enhanced by the suspect that those revolutions were backed by the U.S. itself, what stirred fierce resentments with regards to the Western intervention in the region, and brought to the application of stricter rules in their regimes.
Idem, p. 11

³⁰² The case of Karimov's Uzbekistan is particularly emblematic of the ups and downs in the relations with Russia, determined by the Western presence in Central Asia. It is equally meaningful the fact that in 2002 Uzbekistan left the GUUAM, openly creating a corridor of cooperation avoiding Russia, and took the membership of CSTO and other organisations.
Idem

³⁰³ In the fourth chapter it will be analysed in more detail the question related to the American project in the area and its actions, hence watching to what extent it can be considered a provocation launched to Russian affirmation in the region.

Arbakhan Magomedov, Ruslan Nikerov, *Caspian Energy Resources and the "Pipeline War" in Europe in the 21st Century: Energy Geopolitics in Northern Eurasia, Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol.11, No.3, 2010, pp. 9-11

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factors shaped the new policy of the *strategic pessimism* inaugurated by Putin, which consisted in the assumed negation of the previous idea according to which a peaceful environment could be realized through positive cooperation with the West³⁰⁴. The administration's agenda centred on the build up of Russia as a great power, on the accomplishments of its national interests, and on the realization of a power influential on the international scene. External ties were reinforced, and new diplomatic relations entailed with India, Iran and China, also thanks to an increase in the raw materials fares which brought higher purchases to Russia, reinvigorating the economic apparatus and allowing a more consistent foreign policy expense.

The restored relation with the Central Asian states was progressively made more possible also by the waning in the former relations with the West, motivated by the latter continuous critics moved against the alleged regional lack of democracy and human rights, to which the Central Asian states opposed the theory that the Western-sponsored state-model was not suitable for the Central Asian environment. Russia profited of this to demonstrate its support of the local governments, and its closeness for what related the war on terrorism, about which Russia enjoyed complete sustain on the part of its Southern republics, for what related its intervention in Chechnya. In turn it sidelined with the republics and in particular with Uzbekistan in its war against the IMU and the Hizb-ut-Tahrir and the other extremist organisations³⁰⁵.

Russia started furnishing the republics with renovated military assistance and cooperation, also through bilateral agreements, presumably with the scope of containing also NATO expansion³⁰⁶. Thus a permanent military base was installed in Tajikistan in 2004, near Dushanbe, in the Southern edge of the country and not far from the border with China, with the division that had taken

³⁰⁴ Thierry Kellner, *L'Occidente de la Chine- Pékin et la Nouvelle Asie Centrale (1991-2001)*, Presse Universitaire de France, 2008, pp.176-178

³⁰⁵ Marlène Laruelle, *Russia's Central Asia Policy and the Role of Russian Nationalism*, Silk Road Paper, April 2008, p.11

³⁰⁶ In 2004 the Foreign Affairs Minister openly declared that Russia opposed any foreign base on the Central Asian territory, explicitly referring to China, but comprising also other actors such as U.S., India, Germany, France. Stephen Blank, *Military Rivalry in Central Asia*, Eurasian Transition Group, December 2008 www.eurasiantransition.org/files/da96afeff5fabde0892547f3d472119e-14.php

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part to the civil war, in change of a lowering in Tajikistan debt; the same happened in Kyrgyzstan, in Kant, only 30 km from the American base, in 2003, and only two years later Bishkek demanded for the opening of another base in Osh, to feel more protected on the border with Uzbekistan, which was though never implemented³⁰⁷; a watershed in the military relations with Uzbekistan was the agreement ratified in 2005, according to which Uzbekistan permitted Russia to use ten of the airports present on its soil, and the opening of a permanent base in Navoi was discussed³⁰⁸. Both the bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are part of the CSTO Rapid Reaction Force, endowed with former Soviet military facilities³⁰⁹.

After the creation on the Baku-Tblisi-Cayhan pipeline in 1999, Putin administration realized it had been bypassed, and strengthened its relations with the national companies dealing with energetic resources converging their logics in the region and thus, using them as agents of the state interests. This duality could be possible thanks to the state-run companies in the petroleum sectors, that implemented Russian foreign policy. Gazprom had a pivotal role in this dynamic³¹⁰. Contracts on the exploitation of gas, oil and other materials were preponderant with Kazakhstan and flourished at the mid of the last decade - Gazprom and Lukoil exploit jointly with the state company three sites for an overall quantity of 1,5 billion tons of oil and 800 bcms of gas, apart from a great range of joint ventures over the exploitation of other sites -, but, an increase in the contracts with the others Central Asian republics was registered too.

³⁰⁷ In 2007, Kyrgyzstan increased the amount of the rental the U.S. should pay for the Manas base to 100 times more than the present sum, and Russia sent new divisions.

³⁰⁸ Idem, pp-15-16

³⁰⁹ Ingmar Oldberg, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Powerhouse or Paper Tiger?*, FOI Swedish Research Defence Agency, Stockholm, June 2007, pp, 27-28

³¹⁰ In 2001 this giant, owing the 60% of the Russian gas reserves, established with Yukos and Lukoil, the Caspian Pipeline Consortium, that since 2003 retained the control of the main transports corridors for raw materials, containing the Western bid in this sense in the region. The latter has succeeded more in investing in new off-shore explorations.

Marlène Laruelle, *Russia's Central Asia Policy and the Role of Russian Nationalism*, Silk Road Paper, April 2008, pp.22-26

Thierry Kellner, *L'Occident de la Chine- Pékin et la Nouvelle Asie Centrale (1991-2001)*, Presse Universitaire de France, 2008, p.179

Lane Johnson, *Russia and Central Asia: a New Web of Relations*, the Royal institute of International Affairs, Russia and Eurasia Programme, Washington, 1998, p. 27

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The impressive thrive in commerce of hydrocarbons, was accompanied also by that of mineral resources and electricity. Central Asian resources allow Russia to have access to this powerful weapon at an inferior price, than if it had to deploy its owns, that are located in sites that are strenuous to be reached as the Arctic, Siberia - the 81% of the total amount -, and the Far East, and thus even more expansive to be exploited.

On the contrary the trade of other merchandise did not progressed impressively, by contrast it is evidently a monopoly of China with particular reference to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

It is worthy noting that Russian business relations with Xinjiang are increasing too in the recent years, reflecting also in the cultural sphere³¹¹.

The pervasive presence of Russia in Central Asia was a strategic choice that bestowed it with an influential role on multi-disciplinary stages: Russia exerts a soft power on these regimes, granting itself a high rate of revenues, control over a significant percentage of the oil and gas resources in the area necessary for the modernisation of its internal market, but above all, for the exportations and to meet in special way the Western demand, while smoothing the latter preponderance in the region – perceived as an attack directed to Russia itself -, and that of other outsider actors³¹². The role of Russia remains moreover unbeaten, thanks to the attitude it has with the Central Asian regimes that also is the basic layer of the SCO: integration, cooperation, economic and military assistance is not complemented with interference in domestic affairs, and particularly in matters relating to the application of democracy and the respect of human rights. Nowadays the defence, security and economic sector appears reinforced by the Russian important contribution, and the affirmation of its standards through bilateral and multilateral bonds. This soft power is, in addition, the outcome of an estimation made at the end of the crisis in Tajikistan and Chechnya, that demonstrated how destabilizing and fallacious could the military interventions be, in situations governed by strained disorders, thus staking at con-

³¹¹ Ross Perlin , *Where Four Worlds Meet: Russians, Kazakhs, Uighurs, and Han Chinese in the PRC-Kazakhstan Border Zone* , CEF Quarterly, The journal of the China-Eurasia Forum , October 2004 , p. 23

³¹² Marlène Laruelle, *Russia's Central Asia Policy and the Role of Russian Nationalism*, Silk Road Paper, April 2008, pp. 23-26

trolling in a way from the inside the problematic factors and trying to reshape them, underpinning stability and harmony³¹³.

3.2 China's approach towards Central Asia

The dissolution of the Soviet Union faced China with new independent neighbouring states, and thus, new duties, especially given the fact that their coexistence had always been characterised if not by relations, surely by common events, sharing China 3000 km borderline with three out of five Central Asian states, namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. With the 1991 independence of the former Soviet states, it was meaningful to China to decide and endorse a new direction for its policy towards these close republics that for the first time appeared as autonomous entities with complete control of their destinies. It goes without saying that this constituted an important watershed after the past Sino-Soviet confrontations that used to take place over the shared borders in the region, preventing plenty of potential exchanges³¹⁴. Likewise Russia, the Chinese policy after 1991 passed through different phases.

China immediately recognised the republics new status on the international scenery and showed an interest in developing diplomatic relations based on the platform of the five principles of peaceful coexistence: mutual respect of sovereignty, territorial integrity, political and economic systems, and choices made by the countries with respect to domestic and foreign policies; non-aggression; non-interference in domestic affairs; mutual benefit to be achieved in trades and economic cooperation on the basis of equality; peaceful coexistence to safeguard regional stability against the possible rising disputes, particularly along the quarrelled borders³¹⁵.

³¹³ Loredana di Placido, *Shanghai Cooperation Organization: un modello di cooperazione regionale in Asia Centrale*, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici, giugno 2006 n.6, p. 37

³¹⁴ Vladimir Paramonov, Oleg Stolpovski , *Chinese Security Interests in Central Asia* , Advanced Research and Assessment Group , Defence Academy of the United Kingdom , May 2008, p. 1

³¹⁵ Vladimir Paramonov, Oleg Stolpovski , *Chinese Security Interests in Central Asia* , Advanced Research and Assessment Group , Defence Academy of the United Kingdom , May 2008, p. 2

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A problem with which China had to cope with at the end of the Soviet Union was the fact that it had no more to deal with a single foreign policy – and thus a predictable interlocutor –, but with five policies and five states, to which addressing in a way that was flexible enough to meet the likely different demands. Besides, the fact of being their approach a fully new effort without any negative past scar, put the sides and the future cooperation in an advantageous position, but still at the moment, no long-term strategy could be implemented. In this first stage lasting until 1995, the Central Asian republics appeared as a Russian affair to China, and economic cooperation was not yet a priority in its agenda, even not to spoil these primary attempts of rapprochement with Russia. On their part, the republics felt still bound to Russia, and were instead quite wary about China³¹⁶. Indeed it is worth of note that, since the first breath of the Central Asian states' independence, the Chinese leadership had clear in its mind, when formulating the guidelines of its foreign policy towards this region, that the *Russian Factor* here could not be put apart, nor missed out: by history Russia covered a role in the region that was part of its equilibrium and despite the early orientation of the Yeltsin administration towards West, still the Central Asians counted a lot on Russian to shore them up. This was an element that certainly China took into account and that limited, in a first moment, its ambitions, as put out in the Premier Li Peng in 1994 according to whom “China seeks no sphere of either economic or political influence in Central Asia”, doubtless also not to make its recovering relation with Russia totter³¹⁷.

The afore mentioned principles guiding the Chinese approach were declared also by the Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen in 1994, and expanded to all the CIS states. The same year four tenets were delineated on which to found bilateral relations with the young republics, underlining the unwillingness of developing ties against any third states: good-neighborliness relations; reciprocal economic improvement; non-interference; respect of other countries autonomy

³¹⁶ Vladimir Paramanov, Alexei Stokov, Oleg Stolpovsky, *Stages of China Economic Policies in Central Asia*, Central Asia and the Caucasus, Vol.11, No.1, 2010, p.109

Yangjin Zhang, Rouben Azizian, *Ethnic Challenges Beyond Borders*, St.Antony's college, Oxford, 1998, p.47

³¹⁷ Idem

Vladimir Paramanov, Alexei Stokov, Oleg Stolpovsky, *Stages of China Economic Policies in Central Asia*, Central Asia and the Caucasus, Vol.11, No.1, 2010, pp. 107-110

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and sovereignty. This is certainly an explication of the discrete behaviour China was implementing since the wake of the USSR collapse, that distanced so evidently from that of the Western actors, which sight were attentive and critical on the domestic policies enforced by the newly established governments in Central Asia³¹⁸.

The only reason why China felt the exigence of turning towards Central Asia at the very beginning of the post-Soviet period was the management of regional challenges such as the potential clashes on the blur borders, but especially, the rising separatist boost in Xinjiang, the Western Chinese province. It was highly feared that this cause could be joined by the Uyghur diaspora present in large numbers in the Central Asian states – amounting at around 300.000 people- and of the expanding pan-Islamic and pan-Turkic movements³¹⁹.

This situation brought China to push for the settlement of the long-questioned frontiers, at the beginning, in 1992, through bilateral negotiations with the three neighbouring states, and since a year later, under Moscow's demand, on a multilateral basis, with the latter participation³²⁰. Beijing started to meet the new republics governments to negotiate the questioned common border, military reduction and other security issues on a permanent basis, until the 1996 institutionalization of the Shanghai group that formally introduced China in Central Asian dynamics and meant a completed restoration of its relations with Moscow³²¹. In fact the negotiations resulted in important territorial concessions on the part of the three republics.

The first meetings were held with Kyrgyzstan with which in 1996 and 1999 ratified two protocols that settled the question related to borders, and from which China gained 30.000 hectares, from the first one and 95.000 from the

³¹⁸ Vladimir Paramonov, Oleg Stolpovski , *Chinese Security Interests in Central Asia* , Advanced Research and Assessment Group , Defence Academy of the United Kingdom , May 2008, p. 2

³¹⁹ Ramakant Dwivedi , *China's Central Asia Policy in Recent Times* , central Asia-Caucasus institute, Silk Road Studies Programme, China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly, Volume 4, No. 4, 2006 , p. 142
Yangjin Zhang, Rouben Azizian, *Ethnic Challenges Beyond Borders*, St.Antony's college, Oxford, 1998, p.44

³²⁰ Idem, p.3

³²¹ Yangjin Zhang, Rouben Azizian, *Ethnic Challenges Beyond Borders*, St.Antony's college, Oxford, 1998, pp.33-35

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second. This was the layer for the establishment of new friendship ties and measures of confidence-building along the demarcation line. The Kyrgyz national opposition expressed all its non-alignment with this decision, but president Akayev decisively proclaimed its fairness and equity. Since 2002 the agreements are into force also at an internal level in Kyrgyzstan.

The second republic that succeeded in finding a solution with China upon border issues was Kazakhstan, with which after a series of meetings a joint act was endorsed in 2002, in Beijing, eventually determining the destiny of a 1740 km border stretch. The two countries Foreign Ministers decided to sign it on the basis of the ancient treaties undertaken by the Qing dynasty and the Russian Tsar.

Eventually, Tajikistan was the last to conclude an agreement in 2002, during an official visit of the Tajik president to China, in which occasion 1000 square km were ceded by the former, negotiated with the renounce on the part of China over some claimed 28.000 square km³²².

In this framework, China underwent the signature of agreements with the Central Asian republics, in order to contain this boost, through the agreed prohibition of separatist Uyghurs organisations and activities in the ex-Soviet republics³²³.

Stability was for China the prerogative to enhance economic development and vice-versa, thus good conditions that prevented the emergence of resentments through the region were conceived a priority, and a stabilizer factor for the Xinjiang province.

Many experts hold that this is a testimony of the fact that China policy focus still laid - and presumably lays – on affairs that strictly concern the situation within its borders and that thus its strategy of action appears clearly dictated by the threats, far or nearby to its geographical position, incident on its internal circumstances. In this sense Central Asia unsteadiness is to be read as a poten-

³²² Ramakant Dwivedi , *China's Central Asia Policy in Recent Times* , central Asia-Caucasus institute, Silk Road Studies Programme, China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly, Volume 4, No. 4, 2006, p.147

³²³ Vladimir Paramonov, Oleg Stolpovski , *Chinese Security Interests in Central Asia* , Advanced Research and Assessment Group , Defence Academy of the United Kingdom , May 2008, p. 4

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tial trigger for its own state stability, which makes foreign and domestic policies in some way coincident, or at least tied up³²⁴.

From this frame it is evident how, according to Chinese strategy, non-interference is advantageous for economic cooperation, and this one for progress, and that progress is considered a pillar for the realization of stability. In Chinese perspective this would undoubtedly also speed up its backward and economically feeble North-Western province. In light of this perspective, the Chinese government gathered the representatives of the five provinces belonging to the North-western district in 1992, and discussed the strategy to implement, to endorse a new path in the local economy, opening it to the new neighbouring republics and their complementary economic offer. Height policies were outlined by the Xinjiang and approved by the state Council³²⁵. The task was re-launching the Chinese Northwestern province, to create a favourable environment for economic improvement, and consequently to reduce the possibility of new conflicts, in a way by “Sinacizing” it, through the economic and infrastructural investments -the building of railways, airports, etc. -, that put it in connection with the Chinese fertile Eastern coast, and Central Asian landlocked republics and their markets, which would themselves benefit of this new way³²⁶. From 1992 to 1994 the overall Chinese trade directed to Central Asia escalated by 25%, a great part of which based on barter, thanks to Xinjiang opening eastward. The new political circumstances in the Central Asian republics allowed many to travel to Xinjiang, particularly from the three states bordering with it, and by goods to sell in their villages. This spontaneous hint to

³²⁴ Stephen Blank, *China in Central Asia: the Egeomon in Waiting?*, in Ariel Cohen, “*Eurasia in Balance. The U.S. and Regional Power Shift*”, Ashgate Publishing, Burlington, 2005, p.154

³²⁵ The Northwest moved some steps further both with respect to the minorities integration, certainly thanks

to the contribution of the Chinese policies of integration between the Han, and other minorities and also on

an economic level. The economic progress was impressive for its rapidness, as already in 1993 the GDP had

increased of the 91%, from 25.2 billion one in 1990, to 48.2 billion in 1993. By the way, the local backwardness and underdevelopment is far to be resolved.

Idem, pp.40-44; 90

³²⁶ Stephen Blank, *China in Central Asia: the Egeomon in Waiting?*, in Ariel Cohen, “*Eurasia in Balance. The U.S. and Regional Power Shift*”, Ashgate Publishing, Burlington, 2005, p.156

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commerce, the so-called “shuttle-trade”, played a main role in the economic relations of this initial period³²⁷. Besides, trade with the most favoured state, Kazakhstan, flourished, making of it Xinjiang first partner for relevance, and increasing from 4 to 44 % within two years, half of which exerted through barter. Kyrgyzstan became within 1995 second in the position of the Central Asian states trading with Xinjiang, third in general after Kazakhstan and Hong Kong, and even exchanges with Uzbekistan increased with bewildering speed since 1992. Trades with Tajikistan were slowed down by the ongoing civil war.

The second phase in China policy towards Central Asia started in the second half of the '90s, when the combination between pressing concern over security on its territory, with particular reference to Xinjiang separatism, and the discovery of the great might Central Asia had in terms of natural resources and raw materials, pushed China to opt for a soft penetration in the neighbouring republics. The long-term aim which at the time had been elaborated, was the stimulation of the Xinjiang economy, in the strategy named of the *Greater North-West* development through the exploitation of the Central Asian resources in order to install an industrial apparatus in Xinjiang, and through the injection of its merchandise in the neighbouring market³²⁸. Regular exchanges would be in this way mutually beneficial for all the parts committed, and the ancient spirit of the Silk Road would be revived in the name of a new period of friendship and trust, ending up the diffidence that had characterized the previous period. In particular, in the Chinese leaders mind, directing commerce towards the newly independent republics, would alleviate strains on both parts, reduce the possibility of exploding insurgencies, caused by social discontent, and contrast organized crime and illegal smuggling directed to China, which routes cross and coincide with the legal ones, and which main responsibility is given to the corruptibility on the frontiers - particularly speaking of Xinjiang. Economic development was in their project, the key for security realization³²⁹.

³²⁷ Vladimir Paramanov, Alexei Stokov, Oleg Stolpovsky, *Stages of China Economic Policies in Central Asia*, Central Asia and the Caucasus, Vol.11, No.1, 2010, p.109

³²⁸ Vladimir Paramanov, Alexei Stokov, Oleg Stolpovsky, *Stages of China Economic Policies in Central Asia*, Central Asia and the Caucasus, Vol.11, No.1, 2010, p.110

³²⁹ Yangjin Zhang, Rouben Azizian, *Ethnic Challenges Beyond Borders*, St. Antony's college, Oxford, 1998, p.44 Niklas Swanström, *China and Greater Central Asia: New Frontiers?*, Silk Road Paper, December 2001, Central Asia- Caucasus Institute, Silk Road Studies Pro-

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As a matter of fact, the Chinese policy makers interest towards Central Asia took a new shape already by the end of the '90s, dedicating more attention to the abundant and low-priced energy sources in the Central Asian region. According to Chinese observers, the Chinese leadership felt the urgency of diversifying their energy market and make it not dependant exclusively on the vulnerability of its main providers, the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, and on the American Navy defending stability in those turbulent seas, which were the unique routes of transit for energy exportations.

As some scholars advocated, since the beginning of 2002, China directed its investments in the diversification of its energy providers, addressing to Libya, Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and Central Asia, in order to escape those alterations typically suffered by Western countries that were subjected to the vulnerability of their limited number of unstable suppliers³³⁰. In fact China extended its market towards Sudan, Venezuela, Iraq and Kazakhstan already since 1998-99, when the China National Petroleum Corporation allocated more than 8 billion dollars subsidies in change of oil concessions from these countries and an amount of 12.5 billion dollars for the construction of 13.500 km oil and gas pipelines connecting Central Asia and Russia to China, even though these numbers were reduced little time later. This anxiety related to energy supplies was absolutely linked to the rapidness of the Chinese economic growth that corresponded with the realization of the limitedness of the Chinese domestic sources concentrated in the Tarim Basin: if in the early '90s they were estimated to amount at 482 billion barrels, ten years later the CNPC announced that the reserves were counted for about 1.5 billion barrels. As a consequence China became aware of the fact it could no more count on chequered markets, and rather required a development of domestic resources and particularly stronger supply from outside³³¹.

gramme, p.63

³³⁰ Stephen Blank, *China in Central Asia: the Egeon in Waiting?*, in Ariel Cohen, *Eurasia in Balance. The U.S. and Regional Power Shift*, Ashgate Publishing, Burlington, 2005, pp. 162-4

³³¹ Dru C. Gladney, *China's Interests in Central Asia: Energy and Ethnic Security*, in Robert Ebel, Rajan Mensu, *Energy and Conflict in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, The National Beaureau of Asian Research, Rowman and Little Field Publisher, Oxford, 2000, p.215

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China's purpose was multidimensional: it aimed at shielding its supplies of oil and gas, as stated above, diversifying its importers, it wanted to secure and widen the routes of transfer of energy, foster state-run oil companies overseas investments, lower its dependence on gas and oil through the exploitation of other materials as coal gasification and nuclear power, and eventually managing to construct its own energy system³³².

In order to guard against the unpredictability and susceptibility of the market flows, China endorsed a strategy that implied – as it still does - that the contracts of refurbishments abroad be accompanied by local investments, what made ties mutually profitable and, in a way, based on interdependence. Kazakhstan was the first state to be at the centre of a Chinese project in the energy domain. Viewed the proliferation of the Western companies investments in this sector in the Caspian basin, China decided to launch the plan of building a joint oil and gas industry with Kazakhstan. Within 1997, Chinese shareholding of the Aktobemunaigaz Kazakh company counted for the 66,7% of the total amount³³³.

Trades rose too, they practically duplicated in the second half of the '90s, as an effect of a twofold trend: on the one hand, Central Asia was more trustful towards China and addressed to it a valid alternative to the Russian unreliability; hence consumer goods, as well as more sophisticated products useful for the industrial development, started to be imported from China, using Xinjiang as a main channel and provider, for the 60-70% total of exchanges; on the other hand, it was China that fostered commercial relations establishing a mechanism according to which to the importation of raw materials of various type from Central Asia - not only energy resources, but also raw textiles, metals, etc. - corresponded the exportation of finished products³³⁴. Meanwhile the above mentioned investments were projected for the creation of transport networks

³³² Ramakant Dwivedi , *China's Central Asia Policy in Recent Times* , central Asia-Caucasus institute, Silk Road Studies Programme, China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly, Volume 4, No. 4, 2006, p.146

³³³ Vladimir Paramanov, Alexei Stokov, Oleg Stolpovsky, *Stages of China Economic Policies in Central Asia*, Central Asia and the Caucasus, Vol.11, No.1, 2010, p.110

³³⁴ This system evidently reminds the relation that interrelated Central Asia with the Soviet Union.

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and the realization of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railroad, that, once again, contributed to Xinjiang progression³³⁵.

Arms sales to the producer countries was undertaken under in the same polity, even if it has never constituted huge figures in Central Asia, at list not in quantities that could counterweight Russian provisions³³⁶. Taking into consideration that at the mid of the '90s Chinese trades in general were duplicating with striking quickness, it is easy to figure out that China constituted a giant in the region perspectives.

Being the second oil consumer after the United states, due to the fast growing projections of its economy and so of natural resources demand, China bestowed the subject of access to these supplies with high priority³³⁷.

Despite the growing economic ties, non interference was and remained a mainstay of the Chinese viewpoint in managing interactions with Central Asian and external states in general: the foundation of its strategy is to delink relations from ideology, entertaining them regardless the countries social, political, or economic systems. This is part of its stance with reference to equality among states and in this case among Central Asia and China itself, which is verified by the fact that China treated them as members of the international community since the beginning, and promoted their participation to international forums and organisations³³⁸.

However, apart from the economic advantages that to a larger extent interested the involved parts, the effect on Xinjiang Uyghur was not the one expected. New waves of Chinese Han migrations attracted by the job possibilities towards this province caused the Uyghur to feel further outcast from this profit, to which they did not took part, neither for gain, nor for decisions, as many

³³⁵ Idem, p.112

³³⁶ Stephen Blank, *China in Central Asia: the Egemon in Waiting?*, in Ariel Cohen, "Eurasia in Balance. The U.S. and Regional Power Shift", Ashgate Publishing, Burlington, 2005, pp. 162-4

³³⁷ Ramakant Dwivedi , *China's Central Asia Policy in Recent Times* , central Asia-Caucasus institute, Silk Road Studies Programme, China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly, Volume 4, No. 4, 2006, p.147

³³⁸ Yangjin Zhang, Rouben Azizian, *Ethnic Challenges Beyond Borders*, St.Antony's college, Oxford, 1998, 40-41

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posts were covered by the Hans, also blamed of affecting the traditional life-style of the region³³⁹.

In the late '90s, with the growing activism of the Uyghurs, the issue of separatism was dubbed by China no more as a domestic one, but as one of international relevance referring to the spreading ethno-nationalism, and thus necessitating a joint response³⁴⁰. The problem acquired even more weight with the Afghan turmoil. It surely had a great effect on Chinese perception of its stability, since it was felt as an enhancement to Xinjiang separatism, and also for the consequent illegal trades of arms and narcotics.

China determinately took the path of making its voice heard in Central Asia around 2001, and more decisively in the post 9/11, when Central Asia came suddenly to occupy a central position in the world politics. Cooperation with Central Asia was revisited at different levels, and economy, that formerly had been only secondary to security, acquired now a top position³⁴¹. Besides, whereas it was previously exclusively based on trades of consumer goods, since the second half of the '90s the main vector was energy supply, even though the former was never abandoned, especially in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Loans on privileged terms for targeted projects were allocated for the Central Asian republics, even though mainly absorbed by the Chinese enterprises located on the Central Asian territory³⁴²; in addition, stakes in the energy sector were incremented, especially for what concerned hydrocarbons in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan - the latter mainly for gas, as witnessed by the construction of a gas pipeline in 2006; with a capacity of 10 tons per year, the Kazakh-Chinese Atasu-Alashankou oil pipeline was built in 2003, and Kazakhstan became a main beneficiary of the Chinese investments in its economy.

³³⁹ Dru C. Gladney, *China's Interests in Central Asia: Energy and Ethnic Security*, in Robert Ebel, Rajan Mensu, "Energy and Conflict in Central Asia and the Caucasus", The National Beureau of Asian Research, Rowman and Little Field Publisher, Oxford, 2000, p.217

³⁴⁰ Idem.43

Stephen Blank, *China in Central Asia: the Egeomon in Waiting?*, in Ariel Cohen, "Eurasia in Balance. The U.S. and Regional Power Shift", Ashgate Publishing, Burlington, 2005, p.157

³⁴¹ Vladimir Paramanov, Alexei Stokov, Oleg Stolpovsky, *Stages of China Economic Policies in Central Asia*, Central Asia and the Caucasus, Vol.11, No.1, 2010, p.112

³⁴² Vladimir Paramanov, Alexei Stokov, *China in Central Asia: Energy Interests and Energy Policy*, Central Asia and the Caucasus, Vol.11, No.3, 2010, p.24

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This decade saw economic cooperation thriving in several respects, as for example in trades in general, hydropower, transportation, heavy and light industry, and, interestingly atomic energy, particularly with Kazakhstan. The trend has been intensifying and diversifying for products and countries of destination throughout the decade. The diversification of goods imported, apart from oil-rich countries, is an important element that testifies the willingness of China of making gravitate in its orbit also those states that are not rich in hydrocarbons. More recently, indeed, Chinese projections have been oriented towards coal mining in Kyrgyzstan and power production in Tajikistan³⁴³. The pre-eminence given to the economic sphere by the Chinese leadership is well visible at a multilateral level, from its activity in the SCO: China has been pushing for advances in the economic component since the beginning and particularly since 2005. The main scope was to create a free trade zone to give a stimulus to commerce in the region, implementing a special relation that staved off outsiders ambitions. Putting this sphere, with a fully-fledged cooperation, under the aegis of the SCO was considered fruitful by the Chinese leadership in a long-term perspective³⁴⁴.

Nevertheless the rise of Talibans to power inevitably had internal reverberations in China, for the reinvigorated extremist moods across the region. It has been sustained that Uyghur militants found in Al-Qaeda a valid supporter and a powerful partner, that permitted them to train in Afghanistan and then return home with this experience to drill rebels in Northern Caucasus, Central Asia and Xinjiang, in the most remote regions. Thus Afghanistan was feared as a catalyst for Islamic extremism to spread powerfully across the Central Asian area, in which case it certainly would be a source of assistance for extremists and separatists. On such basis, it was evident to China that the Afghan problem was of sound relevance for Central Asia and its internal security and that it had to be resolved, a reason why the relations between Moscow and the new Central Asian republics became tighter and tighter, also on the security sphere. This

³⁴³ Vladimir Paramanov, Alexei Stokov, *China in Central Asia: Energy Interests and Energy Policy*, Central Asia and the Caucasus, Vol.11, No.3, 2010, p.21

³⁴⁴ Vladimir Paramanov, Alexei Stokov, Oleg Stolpovsky, *Stages of China Economic Policies in Central Asia*, Central Asia and the Caucasus, Vol.11, No.1, 2010, p.113

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was facilitated by the advent in Moscow of Primakov's doctrine that vested sounder importance Eastward³⁴⁵. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation was the culmination, or probably the new start of this new joint path.

In spite of the new foreign policy announced in 1996, set for “democratizing international relations”, and centred on cooperation amongst powers on the regional issues³⁴⁶, is nonetheless impossible to deny the relevance the U.S. entrance in the region on a military level had, after September 2001: as it will be forward further argued, China felt encircled and threatened in its domestic policy by the Western intervention in the region, what led it to claim louder the international character of the Uyghur *Islamic* separatist problem, posing the accent to the religious pattern, in order to move the attention away from this people claim for independence³⁴⁷. Accordingly to the internal policy, one of the risks, amid others, was that if the Uyghur problem was not settled, but, on the opposite found support in some states - the Western democratic model, for instance, that promoted the right to self-determination, as well as sustain on the part of other groupings with the same orientation -, it would put in motion a domino effect with reverberations on other regions critical to the Chinese geopolitics, as Taiwan or Tibet³⁴⁸. Besides, the threats related to the integrity of this stretch of land put also at risk the natural resources it presents, and the wide low-inhabited spaces China exploits here for nuclear testing³⁴⁹.

³⁴⁵ Vladimir Paramonov, Oleg Stolpovski, *Chinese Security Interests in Central Asia*, Advanced Research and Assessment Group, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, May 2008, p.6

³⁴⁶ In the Chinese parlance, this policy envisages the equality among states at an international level, instead of a zero-sum interplay. This strategy is part of the Chinese approach towards other countries and of its own model of “democracy”, which is founded on non-interference in the state sovereignty and equality, principles that are all present and distinctive features of the SCO Charter.

Peter Mattis, *A Victory for China's New Security Concept: The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, in the Special Edition “The SCO at One”, China Eurasia Forum Monthly, July 2005, p.37

³⁴⁷ Loredana di Placido, *Shanghai Cooperation Organization: un modello di cooperazione regionale in Asia Centrale*, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici, giugno 2006 n.6, p. 26

³⁴⁸ Stephen Blank, *China in Central Asia: the Egeomon in Waiting?*, in Ariel Cohen, “*Eurasia in Balance. The U.S. and Regional Power Shift*”, Ashgate Publishing, Burlington, 2005, p.157

³⁴⁹ Loredana di Placido, *Shanghai Cooperation Organization: un modello di cooperazione regionale in Asia Centrale*, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici, giugno 2006 n.6, p. 26

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The Shanghai Forum was an important stage for Chinese commitment in Central Asia, and an important location in which the coordination of internal policies and means to struggle against the expansion of terrorism were privileged topics. In 1999, with the Memorandum ratified in Bishkek amongst the members on the “Practical Cooperation” between executive bodies and special services, but in special way with the 2001 endorsement of the “Convention of Fight Against Terrorism, Extremism and Separatism”, a joint path was concretely undertaken to defeat the terrorist problem. The signature of these acts coincided with a period started in 1999-2000 during which Beijing had been furnishing the Central Asian republics with military equipment and assistance on a bilateral basis, justified by the threat IMU constituted, in its recent attempts of penetrating into the Uzbek and Kyrgyz territories, together with the related anxiety provided by the growing Afghan problem.

Obviously the ties were particularly close with the three bordering states - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan -, but also Uzbekistan received military-technical assistance and anti-terrorist sub-units from the People's Liberation Army.

2002 marked an important year for China, that for the first time moved its troops beyond its borderlines, to embark in the first joint military exercise, planned with Kyrgyzstan. Since 2003, under the auspices of the SCO, this event repeated annually with great participation of CPLA divisions - 1700 units were present in the Peace Mission exercise, in 2007³⁵⁰.

The apprehension of Beijing with regard to its security face to Central Asia, was accentuated by the increasing permeating presence of the United States in the region, used as a hub for the military mission in Afghanistan, that resulted in military divisions deployed in Uzbekistan and especially near Manas airport in Kyrgyzstan, only 200km from its landmass³⁵¹. This shook the balance of

³⁵⁰ Stephen Blank, *China in Central Asia: the Egeomon in Waiting?*, in Ariel Cohen, “*Eurasia in Balance. The U.S. and Regional Power Shift*”, Ashgate Publishing, Burlington, 2005, p.157 Vladimir Paramonov, Oleg Stolpovski , *Chinese Security Interests in Central Asia* , Advanced Research and Assessment Group , Defence Academy of the United Kingdom , May 2008, p.7

³⁵¹ Ramakant Dwivedi , *China's Central Asia Policy in Recent Times* , central Asia-Caucasus institute, Silk Road Studies Programme, China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly, Volume 4, No. 4, 2006, p.144

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power in the area, since until that moment the U.S. had only been present as an economic actor, but a military presence on the Chinese threshold was unacceptable, due the drift that was spreading among the five republics in favour of the former.

Moreover, as it was for Russia, the Coloured Revolutions had a negative effect on the Chinese government psychology, that concreted in the suspect that the U.S. had plans of political influence over Central Asia, and that it could possibly undermine its power, making leverage on the promotion of a Western democratic and human rights-inspired model. It goes without saying that this aspect could ignite the domestic Uyghur separatist restlessness, from the Chinese government standpoint. Once again, as Putin did, the Chinese president Wen Jibao upheld the way Karimov subdued the 2005 Andijan disorders and was also the first one who personally went to visit the Uzbek leader, counterbalancing the pressure voiced by the Western countries on human rights violations³⁵². The Coloured Revolutions in particular prompted China to consider the possibility of installing its own bases in Kyrgyzstan, after the upheavals, and Uzbekistan, after the dismantlement of the U.S. ones, notwithstanding the fact that they were never realized³⁵³.

The Chinese leadership grasped in the U.S. moves, and in special way in the enlargement Eastward of the NATO, which dismemberment expectation after the Cold War were dismissed, an effort of affirming itself as a leader power on the Central Asian as well as on the global panorama, in the perspective of creating – from the U.S. viewpoint “of preserving” - a unipolar world order, jeopardizing the position of the other actors³⁵⁴.

³⁵² Idem

³⁵³ Contemporaneously Russia voiced its intention of stationing a new base on the Kyrgyz territory, that presented already a particular case, in that it was the sole country to host both a Russian and an America base. It is supported that the deployment of a Chinese base was particularly opposed by Russia itself. Recently China addressed its proposal anew to Kyrgyzstan. Russia efforts to preserve its military hegemony in Central Asia is also given evidence by the fact that it also contrasted the intention of India to station its own base in Tajikistan. It was indeed collocated together with a Russian one, in 2006.

Stephen Blank, *Military Rivalry in Central Asia*, Eurasian Transition Group, December 2008 www.eurasiantransition.org/files/da96afeff5fabde0892547f3d472119e-14.php

³⁵⁴ Ramakant Dwivedi, *China's Central Asia Policy in Recent Times*, central Asia-Caucasus institute, Silk Road Studies Programme, China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly, Volume 4, No. 4, 2006, p.144

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From a closer and security perspective, China feared the control the U.S. could exert on its Western district facilities, and especially on the Labnor test range, an important location for Chinese nuclear testing.

Therefore the list of priorities for Beijing was re-settled, accordingly with the Western interference and military expansion in the region and the concern that since that moment it posed to the Chinese space of action, something that was not perceived in the previous decade, when U.S. projected only economic ambitions over Central Asia and over the raw materials of Caspian basin³⁵⁵.

Immediately after the deployment of American troops in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, China reinvigorated its units in the Xinjiang province to shield the Afghan-Pakistani border and the Central Asian partners. Besides, it fostered for a reinforced cooperation in the SCO framework, that Beijing particularly presented as a fierce counterpart for the American presence in the region. Indeed the speed with which the relations between Moscow and Beijing were strengthening within the SCO, the charter undertaken in the 2002 summit, the coordinated response they opposed to organised crime and international terrorism, and the topics discussed on the following years about enlargement, are emblematic of the weight the two regional powers wanted the SCO to assume on the international platform.

The outlook of Chinese policy towards Central Asia appears very focused on economic relation, trade and raw materials exchange. The evolution Chinese policy has undertaken in central Asia tells volumes about the “peaceful rise” - even though questionable - of what was an emerging power, and transformed into a global power, in the last thirty years. China succeeded in affirming its position at a regional level, in Central Asia as well as in other regional contexts in the world, implementing a policy of soft power inspired to non interference in local issues, while marking the territory through economic exchange and becoming a relevant creditor for the states with which it entails relation. This

³⁵⁵ Vladimir Paramonov, Oleg Stolpovski , *Chinese Security Interests in Central Asia* , Advanced Research and Assessment Group , Defence Academy of the United Kingdom , May 2008, pp. 8-9

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strategy makes it possible for China to increasingly escalate its power, without committing great expenses, nor responsibilities³⁵⁶.

³⁵⁶ Zhongqi Pan, *Defining China's Role in the International System*, ISPI Analysis, Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale, No. 55, May 2011, pp.1-2

IV Chapter

SCO: a geopolitical overview



Source:

http://www.iranreview.org/content/Documents/Shanghai_Cooperation_Organization_and_Practical_Capacities_for_Iran_2.htm

4 SCO: a geopolitical overview

Until this moment the work has focused on the genesis of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and on the history that has accompanied its member states until its constitution, shedding the lights on the motivations that led them to the membership in this alliance. It is possible to read through the lines also the character of the single states taking part to this regional body. It emerges that they do not have the same attitude inside the SCO, as a consequence of the different paths that brought them to this group, even though sharing, officially at least, the same tasks.

This start point is fundamental to understand the dynamics of the geopolitical structure of such an important geo-strategic engine, in accordance with the other coalitions gravitating in the region, and their balance of power.

The SCO has been portrayed with many definitions by some Western scholars, mainly American, when they tried to give an explanation about it, actually, only recently, more or less at the mid 2000: “the most dangerous organisation Americans have ever heard of”³⁵⁷, “a potential Warsaw Pact”, “an autocrats club”³⁵⁸, “an OPEC with nuclear bomb”³⁵⁹ in the kindest consideration a “geopolitical counterweight to the United States”³⁶⁰, and so forth.

The SCO is an important experiment of the post-Cold War history, but is appears in many respects still obscure to the rest of the world, surely underestimated or watched with suspicion. It is still questionable for instance its proposed alternative model, which has very little in common with the Western way of conceiving foreign policy.

³⁵⁷ Christopher Brown, quoted in Stephen Aris, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation “Tackling the three Evils”. A regional Response to non Traditional Security Challenges or an Anti-Western bloc?*, Europe-Asia Studies, Vol.61, No.3, May 2009, pp. 458-9

³⁵⁸ David Wall, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Uneasy Amity*, 15 June 2006 http://www.opendemocracy.net/globalizationinstitutions_government/shanghai_cooperation_3653.jsp

³⁵⁹ Simon J. Smith, Emilian Kavalski, *NATO's Partnership with Central Asia: Cooperation à la Carte*, in Emilian Kavalski, *The New Central Asia: the Regional Impact of International Actors*, World Scientific, Danvers, 2010, p.118

³⁶⁰ Nikolas K Gvosdev, quoted in Stephen Aris, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation “Tackling the three Evils”. A regional Response to non Traditional Security Challenges or an Anti-Western bloc?*, Europe-Asia Studies, Vol.61, No.3, May 2009, pp. 458-9

It is moreover interesting to observe its anti-terrorist activity in such a multi-faceted context, as compared with the Western approach.

Nevertheless, the former-Soviet space experienced a large number of multi-lateral forums and organisations, aimed at coordinating the states policies in a variety of domains, without progressing in active operation. These ones constituted great examples of “paper organisations”, that were never able to implement the scopes they had fixed, despite the resonance they enjoyed at home. This is probably the reason why the rest of the world, and the US in particular, got interest in classifying the SCO only some time after its establishment, and though with plenty of reserves about it. The most evident example is the fact that the Bush administration did not seriously considered the SCO, simply reckoning it another element of disturbance in Eurasia, hindering its security policy³⁶¹.

What is taken for sure, is that the interests that stand behind the position taken by its official members, and their relations with the other states interested in the SCO, as well as with states outside its circle in general, prove to be profoundly interlaced with the competition undergoing in the Central Asian region, under the label of “New Great Game”, and with the overall global order with its gears.

In this chapter the attempt lays on analysing the SCO from a bird's eye, in order to insert it in the frame of the objectives, plays and interplays present in the region, and try to explore its points of strengths and weaknesses that make it a possible foe for the Western world or a harmless subject with whom to coexist.

The first part the SCO is displayed as a crucial actor of the international relations on the Central Asian region battlefield, capable of competing with others on many subjects and which weight is worth to be accounted as that of a possible world pole.

The second part will be instead devoted to highlight its dark sides, and especially its weaknesses and uncertainties, which are the mirror of a not yet mature body, and a non homogeneous one.

³⁶¹ Richard Weitz, *Growing Pains*, The Journal of International Security Affairs, Fall 2009, No.17, <http://www.securityaffairs.org/issues/2009/17/weitz.php>

In the end some traces on the likely foreseeable developments will be jot down, on the bases of the previous examinations.

4.1 An “anti-Western bloc” ?

There are several ways of reading the alternative model that the Shanghai Cooperation organisation embodies in the mainstream of the international agencies to which we, the Westerns, are used to assist.

The SCO could be read simply for how it is presented, as a new model of security cooperation: in this vision, it would simply appear far distant from the Western types bodies.

The principles inspiring the Shanghai group are not in themselves harming, nor they are new. By contrary, they recall the principles enunciated in the Charter of the United Nations of 1945, summarized in the articles n.1 and n.2, dictating the bases of a peaceful world order, the renounce to war as a means to solve controversies, but even more significantly, the respect of sovereignty as an hindrance to the interference of other states in domestic affairs³⁶².

This doctrine has proved for the SCO members to be applied in more than an occasion, some examples can be the revolts in Kyrgyzstan in 2005, or the Andi-jan disorders, in the same year. Over these and other examples lay shadows about the degree of fairness of the regional greater powers of having not intervened to quell these extreme situations and above all to take a position in respect to the way the national governments acted to suppress the uproars, which across the Western world were so harshly denounced.

It emerges that the first reason for the SCO to be addressed as an anti-Western organisation, giving to this label the simple significance of “being poles apart to the West” is the fact that it responds to different rules.

As a matter of fact, it has been an assumption of the post-Cold War that the agencies founded on multilateral cooperation should take the liberal democratic value as a cornerstone of their activity. Cooperation is considered to be possible only by respecting the prerequisites of democracy and liberal economy. The

³⁶² Charter of the United Nations, 26 June 1945, San Francisco, art.1,2

reason why these two principles are taken as a mainstay lays on the fact that they are expected to allow deeper integration, on the groundwork of shared common values. Consequently, they reflect in the possession of the required know-how to go through transnational policies and cultures, facilitating the codification of strategies and behaviours and promoting trust amongst participants³⁶³. While this base is reckoned particularly valuable for security organisations, it is absolutely significant the contribution given by the stream sustaining that, in an organisation dealing with security in a circumstance of less developed states, or failed states, or quasi state, the action of highlighting the state sovereignty is functional to the viability of the organisation. The target is, in these cases, not to supervise the operations of the states, by limiting their sovereignty and liberty of action, as it happens for the developed countries, but it is fostering an inter-state nature mechanism, in which gears are put in motion through consultation, the values shared are mainly linked to ancient history, tradition and common geography.

It is certainly the case of the “Asian Values” and the “Silk Road spirit” recalled within the SCO, - as well as in other organisation of this area like the ASEAN. The threats are perceived as internal and posed to governments, rather than external, and overriding element in the process of nation-building³⁶⁴.

This could be a neutral reading of the core of what renders the SCO different from other institutions of the Western world. However a critical observation is required for exploring the reverberations the SCO has not only at a regional but also at a global level, and particularly the reason why it has been labelled as a counterweight to the U.S. power in the Eurasian region. In which terms the SCO can be considered an “anti-Western bloc”?

To this proposal it is worthy to give a glance at the presence of the NATO and its mainly U.S.-led determinate action in Central Asia.

Basically the U.S. was economically present in this heartland previously to the war in Afghanistan, already affirming its presence as a thorn in Russia's side, for the alignment it was able to install attracting many countries around its

³⁶³ Adled (1992) quoted in Stephen Aris, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation “Tackling the three Evils”. A Regional Response to Non-Traditional Security Challenges or an Anti-Western Bloc?*, Europe-Asia Studies, Vol.61, No.3, May 2009, p. 463

³⁶⁴ Nerine (2005) quoted in, Idem, p.464

orbit. In Caucasus, this process was more visible, led on Turkey's side, as demonstrated by the influence exerted on states as Georgia and Azerbaijan - even if to a lesser extent on the second -, but also Ukraine and Moldova³⁶⁵.

NATO entered Central Asia essentially to achieve a double mission: assisting the newborn republics in the difficult transition endeavouring to assure the acquisition of democratic criteria, first of all with reference to the transparency and openness of the regimes and their evolution in accordance with human rights and democratisation; the second goal came later and related to the mission in Afghanistan. The trajectories traced by NATO here are inexplicable without the utmost leading role of Washington policy in this body, as the only one competent for granting security, as witnessed by the fact that these targets were even voiced in the 1999 Silk Road Strategy acts setting out the groundwork of the U.S.-Central Asian relations, and that was renovated in 2006, on the behalf of the tragic events of 9/11³⁶⁶. In particular it is this second pillar that justifies the stationing of 56,000 so far from the European landmass, since 2001. The twofold intervention in Central Asia is by the way effective to the new mission NATO acquired at the end of the Cold War: sheltering the Euro-Atlantic space from the threats deriving from outside, attaining military security by exporting the Western liberal democratic model, hence putting at the centre intervention, with the aim of democratization³⁶⁷.

With the intention of providing a chronological frame, we can recognize three periods in the NATO's commitment in the region: the first one that lasted until September 2001, the post 9/11, and the phase opened in 2003-5.

The first period initiatives went under the umbrella of cooperation and assistance to regimes during the transition in the name of democracy assertion. The promotion of democracy was proposed to go hand in hand with the prevention

³⁶⁵ The tight relations revealed important in the rivalries Ukraine had with Russia and the underlying frictions over pipelines, which they wanted to build avoiding to pass through the Russian territory, thus independently from Russia. The construction of Nabucco was the result of their kinship. On a military level it is to be remembered the support given by the U.S. to Georgia in the war of 2008 against South Ossetia, which was instead shouldered by Russia. These interplays revealed a new battlefields for the Russia-U.S. competition over Eurasia and its resources.

³⁶⁶ Matteo Fumagalli, *The United States and Central Asia*, in Emilian Kavalski, "The New Central Asia: the Regional Impact of International Actors", World Scientific, Danvers, p.180

³⁶⁷ Simon J. Smith, Emilian Kavalski, *NATO's Partnership with Central Asia: Cooperation à la Carte*, idem, pp.29-31

of terrorism, a theme on which the republics were particularly sensitive. Two of the vectors of the American policy in Central Asia were the supervision on the divestment of the former-Soviet arms of mass destruction distributed on the whole territory - a common aim with Russia, due to the likely availability to the advantage of terrorists throughout the region, along with the war against drug trafficking³⁶⁸ -, and the access to cheap resources provisions, in order to break up with the Russian monopoly in Central Asia and the Caucasus³⁶⁹.

This ten years span of time viewed the ratification of the most important Partnership for Peace Programme, in 1994, in Brussels, with the most part of the republics, except Tajikistan that joined it in 2002. It was endorsed on an American initiative, to include the post-Soviet republics and some new European states, for a total of 22 members.

This programme is the very fulcrum of the NATO-Central Asian relations, as it endorses security and stability persecution. It was an important step towards the integration of the ex-Soviet states, that seemed to precede an enlargement eastward, despite neither they were interested in admission, nor it really happened in the end. Nonetheless, this mechanism gave the Central Asian countries access to the military expertise, in which NATO was a pivotal power, and of which the feeble military apparatchiks of the former Soviet states took advantage. Considerably, they could hold consultations with NATO security headquarters, organise joint military exercises, and make use of specific options to achieve their aims in the field of security. The rationale of the partnership is to be found in the Partnership for Peace Framework Document³⁷⁰, which, amid delineating the rules governing their relations, bound the participants to respect treaties of international relevance, such as the UN Charter, the Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, and the Helsinki Final Act, in-

³⁶⁸ Dmitri Trenin, *A Farewell to the Great Game? Prospects for Russian-American Security Cooperation in Central Asia*, European Security, Frank Class, Vol.12, No.3-4, Autumn-Winter 2003, p.30

³⁶⁹ Matteo Fumagalli, The United States and Central Asia, in Emilian Kavalski, *The New Central Asia: the Regional Impact of International Actors*, World Scientific, Danvers, p.184

³⁷⁰ They became formally part of the Partnership for Peace programme, together with other eighteen countries. This partnership allows its participants to cooperate with NATO according to their needs and abilities, thus the action plan is scheduled and personalized and two-years basis. To this link, the list of the twenty two countries joining the Partnership. http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_82584.htm

volving a clear compelling commitment to the international law, but also to democracy and human rights.

The areas included in the NATO-Central Asian cooperation are summarized in five baskets: security, reform of the defence sector, preparedness to emergencies, science and environment, public awareness³⁷¹.

Notably, the state-building process was more deeply addressed by NATO with the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom in October 2001 in Afghanistan, that marked the second stage of an even stronger penetration and interest towards the region. Central Asia came to acquire a key position in the U.S. agenda, due especially to the plot interweaving the terrorist presence based on the territories of the republics, with the Taliban³⁷². The afore quoted five points became the backbones of the strategies endorsed by all the players involved in the Great Game. The graveness of this landmass arose objectively, a fact that the Central Asian republics used as an instrument and a lever in holding external relations, to profit as much as possible from them³⁷³.

At a first stage, the United States walked in many respects on a common path with Russia. In 1999, for instance a targeted joint group was created to share information over Afghanistan, and albeit the advance of the Taliban the two governments decided not to recognize the regime, and to support the imposition of an UN sanctions against it; the apogee of this closeness was presented with the non-obstruction Russia demonstrated to the U.S. in implanting military bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, contravening a mainstay of the post-Soviet doctrine stating that no military alliance or military presence could be allowed to a third part in coordination with a state of the CIS³⁷⁴.

³⁷¹ The reform of the defence sector was endured through the creation of an Action Plan on Defence and Institution-Building, with the target of helping the military institutions to act in the respect of civil democratic principles.

Matteo Fumagalli, *The United States and Central Asia*, in Emilian Kavalski, “*The New Central Asia: the Regional Impact of International Actors*”, World Scientific, Danvers, p.36

³⁷² *Idem*, p.40

³⁷³ Matteo Fumagalli, *The United States and Central Asia*, in Emilian Kavalski, “*The New Central Asia: the Regional Impact of International Actors*”, World Scientific, Danvers, pp. 186-7

³⁷⁴ Few time later, as the U.S. started to conquests new steps in the region and disregard Russian presence, without involving in its decision-making, Russia realized it had been too permissive with its counterpart, that was instead pursuing an individualistic strategy. To simplify, thus the germ of that relation faded and the rivalry between the two increased to the point that the Central Asian republics support became their battlefield.

It is to be acknowledged that the Central Asian regimes had no intention to give up their layout, thus renouncing to the status quo, in favour of the model dictated by NATO, as far as democracy and human rights was concerned, and in the course of the kinship between the two sides, this was a high barrier to the NATO to move forward. The new governments in this region continued to watch NATO as a key provider for the military know-how and the protection especially were needed along the borders, thus only in term of the gain they could extract, no matter of who the supplier was³⁷⁵.

This was foremost tangible with the bases NATO implanted in Central Asia, that early became a blackmail in their hands. A series of bilateral treaties, particularly with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan were ratified, many to sustain economy, but the most part of them related to military cooperation³⁷⁶.

The third moment in NATO - better say U.S. - policy in Central Asia coincided with the war in Iraq in 2003, and with the bandwagon Coloured Revolutions that took place in the first half of 2000s, in particular the “Tulip” one in Kyrgyzstan, that sounded as a threat for the survival of the status quo in Central Asia. The diffidence towards the U.S. interference in the national governments behaviours increased, according to democracy and human rights, and was, to the local counterparts, an evidence of the lack of knowledge the U.S. had of the regional context³⁷⁷.

Dmitri Trenin, *A Farewell to the Great Game? Prospects for Russian-American Security Cooperation in Central Asia*, European Security, Frank Class, Vol.12, No.3-4, Autumn -Winter 2003, pp. 22-23

³⁷⁵ An Action Plan Against Terrorism was envisaged, with the aim of coordinating and sharing intelligence information about terrorism activity, and cooperating in constructing a proper defence response. Besides a Trust Fund was created to finance the demilitarization of the area.

Matteo Fumagalli, *The United States and Central Asia*, in Emilian Kavalski, “*The New Central Asia: the Regional Impact of International Actors*”, World Scientific, Danvers, pp.38-39

³⁷⁶ Lately the trend is inverting, since, while the subsidies for economic development are decreasing, the military cooperation is, by the way getting higher.

Matteo Fumagalli, *The United States and Central Asia*, in Emilian Kavalski, “*The New Central Asia: the Regional Impact of International Actors*”, World Scientific, Danvers, p.186

³⁷⁷ Protests in Kyrgyzstan had outburst after the reelection of president Akayev that a substantial number of the population claimed had been rigged up. They succeeded in toppling him and replacing him with Bakiyev. Idem, p.178

Lowell Dittmer, *Central Asia and the Regional Powers*, The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, Volume 5, No. 4, November 2007, p.20

Thierry Kellner, *L'Occident de la Chine- Pékin et la Nouvelle Asie Centrale (1991-2001)*, Presse Universitaire de France, 2008, p.160

To conclude, it is noticeable the fact that on the Central Asian chessboard, NATO is no more than an option, although a powerful one. On the one hand, NATO fears disengagement, on the other the republics in question demonstrate no intention of chasing it away, but just use its concessions to vehicle its presence in their favour. As a matter of fact, they have only reduced their allowances, but never completely ended them up, exception made for Uzbekistan; U.S. is not seen as a leading power to the realization of “regionalisation”, but more as an important source of gain, an actor to be preferably approached in one-to-one relations³⁷⁸. Such a context confirms the nature of their spread multi-vector foreign policy, easy to cede to the temptations and wooing of greater powers.

The choice of speaking so long about the American presence in the region, even if surely not exhaustively, is motivated by the fact that with China and Russia it is arguably a decisive giant in the dynamics of the region, that especially gear around the jostling among these actors, and is to be read through the lens of their contended stakes. On this platform even the kinships with other states is diverted, in accordance with their interrelations and interests.

Given this premise it is now possible to explore the rationale that the reading of SCO as an anti-Western bloc engulfs.

Geo-Political weight. The geopolitical weight of the SCO in the world affairs lays first of all in its composition. China and Russia foreign policy coordination is evident in world fora, where it acquires great relevance and their different approach is exalted in front of the other states. Notably the SCO hosts two effective members belonging to the BRICS group, Russia and China, and cooperates with a third, India. These three states might is well known and is particularly canalized through the military and economic spheres, compensating their mutual weaknesses; moreover, the SCO is the only organisation in the world in which an economic power as China is member and United States is not, despite the requests on the latter's part of being bestowed the status of observer, to which the SCO members turned deaf ear³⁷⁹.

³⁷⁸ Matteo Fumagalli, The United States and Central Asia, in Emilian Kavalski, “*The New Central Asia: the Regional Impact of International Actors*”, World Scientific, Danvers, p.188

³⁷⁹ The same treatment was reserved to Japan, possibly motivated by its being a very close ally

Accounting only on the effective members, the SCO covers three fifths of the Eurasian territory and one quarter of the world population, but if we consider also the states that joined it as observers in 2004-5 - Mongolia, India, Pakistan, Iran -, it involves the half of the world population and four nuclear power -Russia, China, India, Pakistan. Two of the observer states, India and Pakistan, have not ratified the Non-Proliferation Treaty on the reduction of nuclear armaments, which observance within the SCO has been avowed in Semipalatinsk in 2006, to prevent nuclear weapons from falling under the ownership of non-state actors, terrorists, fortified by the decision of creating a Nuclear Free Zone in Central Asia in 2009. Moreover, SCO entertains close relations with Iran, a state inscribed on the black list of the international relations³⁸⁰. For a part of the international relations scholars, the demographic factor is one of preponderant importance to be analysed, in front of the constantly lowering demographic rate of the industrialized countries. Starting only from an overview as such, it is impossible to think the SCO as deprived of geopolitical repercussions at a global level³⁸¹.

Apart from this insight based on numbers, evidently the SCO pursues a global aim, conducting its war on terrorism, a subject that has been elected as the flag of the Western world strategy. In this respect, the two parts demonstrate no interests in merging to achieve this evidently common target: the SCO is portrayed as a rival and an antagonist, in the light of an assumed unipolar world, headed by the U.S.

The *SCO Charter* adopted at the St. Petersburg summit in 2002, and even earlier the *Declaration on the Establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization* of June 2001, in the art.2 makes reference to a very important concept: by adhering to the principle of non-alignment, “SCO (declares) to be not directed against other states and international organisations” and “(pledges

of the U.S.

³⁸⁰ Ingmar Oldberg, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Powerhouse or Paper Tiger?*, FOI Swedish Research Defence Agency, Stockholm, June 2007, p.9

Alex Wooley, *Paying the Price for Security: The Central Asian Republics and the “Great Powers”*, CEF Quarterly, The journal of the China-Eurasia Forum, October 2004, p. 17

³⁸¹ Richard Weitz, *A Central Asia Without the West?*, CACI Analyst, 01-14-2009, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5013>

to) prevent any illegitimate acts directed against the SCO”³⁸²; moreover it is “open to the outside” and “it shall admit as its new members those countries which recognize the cooperation purposes (...), the principles expounded in Article 6 of the this declaration and other articles, and whose joining will facilitate the realization of cooperation”³⁸³.

In accordance to the above stated viewpoint, there are no delineated criteria neither for establishing what could be “an illegal act moved against the SCO”, nor in what respects should an external actor act in line with the SCO aims, purposes, principles and cooperation. These tenets are better explainable through the filter of the (up to now) eleven years experience, taking into considerations the action plans the SCO has undertaken to protect itself from actions “targeted against it”, and the relations entangled with other states, and the role and place that the countries candidate to obtain membership occupy in the region and in the SCO agenda.

Under the guidance of these concepts, the 2005 request addressed by the SCO to the U.S. of providing a deadline related to its bases in Central Asia, appear as more than simply a kind invitation.

As it has already been touched on in other parts of this work, 2005 was a year rich in events and watersheds. First of all, the “Tulip Revolution” in Kyrgyzstan, preceding and following the elections in which president Akayev was re-confirmed for a new mandate. On the weave of the “Coloured Revolutions” started few years earlier and particularly successful in Serbia (2000), Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004), and fraught with claims for democracy, Kyrgyzstan insurgents overthrew the president and brought this movement at the core of Central Asia. Together with the neighbouring regimes, this escalation made tremble China, in particular, aware of a spread resentment in Bishkek towards its paternalistic behaviour, and afraid that this change could sour their relations³⁸⁴. Russia blamed the U.S - also through NGOs - of having ignited the re-

³⁸² Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, St. Petersburg, 2002, art.2
<http://www.sectsc.org/EN/show.asp?id=69>

³⁸³ Declaration on the Establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Shanghai, 2001, point.7
http://www.ecrats.com/en/normative_documents/2006

³⁸⁴ Stephen Blank, *After the Tulip Revolution: are Sino-Kyrgyz Relations still "Alive and Kicking?"*, Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 2 Issue: 203, November 1, 2005
http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=31050

volts, and strongly perceived the alarm that Western ideologies were gaining ground, risking to cause destabilization for the status quo³⁸⁵.

The second important event that determined a turning point in the region were the revolts broken up in Andijan, in May 2005. The uproars started in the first decade of May, in a first moment conducted pacifically by few peoples to protest against the economic plight and the arrest of 22 businessmen blamed of extremism, a fact that played as a trigger. In few days the number of the demonstrators grew and, according to the U.S. Department Report, arms were seized by “unidentified” people. In the report it is denounced the means used to quell the insurgence, the fire open on civilians, and attributed to the governance forces. Karimov declared that those who had lost their lives in the firing were mainly terrorists, thus that he was not responsible for the death of civilians³⁸⁶. The United States condemned this act and proposed to send a commission to further investigate the incident, but Karimov rejected the demand, accusing the U.S. of having rigged the demonstrations and allowed only Russia to officially open an enquiry on the subject. Oppositely China and Russia praised the way Karimov handled the situation, what certainly played in their favour.

In line with a report issued by the OSCE, the above mentioned U.S. Department report listed a series of human rights abuses - abductions, torture, forced labour of minors in cotton harvest, violation of fair trials and of the people's right to chose their own government, etc. -, and prompted the Uzbek leadership to turn its back the United States, of which it had been a close ally, prior to that moment. Their alliance had in fact being consolidated immediately after September 2001, when the CIA trained an Uzbek commando to carry covert operations in Afghanistan. This implies that for a long time the U.S. had, if not supported, certainly covered the infractions operated by Karimov at home³⁸⁷.

Significantly, during the SCO summit of June 2005, held in Astana, the members jointly asked to set out a timetable for the withdrawal the contingents from

³⁸⁵ Aris, Stephen, *Eurasian Regionalism.. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2011, p.114

Richard Weitz, A Central Asia Without the West?, CACI Analyst, 01-14-2009, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5013>

³⁸⁶ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor 2005, *Uzbekistan*, March 8, 2006, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61684.htm>

³⁸⁷ Khalid, Adeeb, *Islam After Communism*, University of California Press, Berkely, 2007, p. 184

Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, without no open reference to the U.S., given the fact the Afghan war was over, and a contact-group on Afghanistan was on the agenda to handle the persisting threats: the SCO, wanted to pull America out of the region, getting the upper hand over Afghanistan³⁸⁸.

In response, the Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld answered the deal was of a bilateral nature, and the U.S. had to arrange it with the single leaders. A month later he visited both countries, countering that America was unwilling of stationing permanently in Central Asian, and that they planned maintaining the bases until Afghanistan was not completely stabilized. No deadline issued, but things had changed³⁸⁹.

Apart from its outcomes, this anecdote is significant of the stakes and interactions among powers. Making reference to the two points aforementioned, we can ask: in which sense the NATO presence could be regarded as a threat to the SCO, to be warded off? In light of this, what are the likely ideal “friends” of this organisation?

China and Russia did not openly show disapproval for the installation of the Karshi-Khanabad and Manas bases, early after the war in Afghanistan was started: terrorism and the related smuggling of narcotics, illicit goods, arms, and human trafficking were issues with which both regional powers had to cope with. Among these, uranium was another risky good illicitly trafficked that could easily be seized by terrorist groups, what would cause heavy consequences for the entire region³⁹⁰. As a consequence, the U.S. operation in the region, could be a sounder reinforcement to the struggle of these phenomena, and to secure the stability in the turbulent and unsteady Central Asian states, where the compliance of local terrorism with the Afghan wing was a *fait accompli*: the U.S. overwhelming military capability, could be positively critical

³⁸⁸ Vladimir Socor, *The Unfolding of the U.S.-Uzbekistan Crisis*, in John C.K. Daly, Kurt H. Meppen, Vladimir Socor, S. Frederick Starr, “U.S.-Uzbekistan Relations, 2001-2005”, Silk Road Paper, February 2006, p.45

³⁸⁹ Relations with Uzbekistan were at their poorest: immediately after the SCO summit, Karimov put many restrictions on the use of its bases and banned night flights and limited access to its airspace. It also boycotted a joint military exercise. Lionel Beehner, *Asia: U.S. Military bases in Central Asia*, Council on Foreign Relations, July 26, 2005 <http://www.cfr.org/kyrgyzstan/asia-us-military-bases-central-asia/p8440#p1>

³⁹⁰ Nicklas Norling, *RATS Exercise in Tashkent: Concern over Nuclear Terrorism?*, CACI Analyst, May 04, 2004, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/3872>

to the aim of defeating terrorism in the area. At the same time, Russia never demonstrated totally yielding to it: Moscow strengthened its military presence in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, by refuelling its deployments of units and arms and China would have done the same if Russia did not prevent it to go further³⁹¹.

A balance of power was thus being affirmed: while Russia and China used the U.S. presence for their own objectives and in the meantime contained its expansion, Central Asian states looked at the U.S. as a source of supplies extracted in change of their landing territories and gained a card to play with or against Russia³⁹², and the U.S. conquered a foothold in the region to the detriment of the other two giant, while professing its presence was uniquely connected to the anti-terrorist operation in Afghanistan, to avoid the possibility that at any times the other sides united in an anti-American alliance.

The equilibrium was practically broken by the 2005 events, that eroded U.S. credibility, whereas that of the other two powers issued revalued, giving rise to a rollback of the U.S. influence³⁹³. The underlying cause – better saying the “pretext” - was claimed to be interference in domestic affairs, that provoked strained irritation and was evidently in contrast with the SCO “Asian values”, that makes no reference to any projects of democratisation.

In order to answer to the second point, the debated question of enlargement deserves particular attention. Indeed, the summit of 2005 was equally important for the geopolitical weight of which the SCO was invested, by awarding India, Iran and Pakistan with the observer status. The participation of Iran was seen with particular suspicion from the U.S. administration. An year earlier the

³⁹¹ Alex Wooley, *Paying the Price for Security: The Central Asian Republics and the “Great Powers”*, CEF Quarterly, The journal of the China-Eurasia Forum, October 2004, p. 19
Trenin, Dmitri, *A Farewell to the Great Game? Prospects for Russian-American Security Cooperation in Central Asia*, European Security, Frank Cass, Vol.12, No.3-4, Autumn -Winter 2003, p.27

³⁹² Especially for what Kyrgyzstan is concerned, since the financial contribution given by the U.S. had important weight on its economy.

³⁹³ In particular the balance appeared to be broken with Uzbekistan, that, following suit to the SCO summit, did not smoothed its attitude as Moscow itself did, probably worried about a complete decline in the relations with the U.S, but instead sent a note to the U.S. embassy in Tashkent, giving an ultimatum of 180 days for the complete withdrawal. U.S. depicted it as a choice of its own to assign predominance to human rights respect.
The same year Uzbekistan signed a treaty with Russia, asserting its undiscussed role in the region.

observer status had been assigned to Mongolia, which feeble capabilities do not allow it to play a strategic role in the area, whereas the three states that followed to this status are critical for the balance of power of the whole region and the relevance it would acquire in the world politics, if they were appointed full members.

India is a demographically rich country, apart from being a big country in itself, a member of the BRIC and a nuclear power. This data tells volumes about the potentially strategic move that an aggregation with this state would mean to the SCO: not only it would become the second largest organisation after the UN for population, but above all, being India a country which economic rate is growing at a fast pace and the internal demand being so high, it would constitute a bolster to the SCO economic development, an impetus to a multilateral approach, and an economic model for many states of Central Asia. India shares common objectives with SCO, carries an anti-terrorist policy, coping with ethnic nationalism and separatism and played an important role during the war, and in the post-war reconstruction, in Afghanistan³⁹⁴. Moreover it entails friendly relations with Russia, of which it is the second addressee after China for arms exports - 70% of the total Russian production -, and with the Central Asian republics, particularly on the energy and military sectors. The only hindrance to advancements stands in the difficulties in finding safe transit passages and pipelines, that require substantial investments³⁹⁵.

India's geographical position, at the border with the turbulent Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and China, makes it possible for this great power to play

³⁹⁴ Stephen Blank, *The Influence of External Actors in Central Asia*, in Emilian Kavalski "The New Central Asia: the Regional Impact of International Actors", World Scientific, Danvers, 2010, p. 186

³⁹⁵ Tajikistan is the state with which India maintains the most special relation within the republics and, interestingly, the one where the creation of a military base has been advocated by India in 2006, in the air base of Ayini, near Dushanbe, that was renovated by India in the post-Soviet period and which was the channel that allowed India to provide supplies and aid in Afghanistan. By now Russia has opposed the project, but if it became reality, India would be military present in Central Asia not only through supplying military equipment but also actively. Moreover it would be determinant for its relations with Pakistan, and its defence.

Sudha Ramachandran, *India's foray into Central Asia*, 2006

http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/HH12Df01.html

Aris, Stephen, *Eurasian Regionalism. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2011, p.161

an influence in the region, for the potential it constitutes. Indeed, in 2006, jointly with Russia India discussed the hypothesis of admitting India in CSTO, in order to make it participate to the defence of the Central Asian heartland, and in the meantime containing its autonomous military initiatives in the region. Undoubtedly, such a project would be heavily beneficial for the area, as the CSTO would be extended to shield Central Asian energy routes, which are one of the bulk of Indian vectors in Central Asia³⁹⁶. India's projections are more related to become a regional power rather than directly aiming at acquiring global supremacy, and its immediate scope is to extract the resources needed to further develop its economy. In order to do so, a strengthened military partnership with Russia, the main influential power in the region by history, would be very advantageous and also would constitute an important lever to contain Pakistan boosts, with whom India holds turbulent relations. On the other hand, in the U.S. eyes, India would constitute an important counterweight to the Sino-Russian alliance in the region, if it operated alone or in cooperation with it. The opposite case would be detrimental to the U.S. sway in the area³⁹⁷.

India expressed its willingness in taking part to the SCO as a full member in 2008, and by now it has remained an observer state. But it possesses all the cards to be bestowed full member, according to the criteria enunciated in the 2010 *Statute of the Order of Admission of New Members to the SCO*³⁹⁸, being it part of the Eurasian region, immaculate on the point of view of the UN sanctions, and in flourishing contacts with the states involved in the SCO. India is a likely candidate to the SCO, and if this project were implemented the balance in the region, from an economic, political, demographic and military – not to say nuclear – point of view would definitely tip in favour of the SCO³⁹⁹.

³⁹⁶ Stephen Blank, *The Influence of External Actors in Central Asia*, in Emilian Kavalski “*The New Central Asia: the Regional Impact of International Actors*”, World Scientific, Danvers, 2010, p.187

³⁹⁷ New Dheli leadership realised projects oriented to build railroads and roadways to connect Afghanistan to the rest of the region, and is committed in the construction of a North-South corridor, passing through Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and reaching the Iranian port of Chabahar, useful to minimize transportation risks and timing.

Teresita C. Schaffer & Vibhuti Haté, *India's “Look West” Policy: Why Central Asia Matters*, South Asia Monitor, Number 110, September 05, 2007, Centre for strategic and International Studies, Washington

³⁹⁸ Aris, Stephen, *Eurasian Regionalism. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2011, p.158

³⁹⁹ Alexander Lukin, *Should the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation be Enlarged?*, 22 June,

The admission of the other two states is more remote as a possibility, and is seen with reservations by the SCO components. On the one hand there is Pakistan, that has never cultivated friendly ties with the West, caused to its nuclear program and its stance towards the Taliban regime, and that neither is a trustworthy ally for Central Asia and the SCO. It shares with this organisation the everlasting concern about Afghanistan, that by the way faces in a different way and entertains very tight relations with China. At the end of the Cold War, Pakistan decided to sustain any governments that installed in the neighbouring country, for the sake of stability, for the repercussions that agitations over the boundary could have on its North-western flank. By the way Pakistan membership is strongly sponsored by China, its biggest ally in the area. An eventual award as full member would introduce to the region an unstable country, in collusion with the Taliban, dangerous for the regional widespread of terrorism, but could mean a reshaping of the geopolitical trajectories and the participation of a fourth nuclear power in strained relations with the U.S.⁴⁰⁰

Another match point with the other stakeholders present in the region, is constituted by the close ties the SCO holds with Iran. Despite its early policy as an Islamic Republic of choosing “neither West, nor East”⁴⁰¹, Iran is an historical cultural and traditional paramount for the region, as a large part of the Central Asian populations inherited Persian tradition and language, diffused throughout this southern flank, along with the Turkic one⁴⁰². Furthermore, since 1989-1990 Iranian relations with the Soviet Union relaxed, and the exchanges went even further through the decade, and, while until that moment they had been only

2011

<http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Should-the-Shanghai-Cooperation-Organization-Be-Enlarged---15245>

⁴⁰⁰ Cornell, Svante, *Uzbekistan a Regional Player in Eurasian Geopolitics?*, European Security, Vol.9, No.2, Summer 2000, p.125

⁴⁰¹ Tchangiz Pahelavan, *Iran and Central Asia*, in Atabaki, Tauroj, O' Kane, John, “*Post Soviet Central Asia*”, International Institut for Asian Studies, Tauris Academic Studies, New York, 1998, p.73

⁴⁰² At the end of the Cold War, the Turkish model was promoted for the new established regime, for its being secular and rapidly evolving in the economic sector, in its journey towards modernity. The Iranian model was, on the contrary feared: first of all the spectre of the Iranian revolution and of fundamentalism Islam, could be a bolster for the republics; in addition the Central Asian form of Islam, following Sunni Hanafite ritual, was a tract of stability across this landmass, and the consequences for security of a likely introduction of schiism could be very serious.

occasional, later Moscow and Tehran cooperated on a more regular basis⁴⁰³. Especially as a consequence of the American pressures, Iran became very close to Russia, even in light of the economic perspective that such an overture could lead to, in various fields, cooperation in the nuclear sector in special way⁴⁰⁴.

In spite of its enthusiasm about acquiring membership to the SCO, demonstrated in the application of 2008, the SCO members made it clear that Iran will not be promoted to such a status, unless until its criminal record will be clean, that is to say, until the UN sanctions burdening on it will be suspended. Nevertheless, the ties are tight between the SCO members - Russia in special way - and Iran, and this one could be a fundamental actor to cooperate with in the economic and, notably, energy sector.

As far as the international position Iran covers, it is an outcast state, condemned by the international community, the U.S. in the first place, as a terrorist state, part of the so called “axis of evil”, running up nuclear programme, to sum up, a declared enemy of the U.S. The SCO is for Iran an attractive alternative both for the fact that it can be considered a big bloc opening its doors to it, and because of the principle of non- interference in state affairs, which is certainly fascinating for a state that profoundly counters the Western-led mission of democratisation and homogenization⁴⁰⁵. From this standpoint the SCO could be a valuable weapon in Iranian hands, and the U.S. would have to fear such and alignment. From a speech during the Yekaterinburg meeting of 2009⁴⁰⁶, the

⁴⁰³ It was also a way for Iran to contrast the affirmation of the U.S. besides Turkey in the Central Asian region. Since mid '90s they became strictly bound for the enhancement of the hydrocarbons industry, that was useful to Iran to compensate the American embargo on it, since 2001.

Kellner, Thierry, *L' Occidente de la Chine- Pékin et la Nouvelle Asie Centrale (1991-2001)*, Presse Universitaire de France, 2008, pp.184-192

⁴⁰⁴ The nuclear energy site of Bushire became the flagship of their results in cooperating with each other.

Tchangiz Pahelavan, *Iran and Central Asia*, in Atabaki, Tauroj, O' Kane, John, “*Post Soviet Central Asia*”, International Institut for Asian Studies, Tauris Academic Studies, New York, 1998, p.75

⁴⁰⁵ Aris, Stephen, *Eurasian Regionalism. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2011, p.159

⁴⁰⁶ Even the date is significant, as it coincided with the mass protests that exploded in Teheran following to his reelection.

Richard Weitz, *The SCO's Iran Problem*, Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, Vol. 11 No. 15, 19 August 2009, p.6

From a broadcast tv programme, a part of the Iranian President discourse: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P7w5pp-yIcQ>

position Iran had - and keeps – taken towards the U.S. was clear: a state loosening its power, that can not afford to keep carrying its arrogant policies in the region, which could be instead perfectly covered by the SCO. In a moment in which the crisis was curbing Western economies, these words sounded not so distant from reality.

“The Asian NATO”. The military sphere of the SCO was consolidated in the 2006 fifth year declaration, in which the members pledged mutual confidence and assistance, but above all stated that they will not strengthen alliances with “organisations undermining the member states' sovereignty”. Beside they affirmed the willingness to realize, in line with the “Shanghai spirit”, a peaceful world, based on non-confrontation and cohabitation of different ideologies. It emerges in the last tense the underlying vision of the world geopolitical architecture as multi-polar, in contrast with the U.S. unipolar view, what makes it sound as a confession of its aversion against its projections⁴⁰⁷.

Through time the SCO has ever more assumed the aspect of a military pact, undoubtedly posing a threat to the Western presence in Eurasia, or at least a limit, that in some occasions threatened the latter with the spectre of the Cold War military builds up and competition in general. As a matter of fact the SCO agenda started soon to present the projection of planning regional joint exercises within its members, evidently excluding even the possibility of taking them with other military power of the region, the U.S.

The first regional counter-terrorist drills were held with Cooperation 2003, that took place in China and Kazakhstan. Since that first date, exercises were planned on a year basis, and took the banner of “Peace Mission” since 2005, when RATS was elected as the organism entrusted, among other tasks, of planning counter-terrorism exercises. This was the first time Russia and China arranged a joint drill and two years later they enlarged it to the other members, on the Ural mountains, in Peace Mission 2007.

⁴⁰⁷ In this point there is an explicit reference to the pursuit of abandoning the Cold War mentality, where the reference to the U.S. is impossible to be bypassed. *Declaration on Fifth Anniversary of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation*, 12 December 2006, <http://www.sectSCO.org/EN/show.asp?id=94>
Ingmar Oldberg, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Powerhouse or Paper Tiger?*, FOI Swedish Research Defence Agency, Stockholm, June 2007, p.18

The biggest members of the SCO China and Russia, gave sound emphasis to the event, emphasizing their entity, that year by year, frightened ever more the Western spectators.

The aim of uniting military capabilities in a common front, was justified by the Minister of defence Sergei Ivanov, at the eve of the 2007 large scale Peace Mission joint exercise, as a necessary measure to defend the SCO member states' border and especially the conspicuous number of the population involved from the non-traditional threats menacing the region, so as included in their security cooperation agenda, targeting the three evils⁴⁰⁸. Although not being the first war game the SCO undertook since Cooperation 2003 took place, this one was particularly debated in the international magazine headlines for the supposed participation of Iran, that in that moment was facing the possibility of being subjected to UN sanctions, and was countering agitations at home, caused to the unpopular results of the elections that brought Ahmadinajad to his second mandate. The Western world interpreted it as a signal that the SCO would side Iran, if the U.S. attacked it, an hypothesis denied by the SCO leaders, who answered that Iran is an observer state and thus that the full members are not bound to intervene in its defence⁴⁰⁹.

The manoeuvres were a show of force for their size, reminding the Cold War scenarios to the West: in the end, only the SCO members deployed between 6500 and 7500 troops⁴¹⁰. The observers were allowed to assist but not to participate. Conventional heavy ground forces and equipment were employed in the 2009 drill and even on the following year.

If it served as a warning for extremists within the SCO boundaries, especially in Xinjiang as the first two days of the exercise took place there, surely it also had a shocking effect outside, on the U.S. in particular, as it was the evidence for it that the Chinese and Russian condominium in the region was transforming the organisation in a new Warsaw Pact.

⁴⁰⁸ Roger Mc Dermott, *Sino-Russian Military Exercises Conceived as a Show of Unity*, Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 6 Issue: 86, May 5, 2009

⁴⁰⁹ Konstantin Lantratov, Bek Orozaliev, Mikhail Zygar, Ivan Safronov, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization acquires military character*, Kommersant, Apr. 27, 2006 <http://www.kommersant.com/page.asp?idr=527&id=670100>

⁴¹⁰ Marcel de Haas, *The "Peace Mission 2007" exercise: the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Advances*, September 2007, Defence academy of the UK, p.6

Besides the events organised to jointly train military personnel, both China and Russia continue holding drills with the single states, contributing to the growing confidence in the military domain and also interdependence on the two giants.

But the denounce on the part of the non Western world about the military situation in the region is progressively getting worst.

The counter-terrorist exercise of 2007 came, just few months later the U.S. announcement - voiced at the beginning of 2007 - of positioning ten ballistic missiles in Central Europe, precisely in Poland, and a radar in the Czech Republic to shelter Europe from likely Iran's attacks. Certainly the idea is not meaningless to the SCO members and the two titular states, Russia and China, that are in possession of nuclear weapons. In particular what vexes Russia is that since the end of the Soviet Union it still is the only superpower owing non-conventional warheads with the U.S. , and that the latter is not taking it into consideration in its plans of distribution, albeit international treaties relating to this subject. Many scholars maintained that the reason was even more seriously put : there would be the intention on the part of the then Bush administration of holding the reins of Russian new endeavours of reaffirming an imperial power, by pointing these warheads directly against Russian, since in the Eastern world the latter was - and is - the only power possessing a system comparable to the one planned by the U.S.. Iran is not a plausible justification, as its nuclear programme is in progress and not yet clear, and although the U.S. has all the interest in raining off its ambitions, it is not yet so developed – in 2007 it was even less - to occupy the core of the U.S. foreign defence policy⁴¹¹. It was evident that the U.S. hegemonic ambitions were refuelling and acquiring a top position in its agenda and is widely alleged that the real target of this missile system is encircling Russia and China. In response to this Russia decided shortly after the 2007 drill of permanently retrieving the Cold War use of deploying long-range air patrol⁴¹². Russia and China seem to have the intention of increasing their cooperation on military issues and capabilities to face the en-

⁴¹¹ Fu Mengzi, Signs Point to Rekindle the Cold War Mentality, China Daily, August 21, 2007, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/international/221579.htm>

⁴¹² M.K. Bhadrakimar, *The New NATO of the East Takes Shape*, August, 25, 2007, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/IH25Ag02.html

circlement operated by their adversary in what they conceive as their backyard⁴¹³.

On their part, they provided a low-profile imagery according to the military aspect of the SCO: Putin avowed, indeed, in 2007 that military activities are not a foundation of the SCO agenda and that it has no defensive aim directed against third powers, as demonstrated by the drills correspondingly organised together with other agencies.

It is arguably assessable that even at a national level, both Russia and China are giving a boost to their military sectors, the first by reinforcing, updating and expanding its nuclear potential, the second by seeking to develop and modernize its military sector, a field in which it had previously lagged far beyond other powers, and that in the last two decades has been pushed by its economic resilience and rapid growth, making it advance in the economic ladder from the sixth to the second place. At the beginning of the second decade of 2000s the Chinese government poured 12.7% more expenditure for the modernization and empowerment of the military sector permitted by the sustainable improving of the economic sphere in parallel. The modernization of the PLA comprehended the application of information technologies mechanism to the coordination of military responses, and innovation in the training doctrine⁴¹⁴.

The importance the SCO and its single components are acquiring in the military sector gives good reasons to the U.S. to feel put in discussion in the region and keeps the competition open: the counter-terrorist simulations that followed, were no less effective and bewildering at the Western eyes than the previous ones and the RATS, that was considered “the arm of the SCO”, was ascertained to be effective, for its endeavours and activities brought to relevant results in the war against terrorism, firstly for what identification was concerned, and secondly for the arrest of numerous suspected people. This effectiveness, together with the military advancements, and the trust the states members nurture

⁴¹³ Idem

⁴¹⁴ In 2011 China made public in a white paper its new military strategy that covered internal defence, social stability and the safeguard of the global peace. It is sustained that the SCO exercises gave a strong boost to Chinese military progress, since for the first time China had the chance to share military know-how with other actors, also enhancing its credibility and relief. Jiao Liang, *China's Rising Military Power & Its Implications*, Asia Paper, March 2012, Institute for Security and Development Policy

for the China and Russia in providing security, without interfering, play undoubtedly in favour of this actors and stir the suspect that in future this simple cooperation will develop in a military axis.

An economic monopoly. Economic cooperation has been an impetus and a vector of attraction common to all the members of the SCO for the richness of their territories and the size of the markets that opened with the demise of USSR. The evidently antagonistic leanings with the Western powers present in the region has been measured also with the rivalry on this field, especially for what concerns the run for monopoly on energy.

Indeed Russia's eagerness of maintaining its monopoly on the energy transit and sources in Central Asia⁴¹⁵, as already stated, is motivated with the fact that this grants it lower-cost energy, and a consequent position as great power for the dependence it generates, whether China fast-growing economy needs consistent refurbishments, and the U.S. puts its strengths in place to contrast these tendencies and jostle in the region.

In light of the assumption that the disposition of oil and other raw materials is a tantamount for geopolitical weight, the race on this domain amongst all the protagonists involved – Russia, China, Iran, India and Pakistan; U.S. and Europe - is full of meaning.

Apart from other significant measures undertaken by the SCO, such as the Business Council and the Fund for Development, it is worth making reference to the project of an Energy Club, advanced by president Putin in 2006.

The club would envisage the coordination between demand and offer amongst the member states and would be composed of the producers - Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and possibly Turkmenistan and Iran - and consumers states – China, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and possibly India Pakistan and Mongolia -, what would translate it in a utterly self-sufficient system. It would be a functional channel to grant access and control on the regional riches, to the energy-thirsty economies of Russia and China. Furthermore it would certainly be used to apply restrictions on third states that are not in geographical proximity with Central Asia, or undesirable in the region, the U.S. in particular: this

⁴¹⁵ For instance it imports the 92% of the gas exported by the Central Asian republics, mainly Turkmenistan, that is in a second moment transferred to Europe.

would determine that the gate giving access to the raw materials of this basin, be managed strictly by the protagonists of their production and the adjacent powers financing this system, creating an OPEC-like organism⁴¹⁶.

Such a proposition manifests the centrality occupied by resources in the national, regional and global policies. At a global level it would close the route to numerous stakes, for Central Asian countries this would consolidate in an important boost to their economies, and eventually the SCO and its main players would benefit in great volumes of such a configuration. If we consider that the group might be joined also by states that take no part in the SCO, but that are addressee of the world demand of energy supplies, such as Turkmenistan - producing gas – and other states of the Caspian basin - like the rich Azerbaijan -, or by the SCO observers despite their political orientation, it is not difficult to imagine the dimensions and relevance that such a gear could constitute: a clear testimony is provided by the hypothetical participation of Iran, that apart from deeper introducing a “naughty state” in this play, would mean an alliance on estimated 28 trillions of cubic metres in gas reserves, that places it second in the top list of the gas owner states, after Russia. The institutionalization of an Energy club could perfectly compensate its inability in endowing itself with valuable corridors for exportations. It would certainly buttress the already existing ties between the two powerhouses and the bonds that link Iran to China or other actors in the region⁴¹⁷.

Notably a mechanism likewise would put the control of the production, transit, consume and exportation of the regional energy refurbishments all in the Sino-Russian hands, ushering the setting up of an energy Asian market, advocated to create a parallel space of exchange⁴¹⁸. If even the rumoured financial

⁴¹⁶ An American journalist, David Wall, called it in 2006 “an OPEC with bombs”, outlying an alarming idea of what the realisation of this plan could provoke.

Berkofskj, Axel, Serena Giusti, Tomislava Penkova, *Le Relazioni Sino-Russe e il Caso dell'Organizzazione per la Cooperazione di Shanghai*, Osservatorio di Politica Internazionale, n.14- May 2010, p.12

⁴¹⁷ Kellner, Thierry, *L' Occidente de la Chine- Pékin et la Nouvelle Asie Centrale (1991-2001)*, Presse Universitaire de France, 2008, p.184

⁴¹⁸ Berkofskj, Axel, Serena Giusti, Tomislava Penkova, *Le Relazioni Sino-Russe e il Caso dell'Organizzazione per la Cooperazione di Shanghai*, Osservatorio di Politica Internazionale, n.14- May 2010, p.13

transitions in the energy field sector through local currencies instead of dollar were introduced, the impact it would have on the U.S would be dramatic.

Even though this project has not gone any further than an idea despite occasional reiteration, and on the contrary it has lost its shine in the following discussions that followed the 2006 launching of the proposal, the Energy Club remains a possibility in an area where confrontation is very much plaid over energy routes.

4.2 A Paper Tiger ?

The previous paragraph has tried to offer an insight on the reasons that make the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation appear as a rapidly evolving pole, growing in importance and means, and an antagonist counterbalance to the other actors interested in defending their stakes in the Central Asian region, chiefly the U.S.

The SCO is certainly an interesting phenomenon to be analysed, not only for its strengths, but also for its dark sides and elements of weakness, that are critical to understand to which point the post-Soviet process has arrived for the new republics, at which state of achieving stability they are arrived, and what new mechanisms cohabit with the lingering legacy. In order to do so, hereinafter a few points will be argued with the aim of examining some uncertainties and putting in discussion the above stated accomplishments.

“Virtual regionalism”⁴¹⁹. The SCO is vitiated by a number of imperfections, a part of which stands probably in the fact of being a young organisation, what hampers the persecution of a viable and well-coordinated regionalism. A part of this responsibility is to be found in its inter-governmental nature: subjects agreed upon in SCO fora - through the informal process of discussion and consensus, that is another important agent on the SCO stillness - are implemented

⁴¹⁹ This definition was elaborated by Allison in 2008 and sustain that this system of integration is in reality a way to counter other actors' ambitions in the region, so that is a kind of “protective regionalism”.

Roy Allison, quoted in Emilian Kavalski, *The New Central Asia: the Regional Impact of International Actors*, World Scientific, Danvers, 2010

through national legislation, resulting in a slow process of “filtration” through national law. Notably, no organism has been set out charged of ensuring the coherent enforcement in national orders, what makes all dependant on the interest and benevolence of the states in adopting SCO measures⁴²⁰.

Another relevant hindrance is the existence of a large number of organs and conferences within the SCO, that makes coordination strenuous. Besides SCO projects suffer from member states investing insufficient financial resources in multilateral cooperation. Indeed they generally still prefer giving pre-eminence to bilateral agreements, in interactions with other states, what grants them more considerable profits in a shorter time, but also and maintain the cooperation in the economic sphere under the SCO aegis low-profiled, while compensating the consequences of the lack of interstate economic cooperation. A multilateral cooperation in the economic sector is hampered by the exceeding number of projects carried out, disproportionate to the SCO budget. Even though proposals of establishing banks and funds for the financial support to the state members, none of them has been realized. The main reason is to be found on the reticence of Russia, that fears a predominance and control of China, whether such an institution was created, as China itself advanced in 2009, for the institution of a fund for emergencies, to give loans on privileged conditions. To this project, aware of the need for the SCO to be shored up in its agenda, Russia opposed the offer to use the Development Fund existing under the EurASec, to which basically it would participate only with Kazakhstan⁴²¹.

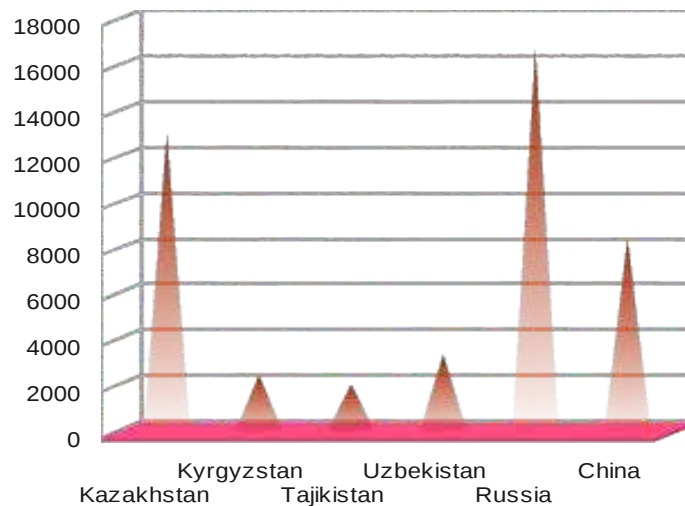
What is more, this trend on keeping bilateral deals high on the national foreign policies agendas of the SCO members is symptomatic and consequential to the disparity of capabilities and divergences of stances, stakes, and perspectives amongst the titular states. This is particularly evident in the economic sphere: obviously the status of Chinese and Russian economy are not even comparable to that of weaker republics such as Tajikistan or Kyrgyzstan, a mat-

⁴²⁰ Aris, Stephen, *Eurasian Regionalism.. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2011, p. 26

⁴²¹ Alexander Lukin, Should the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation be Enlarged?, 22 June 2001 <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Should-the-Shanghai-Cooperation-Organization-Be-Enlarged---15245>

Berkofskj, Axel, Serena Giusti, Tomislava Penkova, *Le Relazioni Sino-Russe e il Caso dell'Organizzazione per la Cooperazione di Shanghai*, Osservatorio di Politica Internazionale, n.14- May 2010, p. 10

ter that affects the realization of projects, that finish directly to depend on the investments of those countries that pour the higher contribution in the SCO budget, China heading the list. The following table shows the SCO members GDP rate, updated to 2011 and counted in US\$.



CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook>

It goes without saying that the Central Asian republics welcomed the partnership with two powerhouses as China and Russia, to shore up their feeble economies and undefined states, in the aftermath of the Soviet Union collapse: this meant to them availing on advantageous foreign investments and being legitimized as governments and states, both at home and faced to the international community, especially since the cooperation was established on an equal basis⁴²².

But aside from the gap relating to the economic domain, there is large space wariness among the actors implicated, referred to water resources and other old disputes⁴²³. Ideological differences in approaches towards the SCO as a regional security body are very evident among the two biggest powers too and, especially in the early life period of the organisation there existed a stark perception

⁴²² Aris, Stephen, *Eurasian Regionalism, The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2011, pp. 36-37

⁴²³ Trenin, Dmitri, *A Farewell to the Great Game? Prospects for Russian-American Security Cooperation in Central Asia*, European Security, Frank Class, Vol.12, No.3-4, Autumn-Winter 2003, p.29

in the scholars milieu that old tensions would never be settled and that the competition that still nowadays exists, could become even harsher.

China's consistent contribution to the SCO is visible already by comparing the Shanghai Spirit doctrine to the new “security concept”, developed in the last two decades, as resumed in the *China's position paper on the new security concept*, of 2002. Evidently, the Shanghai Spirit is an extension of the Chinese own world vision of peaceful and “democratised” international relations - in the sense of respecting equality among states, devoid of hegemonic ambitions -, availing on the richness of diversity, and fostering cooperation and diplomatic relations, to peacefully settling disputes⁴²⁴. Together with the implementation of its soft power, Chinese strategy has win in gaining trust in Central Asia, endeavouring to clean off the negative association the republics attached on it, albeit still persist, due to its economic penetration. The SCO has contributed in large part to this, diffusing Chinese culture, useful for the persecution of its state struggle against Uyghur separatism, regional ambition to securing provision of energy resources, and global aim of making its voice heard, affirming a successful model alternative to the Western one.

Security is a bulk of the Chinese presence in Central Asia, and in light of this expanding military cooperation with the Central Asian states is a milestone of its regional policy, besides trade. On behalf of this China was eager to stationing a base of its own in Central Asia after 2005 U.S. departure from Uzbekistan, in a move planned also to counterbalance the Manas NATO base, so close to its frontier, and the increasing Indian presence in the region and this one's project of deploying troops in the Ayni base in Tajikistan. In fact, in China's view, India's intention could also be not totally benign, given their rivalry, and the motivation of implanting the base to stem Pakistan, could be inclusive of containing China too. Nevertheless, Russia's stance was of fierce denial towards China, smoother towards India, but neither has succeeded, at the moment of speaking, in realizing their military project.

⁴²⁴ *China's position paper on the new security concept*, 31 July 2002, <http://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/wjb/zzjg/gjs/gjzzyhy/2612/2614/t15319.htm>
Mattis , Peter , *A Victory for China's New Security Concept: The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, in the Special Edition “*The SCO at One*”, China Eurasia Forum Monthly, July 2005, pp. 38-41

As part of Chinese “peaceful development”⁴²⁵, caused to Russian obstruction and the related intention of not souring their relation, China has embarked in copious bilateral military agreements and exercises with the Central Asian republics, certainly also encouraged by the fear of the destabilization that a definitive NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan could provoke⁴²⁶. Bilateral agreements help also to increase Chinese credibility among the Central Asian leaderships and to preserve the status quo, even though it means respecting Russian prevailing influence in the region, for the sake of not risking radical or unfriendly regime to supplant the ones in rule.

China is leading in the SCO backdrop especially for its economic presence. Apart from annihilating terrorism, its main stress within the organisation is economic cooperation, with the scope of assuring its fast rhythms economic development and advantageous markets for its cheap goods. To this aim, in the frame of multilateral cooperation, it prompted the idea of realizing a free-trade zone, already in 2002, and other structures as a Development Fund, later, that by contrast, Russia was loath to activate. Parallel to the multilateral cooperation, bilateral ties are flourishing, especially pushed by the internal demand of energy, China being the second most energy consumer nation and the third importer of oil. Its interest indeed covers Kazakh oil - the first pipeline outside China connects Xinjiang with Kazakhstan and was built in 2005 - and Turkmen gas, but also by the enormous merchandise demand of markets as Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan too⁴²⁷. Indeed even if it has not yet supplanted Russia as the Central Asian foremost trade partner, China is collocated at the third position. Here below the first table shows the volumes of the other SCO members importations and exportations from and towards China, updated to 2009:

⁴²⁵ Bobo Lo, *Ten Things Everyone should know About the Sino-Russian Relationship*, Policy Brief, Centre for European Reform, December 2008, p. 3

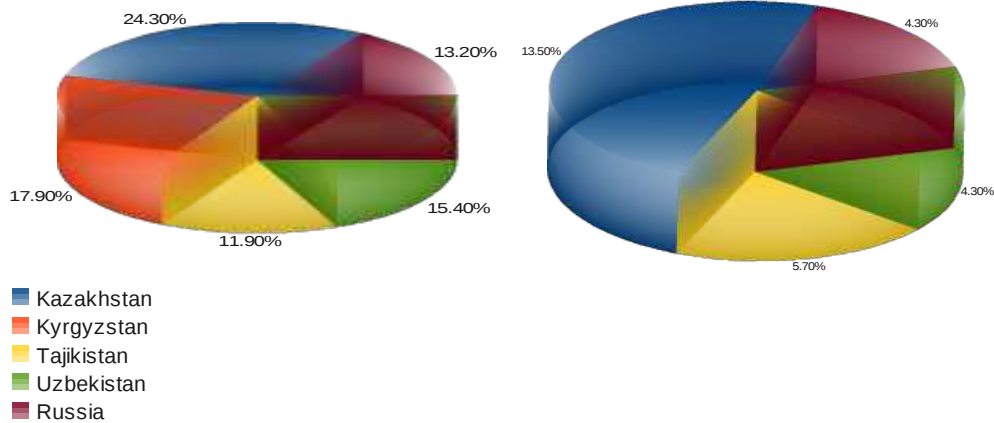
⁴²⁶ Swanström, Niklas, *China and Greater Central Asia: New Frontiers?*, Silk Road Paper, December 2001, Central Asia- Caucasus Institute, Silk Road Studies Programme, pp. 29-31

⁴²⁷ Aris, Stephen, *Eurasian Regionalism, The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2011, pp. 77-83

Ingmar Oldberg, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Powerhouse or Paper Tiger?*, FOI Swedish Research Defence Agency, Stockholm, June 2007, p.33

Imports

Exports



Source: CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

The great size of Chinese investments and loans in Central Asia worries the states in question that perceive it as a pervasive intrusion in their home affairs, a dependence imposed, leveraging on their weak economies, unable of staying on their feet.

For what concerns the geopolitical importance of its membership in the SCO, it is deducible from the afore mentioned 2002 paper and in the theory of the persecution of the “harmonious world”, voiced in 2005 by Hu Jintao⁴²⁸, that China does not cultivate hegemonic aspirations on the global arena, notwithstanding its awareness of being a superpower: China recognises that the unipolarity of the U.S. has not yet been eradicated, it aims at creating a multi-polar world architecture, where it could cover a high position, in the long term. Its mid-term objective instead, stands in reinforcing the base for it, by acquiring the necessary tools to keep its economy growing. Besides, being this objective persecuted by China in other regions of the world, as Africa and Latin America and the Gulf, that together stand for the 75% of its energy importation⁴²⁹, Cent-

⁴²⁸ Discourse of Hu Jintao addressed to the delegates of 170 countries during the world summit and 60th General Assembly of the United Nations in New York, 15 September 2005 http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-09/16/content_478349.htm

⁴²⁹ Bobo Lo, *Ten Things Everyone should know About the Sino-Russian Relationship*, Policy Brief, Centre for European Reform, December 2008, p. 5

ral Asia remains a possible ally and area of expansion, but not the principal one. To sum up, SCO is a decisive instrument for preserving the integrity of its territory against the Uyghur separatist movement which has cross-boundaries features and is a main concern for Chinese security agenda, but on the layer of economy it plays as a strategic choice to be buttressed, but not the only one⁴³⁰.

Russia demonstrates quite a different policy vis à vis to the SCO, that many experts have described as “new imperialistic”. Indeed SCO is for Russia a tool to maintain vivid its influence on Central Asia, above all after the failure demonstrated by the CIS and the shift of influence decided from states as Georgia and Ukraine, that made Russia turn eastwards. Russia has explicitly expressed its foreign ambitions in 2008 discourse on Foreign policy Concept, declaring that “as other countries in the world (...) Russia cultivates interests in a privileged region”⁴³¹. From this parlance and its further steps in foreign policy it is evicted that Moscow behaves as a great power in world politics, and applies a more aggressive and Soviet-like “realpolitik” in the region, something that is elusive of its diverging stance from the Chinese one. As a matter of fact, Russia considers the U.S. uni-polarity over, and that the end of the cold war did not left the United States winner, but that instead it decreed the beginning of a new era, where the great powers, namely the two giants that had faced themselves for over half a century, coexist and are equally responsible for the sorts of the globe. In this vision of a multi-polar world politics architecture, Russia feels authorized at nurturing superpower projections. In light of this Moscow's duty is that of sheltering its sphere of influence, by cherishing its development and contrasting every force that presents as an obstacle to the persecution of its global scopes. In the region it is Islamic fundamentalism, especially of Northern Caucasus origin, from a global view point it is the U.S.⁴³².

Economic cooperation is another mainstay of the strategy Russia enforces in Central Asia, aiming at preserving its monopoly on oil and gas exportations abroad, especially towards Europe.

⁴³⁰ Paramanov, Vladimir, Aleksej Stokov, *China in Central Asia: Energy interests and Energy Policies*, Central Asia and the Caucasus, Vol.11, No.3, 2010, p.29

⁴³¹ Aris, Stephen, *Eurasian Regionalism*,. *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2011, p. 59

⁴³² Idem, pp.59-62

In the efforts to envisage economic development by pushing EurAsec rather than driving large-scale activities under the SCO auspices, there is the undercurrent purpose of leaving China aloof. Indeed, despite the increasing trust between them, competition is still open on few subjects, first of all energy and raw material accumulation, and the race for the conquest of the Central Asian markets, due to the fast growth of the Chinese presence there⁴³³. Firstly, China is a leading economic power both in the region and on a global perspective: fostering economic cooperation based on a free trade zone, would let China prevail and dominate the Central Asian economies, as Russia is not in the position of being competitive with the Chinese economic fast growth rate, and Russian privileged position in trades with the republics could be easily capsized in the short time, what would also undermine its political predominance. Besides the initiative has neither been supported by the Central Asian governments as well, since what they cherish are inflows to finance infrastructures, rather than a complete domination on their economies, what would attack their sovereignty from another front than the political one⁴³⁴.

Secondly, although numerous bilateral projects were signed by the two in the energy sector, as for what concerns pipelines trajectories bringing gas and oil to China - *Vostochnyj vektor*, for instance -, rivalry is ongoing also here. President Putin's proposal of constituting an Energy club can be read as an attempt of creating a group where Russia and Iran would be the leading members, for the prevalence of gas and oil on their soils. Consequently, such a club would tip the balance in their favour, as tariffs would be basically decided on their terms.

Multilateral military cooperation is another hot issue for the two powers. Cooperation is flourishing both bilaterally and under the SCO umbrella, nevertheless, Russia did not give green light in response to the Chinese plan of implanting its own military bases in central Asia, and even in this sphere, it prefers to chief coordination under the CSTO aegis. Cooperation

⁴³³ Paramanov, Vladimir, Aleksej Stokov, *China in Central Asia: Energy interests and Energy Policies*, Central Asia and the Caucasus, Vol.11, No.3, 2010, pp.29-35

⁴³⁴ Aris, Stephen, *Eurasian Regionalism*, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2011, p.82

with NATO has also been a weapon in Russia's hands to limit Chinese expansion in the region. It was marked by the signature of the 2002 Russia-NATO Council, which central theme of discussion is anti-terrorism⁴³⁵. However it is inevitable to appreciate Sino-Russian advancements on this domain too, and military exercises have been recently planned jointly between the two organisations. Nonetheless, the persistence of competitiveness between the two is worthy of note in order to understand to what extent SCO is a fundamental channel of Russian policy in the region. Indeed, while for China the SCO is a key vehicle to canalize its influence over Central Asia, whether it is not prominent for its international image and scopes, Russia considers the SCO as an option among others to keep its influence on the region, and an important tool to reinforce its credibility on the international stage, featuring at the side of China, a fast-pace growing world economic pole⁴³⁶. Moreover it allows Russia to keep its competitor under control and use it as a valuable instrument against the U.S. penetration in the region.

On their part the Central Asian republics are all, but homogeneous. Certainly there are common patterns among them, especially connected with the Soviet period heritage, but also with the threat posed to their regimes by the persistent activity of extremists and separatist groups. Besides, the most part of them possess the lever of energy to orientate and attract, or play against third powers, eager of gaining access to them.

Nonetheless, they are different entities, perceiving the “three evils” threat at different degrees, with diverse level of economic and cultural achievements, and that are not in the same way resources traders.

Bilateral agreements underscore the consistence of these differences and the space left for race among the external powers involved in the region - namely Russia, China, U.S., Europe, Turkey, India, Iran -, that bypass any forms of alliance and aggregation.

⁴³⁵ Ingmar Oldberg, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Powerhouse or Paper Tiger?*, FOI Swedish Research Defence Agency, Stokholm, June 2007, p.27

⁴³⁶ Idem, p.62

Berkofskj, Axel, Serena Giusti, Tomislava Penkova, *Le Relazioni Sino-Russe e il Caso dell'Organizzazione per la Cooperazione di Shanghai*, Osservatorio di Politica Internazionale, n.14- May 2010

Overall, these republics ushered multi-vector foreign policies, capitalizing on the stakes offered.

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan situate themselves as the most ambitious states, carrying hegemonic policies on the regional scene, what generates frictions with other important actors and among them. In fact their relation is featured with rivalry, and the second prevails on the former for its more progressed military apparatus. However, as testified by its contribution of 21% to the total percentage of the SCO budget, Kazakhstan economy is the strongest in the region and it plays as a point in its favour, allowing it more independence. This fact was well visible in the 2005 Astana vertex offer of 900 million dollars loan from China, which Kazakhstan was in the conditions of declining and its neighbours were not⁴³⁷, and also towards the U.S. and Western powers in general, like during the Iraq war when it sent a small contingent to help the U.S.. Kazakhstan is well aware of the relevance its energy has for the West and for Europe and is careful in defending its equilibrium with these actors, also as a counter-balance to China and Russia. Relations with external actors, although very ambiguous, with Russia and China in the first place, are based on its oil and gas reserves, and the stake within the SCO is foremost the opportunity to access to neighbouring markets⁴³⁸.

Security has generally been a less pressing urge for Kazakhstan, as it has never been a direct concern, for it; what instead Nazerbayev regime fears are the reverberations that disorders in the states nearby could provoke at a national level.

The situation of Uzbekistan is more complicated, as it has been a thorn in the side of Russia, during all the '90s, and has held an independent foreign policy even when the tensions with Moscow were mostly put aside. Uzbekistan volatile foreign policy is mainly justified by the fact of being a quasi self-sufficient state, with a stable economy and natural resources in enough quantities for its nation. Until the decline of the situation in the bordering Afghanistan, the

⁴³⁷ Aris, Stephen, *Eurasian Regionalism, The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2011, p. 82

⁴³⁸ It has been a promoter of the custom union development in the region, together with Russia and Belarus, with whom it is willing to establish a kind of triumvirate in the area. Idem, p.65

threats were more or less under control, also thanks to its almost homogeneous ethnicity, being the Uzbeks the major ethnic group, apart from a relevant percentage of Tajiks. Since its independence, it gathered with states leading anti-Russian policies such as Georgia, Ukraine and Azerbaijan, and entailed close relations with the U.S., Germany and Israel, on many subjects, included terrorism and economy⁴³⁹. Even though shoring the U.S. up Uzbekistan carried its policy also on its singular path, as in Tajikistan during the civil war, when it provided military support with Russia. Karimov felt defied at the end of the war when the Russian 201st Motor Rifle was decided to remain on Tajik territory for ten years to be extended. In his view, once the threat had disappeared, the only reason for Russia for not bringing them home was a preventive action against Uzbekistan. The latter demonstrated in other cases a malign interference in Tajikistan home affairs⁴⁴⁰. Nonetheless, highest priority is put by Karimov on granting the survival of his regime against any form of constraint, as demonstrated in 2005, included close cooperation, if it involves intervention in its domestic affairs, as it is the case for the U.S. The SCO system of values and especially the respect of the state sovereignty and non-interference principle is what has rendered its membership possible, together with strengthening the bond with Russia, after Andijan events.

By the way the regional condominium of Russia and China serves as a limit for the two's aspirations and the equilibrium remains vulnerable, as taking into account Karimov's priority, his enemy is decided by the state posing the most threats on his regime survival and regional ambition. It is questionable the withdrawal from EurASec in 2008.

The last two smallest states, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are weaker and do not cultivate ambitions of their own for any kind of predominance within the region. The focus of their policies is mainly led on ascertaining national stability and security, especially after the civil war for the former and the Colour Revolution of the second. Economic and military support is subsidized from China and Russia, on which they are almost utterly dependent on the respective

⁴³⁹ Cornell, Svante, *Uzbekistan a Regional Player in Eurasian Geopolitics?*, European Security, Vol.9, No.2, Summer 2000, pp.125-6

⁴⁴⁰ Idem, p.128-9

sectors. Tajikistan can be described as a Russian protectorate and a privileged trade partner for China, due to the increasing strained economic plight and the corresponding exigence of developing means to overcome new crisis as the energetic one of 2007-9⁴⁴¹. SCO is functional to the improvement of Tajik-Chinese bilateral relations, which are mutually beneficial in trade, energy, and transit routes, as the Dushambe-Kuliab tunnel. Besides exchanges with neighbours are also facilitated, as it happens with Uzbekistan, with whom water and energy are supplied, often through informal negotiations and despite tensions.

Nonetheless SCO is also instrumental to the achievement of security, being stability not mature and always at risk in Tajikistan, due to the shared border with Afghanistan, and being the population still reliable by 30-50% on drugs smuggling.

As its twin states, Kyrgyzstan was eager in receiving foreign investments at the end of the Soviet Union to fuel its economy. Russia was the best candidate for the relations that linked the two by history, but many steps were moved to attract international eyes on it too, a process that reached a climax with its admission as a member of the WTO in 1998.

U.S. support was welcomed at the break up of the Afghan war, to preserve its stability and grant itself revenues from the rent of the base. Anyhow, turmoil never stopped after 2005 Tulip revolution and clashes are a lingering reality. Among the group accused of bringing instability, extremists and terrorists are also blamed. SCO is a fundamental ally in this respect, but U.S. contribution has never issued discarded⁴⁴².

Divergences are commonly managed through compromise or omission were harmony is at risk among the members, for the sake of cooperation. This aspect is reckoned by some scholars to be effective and successful, but seen from another perspective, it could be also deemed the base of a vulnerable equilibrium.

Especially after the constitution of RATS, the Central Asian counterparts feel protected in their security by the SCO, and they have registered a decrease in terrorist and extremist manifestations. Nonetheless, it is difficult to quantify if

⁴⁴¹ Aris, Stephen, *Eurasian Regionalism*,. *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2011, p.70

⁴⁴² Idem, p.73

it has been the SCO or NATO's merit, particularly taking into consideration areas such as the Northern Caucasus, which is not part of Central Asian geography, but that is nonetheless the fulcrum of terrorist manifestations, inspired by religious fundamentalism and separatism, in the Russian Federation⁴⁴³.

By the way, the SCO foundations and practices assure protection against what the Central Asian leaderships fear the most: the subversion of their regimes. The economic sphere is another paramount to their participation in the organisation, since differently from other agencies constituted with Russia, the SCO opens the way to Chinese participation in their economies, and the viability of macroeconomic infrastructural projects in the region, so multilateral and bilateral projects are fostered, despite the second still prevail in number, at times overlapping with and at times impeding multilateral hints.

It is however worth of note, that due to their strong economic weakness the republics do not underestimate the U.S. and overall Western investments in the region, that outweigh the intrusion on their part. On the contrary, the leaders of the republics openly curb explicit moves aimed at definitely excluding the U.S. from the region – the Kyrgyz president kept the bases in Manas, despite the invitation to depart in 2005 SCO summit – or at featuring the SCO as an anti-Western bloc⁴⁴⁴. On their part, China and Russia too are reluctant at banning the U.S. for the profits in terms of cooperation upon regional non-traditional threats, to the extent that their individual and common spheres of influence are not tackled, and the status quo is not undermined.

“A club of autocrats and dictators”. This expression appeared on many newspapers and publications in the Western hemisphere, since the first breaths of the group, and particularly after the crushing of the Andijan and Kyrgyz risings. The two events were important test-beds for the efficiency of the SCO model promoting non-interference in the state sovereignty, and to measure the accomplishment of the state-building process and how the states cooperate to calm down alleged terrorist uproars.

⁴⁴³ But lack of action could also be found in the 2010 riots in Kyrgyzstan, in opposition to Bakyev taxation of energy and to the spreading economic crisis. Although it is clear that military intervention is not a provision of SCO policy, what kind of contribution is then given to actively counter terrorism is not yet clear.

⁴⁴⁴ Idem, p.86

In fact, its non-intervention in this and other disorders through the region, but particularly the agreement expressed on the Russian and Chinese sides with Karimov's repressive methods of quelling the insurgence is an appropriate example to analyse how the SCO promotes autocracy, by contrast to many organisations in the world, born to broadcast democratic ways of living and human rights by conveying its values to the members, promoting normative amendments in national jurisdiction, or simply fostering the confrontation among democratic and less democratic actors⁴⁴⁵.

Through this lens, observers support the thesis that the kind of cooperation espoused by the SCO is a key for like-minded autocratic regimes to unite in a regional bloc, protecting their adamant authoritarian norms and shared tenets, which in this case can not be criticized, since it is exploited as an immunity system against outside interference, and offered as the solution for instability and threats originating in terrorism, and international terrorism. Democracy is, in their perception depicted as a pretext and a vehicle the three evils can use to break up the political and security equilibrium in the region, endangering the survival of the regimes. In many cases the states denounced the U.S. hand in orchestrating such manifestations⁴⁴⁶.

It has already been assumed that the official documents adopted by the SCO set democratic values and respect for human rights at the end of the member states list of priority, as inferred by the fact that these values are mentioned in very few cases.

With respect to the international environment, the stress is oppositely laid on the attendance with International Law, as a requisite for both for full members and for those states, aspiring at becoming part of this multilateral mechanism. But as multilateral inter-state body, the SCO accent is put on sovereignty and non-interference, on diversity as a source of richness and on the prerogative of the singular states' freedom to choose their own path to achieve development. In light of 2005 events, - but also according to the show of violence to quell up-

⁴⁴⁵ Thomas Ambrosio, *Catching the "Shanghai Spirit": How the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Promotes Authoritarian Norms in Central Asia*, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.60, No.8, October 2008, p.1324

⁴⁴⁶ Unofficial sources attribute to the U.S. to have subsidised the Chechen during the wars and to entrench contacts with the Uyghurs, who also hold their main headquarters in Washington.

roars in Xinjiang, or to the bloodshed in Chechnya to capture suspected terrorists - democratisation is neither promoted, nor sheltered, and complete freedom of action is instead assured to the national governments to alienate dissidents from the political scene⁴⁴⁷.

In the above mentioned events, the regimes demonstrated all their interest in keeping their position, not surrendering to the people's demands of abandoning their roles. The fact of SCO shoring them up tells volumes about the relation interlacing SCO and "democratisation", that has a lot to do with the persecution of "stability". From these situations it is inferred that "stability" is conceived, as the antinomy of "change": in spite of the inclusion of economic and cultural cooperation and development in this projection, the leaders do all that is in their capabilities to preserve their grip and limit all opposite boosts, under the brand of preserving peace. It seems in this light that the SCO members boast the "Shanghai Spirit" as a cover to grant the survival of the leaderships in rule.

Viewed from another perspective this choice puts in motion other dynamics too: on the one hand the SCO conceit of stability as made up of economic development and security makes it possible for the states to remain low-profiled and dependant on the main powers in the economic and military sectors; on the other, it limits the duty on the part of the states with the greatest potential, basically China and Russia, to commit with their own means in incidents as such, hiding behind the veil of non-interference.

But what also emerges is the pragmatic inability of the SCO in actively countering terrorism and a strong ambiguity laying innate in this concept. In the Andijan events Karimov blamed terrorists for the uprisings. If this affirmation was true, how could it be possible for the SCO to reveal so inoperative, being an organism targeted against terrorism, and international terrorism, not interpreted simply as a domestic affair?

⁴⁴⁷ It is interesting noting that the non governmental organisation "Freedom House" investigating on the rate of democracy globally, classifies all the SCO states as "non free", with an exception for Russia, at the time of instituting the SCO, when it was categorised as a "partly free" state, and for Kyrgyzstan since the end of the Tulip revolution. But what is salient is that there is no reason for democracy to be sponsored as a chief value, since the two leading powers, Russia and China are non democratic states.
Idem, pp. 1328-31

And if they simply were anti-regime manifestations denouncing economic weakness and the impacts it has on civil society, whose insurgence has been quelled? That of an opposition group?

Uzbekistan provide a good case study for the crackdown of the opposition and the dichotomy between terrorists and naysayers: in Karimov's rhetoric "the wrong kind of Islam", fundamentalism, appears as an urgent concern and he exploits coercive instruments of control on religion and divert towards the politically non-committed Hanafite cult, which is almost binding since 2000. His campaign of prosecution is evidently directed at ousting opponents, often accused of belonging to extremist groups, or being Wahhabis⁴⁴⁸.

In the SCO parlance, 2005 events happened in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan were frequently treated together in official speeches General Zhang, whose focus was put on the looming graveness and exigence of calming extremist boosts, as if they were made of the same nature, which intermingled anti-regime and extremist spirits, when the request was instead of democratic implementations. Furthermore some normative measures were endorsed by the leaders to restrict NGOs activities, and the free use of the internet, so as to counter-acting its use as a vehicle to carry criminal or terrorist operations⁴⁴⁹. Coloured revolution were undercurrent arrowed as illegal, since "any changes must be resolved with legal means and not by creating chaos in Central Asia"⁴⁵⁰ and, as declared in the 2007 Bishkek declaration ratified by the heads of the member states, "the right of every state to choose independently its way of development based on its unique historical experience (...) must be guaranteed⁴⁵¹. Nevertheless, it is well known that opposition is practically not admitted.

This merge of terms can be possible thanks to the flexible definitions of the three evils, as stated in the Convention on Combating Terrorism, Extremism and Separatism, of 2001, which allows the states to intervene whenever they

⁴⁴⁸ Khalid, Adeeb, *Islam After Communism*, University of California Press, Berkely, 2007, p. 171

⁴⁴⁹ In a statement of 2006, issued by the heads of the SCO member states, to which followed the establishment of a control group for information security.

⁴⁵⁰ *Idem*, p. 1334

⁴⁵¹ *Bishkek Declaration of the Heads of the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation*, 16 August 2007, <http://www.sectSCO.org/EN/show.asp?id=92>

consider stability is at risk. Besides non-interference justifies the SCO act of delegating to the single states the actions taken to quell any chaos outbursts.

The direct result of this situation was immobility and inefficiency, and the replacement of the elected president Akayev in the Kyrgyz Tulip Revolution can be considered as a defeat for the SCO's security formula, despite the autocratic pattern in the new president's policy did not disappeared and the regional politics results in no way undermined. Moreover contrast shown against these hints and the promotion of undemocratic – in the Western universally-conceived – values through the regional states, is seen as a device to ward off the infiltration of Western model that would mean a shift in favour of the U.S.

However, the SCO shows inability to decisively intervene as a multilateral organism to contrast manifestations opposing its model, when the case presents. This fact is accompanied by the absence of a military body charged of planning retaliations against the non-traditional threats in the region, even following to the multilateral drills, that are mainly interpretable as a bare show of force capabilities, without any subsequent further evolution. In addition, albeit it was declared that consultation shall follow any emergency or external attack, this does necessarily imply military intervention in the case of aggression moved to one of the states members, as it happens in NATO⁴⁵². Up to now, the only agency appointed at facing regional menaces through military means is CSTO, an organism of which Russia is part with the republics, but China is not. This poses also the question on the real achievements SCO has obtained in waging war on terrorism. RATS avowed that 400 people have been registered as suspected terrorists, and that numerous cases for terrorist aggressions have been averted, but no evidence has been advanced to demonstrate this successes.

Terrorism, extremism and separatism appear as forces with a shouting and disarmed enemy, and the SCO lacking promotion of human rights and democratic principles is used as the end that justifies the means, possibly the alibi, of the war on international terrorism.

“Hegemonic fragmentation”. This assumption reflects the complexity of the Central Asian geopolitical map and has a lot to do with the stakes that the nu-

⁴⁵² Ingmar Oldberg, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Powerhouse or Paper Tiger?*, FOI Swedish Research Defence Agency, Stockholm, June 2007, p. 21

merous and rival actors cultivate there, and how they combine them to maintain their powers in this rich regional tinderbox.

The topic of enlargement is emblematic for the balance of power that SCO is shielding in the region.

Despite the advantages that would result from an SCO enlargement, none of the states that have been recognized the observer status has been upgraded with full membership. SCO leaders lay the responsibility on the fact that a clear procedure for their integration has not yet been clearly defined. But analysing the interrelations amongst the states involved, it emerges that the stakes implicated outweigh the possible benefits, or at least they justify the limbo in which the SCO members have relegated the argument.

What the SCO has established until now is a division of the spheres of influence, even referred to as a “balance of power”: under the SCO umbrella, China protects its influence on the region affirming its economic position, and trying not to subvert the historical Russian one, in the name of its “peaceful development”; Russia has situated anew as a big brother for its Near Abroad, granting the military sustain that China until now has not been in the might of providing, and avails of the SCO and of the U.S. presence in the region as tools for restraining the Chinese expansion; the Central Asian leaders' concentration on preserving their sovereignty, hampers a massive penetration of external powers, while extracting as much profit as possible from each one of them⁴⁵³.

Among the great powers, Russia is well conscious of the benefits of the friendly *modus vivendi* consolidated with China, advantageous for making their voice heard in the international community, and both profit from the NATO action in Afghanistan to assure security in the region.

Preserving peaceful coexistence with the U.S. is a mainstay too, firstly for its important role of limiting Chinese expansion in the region, which is a basic interest of Russian and the Central Asian states policies, and for its commitment in waging war on extremism and terrorism, with means that the SCO can not grant. The 2005 motion to invite the foreign troops to pull out from the region was an example of how the U.S. presence in this heartland is beneficial to re-

⁴⁵³ Di Placido, Loredana, *Shanghai Cooperation Organization: un modello di cooperazione regionale in Asia Centrale*, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici, giugno 2006 n. 6, p.30

gional protagonists: no clear hint was voiced about the U.S. and there was no other open occasion following the meeting in Astana in which the intention was recalled. Furthermore, the implementation of that proposal resulted to depend from the single states trajectories, what motivates why Uzbekistan issued an ultimatum and Kyrgyzstan did not, but rather preferred to transfer on its soil the equipments and ammunitions based in Karshi-Khanabad, imposing to the U.S. a supplementary taxation on the Manas base. Besides the preponderance of trades with West is an aspect to be preserved, for Western markets still remains the most important partners for both China and Russia⁴⁵⁴.

The admission of new participants is controverted for the preservation of this power balance, in combination with new unstable elements they would bring in.

Awarding India or Pakistan with full membership, for instance, would be critical, as their relations have always been tense, since the split in 1947, and the conflict on the Kashmir region is a real concern. Besides, it would shed the light on the divergent policies directed towards these centres of power from China and Russia. During the Cold War period in which relations among the two were at their worst, China supported Pakistan and Russia India, a configuration that is nowadays reflected in the volume of trade and partnership between the two pairs⁴⁵⁵. Any admission of one or the other would compromise the bilateral relations on the one or the other side. On the other hand, admitting both countries, in ever-lasting contrast, would be dangerous for the stability of the organisation itself. What is more, accepting them would demand a sounder commitment to Afghanistan on the part of the SCO, due to the Indian cooperation with this country and to the Pakistan fragile situation in front to the Afghan instability, apart from the fact that such a move would force the SCO to open the door to Iran too. On behalf of the relation it enshrines with Pakistan, China harshly opposes Indian entrance, justifying that it would be detrimental for a still relatively young organisation and that it would further slower the decision

⁴⁵⁴ Idem, p.39

⁴⁵⁵ Ingmar Oldberg, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Powerhouse or Paper Tiger?*, FOI Swedish Research Defence Agency, Stockholm, June 2007, p. 40

making process⁴⁵⁶. But beyond China's opposition there is also a growing diffidence towards the increasing role of India as a world economic pole, and regionally for its influence in Tajikistan, on a commercial and military point of view. Especially for what concerns the Indian military base of Ayni, that by the way is still at the state of project, China considers it attempt of encirclement and challenge⁴⁵⁷.

Iran is the most precarious candidate to full membership, since its entrance could possibly coincide with the formation of a anti-Western triumvirate with China and Russia.

On the regional backdrop, this is also the reason the stands at the base of the four republics to express not in favour of its entrance: the organisation would become deeply polarised, since the gap among their overall economical potential and that of the other members would widen exorbitantly. Their sovereignty and space of action would result almost certainly limited from a likewise equilibrium⁴⁵⁸.

Undoubtedly, they are cautious in making a decision likewise, as it would convey such a message, for the consequences it would provoke. On the one hand, it would jeopardize the SCO credibility in the international community and in the UN forum and it would certainly be detrimental for its image, due to the position taken by Iran face to its nuclear programme. On the other, for the SCO it would be the equivalent of choosing with which part to side in the its Iran-U.S./Israel confrontation. Its admission would be a double-edged sword, since together with the economic benefits of enhancing cooperation in the en-

⁴⁵⁶ Moreover, Pakistan is deeply worried about India's commitment in Afghanistan and its investments there, for its own cooperation with the Taliban. In this light, Afghanistan is another table of confrontation for the two states, in which the SCO would get involved. Stephen Blank, *The Influence of External Actors in Central Asia*, in Emilian Kavalski "The New Central Asia: the Regional Impact of International Actors", World Scientific, Danvers, 2010, p.288

Alexander Lukin, Should the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation be Enlarged?, 22 June 2001 <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Should-the-Shanghai-Cooperation-Organization-Be-Enlarged---15245>

⁴⁵⁷ Sudha Ramachandran, India's foray into Central Asia, 2006

www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/HH12Df01.html

Alyson J. K. Bailes, Pál Dunay, Pan Guang, Mikhail Troitskiy, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation*, SIPRI Policy Paper, No.17, May 2007,

⁴⁵⁸ Stephen Blank, *Iran and the SCO: a match made in Dushanbe or in Moscow?*, CACI Analyst, 30 April 2008, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4847>

ergy sector, moving forward the ongoing agreements, the side effects would outweigh the profits.

The SCO is evidently taking time to procrastinate a definitive decision, with the pretext of the lack of a procedure for enlargement, but in fact is not likely to be a forthcoming eventuality⁴⁵⁹.

SCO presents a range of fragilities that hamper a complete accomplishment of its overriding missions. As far as its principal objective is concerned, defeating the “three evils”, it is not clear what the achievements have been till now, despite the vowed RATS successes; on the economic sector, multilateral advancements are limited by the single states' ambitions. The rationale itself of the SCO is veiled with suspicion, since its activity appears more and more filtered through the lens of the geopolitical tracks traced on the Central Asian map by regional and external powers.

4.3 State of the Art

The SCO has demonstrated since 2008 to have the intention to fortify its presence in Central Asia and moving steps forward to harass the non-traditional threats of the Central Asian regions and encourage economic development.

In particular since the summit held in Moscow on 27 March 2009, the SCO members focussed their interest in playing an active role in stabilizing Afghanistan. After the numerous critics addressed against the U.S., that according to the SCO mindset was desirous of monopolizing this process, the Moscow summit set a change of direction: foreign ministers and officials from 36 countries gathered in Moscow, for the meeting arranged under the SCO auspices to discuss the future of Afghanistan and a roadmap for cooperation. Surprisingly, among others, the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, the OSCE one, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, but especially NATO and American officials were invited, and sat at the table with Iran too⁴⁶⁰.

⁴⁵⁹ Idem, p.20

⁴⁶⁰ Vladimir Radyuhin, *SCO: towards a high-profile role in Afghanistan*, The Hindu, 31 March 2009
<http://www.hindu.com/2009/03/31/stories/2009033152430800.htm>

An SCO-Afghanistan Action Plan was adopted, projected especially towards post 2014, when the NATO troops are expected to leave the region, and copes with implementing new concerted mechanisms aimed at contrasting drug and psychotropic substances trafficking, cultivation of poppy - that grew despite NATO mission in the region-, security and military cooperation against any form of terrorism and organised crime. The regional approach went through a transformation, since the three evils were discussed to be onwards addressed as a concern on which regional actors ought to unite their efforts, included those that were directly interested in the matter⁴⁶¹. Indeed, a further involvement of Afghanistan and Pakistan governments in impeding terrorism with all means at their disposal at a national level was stressed, including “denying sanctuaries and (...) extremist ideological centres”⁴⁶².

The initiative marks a watershed both in relation to the past lack of action despite the close links with president Amid Karzai and the creation of a contact-group dealing with Afghanistan, apart from his participation to the SCO meetings as a guest.

SCO is featured to be invested with a new leading regional role and a perfect interlocutor for Afghanistan, since all its components, either members or observers, have their policies and domestic stability deeply intertwined with the Afghan situation, apart from the strong commitment of certain countries such as India in the post-war reconstruction.

Particularly recent meetings put in evidence the growing role of SCO, that for the first time in 2009 was addressed as a fundamental regional protagonist, through that “multilateral diplomacy” evoked in the Dushanbe Declaration, as the base for the overcoming of “bloc mentality, and uni-polarity”⁴⁶³. Furthermore, its importance was further emphasized in the 2010 agreement reached with the UN on the cooperation between the UN-SCO secretariats. In this re-

⁴⁶¹ Nivedita Das Kundu, *SCO: a catalyst for Afghan Stability*, Russia and India Report, 31 October 2011

http://indrus.in/articles/2011/10/31/sco_a_catalyst_for_afghan_stability_13186.html

Idem

⁴⁶² *Declaration of the special Conference on Afghanistan convened under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, 27 March 2009, Moscow <http://www.sectSCO.org/EN/show.asp?id=98>

⁴⁶³ *Dushanbe Declaration of the Heads of the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation*, 2007, Dushanbe <http://www.sectSCO.org/EN/show.asp?id=90>

gard, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is demonstrating of situating itself in a good condition to make its voice even more heard in the international community and its role ever decisive on the international stage.

In lieu of a conclusion

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization was born from a process of confidence-building initiated in 1989-90 by the Soviet Union and China and inherited by the newly independent republics, after the former collapse. The agreements of 1991 and 1996 laid down the basis for a deeper cooperation, particularly aimed at assuring the security of the area and shoring up the Central Asian republics, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, during their difficult transition.

The SCO was the body in which such exigences were embedded since 2001, ushering a new model of security cooperation based on principles that, although not being brand new, are not the core values for any of the security agencies operating in the world: respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states, regardless of their internal political order and level of democratisation.

With the aim of fostering the emergence of a secure environment, Russia and China support the regimes heading the republics members of the SCO, despite being classified as non democratic.

The two powers were driven towards this region with different aims: on the one hand Russia, was interested in keeping its historical role in Central Asia and the related profits in term of monopoly of the control and exportation of energy, on the other China was eager to assure its own internal security, in large part bound to Central Asian stability, and to acquire access to the new markets, risen from the Soviet ashes.

On their part, the four Central Asian republics capitalized on the support of the two great powers, for what related their economies, military equipment and modernization and at the level of the international legitimization acquired through the SCO, that also was appointed as an observer to the UN. In addition, the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure has been declared to have curbed the escalation of terrorism throughout the region, a problem that is central for the loc-

al regimes and status quo survival and that occupies a core position in the SCO agenda.

By the way, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is not the only player in the region. As a matter of fact this landmass has been associated with an expression resumed from the XIX century “New Great Game”, and connected with the open race undercurrent mainly among Russia, China and the United States to defend their spheres of influence, but involving even a larger number of countries.

The U.S. played its role furnishing the new republics with economic assistance, in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse. Progressively it moved steps forward to extend this cooperation on the military field too, particularly in 2001, with the beginning of the operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, that saw the U.S despatching military bases also in Central Asia.

The regional alliances that from time to time change among the great powers and the nearby satellite states are a hindrance to the survival of the balance of power that, despite rivalry, still allows equilibrium in the area.

Evidently, country as India, Iran Pakistan that at the moment features as observers in the SCO, would exert a great weight on many aspects of the organisation if admitted as full members, as for what relates the volumes that the agency itself would assume, as for its might in terms of economics, military and nuclear disposal, as for the political repercussions it would generate on the stage of international relations.

Nonetheless, the role of the the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation results still obscure, especially in relation to its global role, face to the Western world. It is, for instance, not yet clear the real entity of the missions accomplished up to now and the future developments that the international community should expect form it.

It evidently is a huge organism with an overall important extension in terms of territory and population, economic might, energy reserves availability, military capabilities - as testified by the exercises that on an annual basis put on the stage all the strengths and dreadful scenarios the SCO could envisage in the future -, possibly in the position of challenging the Western U.S.-led world, and alleged unipolar post-Cold War order.

Nevertheless, it is doubtless that the SCO presents many dark sides. One example is the one mentioned hereinafter, about the ambiguous relationship between China and Russia, but also the cleavages that draw the single member states aloof on some points of the agenda and perceptions about security and regional challenges. Furthermore the means and finances at disposal appear to be limited, and certainly disproportionate for the implementation of all the projects outlined along these eleven years.

Despite the attempts and many achievements registered in the Russian and Chinese rapprochement, competition reveals still open. Russia has all the intention of keeping the Chinese power low on some matters, like military cooperation, and in general it hampers its advancement in the region as a great economic power, for instance by fostering regional agencies to which China does not take part. The four republics are totally in line with Russia on this matter, since the keystone of their relations with external power is preserving their sovereignty and they fear a Chinese domination of their internal economies. Beside Russia also displays the intent of using China as a weapon to rein in the U.S. progress in the region too, and vice-versa. On the contrary China endeavours to exploit its economic might on its best, making leverage on the feebleness characterising the Central Asian republics, that despite reluctant in accepting the copious and attractive Chinese loans, are not in the position of renouncing to them. Thus the SCO destiny seems to be in many respects bound to the future evolution of the relations between its two bigger participants.

What is more, bilateral relations are still the main vehicle used to enhance one-to-one relations, since they grant a wider freedom of action and an armful weapon to conquest the reliability of a partner, to the disadvantage of the other powers and especially of multilateral cooperation.

Even the Western feared enlargement eastwards, to englobe India, Pakistan and Iran, while being a sure source of advantages and profits, could neither be devoid of hazard, due to the relations between the first two and the incongruous ones they entail with the main powers in the region – the U.S. included -, nor a factor of prestige, given the position occupied within the international community for what the latter is concerned.

With insight, it is possible to conclude that in the Central Asian jigsaw the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation had first of all the merit of having ushered

a new era of good-neighbourliness relations among countries that had been in quarrel for so long time. It profoundly contributed to slacken the tensions among Russia and China in the first place, that despite the lingering rivalry on some fields found in the SCO a common groundwork. The SCO has been particularly beneficial to the the situation amongst the Central Asian new entities too, for it issued them to embark in diplomatic confrontation on topics of shared concern, and in a new cooperative atmosphere, loosening the old disputes and wariness.

This regional mechanism was doubtless successful in averting regional conflicts to break out in such an unsteady moment as the one presented in the wake of the Soviet Union implosion, and was fundamental to provide new layers of mutually beneficial interaction.

While the Western world continues addressing directly to its single members, possibly underestimating the relevance of the SCO as a multilateral regional mediator, this body and its alternative model of cooperation has attracted many external eyes on it and seems to be increasingly ready to offer an answer to the new challenges of the area and to emerge as a significant voice on the international panorama.

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Università Ca' Foscari - Venezia

**ESTRATTO PER RIASSUNTO DELLA TESI DI LAUREA E
DICHIARAZIONE DI CONSULTABILITA'(*)**

Il sottoscritto/a ROSANNA MARTUCCI

Matricola n. 831491 Facoltà LINGUE E LETTERATURE STRANIERE

iscritto al corso di laurea laurea magistrale/specialistica in:
Relazioni internazionali comparate - International relations

Titolo della tesi (**): Emerging demands and new answers: the experiment of SCO in the Central Asian region

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Firma dello studente Rosanna Martucci

(spazio per la battitura dell'estratto)

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is a security organisation composed of the People's Republic of China, Russia and four of the Central Asian Republics Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Nowadays this organisation covers over 32 million square km¹, is extended on 3/5 of the Eurasian region, counts about one billion and a half people, about 1/4 of the world population, and is the only case of security organisation including as a member China but not the U.S.2. It was inaugurated in June 2001 with the adoption of its Declaration, but this act was the culmination of a structured process started in 1991, in which the Soviet Union, China and the ups and downs in their relations played a main role. At the early beginning, in fact, the target was for the two sides to solve old suspended questions, pertaining demarcation and armament and starting good-neighbourliness policies, by implementing confidence-building measures³.

(*) Da inserire come ultima pagina della tesi. L'estratto non deve superare le mille battute

(**) il titolo deve essere quello definitivo uguale a quello che risulta stampato sulla copertina dell'elaborato consegnato al Presidente della Commissione di Laurea



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