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CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION BETWEEN KAZAKHSTAN AND NEIGHBORING CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES: POST-SOVIET TRAJECTORIES

Sergei V. Golunov
SDU University, Kaskelen, Kazakhstan

Abstract. *Introduction.* This study examines the specific features and post-Soviet trajectories of Kazakhstan's cross-border cooperation (CBC) with Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. *Methods and materials.* It applies a comparative historical analysis to identify common and distinctive characteristics of cooperation along the three borders. Existing conceptual approaches to CBC are interpreted in light of their frequent Eurocentric bias and their limited applicability to centralized Central Asian settings. The study draws on international agreements, statistical data, official communications, news-agency reports, and regional press materials, including approximately 3,000 items identified in the Integrum database. *Analysis.* The article examines geographical conditions, changes in border regimes, socioeconomic and political dynamics, institutional contacts between adjacent administrative regions, and the main areas and functions of cooperation. *Results.* The models that emerged differ substantially from the "classical" EU model in their blurred conceptual and territorial focus, limited funding, weak institutionalization, and the central authorities' controlling role. Their trajectories nevertheless diverge. Kazakh–Turkmen CBC remained weak and minimally institutionalized because of unfavorable geography and Turkmenistan's restrictive policies. Kazakh–Uzbek CBC shifted from tight control and low-intensity contacts to economic liberalization and centrally managed interregional cooperation from the late 2010s. Kazakh–Kyrgyz CBC followed a more stable and comparatively open trajectory, with the most developed institutions but also the greatest disparity between the participating countries' economic capacities. *Funding.* This research was conducted under Project No. AP23489647, "Kazakhstan's Cross-Border Cooperation with Neighboring Central Asian Countries," with support from the Science Committee of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Key words: cross-border cooperation, Central Asia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan.

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ПРИГРАНИЧНОЕ СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВО МЕЖДУ КАЗАХСТАНОМ И СОПРЕДЕЛЬНЫМИ СТРАНАМИ ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ: ТРАЕКТОРИИ РАЗВИТИЯ В ПОСТСОВЕТСКИЙ ПЕРИОД

Сергей Валерьевич Голунов
Университет СДУ, г. Каскелен, Казахстан

Аннотация. *Введение.* Статья посвящена специфике и постсоветским траекториям приграничного сотрудничества (ПС) Казахстана с Кыргызстаном, Туркменистаном и Узбекистаном. *Методы и материалы.* Для выявления общих и специфических характеристик взаимодействия в зонах трех границ применяется сравнительно-исторический анализ. Существующие концептуальные подходы к ПС интерпретируются с учетом присущего многим из них евроцентризма и их ограниченной применимости к централизованным условиям Центральной Азии. Исследование основано на международных соглашениях, статистических данных, официальных сообщениях, материалах информационных агентств и региональной прессы, включая около 3 тыс. сообщений, выявленных в базе «Интегрум». *Анализ.* Рассматриваются географические условия, изменения пограничных режимов, социально-экономическая и политическая динамика, институциональные контакты между сопредельными административными регионами, а также основные сферы и функции сотрудничества. *Результаты.* Сформировавшиеся модели существенно отличаются от «классической» модели ЕС размытым концептуальным и территориальным фокусом, ограниченным финансированием, слабой институционализацией и контролирующей ролью центральных властей. Вместе с тем их траектории расходятся. Казахстанско-туркменское ПС оставалось слабым и минимально институционализированным вследствие неблагоприятных географических условий и ограничительной политики Туркменистана. Казахстанско-узбекское ПС перешло от жесткого контроля и малоинтенсивных контактов к экономической либерализации и централизованно управляемому межрегиональному сотрудничеству с конца 2010-х годов. Казахстанско-кыргызское ПС развивалось по более стабильной и сравнительно открытой траектории, отличаясь наиболее развитыми институтами и одновременно наибольшим неравенством экономических потенциалов участвующих стран. Дальнейшее изучение этих моделей способно углубить концептуализацию приграничного сотрудничества за пределами европейского контекста. *Финансирование.* Исследование осуществлено в рамках проекта № AP23489647 «Приграничное сотрудничество Казахстана с сопредельными странами Центральной Азии» при поддержке Комитета по науке Министерства науки и высшего образования Республики Казахстан.

Ключевые слова: приграничное сотрудничество, Центральная Азия, Казахстан, Кыргызстан, Узбекистан, Туркменистан.

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Introduction. Cross-border cooperation (CBC) is a practically important phenomenon addressed by a substantial body of scholarship and guidance documents. Researchers and practitioners emphasize that CBC can bring participants considerable benefits extending beyond commercial profit. It enables adjacent territories to overcome peripheral geographic positions; make effective use of complementary capacities; jointly plan various forms of infrastructure; provide rapid assistance in emergencies; match labor demand with supply; reduce socioeconomic inequalities across borders; foster good-neighborly relations; and settle local conflicts, among other benefits [3; 8].

This study analyzes the trajectories of Kazakhstan's CBC with neighboring Central Asian countries (Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) during the post-Soviet period (1990s–2020s) in order to identify their common and distinctive features. Conceptually, it addresses CBC that, unlike the EU's CBC, develops under conditions of limited funding, strict centralized control over regions, and generally weak institutionalization of cross-border interactions [8].

The study seeks to help fill a theoretical gap: conceptualizations developed primarily from EU experience insufficiently account for these and other conditions. At the same time, the participating parties must address largely specific challenges, including overcoming logistical, political, legal, and other barriers; developing trade; allocating water resources; and exchanging agricultural experience. These issues shape the structure of the main section, which examines geographical conditions, changes in border regimes, and the specific features of contacts between administrative regions, as well as domains and functions of cooperation.

Methods and materials. The study combines a comparison of CBC along the Kazakhstan–Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan–Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan–Uzbekistan borders with an analysis of its development during the post-Soviet period (1992–2025) and a synthesis of its common patterns.

Conceptually, the study applies existing conceptualizations of CBC to Central Asian realities. Despite its conceptual and practical significance, CBC has been studied in a largely one-sided manner. A clear majority of conceptual works take European experience as their point of departure, whereas peer-reviewed studies offering developed conceptualizations of CBC in other regions are far less common, and comprehensive studies of CBC in Central Asia are exceptionally rare [8]. EU cross-border cooperation, meanwhile, operates under uniquely favorable conditions: its incorporation into a project of deep integration, unprecedentedly generous competitive project funding from the EU regional-policy budget (nearly EUR 1 billion annually), and legal support for the establishment of cross-border institutions. CBC in the "rest of the world," which is more typical globally, develops without deep integration or legal support for cross-border institutions, with modest funding and tighter central-government control over regions' external relations [7].

The Eurocentric bias in CBC research becomes apparent as soon as attempts are made to define the phenomenon and has received growing scholarly attention since the late 2010s [7; 13; 18]. The most frequently cited definition is found in the 1980 Madrid Convention, which understands CBC as interaction between territorial communities in different countries aimed at strengthening good-neighborly relations, together with the agreements concluded between them [5]. Other definitions, even with some modifications, such as recognizing the particular contribution of nonstate actors, likewise tend to place subnational authorities at the center of CBC [16; 19]. The problem is that outside the EU, subnational authorities generally lack the power to conclude agreements, while central authorities may also play an active role in cooperation between border areas. The author therefore proposes adjusting the definition by removing the emphasis on the leading role of regional authorities and focusing instead on border communities as beneficiaries. In this study, CBC denotes systematic cross-border interactions among lawful actors that should be mutually beneficial to communities in adjacent border areas and, at least potentially, may be endorsed by public authorities.

The study draws on a broad range of sources, including official documents, primarily international agreements on various aspects of CBC; statistical data, in particular data enabling comparison of the parties' economic capacities; official communications from central and regional authorities; news-agency reports; and the regional press. Approximately 3,000 such reports, identified by keyword searches in the Integrum World Wide database, were processed. Given the journal's length limit, references are provided primarily for sources substantiating little-known, contested, or difficult-to-identify events and facts. Widely known and readily verifiable information is generally not accompanied by separate references.

Analysis. ***Geographical conditions.*** The lengths of Kazakhstan's borders with neighboring Central Asian states are, from west to east: 456 km with Turkmenistan, 2,351 km with Uzbekistan, and 1,242 km with Kyrgyzstan (see Figure).

Landscape conditions for cross-border contacts along these borders are largely unfavorable. Kazakhstan's border with Turkmenistan and most of its border with Uzbekistan traverse desert and semidesert areas in which major settlements are hundreds of kilometers apart. The nearest major urban centers in the adjacent regions of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan – Zhanaozen and Turkmenbashi – are more than 400 km apart, while the distance between Kazakhstan's Aktau and Uzbekistan's Nukus approaches 1,000 km. Notably, although the Kazakhstan–Uzbekistan border exceeds 2,000 km, most cross-border flows pass through a relatively short section of only a few hundred kilometers in the eastern borderland.

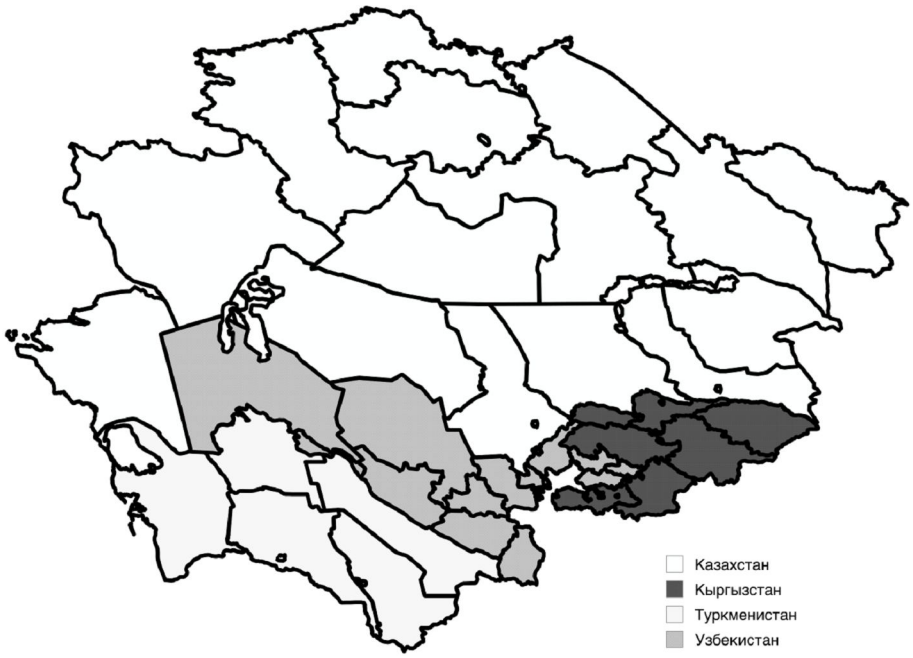

Figure. Kazakhstan and neighboring Central Asian states by first-level administrative subnational units

Notes. The map was compiled and edited by the author from an image created with MapChart (mapchart.net), CC BY-SA 4.0 license.

Cross-border transport connections along the Kazakhstan–Kyrgyzstan border run through three valleys: Talas in the western borderland, Chuy in the central part, and Karkara in the east. The most intensive flows pass through the Chuy Valley, where the Kyrgyz capital, the city of Bishkek, is located.

Transboundary water management has a major influence on CBC in the region. Along the Kazakhstan–Uzbekistan border, the relevant rivers and canals belong to the Syr Darya basin; along the Kazakhstan–Kyrgyzstan border, the key resources are those of the Talas basin in the western borderland and the Chu basin in the central part. In most instances, Kazakhstan is the downstream state, giving its neighbors a certain advantage in resolving disputes.

On the Kazakh side, Mangystau Province adjoins the Kazakhstan–Turkmenistan border; on the Turkmen side, it is Balkan Velayat. On the Kazakhstan–Uzbekistan border, the Kazakh side comprises Mangystau, Aktobe, Kyzylorda, and Turkistan provinces, while the Uzbek side comprises the Republic of Karakalpakstan and Navoi, Jizzakh, Syrdarya, and Tashkent provinces. Aktobe, Kyzylorda, and Navoi provinces have no official transport link with the neighboring country and no border checkpoints on their respective sections.

On the Kazakh side, the Kazakhstan–Kyrgyzstan border adjoins Turkistan Province, including a short section without transport links, Zhambyl Province, and Almaty Province; on the Kyrgyz side, it adjoins Talas, Chuy, and Issyk-Kul provinces. The westernmost and sparsely populated region, Talas Province, lacks a full internal transport connection with central Kyrgyzstan, making transit through Zhambyl Province critically important.

An important feature of these border landscapes is the proximity of the capitals of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan – Tashkent, with a population of over 3 million, and Bishkek, with over 1.3 million – to the border. This channels most cross-border flows toward them. The Kazakh metropolitan centers nearest to the foreign capitals are Shymkent, with 1.3 million residents, and Almaty, with 2.3 million, both of which hold special administrative status in Kazakhstan. Given their economic weight, the Tashkent–Shymkent and Almaty–Bishkek pairs are the principal axes of attraction for Kazakh–Uzbek and Kazakh–Kyrgyz CBC, respectively.

Changes in border regimes. The collapse of the Soviet Union gradually transformed previously nominal boundaries into barriers that tightly regulated cross-border movements. The

borders also became markers separating, in some cases, sharply contrasting political, economic, legal, and migration regimes. Under these conditions, establishing CBC required adaptation to these barriers and contrasts.

Until approximately the late 1990s, however, most travelers crossing these borders still faced no serious restrictions. Border regimes began to tighten substantially from the end of the 1990s. In 1999, Turkmenistan introduced visa requirements for citizens of CIS countries, including Kazakhstan, although under a 2001 intergovernmental agreement, permanent residents of Kazakhstan's Mangystau and Atyrau provinces were granted visa-free entry to Turkmenistan's Balkan Velayat for stays of up to five days [1]. In practice, this arrangement ceased to operate in 2016.

Also in 1999, following an attack on Tashkent by an international terrorist group, Uzbekistan began systematically taking unilateral measures to tighten control over the busy eastern section of the border, including patrols, the construction of barriers, and periodic restrictions on border crossings and the movement of goods. Together with Kazakhstan's countermeasures, this heightened tensions in Kazakh–Uzbek relations and led to numerous incidents involving border guards and local residents. In 2001–2002, the parties concluded two border-delimitation agreements [11]; within several years, the active section had become a zone enclosed by barbed-wire fences.

The Kazakhstan–Kyrgyzstan border regime also tightened somewhat in the late 1990s and early 2000s, as border guards and customs officers began systematic patrols. Unlike the borders with Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, this did not create major problems for travelers using official checkpoints, although the number of checkpoints fell considerably. Kazakhstan also periodically conducted campaigns against the transit smuggling of Chinese goods. These campaigns produced enormous queues, with waits of up to several days. In addition, from the second half of the 2000s, Astana sharply tightened conditions for Kyrgyz exports of meat and dairy products [10].

The second half of the 2010s brought simplified border-crossing rules both between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and, somewhat later and for different reasons, between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Kyrgyzstan's accession to the Eurasian Economic Union in August 2015 abolished customs controls and later eased Kazakhstan's sanitary and quarantine restrictions on imports of meat, dairy, and plant products. The advent of Shavkat Mirziyoyev's administration in Uzbekistan led to the liberalization of the country's economic policies and rules governing citizens' travel abroad, substantially easing many import and export restrictions and legalizing the largest smuggling flows [22]. Thus, the period of tighter border and customs controls gave way to their relaxation, creating more favorable conditions for CBC.

Socioeconomic and political dynamics. During the post-Soviet period, CBC between Kazakhstan and neighboring Central Asian countries developed under fundamentally new political and economic conditions. These conditions were shaped largely by the divergence of the countries' economic and political trajectories, ranging from Turkmenistan's strict political authoritarianism and policy of economic self-sufficiency, partly shared by Uzbekistan under Islam Karimov, to the considerably more liberal economic policies and relatively high informational openness of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. The state of interstate relations also mattered greatly: it ranged from caution and partial closure in Kazakhstan's relations with Turkmenistan and Karimov-era Uzbekistan and brief periods of heightened tensions with Kyrgyzstan over border control and water allocation in 2010 and 2017 to policies of openness and expanded cooperation under Mirziyoyev in Uzbekistan and, for the most part, between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Politically, the greater rigidity of the Turkmen and, under Karimov, Uzbek regimes impeded CBC because these governments imposed restrictions on transboundary mobility, including their own citizens' ability to leave the country, and on the free circulation of information, including information important for intensifying CBC. They also minimized official contacts between their regional authorities and counterparts in neighboring countries. Restrictions on mobility and interregional contacts between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan were nevertheless less severe, as no tough visa restrictions for entrance and exit were implemented.

Economic barriers arose from differences in the parties' openness to foreign economic interaction. Uzbekistan's exchange-rate controls

and tight restrictions on exports of fruit and vegetables, imports of Kazakh flour, and consumer goods from third countries drove a substantial share of cross-border economic contacts underground; from the second half of the 1990s, seizures of multi-ton consignments of contraband, much of it transported outside checkpoints, became routine (see, for example, [15]). In cross-border relations between the countries with the most open economic regimes – Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan – persistent points of contention included Kyrgyzstan's inadequate control over the transit flow of Chinese goods and the quality of its meat and dairy products. In the second half of the 2010s, Uzbekistan substantially liberalized its economic policies, while Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan partly resolved disputes over transit flows and the quality of Kyrgyz products.

Some researchers argue that moderate inequality is most favorable for CBC: its absence leaves the parties with insufficient incentives, while excessive inequality provokes conflict by encouraging unilateral protective measures [4]. The diverging economic trajectories of the region's countries during the post-Soviet period deepened inequalities both between countries and among regions within them, while the interstate gap widened sharply in Kazakhstan's favor. In 1992, the ratio of Kazakhstan's GDP per capita at purchasing power parity to that of Turkmenistan was 1.6, to Uzbekistan 2.9, and to Kyrgyzstan 3.4. By 2013, these ratios had peaked at 2.0, 3.7, and 5.9, respectively, before narrowing only slightly by 2025 to 2.0, 3.3, and 4.8 [21].

Assessing the impact of inequality on CBC, however, requires attention to border-region conditions and disparities among regions within the same country. The proximity to the border of the capitals of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, which lead their countries in GDP per capita, and their location opposite relatively "poor" Kazakh regions not only offsets inequality but even reverses it: Bishkek's GDP per capita is 1.2 times that of Zhambyl Province, while Tashkent's is 1.7 times that of Turkistan Province [1].

Finally, an important feature of the economic development and cross-border connections of some of the areas under consideration has been the growing role of agriculture combined with partial deindustrialization, especially in Kyrgyzstan. The development of privately driven agriculture in place of the planned system diversified production and increased fruit and vegetable output three- to fourfold over the Soviet-period level [2]. Agricultural growth has placed greater pressure on water resources and increased the need to coordinate measures against the transboundary spread of locusts. Cooperation in these areas plays an important role in the CBC arrangements discussed below.

Institutional formats of official contacts between border regions. During the Soviet period, contacts between authorities in adjacent regions of union republics to resolve local economic and other issues were routine, but key strategic decisions, such as the development of interrepublican transport infrastructure, were made by the union center. Even in the first half of the 1990s, the press apparently did not yet portray cooperation between regions of neighboring states as international, and regional leaders were not prepared to substantially reconfigure it.

The earliest evidence identified by the author of contacts between authorities in adjacent provinces aimed at jointly addressing a range of problems and concluding international agreements dates to the second half of the 1990s [6]. Bilateral and even multilateral contacts between the authorities of Kazakh and Kyrgyz border provinces and local branches of central agencies, particularly interior and emergency agencies, quickly became regular. By contrast, official meetings between subnational authorities of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan mentioned in the press were sporadic until the second half of the 2010s (see, for example, [20]), while contacts between subnational-level officials in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan were extremely rare.

In every instance, regions had to coordinate their official international contacts with higher-level authorities. A distinctive informal feature of Kazakhstan's policy for developing regional ties with Uzbekistan, less characteristic of the other relationships examined here, was the rotation of officials between the posts of akim (governor) of Turkistan Province and ambassador to Uzbekistan. As of early 2026, four of the fourteen people who had served as akim of the province had also been ambassadors to the neighboring country.

In the second half of the 2010s, Mirziyoyev's government adopted a policy of intensifying interregional contacts with Kazakhstan, primarily

to increase bilateral foreign trade, develop industrial cooperation, and improve cross-border transport links. A major step was the organization of Kazakh–Uzbek interregional forums involving both borderland and non-borderland provinces. Four forums have been held to date: three in border regions, in Shymkent in 2018, Urgench in 2020, and Turkistan in 2021, and one outside them, in Samarkand in 2024. Irregular intervals between the forums and the decision to replace them with meetings of the Council of Heads of Regions in November 2025 may, however, indicate that the two governments were not fully satisfied with the format's effectiveness. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan also tested interregional forums, but the 2023 forum in Taraz remains the only one. One likely explanation is the greater effectiveness of contacts specifically between the two countries' borderland provinces, given that intensive overland connections between southern Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are impeded by mountainous terrain.

Areas of cooperation. Priority areas for CBC-related projects in the borderlands under consideration include trade, agriculture, water management, environmental protection, infrastructure development, logistics, emergency management, law enforcement, culture, and others. Some projects span two or more areas: trade-development projects, for example, may also optimize the logistics of cross-border routes.

A substantial share of projects is connected in one way or another with agriculture. Uzbek and Kyrgyz producers supply Kazakhstan with large quantities of fruit and vegetables, while Kazakhstan exports wheat and flour, livestock products, eggs, and other goods to neighboring countries. Cotton growing is one of the key areas of agricultural cooperation between Turkistan Province and neighboring provinces of Uzbekistan.

Agricultural CBC extends well beyond the supply of products. Repeated attempts have been made to formalize farmers' access to markets in neighboring provinces: fairs have been held, including in Zhambyl Province, and projects to establish joint markets at the border have been discussed. These projects have yet to produce tangible results because of difficulties in coordination and attracting investors. For example, a 2007 agreement between the governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to construct permanent borderland trading centers [17] was never implemented. Projects to create agro-industrial production chains have likewise remained largely unrealized.

Locust control is a specific form of agricultural cooperation that requires joint monitoring and synchronized treatment of affected areas. It is coordinated by the agriculture ministries and has been conducted systematically by neighboring parties since the 2000s.

Agricultural CBC is not limited to officially authorized, large-scale projects. Grassroots initiatives involving the supply of small machinery, such as cotton-harvesting equipment, spare parts, seeds, and breeding livestock, as well as exchanges of experience and the introduction of new technologies, are often more dynamic and effective. Turkistan Province, for example, has adopted Uzbek experience in biological pest control. Since approximately the second half of the 2010s, some farms in the same province have drawn on Uzbek experience in growing exotic fruits, including bananas, papayas, oranges, mandarins, kiwis, and dragon fruit [14]. Uzbek farmers, in turn, have adopted Kazakh experience in livestock farming.

Water management is a priority area of CBC because the allocation of water resources and maintenance of acceptable water quality are critical for border regions. This is especially true of Turkistan and the Zhambyl provinces, which depend heavily on transboundary water resources originating in neighboring countries. Water cooperation between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan is highly centralized, although local authorities also participate in decision-making. Kazakh–Kyrgyz cooperation, by contrast, follows the integrated water resources management approach adopted by the United Nations in the 1990s. Established in 2006 to address water allocation, maintain water infrastructure, and monitor water quality, the Chu–Talas Water Commission includes representatives of central and regional authorities, local communities, and nongovernmental organizations in its governance.

The Chu–Talas Commission is one of the few functioning cross-border institutions in the region and was actively promoted by organizations within the UN system and the OSCE. Cross-border institutions are not typical of Central Asia, whose governments generally seek to keep civic

activity within controlled national frameworks. The depoliticized environmental sphere, including water management, may be considered a partial exception: other cross-border institutions have emerged along Kazakhstan's borders with neighboring Central Asian countries, although nongovernmental actors and local communities participate in them less extensively than in the Chu–Talas Commission.

The International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea was established on an intergovernmental basis in 1993 with the involvement of several authoritative international organizations to coordinate efforts to mitigate the consequences of the sea's catastrophic desiccation. Some of its activities, such as regulating water allocation, extend beyond the Aral Sea region. Others focus on border areas, particularly the large-scale Kazakh–Uzbek cooperation launched in 2021 to coordinate the planting of saxaul and other drought-resistant vegetation on the dried seabed.

At tri-border junctions, cooperation is developing to coordinate the activities of protected areas located on opposite sides of borders. Environmental cooperation at the junction of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan, which began in the late 1990s, gained broad international recognition, leading to the inscription of the transboundary Western Tien-Shan natural site on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2016. In the 2020s, similar cooperation began to develop at the junction of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan to preserve the biodiversity of the desert Ustyurt Plateau.

Landscape constraints and Central Asia's continental location in some instances heighten the importance of cross-border infrastructure projects, which generally require joint planning of facilities constructed by the parties in parallel on their respective territories. Such projects are often implemented well behind schedule or remain on paper, partly because of difficulties in securing funding and agreeing on parameters among the participating parties. A prominent example is the proposed road shortening the route between Almaty and Lake Issyk-Kul. Its implementation has been announced at least four times during the post-Soviet period, most recently in 2023, yet the prospects for completion remain unclear. Another example is the project, officially approved in 2021, to build a railway and highway between Kyzylorda and the Uzbek city of Uchkuduk. It could stimulate cross-border traffic along a sparsely connected desert section of the border, but funding problems have also delayed implementation [9].

Since the late 2010s and early 2020s, the Kazakh government has promoted the establishment of joint centers near the borders with Kyrgyzstan, the Alatau Industrial, Trade and Logistics Complex, and Uzbekistan, the Central Asia International Center for Industrial Cooperation. These centers are intended to serve both as key trade and logistics hubs and as zones for the joint production of goods using complementary resources of companies in neighboring countries. Both projects are also considerably behind their original schedules, although their political priority in Kazakhstan's bilateral cooperation with its neighbors provides grounds to believe that the facilities will ultimately be commissioned.

Local emergency-service units cooperate quite closely, especially along the Kazakhstan–Kyrgyzstan border, where earthquakes, mudflows and landslides, forest fires, floods, and other emergencies are relatively common. Although local emergency authorities are subordinate to central governments, this does not prevent periodic meetings between the two sides, joint exercises, and the maintenance of operational communication channels.

The need to resolve issues arising locally without delay contributes to intensive cooperation among local units of law enforcement agencies, border guards, and customs services through regular meetings, information exchange, operational communications, and joint operations.

In tourism, Kazakhstan and its neighbors seek to increase local cross-border flows to tourist and recreational sites and to organize joint cross-border routes for visitors from third countries. Almaty travel companies have established stable links with hotels on the shores of Issyk-Kul and in several Uzbek cities, as well as with Uzbek and Kyrgyz carriers that receive Kazakh tourists after they cross the border on foot because vehicle crossings take much longer. In 2007, the governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan concluded an agreement on mutual recognition of visas held by third-country nationals traveling through adjacent provinces of the neighboring country [12]. Cross-border itineraries

covering two or more Central Asian countries are being developed, but these efforts have not yet produced large-scale results.

CBC in culture and sports has symbolic significance, serving to demonstrate good-neighborly relations and ethnocultural solidarity between territories in neighboring countries. Such events are quite frequent, while local initiatives are often tightly controlled by central authorities.

Results. The models of Kazakhstan's CBC with neighboring Central Asian states that have emerged to date differ substantially from the "classical" EU model in their blurred conceptual and territorial focus, much more modest funding, and the central authorities' key controlling role.

At the same time, the trajectories of cooperation in the three border areas differ substantially. In the Kazakh–Turkmen borderland, unfavorable landscape conditions and the Turkmen side's highly restrictive policies meant that the period under study saw no substantial movement toward more intensive or institutionalized cross-border contacts. CBC with Uzbekistan, by contrast, changed considerably: tight control over cross-border flows and low-intensity contacts between subnational authorities in adjacent territories during the 2000s and first half of the 2010s gave way, from the second half of the 2010s, to the liberalization of economic ties and a centrally managed intensification of interregional cooperation. Finally, the relatively stable trajectory of the Kazakh–Kyrgyz CBC featured comparatively high levels of economic and political openness and the most developed institutionalization among the three border areas, but also the greatest disparity in the economic capacities of the participating countries.

Further study of these models, which differ markedly from the European model but may be closer in their parameters to conditions more typical globally, can make a substantial contribution to the conceptualization of cross-border cooperation.

NOTE

[1] Based on data from the Bureau of National Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic.

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Information About the Author

Sergei V. Golunov, Doctor of Sciences (Politics), Professor, SDU University, Abylai Khana St, 1/1, 040900 Kaskelen, Kazakhstan, sergei.golunov@sdu.edu.kz, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5859-576X

Информация об авторе

Сергей Валерьевич Голунов, доктор политических наук, профессор, Университет СДУ, ул. Абылай Хана, 1/1, 040900 г. Каскелен, Казахстан, sergei.golunov@sdu.edu.kz, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5859-576X