

**IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

MASTER'S THESIS

**WHY DO CENTRAL ASIAN STATES FAIL TO
ACHIEVE REGIONAL INTEGRATION?**

OSMAN MİCAN

**THESIS ADVISOR
ASSOC. PROF. ALİ ASLAN**

İSTANBUL 2024

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by

OSMAN MİCAN

**A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Political Science and International Relations.**

**THESIS ADVISOR
ASSOC. PROF. ALİ ASLAN**

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APPROVAL PAGE

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that, in our opinion, it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Political Science and International Relations.

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I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ÖZ

ORTA ASYA ÜLKELERİ NEDEN BÖLGESEL
BÜTÜNLEŞMEYİ BAŞARAMIYOR?

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Uluslararası ilişkiler literatüründe bölgesel çalışmalar, özellikle İkinci Dünya Savaşı sonrasında birçok ülkenin bağımsızlığını kazanmasının ardından bölgesel politikalara daha yakından bakmak amacıyla ortaya çıkmaya başlamıştır. Bu çalışmalarda en önemli analiz konularından biri de bölgesel örgütler olmuştur. Güvenlik, siyaset ve sosyo-ekonomi gibi birçok faydalı çıktı sağlama kapasitesine sahip olan bu örgütler, barış ve istikrarın sağlanmasında önemli rol oynamaktadır. 1991 yılında Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasıyla bağımsızlıklarını ilan eden Orta Asya devletleri tarafından da bölgesel örgütlenme girişimleri başlatılmıştır. Orta Asya'da Sovyet sonrası dönem, bölgesel entegrasyon girişimlerinde bir artışa tanıklık etmiş, ancak bu çabalar sürekli olarak amaçlanan hedeflerin gerisinde kalmıştır. Bu tez, Çarlık dönemine kadar uzanan Rus sömürgeciliğinin mirasının bölgesel iş birliğinin önünde önemli bir engel olmaya devam ettiğini savunarak bu olgunun altında yatan nedenleri araştırmaktadır. Mevcut literatür bu entegrasyon eksikliğini genellikle ekonomik tamamlayıcılık, rejim tipleri, ulus inşası, dış müdahale ve bölgesel liderlik için rekabet gibi faktörlere bağlarken, bu tez yaklaşık 150 yıllık Çarlık ve Sovyet sömürge politikası gibi önemli bir tarihsel gerçeği göz göz önüne alarak sömürgeciliğin etkisi gibi yeni bir bakış açısı ortaya çıkarmaktadır. Bu çalışma Orta Asya'da bölgesel örgütlerinin başarısızlığının nedenini sömürgecilik olarak cevaplayacaktır. Bölgenin Rus hakimiyetiyle şekillenen tarihi deneyimleri, bölgesel entegrasyonu engelleyen köklü zorluklar yaratmıştır. Sömürgecilik döneminin kalıcı mirasları birkaç kilit alanda kendini göstermiştir. Bu tezde bu mirasın sonuçları olarak miras kalan güvenlik problemleri, ekonomik yapının şekillenmesi, otoriter rejimlerin

oluşumu, ulus inşası ve kimlik problemleri ve son olarak zayıf devlet problemleri ve devlet krizleri üzerinden açıklanacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bölgeselcilik, Bölgesel Düzen, Bölgesel Entegrasyon, Bölgesel Örgütlenme, Sömürgecilik, Orta Asya.



ABSTRACT

WHY DO CENTRAL ASIAN STATES FAIL TO ACHIEVE REGIONAL INTEGRATION?

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September 2024, 62 Pages

In the international relations literature, regional studies have started to emerge in order to take a closer look at regional policies, especially after the independence of many countries after the Second World War. One of the most important topics of analysis in these studies has been regional organizations. These organizations, which have the capacity to provide many useful outputs such as security, politics and socio-economics within the region, play an important role in ensuring peace and stability. Regional organization initiatives have been undertaken by the Central Asian states that declared their independence with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The post-Soviet era in Central Asia witnessed a surge in regional integration initiatives, yet these endeavors have consistently fallen short of their intended goals. This thesis investigates the underlying reasons for this phenomenon, arguing that the legacy of Russian colonialism, dating back to the Tsarist era, remains a significant obstacle to regional cooperation. While existing literature often attributes this lack of integration to factors such as economic complementarity, regime types, nation-building, external interference, and competition for regional leadership, this thesis introduces a new perspective on the impact of colonialism by taking into account the important historical fact of nearly 150 years of Tsarist and Soviet colonial policy. This thesis will answer the reason for the failure of the regional organizations in Central Asia as colonialism. The historical trajectory of the region, shaped by Russian domination, has created deep-rooted challenges that impede regional integration. The lasting legacies of the colonial era have manifested themselves in several key areas. In this thesis, the

consequences of this legacy will be explained through the inherited security problems, the remaking of the economic structure, the legacy of authoritarian regimes, the problems of nation-building and identity, and finally the state crises.

Key Words: Regionalism, Regional Order, Regional Integration, Regional Organization, Colonialism, Central Asia.



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The period when I was writing my thesis was witnessing one of the most shameful cases in the world. A massacre is taking place in Palestine. I want to express that I will stand against this situation, which cannot be practiced by human beings, with every part of my body.

May Allah forgive us all for the loneliness of the shahadah of Yahya Sinwar and so many other shahids.

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LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CACO	Central Asian Cooperation Organization
CAEC	Central Asian Economic Cooperation
IES	Integrated Economic Space
EEC	Eurasian Economic Community
IFAS	International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
CAREC	Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation
ACD	Asia Cooperation Dialogue
ECO	Economic Cooperation Organization
OTS	Organization of Turkic States
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Within the realm of international relations, concepts such as region, regionalism, and regionalization hold significant weight. While the definition of "region" itself is a separate discussion, this analysis focuses on the interplay between regionalism and regionalization. Regionalism can be conceptualized as a collection of regionally-focused ideas, encompassing not only specific strategies and goals, but also formalized political programs. Conversely, regionalization represents the transformative process by which these ideas are translated from theory to practical action. A critical manifestation of regionalism and regionalization policies is the establishment and subsequent institutionalization of regional organizations, serving as concrete initiatives towards regional integration.

In the aftermath of World War II and the subsequent wave of decolonization, regional integration initiatives gained significant traction. This trend fueled the development of a subfield within International Relations (IR) that focuses on analyzing patterns of cooperation and conflict within specific regions. Central Asia serves as a prime example of such a region. Following their independence from the Soviet Union, these strategically situated states embarked on crafting distinct national policies. Recognizing their nascent status, these countries participated in various regional initiatives, either independently or in collaboration with external actors. However, these endeavors have consistently fallen short of achieving their intended institutional objectives.

This research investigates the obstacles hindering the formation of independent regional organizations in Central Asia following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. A comprehensive review of existing literature on the region reveals a prevalent argument attributing this lack of regional integration to the historical legacy of Russian colonization, dating back to the Tsarist era. By analyzing the Central Asian policies

implemented during both the Tsarist and Soviet periods, this study aims to elucidate the factors contributing to the failure of regional cooperation in Central Asia. It will further explore the enduring impact of this colonial period on the contemporary political and economic landscape of the region.

The research question of the thesis will be “Why Can't Central Asian States Build a Successful Regional Organization?”. While “failure and success” can be a subjective term depending on the desired outcome, for the purpose of this discussion, successful organizations will be those that achieve their stated institutional goals. While our dependent variable is the success of regional organization initiatives, the independent variable that will explain this will be the colonial policies and their consequences in the Tsarist and Soviet periods. The hypothesis of the study is “The legacy of the colonial period that the Central Asian countries experienced before their independence has hindered integration initiatives in the region and caused the failure of the established regional organizations.”

This research adopts a historical deconstructionist approach, employing a multi-method strategy for data collection. Primarily reliant on secondary sources, the study utilizes qualitative methods for an in-depth analysis of textual data. However, to enrich the analysis, quantitative data may be selectively incorporated in specific sections. Focusing on a case study of Central Asia, the research will deconstruct the lingering effects of colonialism on the region's contemporary dynamics.

The study is the result of an important literature review and there are independent variables that compete with the independent variable we have put forward.

I. Lack of Economic Complementarity: This approach argues that a lack of economic complementarity hinders the development of robust regional organizations in Central Asia. It posits that stronger economic partnerships are a prerequisite for successful regional integration. The dramatic decline in intra-regional trade compared to other regions underscores a critical economic challenge. This suggests a fundamental problem of economic interaction in Central Asia, where economies compete rather than cooperate. This competitive dynamic impedes regional integration efforts.

II. Regime Types: An alternative viewpoint on the limitations of Central Asian regional integration initiatives highlights the influence of regime type. This perspective posits a strong correlation between a nation's political system and the effectiveness of regional policies. It argues that the authoritarian nature of Central Asian regimes constitutes the primary impediment to successful regional integration. Proponents of this view contend that many regional initiatives have largely been unsuccessful due to their primary function of strengthening the domestic legitimacy of these regimes. Even security cooperation is perceived as being driven by self-serving motives rather than genuine concern for regional security.

III. Nation Building: Nation-building is the process of transforming a collection of disparate communities lacking a unifying identity into a cohesive nation. This entails fostering a shared narrative and value system. These elements collectively cultivate a sense of national unity that transcends internal differences. The collapse of the Soviet Union provides a prime example of this phenomenon. Previously united under a singular Soviet identity, the newly independent states faced the challenge of forging their own national identities. The suddenness of independence and the absence of a naturally evolved national narrative limited the time available for this consolidation. Top-down efforts by the ruling elites, often referred to as "titular elites," became the primary driver of this process. Consequently, these nations prioritized the research, revision, and creation of their own unique histories, languages, and symbols, rather than focusing on supranational regional organizations that might have emerged organically with a more gradual transition.

IV. Intervention of Extra Regional Powers: The involvement of extra regional powers presents a significant challenge to regional integration endeavors. Their policies can exert a multifaceted influence. On the one hand, they can incentivize regional integration by offering economic or political benefits. Conversely, they may impose constraints that prioritize the extra regional power's interests. This intervention fosters a network of bilateral ties between individual states and the extra regional actor, hindering the development of robust intra-regional interactions. The activities of China and Russia in Central Asia, manifested through active participation in regional institutions and policy initiatives, serve as prime illustrations of this phenomenon.

V. Competition for Regional Leadership: One significant impediment to regional integration is the contestation for regional leadership, exemplified by the dynamics between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. These regional powers characterized by elements like military strength, economic leverage, or a large population, exert greater influence compared to other regional actors. These states utilize bilateral relations or participation in regional institutions to advance their national interests, which may sometimes align with broader regional objectives, but prioritization remains on their own agendas. By competing with each other they are trying to be regional leader that fosters cooperation, regional order, and stability without employing domination or coercion. These states advocate for dialogue among regional actors. Most importantly, they spearhead the promotion of regional integration initiatives and undertake collective action.

While the provided analyses effectively highlight the issues and complexities of Central Asia, they overlook a crucial historical factor that presents the most significant impediment to regional integration. Central Asia has been under the dominant influence of Russia since the mid-19th century. This perspective argues that a decolonial lens, critically examining the lasting legacies of both Tsarist and Soviet rule, is essential for a more comprehensive understanding of the obstacles hindering regional integration within Central Asia.

The question of whether a colonial order existed in Central Asia is a crucial starting point. Central Asia's colonial history hinges on a precise definition of colonialism. Establishing a universally accepted definition proves challenging due to the region-specific nature of colonial experiences. In broad terms, colonialism signifies a form of domination where entities control the territory and/or actions of others. Imperialism, frequently conflated with Russian expansion, emphasizes economic control. This paper defines established scholarly markers of colonialism. By analyzing these explanations alongside historical evidence, the paper argues that a colonial lens is indeed applicable to Russia's invasion into Central Asia.

I. Inherited Security Problems: The enduring legacies of colonialism continue to manifest as significant security challenges for many post-colonial states. The imposition of administrative and political structures by colonial powers has

demonstrably resulted in long-term instability. A prime illustration of this phenomenon can be seen in the border disputes plaguing Central Asia. These conflicts stem from the region's historical trajectory, shaped initially by Tsarist-era administrative control and subsequently by the Soviet Union's administrative framework. Further compounding these challenges are the intertwined issues of ethnicity and water scarcity, the latter of which is projected to intensify in the coming years. The water crisis is further exacerbated by energy problems, both of which can be traced back to administrative oversights committed during the Russian colonial period. These collective issues have demonstrably hampered positive relations between the countries of Central Asia and continue to obstruct efforts towards regional integration.

II. Remaking Economic Structure: Newly independent states inheriting a colonial economic structure face significant challenges. Colonial economies, designed to extract resources and benefit the dominant power, create a fundamental mismatch with the needs of national development. This inherent disconnect can lead to economic failure if the structure remains unaltered after independence. The complexity of transitioning to a new economic model further hinders progress. Central Asian nations exemplify this difficulty. Previously governed by a centralized command economy under Soviet rule, these states faced the abrupt challenge of adopting a market-based system. While the command economy offered a degree of stability, it lacked the dynamism necessary for long-term prosperity, ultimately hindering economic growth. Central Asia's situation differed from more typical transitions, where authoritarian capitalist regimes evolve towards liberal democracies. Here, both the state apparatus and the economic foundation required complete restructuring. This complex transition resulted in a dual challenge: economic weakness and the failure to establish robust economic ties amongst these newly independent states.

III. Authoritarian Regimes as Legacy of Colonialism: Authoritarian tendencies of contemporary Central Asian leaders are rooted in the Soviet legacy. Firstly, Soviet demarcation policies, which established national borders, instilled a more authoritarian conception of sovereignty amongst these leaders. Secondly, patronage networks established during the Soviet era, often based on kinship or shared interests, continue to exert influence on resource allocation today. Prior to the Tsarist and Soviet eras, the

concept of sovereignty based on national identity was absent in Central Asia. This lack of national consciousness impeded the development of national borders. Instead, social structures revolved around allegiances to clans, kinship groups, regions, and tribes. While these territorial affiliations were fluid, identification with non-national identities remained dominant. The Soviet policy of defining borders along national lines and placing rulers from specific clans at the helm, particularly through the practice of indigenization, fostered a protectionist and authoritarian approach.

IV. Process of Nation Building: One of the most important regional challenges following the decolonization period has been the identity crises faced by newly independent states. In the process of colonization, images are often constructed to legitimize subjugation and define the colonized population. These images typically portray the colonized as having negative characteristics such as ignorance or laziness. This discursive strategy serves to establish a binary opposition between the colonizer and the colonized, positioning the colonizer as superior and the colonized as inferior. Through this psychological manipulation, the colonized can internalize this constructed identity and reinforce the power dynamic inherent in the colonial system. The assimilation or Russification policies implemented by both the Tsarist and Soviet regimes are the most important examples of this. This policy took three main forms: Creating political divisions among Central Asian countries, fragmenting the region along cultural lines, attempts to erase the historical memory of the peoples of the region, isolating them from culturally and linguistically connected geographies, and finally the humiliation and destruction of Islamic institutions. Even if we set aside the old identity of the Central Asian states that were subjected to these practices, the process of formation of the new identity is fraught with difficulties.

V. State Crisis ‘‘Problem of Weak State’’: Post-colonialism, many newly independent states experience a period of state crisis, often resulting in the emergence of weak states. This vulnerability can be exacerbated by pre-existing security and governance challenges inherited from the colonial era, and can ultimately contribute to regional instability. Weak states are typically characterized by a combination of factors, such as geographical or resource limitations, an authoritarian ruling elite focused on self-preservation and control, and an often limited capacity to manage both internal social

pressures and external influences. The theoretical concept of omnibalancing provides a useful framework for understanding the policies of these states. Unlike traditional balancing tactics that target primary threats, omnibalancing prioritizes the appeasement of secondary adversaries and alliance formation. This prioritization stems from domestic politics and strategic calculations that are inherently more unpredictable and threaten the power of elites. Authoritarian leaders consolidating internal control prioritize external partners willing to support the stability of their regimes and make rational calculations to identify such patrons. The emergence of weak states, often a consequence of post-colonial state crises, has important regional implications beyond alliances with external powers. They may engage in regional rivalries that reflect a strategy within this framework. In this approach, states not only compete to become regional leaders and maximize their own interests, but also seek to become the most important power in the region by attracting the attention of international actors.

This thesis delves into the historical roots of Central Asia's regional integration challenges, offering a fresh perspective that surpasses current explanations by these arguments. It highlights the lasting impact of colonialism on the region's political landscape, providing a more nuanced understanding of the obstacles hindering regional cooperation and integration. This paper uses a decolonial framework to analyze five main explanations for the lack of regional integration in Central Asia and uncovers underlying colonial influences. In this way, it also contributes to the literature. This thesis explores how Central Asian states can overcome this historical burden and cultivate a regional integration, ultimately paving the way for a more stable, prosperous, and interconnected future for the region.

CHAPTER II

FAILURE OF CENTRAL ASIAN INTEGRATION: COMPETING EXPLANATIONS

2.1. Introduction

Emerging prominently in the aftermath of World War II, regional organizations have served as crucial instruments for fostering peace and promoting regional development. Upon gaining independence from the Soviet Union, Central Asian states, as newly sovereign entities, faced a multitude of challenges. In response, initiatives were undertaken to establish regional organizations. However, the number of such organizations remains limited, and those that have been established have often experienced failure. Notably, a significant portion of these organizations involve partnerships with non-regional actors.

This chapter delves into the significance of regional organizations. It begins by clarifying the often-confusing concepts of region, regionalism, and regionalization. The chapter then explores the crucial role of regional organizations in fostering peace, security, and economic development – key outcomes of regionalization that pave the way for deeper regional integration. Following this, the chapter analyzes specific regional organizations established in Central Asia, examining both their successes and shortcomings. Finally, the chapter critically engages with explanations presented in existing scholarship.

2.2. Importance of Regional Organizations

The relationship between the concepts of region, regionalism, regionalization, and regional order is a complex and multifaceted one. While the term "regionalization" has been used in various contexts throughout history, its emergence as a distinct concept in international relations discourse can be traced to the aftermath of World War I, gaining further prominence following World War II and becoming an integral feature of the state system.

Broadly speaking, the dynamics of regionalization can be categorized into three phases: pre- and post-World War II and after the 1980s. The first wave of regionalization, characterized by the existence of colonialist policies and empire systems. Generally in this period regional cooperation aim to strengthen security needs of states. Also, institutions which is not much not based on strong alliances. The most important examples for this period are early manifestations of regionalization the establishment of the German Customs Union (Zollverein) in 1818, the trade agreement between the United Kingdom and France in 1960 and also we can add League of Nations after the World War I. The second wave of regionalization, it was influenced by the structure of the bipolar system in the Cold War. In this regionalism approach, where the state is the main actor, integration can only take place between states. This has strengthened security-oriented co-operation, but it has also been the beginning of strong economic integrations that are not as loose as in the past. The most important of these, the formation of the European Economic Community (EEC), formed the basis of the European Union (EU). After 1980, the bipolar world order of the Cold War era came to an end, signaling the collapse of the international political structure based on two opposing poles. (Sağlam, 2015, pp. 29–31) This shift in the global system, marked by structural transformations, gave rise to new regionalism or third-wave regionalism. The fundamental distinction between old and new approaches can be understood through the context of pre- and post-Cold War structures. While old regionalism was rooted in the bipolarity of the Cold War, new regionalism finds its significance within globalization and a multipolar world order. New regionalism, which is considered both more global and pluralistic in nature (Söderbaum, 2003: 4), is argued to be a system where the formation and maintenance of regional institutions are shaped not by the dominance of a single power, but by interactions among various actors (Acharya, 2018b: 81). Additionally, its traditionally state-centric structure has expanded, encompassing non-state actors and issues. Despite this, regionalism is still predominantly viewed in most studies as a system where states remain the primary actors, especially in the context of constructing intergovernmental institutions. One of the most significant aspects of new regionalism is its transcendence of the concept of geographic proximity, adopting a transnational regional approach (Hettne, 2005: 544).

The concept of "region" is multifaceted and defies a straightforward definition. While various approaches to defining regions exist, ranging from geographical to cultural and social perspectives, a comprehensive definition that encompasses the core elements of a

region can be formulated as follows: A region is a group of states or territories that are geographically proximate, culturally connected, and share a sense of common identity and purpose. This definition highlights the interplay of geographical proximity, cultural affinity, and shared interests in shaping a region's distinct identity. In addition to this traditional understanding of region, a more virtual concept of region has emerged. This virtual perspective extends the notion of region beyond physical boundaries, encompassing shared online spaces, virtual communities, and networks of interconnected individuals and organizations.

These conceptual approaches offer insights into the potential forms of regionalism, regionalization, and regional order. Notably, the intensifying effects of globalization have necessitated the emergence of sub-state actors capable of contending with the increasingly competitive environment. This has driven the need for regionalism, followed by regionalization. Furthermore, the patterns observed in regionalization initiatives have spurred the development of regional order studies. An examination of the relationship between regionalism and regionalization reveals a key distinction. Regionalism can be understood as a set of ideas, encompassing strategies, goals, and political programs that are regionally oriented within a specific geographic area. Conversely, regionalization represents the process by which these ideas are translated into concrete action. (Hveem et al., 2006, pp. 296–297) One of the most significant tangible steps associated with regionalism and regionalization policies for states is the establishment and institutionalization of regional organizations.

States engage in interactions across political, economic, social, cultural, and security domains, both among themselves and with other actors. Regional organizations serve as crucial intermediaries in facilitating these interactions. Encompassing three or more geographically proximate states or states brought together by common interests, even if dispersed across vast territories, (Van Kleffens, 1949, pp. 668–671) these organizations play a significant role in shaping regional and global order.

Primarily, regional organizations contribute to maintaining regional peace and stability by supporting the peaceful resolution of potential interstate disputes through various diplomatic means. This collaborative framework, encompassing both strong and weak states, can act as a shield against security threats, particularly for weaker states within the

region. Furthermore, these organizations foster economic development through collaborative initiatives, implementing various programs and ventures aimed at promoting regional progress. This includes establishing trade links, harmonizing customs standards and creating environments conducive to shared prosperity. (Tripathi, 2010, pp. 1247–1249) Additionally, regional organizations can facilitate the development of a common stance on global issues that align with their regional interests.

2.3. Central Asian Initiatives

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, five Central Asian states – Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan – emerged as independent republics. This independence marked a significant turning point for the region, which had been under Russian control since the Tsarist conquest in the early 19th century. However, the euphoria of newfound sovereignty was tempered by the realities of nation-building and regional integration.

Central Asian states, having endured nearly two centuries of Russian domination and economic exploitation, prioritized establishing independent national identities and pursuing distinct foreign policies. This focus on individual statehood, rather than regional integration, stemmed from the complex challenges these newly independent nations faced domestically and internationally. Despite possessing geographical proximity, shared ethnicities, a common Islamic heritage, and similar historical experiences, attempts to create a regional union that could leverage their combined economic and political power proved unsuccessful.

2.3.1. Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO)

The pursuit of regional economic integration in Central Asia has been a complex and evolving process. In 1994, the Central Asian Economic Cooperation (CAEC) emerged as the initial initiative. Established through the Treaty on the Establishment of an Integrated Economic Space (IES), the CAEC comprised Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. Following the resolution of its civil war, Tajikistan joined the organization in 1998. Turkmenistan, however, opted to remain outside the CAEC framework, citing its policy of "independent, permanent neutrality." (*Внешняя Политика*, n.d.) Despite initial

enthusiasm, the CAEC's effectiveness was hampered by internal discord among member states. The inability to develop a unified strategic vision due to these internal conflicts hindered progress towards regional economic integration.

However, the post-2002 period witnessed a renewed effort at regional cooperation. Recognizing the need for a coordinated approach, particularly regarding Afghanistan, the Central Asian states formed the Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO). (Eren, 2012, p. 46) This organization aimed to facilitate foreign policy coordination, but its lifespan proved short-lived. The CACO was ultimately merged with the Eurasian Economic Community (EEC), a broader initiative seeking to establish a common economic space with unified legislation and a customs union among member states. This merger effectively marked the dissolution of the CACO as a distinct entity. (Bohr, 2019, p. 76)

2.3.2. The International Fund for Saving The Aral Sea (IFAS)

Established on January 4, 1993, the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) stands as one of the earliest regional organizations formed by Central Asian countries. The organization emerged in response to the Aral Sea disaster, a pressing environmental crisis demanding regional cooperation. Its primary objective is twofold: to address the ecological devastation caused by the Aral Sea's decline and to facilitate broader discussions on socio-economic challenges faced by the region.

IFAS serves as a platform for member states to exchange expertise and formulate policies aligned with the region's production and natural resource potential. A key function involves regulating interstate relations, particularly regarding water management and environmental initiatives. These critical issues are prioritized during regular meetings between member states. While agreements are established, a comprehensive solution to the ongoing Aral Sea crisis remains elusive. (*International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea*, n.d.)

While the aforementioned examples represent direct initiatives undertaken by the Central Asian states themselves, these states have demonstrably adopted a proactive approach towards fostering regional integration with third actors beyond themselves. This is

evidenced by their participation in, and sometimes the establishment of, various regional organizations that include external actors. These initiatives serve as significant platforms for dialogue and collaboration among the Central Asian states and other participants. However, similar to their independent initiatives, the effectiveness of these organizations has also been subject to debate.

The Central Asian region is characterized by a diverse landscape of regional actors, each pursuing distinct or overlapping objectives. These actors can be broadly categorized into eight groups:

- I. Central Asian States: The primary regional actors are the Central Asian states themselves, whose initiatives, while limited in number, have formed the foundation for regional cooperation in the sub-region.
- II. Russia-Led Organizations: Russia has played a prominent role in establishing regional organizations, including the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Eurasian Economic Union (EurAsEc), the Customs Union (CU), the Eurasian Development Bank (EDB), and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). These organizations serve as platforms for cooperation among Russia and the Central Asian states, with varying degrees of participation and engagement.
- III. China-Led Organizations: China has emerged as a significant regional actor, particularly through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which it initiated. The SCO serves as a key instrument for China's interests in the region, fostering economic cooperation and security arrangements.
- IV. Turkey-Led Organizations: The Organization of Turkic States (OTS) was established in 2009 through the Nakhchivan Agreement as an international organization aimed at strengthening cooperation among Turkic-speaking countries. In 2021, the organization was renamed the "Organization of Turkic States." Under the leadership of Turkey, the OTS has emerged as a significant platform for cooperation and development in Central Asia, fostering stronger ties among member states and contributing to regional stability.
- V. Europe and Transatlantic-Based Organizations: Europe and Transatlantic actors have also established regional organizations in Central Asia, including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) Program, the Europe-Caucasus-Asia Transport Corridor (TRACECA), and the Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe (INOGATE). These organizations promote cooperation

in areas such as security, transportation, and energy.

VI. Religion Based Organizations: The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) plays a role in Central Asia, representing the shared religious identity of many states in the region. The OIC facilitates cooperation on issues related to Islam and promotes dialogue among Muslim-majority states.

VII. West and South Asia-Based Organizations: Central Asian states are also involved in organizations that extend beyond the sub-region, such as the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). These organizations promote regional cooperation and dialogue among a broader range of Asian states.

VIII. Regional Financial Institutions: Several regional financial institutions provide support for development in Central Asia, including the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), and the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC). These institutions play a crucial role in financing infrastructure projects, promoting trade, and supporting economic development in the region.

2.4. Failure of Central Asian Regional Integration Initiatives

Central Asian countries, since gaining independence in the 1990s, have pursued various avenues for regional integration. This pursuit has involved the creation of numerous institutions over the years. However, these organizations haven't always translated into improved relations. The reasons behind Central Asia's limited success in this area are multifaceted. While "failure" can be a subjective term depending on the desired outcome, for the purpose of this discussion, successful organizations will be those that achieve their stated goals. It's also worth noting instances where individual countries have benefited beyond the collective achievements. (Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2012, pp. 23–31)

This failure of Central Asian countries has been analyzed by many scholars in the literature. Basically, these studies focus on lackness of economic complementarity, effect of regime types, problems about nation-building process, intervention of external hegemon power and regional hegemony competition. The rest of this section will examine these approaches.

2.4.1. Lack of Economic Complementarity

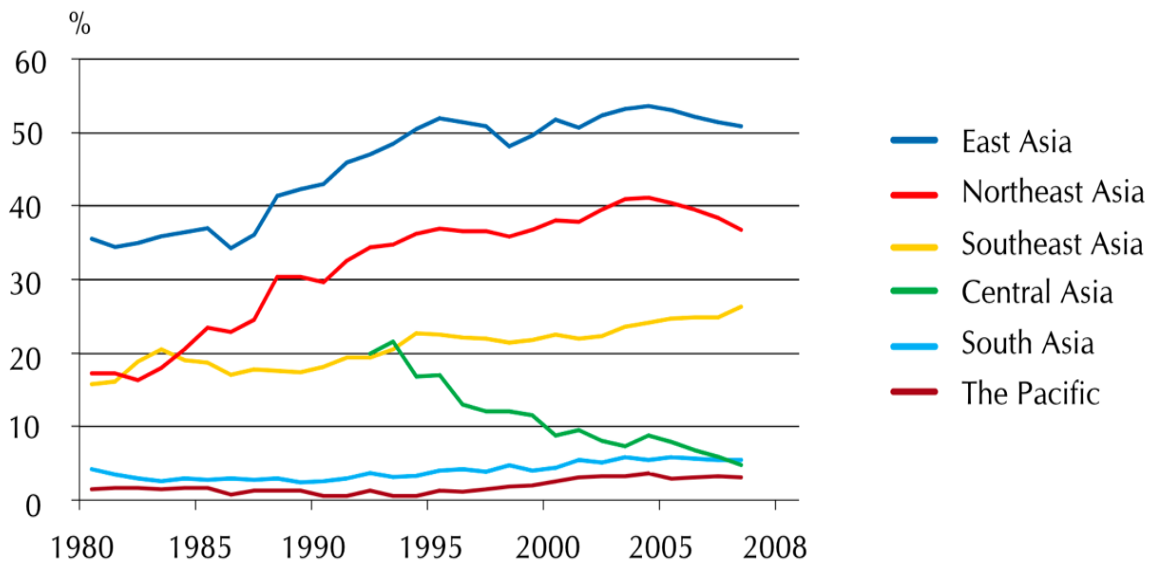
Economic factors are among the most prominent explanations for regional integration in Central Asia. Studies focused on economic interdependence hold significant weight in understanding the drivers of integration. These studies posit that fostering economic relations between countries reduces the likelihood of conflict and fosters peace. This, in turn, creates a mutual interdependence, and the establishment of economic harmony is theorized to contribute to a stable international order. However, while quantitative studies may lend credence to this argument, the results can be sensitive to variations within the datasets employed. (Owen, 2012, pp. 111–125)

The idea that economic interdependence fosters peace has its roots in the thinking of Enlightenment-era thinkers. They argued that the division of labor within a village would reduce internal conflicts, as it would be detrimental to disrupt mutually beneficial specialization. Extrapolating this concept to the international system, they believed that a free market economy would promote peace because war would be an irrational choice from an opportunity cost perspective. In simpler terms, the potential economic benefits of trade would outweigh the costs of war. Later scholars expanded on this argument, suggesting that the high degree of interdependence characteristic of industrialized economies renders war increasingly meaningless. (Howard, 2008, pp. 5–21) While the core tenet of this thesis remains grounded in opportunity cost analysis, it has not gone unchallenged. Critics point to the limitations of a state-centric approach, arguing that other actors, such as multinational corporations, also play a role. Additionally, the concept of "costly signals," where states incur deliberate economic losses to demonstrate resolve and deter conflict, has emerged as a complementary explanation for the war-detering potential of economic relations. Capital flight, the movement of capital away from politically unstable regions, has also been cited as a consequence of heightened economic interconnectedness that discourages conflict.

The critique that Central Asian countries' failure to establish robust regional organizations stems from a lack of economic ties draws upon the liberal explanation for peace through trade. This approach posits that economic interdependence fosters cooperation and discourages conflict. From this perspective, stronger regional economic partnerships are seen as a necessary precursor to successful regional integration in Central Asia. However,

despite numerous attempts to bolster economic cooperation among Central Asian states, progress has been limited. (Pomfret, 2009, p. 51)

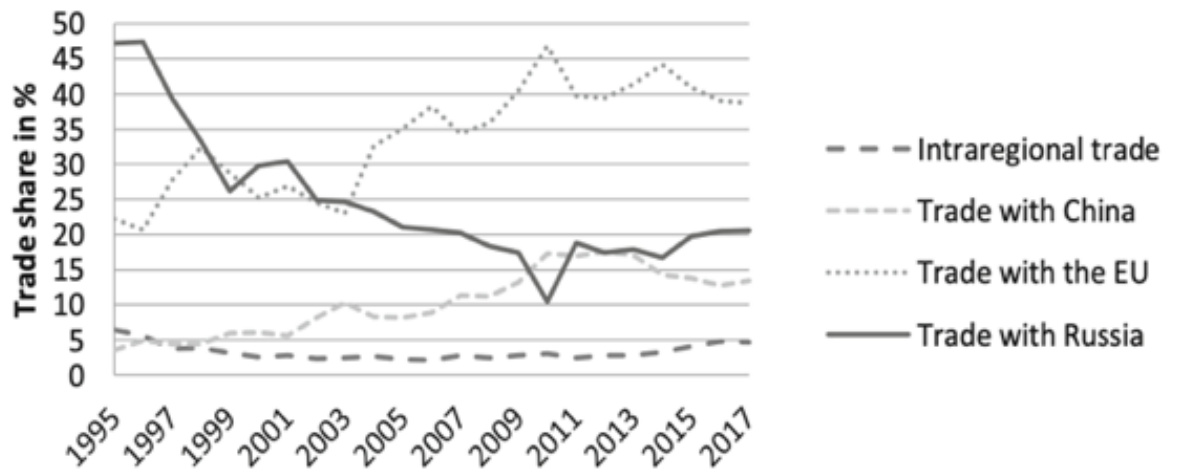
The dramatic decline in intra-regional economic ties among Central Asian countries, compared to other regions following the Soviet breakup, indicates an economic problem in the region. (Linn, 2012, p. 99)



Graphic 2.1. Intra-Regional Economic Relations According to Region

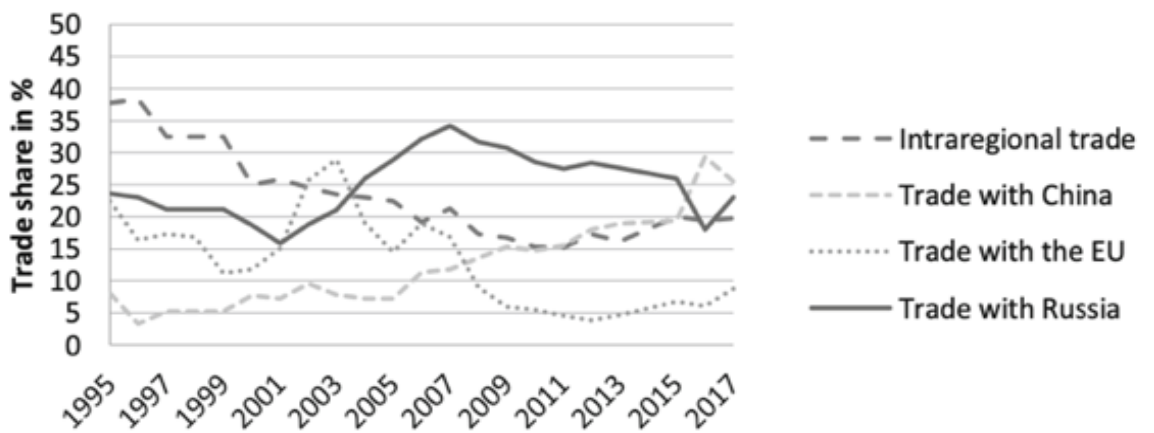
Although it was initially hoped that such rapid acceleration would occur due to their establishment, the subsequent period revealed the low level of intra-regional economic relations among these countries. (Krapohl & Vasileva-Dienes, 2020, pp. 353–357)

Kazakhstan



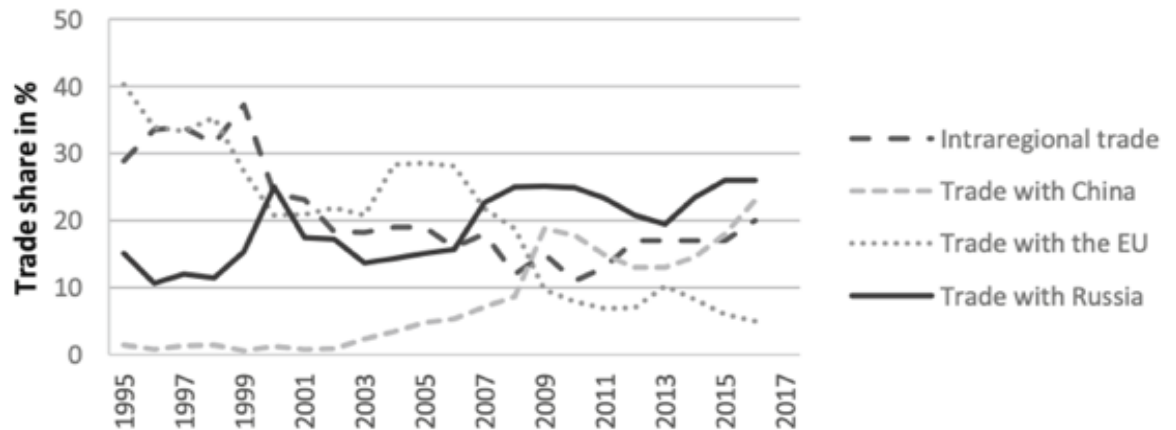
Graphic 2.2. Trade Rates of Kazakhstan between 1995-2017

Kyrgyzstan



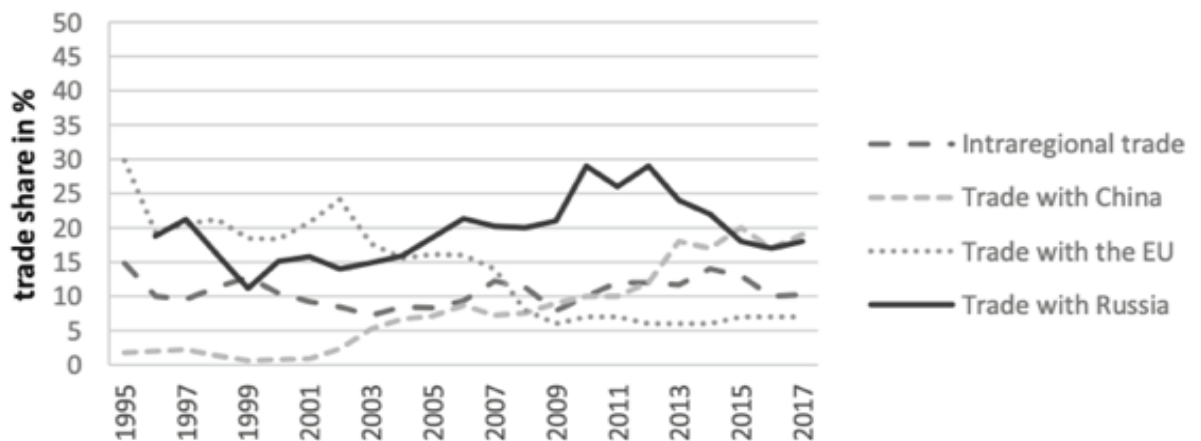
Graphic 2.3. Trade Rates of Kyrgyzstan between 1995-2017

Tajikistan



Graphic 2.4. Trade Rates of Tajikistan between 1995-2017

Uzbekistan



Graphic 2.5. Trade Rates of Uzbekistan between 1995-2017

An examination of the preceding tables reveals a decline in intra-regional economic relations within Central Asia since independence, compared to other regions globally. This trend is further substantiated by the country-specific graphs, which demonstrate that Central Asian states generally exhibit significantly lower trade volumes with regional partners compared to their trade with actors outside the region.

Given this situation, it can be seen that there is indeed a problem with economic interaction in Central Asia. The main reason for this situation, which also affects the regionalization process, is that economic goods in the region compete more than they complement each other. (Bohr, 2004, pp. 496–497), (Green, 2001, pp. 1156–1157) Additionally, problems such as customs issues have further complicated trade. This situation in the region essentially constitutes trade diversion, characterized by tariff damages and low-quality products. (Pomfret, 2009, pp. 54–63)

2.4.2. Regime Types

Another perspective on the limitations of regional integration initiative in Central Asia emphasizes the role of regime types. This approach posits that a country's political system significantly influences the success or failure of regional policies. The core argument rests on the notion that regional organizations often mirror the domestic political structures of their member states. In other words, states are seen as transferring their governing principles, behaviors, and operating mechanisms from the national to the regional level. Consequently, regional organizations are believed to reflect the domestic political institutions and practices of their members. These domestic factors are fundamentally linked to the type of regime in power, as the regime plays a critical role in shaping the functioning of the entire political order.

Distrust of other states is a hallmark of authoritarian regimes, leading to strained relations and limited integration within regional organizations. This is further compounded by their prioritization of national interests, which directly contradicts the potential dilution of these interests and the transfer of sovereignty inherent in regional integration. In political systems that are unwilling to share power even with domestic opposition, the concept of ceding control to a supranational entity becomes particularly unpalatable. Limited and controlled political participation further hinders the development of a domestic constituency that might champion regional integration. Furthermore, a self-interested focus often manifests as protectionist policies, which can escalate tensions and ultimately lead to the use of hard power tactics. Finally, the weakness of domestic civil society restricts its potential role as a facilitator of regional integration. (Grabowski, 2020, pp. 199–200)

The term "authoritarian regime" emerged during the Cold War to differentiate them from totalitarian states. In the post-colonial era following the 1970s, some newly independent countries adopted a façade of multi-party systems, often with restrictions, to maintain the dominance of ruling elites. This approach weakened democratic institutions and electoral processes, fostering the emergence of flawed elections. Consequently, a hybrid system emerged, characterized by authoritarian rule coexisting with elements of liberal and democratic institutions, while the ruling elite retains control.(Kars Kaynar, 2020)

Congruent with the preceding discussion, Central Asian states can be categorized as authoritarian regimes. A 2024 study examining 29 countries designated these nations as "consolidated authoritarian regimes," the most restrictive classification on the index of individual rights and competitive political systems. The report's methodology identifies states within this category as closed societies where ruling elites suppress political competition and pluralism. Additionally, these regimes are characterized by systematic violations of fundamental political, civil, and human rights. (Smeltzer & Karppi, n.d., pp. 27–29)

Critics argue that the Central Asia's authoritarian regimes are the primary obstacle to initiatives on regional integration. Comparisons are often drawn with democratic states in Western Europe, North America, and Latin America. (Collins, 2009, p. 250) Central Asian leaders wield highly centralized power. Even when elections, referendums, etc. are held, these are often seen as tools to maintain the authoritarian grip. Power isn't limited to the leader but extends to their carefully constructed network of allies. This "periphery," embedded throughout the system, fosters corruption, nepotism, bribery, and rent-seeking behavior. Critics argue that these regimes prioritize self-preservation over the well-being of their citizens. (Collins, 2009, pp. 262–276),(Bohr, 2004, p. 498)

This perspective suggests that the numerous regional initiatives launched in Central Asia have largely failed because they primarily serve to bolster the domestic legitimacy of these regimes. Even security cooperation is viewed as driven by self-interest rather than regional security concerns. Similarly, ties with external actors are seen as tools for managing internal tensions. (Allison, 2008, pp. 193–197)

2.4.3. Process of Nation Building

The process of nation-building presents another obstacle to initiatives on regional integration. This concept has gained prominence in recent years due to the rise of conflict resolution studies, as state collapse in conflict zones often leads to social crises and renewed conflict. While nation-building and state-building are sometimes used interchangeably, nation-building encompasses a broader and distinct field of study focused on fostering a sense of national identity and cohesion within a population. This emphasis on internal dynamics can create challenges for regional integration, as strong national identities can sometimes impede efforts at regional cooperation and compromise.

Nation-building, defined as a series of actions undertaken by a state's elite to cultivate a sense of national identity among its population, pursues several key objectives. These include overcoming ethnic, sectarian, or social divisions, marginalizing alternative sources of identity that could compete with the newly formed nation, and fostering public loyalty to the established state. The process relies heavily on the implementation of a national ideology, a set of shared values and beliefs that the ruling elite constructs to unify diverse communities within the state's borders. In essence, nation-building transforms a collection of distinct communities lacking a unified identity into a cohesive nation bound by a common narrative and set of values. This identification process often involves prominent figures representing various communities, the creation of shared myths and legends, and the establishment of national symbols like anthems, flags, and a unified language. Additionally, national narratives that emphasize common beliefs and traditions are disseminated to foster a sense of "us" that transcends internal differences. Ultimately, this nation-building exercise aims to cultivate a sense of shared values, mutual understanding, and loyalty to the newly constructed national identity. (Grotenhuis, 2016, pp. 73–80)

While the reliance on a constructed national identity as a source of state legitimacy can be contentious, many argue that fostering a sense of shared national identity (or "super-identity") is essential for nation-building. Prioritizing pre-existing ethnic or social identities over this national identity can indeed hinder the process. However, social and cultural integration among all groups within the nation remains crucial. Discrimination or exclusion of any group will ultimately undermine nation-building efforts. The

challenge lies in striking a balance: fostering a sense of national unity while respecting and integrating the diverse identities that make up the nation. (Hippler, 2005, p. 147)

These countries, formerly Soviet citizens belonging to diverse communities under the umbrella of a Soviet identity, had to forge a new national identity after gaining independence. Due to the abrupt nature of their independence and the lack of a natural historical process, these countries had limited time to solidify their national identity. Consequently, identity construction was driven from the top down by both the former Soviet elites and the new leadership that emerged during the independence process. (Kamrava, 2020, pp. 8–10)

The Soviet strategy of fostering titular elites, or national elites within each Soviet republic, had a lasting impact on regional power dynamics. This strategy, coupled with the existing patron-client relationships among Communist Party nomenklatura (bureaucratic elites), led to the transformation of these nomenklaturas into dominant national elites. The informal networks and adaptable cooperation fostered by these two factors solidified the position of these titular elites even after the Soviet collapse. (Dinç, 2021, pp. 125–126)

Having witnessed and even implemented Soviet nationality policies firsthand, these titular elites understood the challenges of forging a superior national identity. Public skepticism towards such claims further complicated their efforts. Consequently, these post-Soviet states often prioritized a strategy of spatial integration, aiming to collapse the distinction between state and nation by fostering a sense of national unity based on shared territory and governance. Rather than creating supranational regional organizations that could be formed with the new structures expected of them, they have turned to researching, revising and creating their own histories, languages and symbols. (Smith et al., 1998, pp. 144–163)

2.4.4. Intervention Extra Regional Power

The intervention of extra regional powers presents another significant obstacle to initiatives on regional integration. Policies implemented by these actors can have a dual effect on regional integration efforts. While they may offer incentives to regional

integration, they can also introduce obstructive elements that serve the interests of the extra regional power. The nature of these extra regional actors is crucial, as democratic and authoritarian countries are likely to employ different methods to achieve their objectives within the region. To navigate this complex landscape, regional actors must critically analyze the potential positive and negative ramifications of external influence in order to minimize risks and maximize potential benefits.

Examining the positive impacts of extra regional powers, we first encounter their role as facilitators of regional integration. By providing financial, technical, and political support, extra regional actors can encourage regional initiatives and cooperation. Additionally, they can play a pivotal role in fostering regional security and stability. Acting as a deterrent force in regional conflicts, extra regional powers can mediate disputes and promote a stable environment. Furthermore, these actors often serve as significant trade partners for the regions they influence. By leveraging the investment and partnership opportunities offered by extra regional powers, regional states can experience economic growth. Finally, extra regional powers may also seek to promote their own values, such as democratic principles, human rights, and good governance practices.

While extra regional powers can exert positive influences on regional integration, their presence can also introduce negative consequences. These can include imposing agendas aligned with their self-interest, seeking to dominate regional decision-making processes, and restricting the sovereign rights of regional states. In extreme cases, extra regional powers may distort key regional priorities to manipulate outcomes in their favor. This can disrupt regional stability by fostering divergent approaches among member states. Furthermore, extra regional powers may exploit existing regional divisions to advance their own interests, exacerbating tensions and hindering regional solidarity. Over-reliance on extra regional powers by regional states can create vulnerabilities, potentially compromising their sovereignty and hindering their ability to pursue independent policies.

The role of extra regional powers in regional integration is a complex one, characterized by both positive and negative effects. The United States' involvement with Europe exemplifies this paradox. During the European Union's (EU) establishment, the U.S. provided essential support and acted as an incentive for regional cooperation.

Additionally, through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the U.S. bolstered European security, serving as a deterrent force against potential threats.

However, the recent Ukraine war highlights the potential downsides of extra regional influence. While the U.S. may not have directly pushed European states into the conflict, its strong support for Ukraine and its pursuit of a particular agenda in the region arguably placed European security in a precarious position. The war has reached Europe's doorstep, forcing member states to take a more active stance even if they have reservations about the conflict itself. This situation exemplifies how a hegemonic power's actions, even when intended to promote regional security, can inadvertently have destabilizing effects and limit the agency of regional actors.

Instead of fostering intra-regional interactions, a network of relations develops between the countries and extra regional powers. This dynamic further impedes regional integration. Russia is a particularly prominent example of an extra regional power exerting pressure. China (Ziegler, 2014, pp. 603–605) and to a lesser extent the United States, also play this role. This dynamic is perhaps unsurprising for the countries that emerged from the Soviet Union. The dissolution of the Soviet Union did not extinguish Russia's imperial ambitions. The Russian Federation, the successor state, actively seeks to reclaim a mantle of colonial legacy. This is particularly evident in its approach to Central Asia, which Russia views as firmly within its sphere of influence. Here, Russia desires a top-down, all-encompassing role. This ambition manifests in three key objectives: first, providing border defense beyond its own borders to ensure the security of its periphery. Second, becoming the dominant economic actor in the region, likely to exert control over trade and investment. Finally, Russia aims to manage the flow of goods and resources within Central Asia, potentially to its own advantage. (Williams, 2012, pp. 163–166), (Laruelle, 2014, pp. 2–4)

2.4.5. Rivalry for Regional Leadership

Another significant obstacle to regional integration is the competition for regional leadership, as exemplified by the case of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The rise of regionalization initiatives has coincided with an increased emphasis on the role of regional leaders. International organizations often endorse these powers in the belief that

they can promote regional stability. South Africa serves as a potential example of this phenomenon, having demonstrably contributed to regional stability and development. Its economic prowess, population density, and military strength position South Africa as a leading state within the region. Additionally, South Africa's policies reflect its leadership role. Should any regional state pursue policies that disrupt the established order, South Africa is likely to exert pressure to implement corrective measures. (Makinda, 1992, pp. 154–166)

Differentiating between regional powers, hegemons, and leaders is crucial for understanding their diverse approaches to regional influence. While these concepts share similarities, the specific strategies and policies employed by regional actors are shaped by their varying degrees of power. An ambitious state might initially aspire to regional hegemony, aiming to exert dominant influence over the political, economic, and security landscape. However, achieving true hegemony requires a confluence of power elements – military might, economic clout, and cultural influence – that allows them to dictate the regional agenda and set the terms of cooperation in a way that benefits their interests. (Destradi, 2010, pp. 912–920)

In contrast to regional hegemony, regional leadership emerges as a demand for a different kind of influence. Here, an active state takes on a constructive role, promoting cooperation, order, and stability within the region without resorting to dominance or coercion. These states play a facilitating role in the region, often acting as mediators in disputes and fostering dialogue between regional actors. Most importantly, they are pioneers in promoting regional integration initiatives and taking collective action steps. Indeed, the most important source of their legitimacy is their role as incentives for the region to achieve its common goals. (Destradi, 2010, pp. 921–925)

Finally, the concept of regional power occupies a position of less pronounced influence compared to regional hegemons or leaders. Regional powers possess certain elements of influence, such as military strength, economic clout, or a large population, that grant them greater sway than other regional actors. These states exert their influence through bilateral relations or participation in regional institutions, often pursuing their own national interests, even when these interests occasionally align with broader regional goals. (Destradi, 2010, pp. 904–909)

As the two most developed countries in Central Asia after gaining independence, their rivalry for regional leadership has impacted regionalization efforts. This competition even shapes their relationships with extra regional powers. (Bohr, 2003, p. 266), (Bohr, 2004, pp. 494–495) Economic disparity and political development are key factors influencing the power dynamics within Central Asia. While all five Central Asian states gained independence after the Soviet collapse, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have demonstrably outpaced their neighbors – Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan – in terms of political and economic development, positioning themselves as the region's leading powers.

Uzbekistan boasts several factors that contribute to its aspirations for regional leadership. Firstly, it possesses the largest population in Central Asia, with approximately 36 million inhabitants. This demographic advantage translates into significant potential for regional influence. Secondly, Uzbekistan occupies a geographically strategic location at the heart of the region, situated along the historical Silk Road. This rich historical legacy further bolsters its claim to regional prominence. Additionally, Uzbekistan maintains a relatively robust military compared to its neighbors, a capability necessitated by its population size and potentially a tool for asserting regional military influence.(Efegil, 2010, pp. 54–55)

Kazakhstan, on the other hand, leverages its economic strength to pursue regional leadership. Its vast oil and natural gas reserves have fueled its rise as the economic powerhouse of Central Asia. Furthermore, Kazakhstan actively participates in all major regional organizations, positioning itself as a crucial bridge between various regional powers. This active engagement serves as a key strategy in its pursuit of regional leadership. Finally, Kazakhstan's foreign policy, characterized by a multi-vector approach, sets it apart. By fostering cooperation with a diverse range of regional and global actors, including Russia, China, Europe, and the United States, Kazakhstan broadens its political options and enhances its regional influence.(Akkaya, 2018, pp. 21–67)

While both Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan possess attributes that contribute to regional influence, achieving true regional leadership in Central Asia faces significant hurdles. Crucially, establishing regional leadership requires not only internal capabilities but also the acceptance of other regional actors. This necessitates a delicate balance between

fostering internal political and economic strength, demonstrating leadership ambition, and respecting the sovereignty of neighboring states. Achieving this equilibrium will be particularly challenging for Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, whose strict adherence to self-sovereignty creates apprehension about a unified regional leadership structure. (Schoeman, 2003, p. 353) Within regional organizations, initiatives led by each other are often downplayed. For instance, Kazakhstan viewed the Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO) as a tool for Uzbekistan to bolster its own influence. Conversely, Uzbekistan viewed the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) with suspicion, perceiving it as a constraint on its sovereignty and a platform for Kazakhstan to exert dominance. (Bohr, 2003, p. 264)

2.5. Conclusion

Following the Soviet Union's collapse, newly independent Central Asian states embarked on regional integration initiatives which were unsuccessful. This chapter delves into five key explanations for this outcome. Firstly, the lack of economic complementarity among these states impedes regional trade and economic integration. Secondly, the political systems of these countries, often characterized by authoritarianism, can hinder integration by prioritizing national interests over regional goals. Thirdly, the complex processes of nation-building and the creation of strong national identities can create tensions with efforts to establish a shared regional identity, further obstructing regional integration. Fourthly, the influence of powerful extra regional actors like Russia and China disrupts regional dynamics and undermines regionalization efforts. Finally, competition and rivalry among Central Asian states which are Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan for regional dominance, as captured by the "regional leadership conflict perspective," further complicates regional integration endeavors.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Question and Aim

This thesis delves into the intricate dynamics that have hindered the success of regional organizations established by Central Asian states. The history of regional cooperation in Central Asia paints a picture of unrealized potential. Despite numerous attempts, these organizations have largely fallen short of their stated goals. To understand this phenomenon, we must analyze the relationship between the dependent variable – the inability to establish successful regional organizations – and various independent variables hypothesized to influence this outcome. This exploration aims to answer the central research question: "Why have regional organizations formed by Central Asian states been largely unsuccessful in achieving their stated goals?"

Existing literature has proposed different type of approaches for the failure of regional organizations in Central Asia. Scholars have devoted significant research to analyzing the factors contributing to this failure. Their studies highlight various independent variables that may influence the success of regional organizations. One set of explanations focuses on the lack of economic complementarity among Central Asian states. These economies share similar resource bases and industrial structures, limiting opportunities for mutually beneficial trade and investment. Additionally, scholars point to the effect of regime types on regional integration. The dominance of authoritarian regimes, with limited democratic participation and a focus on maintaining internal control, can hinder the development of trust and transparency necessary for effective regional integration. Nation-building challenges also figure prominently in the analysis. The complex and sometimes contested processes of nation-building within Central Asian states can lead to lingering ethnic tensions and border disputes. These issues create friction and make it difficult for countries to develop a sense of shared regional identity, a prerequisite for successful regional cooperation. The role of extra regional powers is

another key theme. The influence of these states can sometimes undermine regional integration efforts. These external actors may pursue their own strategic interests in the region, sometimes exacerbating existing divisions or promoting bilateral relationships that bypass regional organizations. Lastly, regional leadership competition, particularly between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, further complicates the landscape of regional integration.

While these established explanations offer valuable insights, this thesis argues that they only paint part of the picture. Existing scholarship often overlooks a fundamental historical reality: the enduring legacy of colonialism. By focusing solely on contemporary factors, explanations fail to fully understand the historical context that shapes Central Asia's political landscape and continues to influence regional dynamics today.

This thesis contends that the colonial experience, particularly the policies implemented during the Tsarist and Soviet eras in Central Asia, serves as a crucial, underlying cause of the region's struggle to establish effective regional integration. These colonial policies significantly shaped the political, economic, and social structures of Central Asian states, leaving a legacy that continues to resonate in the post-independence era. To substantiate this argument, the thesis employs a historical approach. It will meticulously trace the colonial policies that shaped Central Asian states, analyzing how these policies continue to manifest in the region's contemporary dynamics.

By delving into the historical roots of Central Asia's regionalization challenges, this thesis offers a novel perspective that transcends the limitations of existing explanations. It highlights the profound and enduring impact of colonialism on the region's political landscape, providing a more nuanced understanding of the factors impeding regional cooperation and integration in Central Asia. Recognizing the colonial legacy as a fundamental obstacle is crucial for devising effective strategies to move forward. The concluding section of this thesis will explore how Central Asian states can overcome this historical baggage and foster a sense of regional identity, ultimately leading to a more stable, prosperous, and interconnected future for the region.

In this context, the objectives of the research are listed as follows.

- Understand the existing explanations for the ineffectiveness of regional organizations in Central Asia, including lack of economic complementarity, regime types, nation-building challenges, external influences, and regional leadership competition.
- Examine the historical context of Central Asia, particularly the policies implemented during the Tsarist and Soviet eras.
- Analyze how these colonial policies shaped the political, economic, and social structures of Central Asian states.
- Investigate how the legacies of colonialism continue to manifest in the region's contemporary dynamics.
- Explore how colonialism has contributed to the challenges of establishing successful regional organizations.
- Develop a more nuanced understanding of the factors impeding regional cooperation and integration in Central Asia by highlighting the enduring impact of colonialism.
- Explore potential solutions for mitigating the effects of the colonial legacy on regional cooperation.
- Recommend strategies for fostering a sense of regional identity and promoting a more stable, prosperous future for Central Asia.

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

This research will primarily rely on a historical approach to examine the colonial legacy's impact on regional cooperation in Central Asia. Data collection will involve a multi-method approach, drawing upon various secondary sources to achieve a comprehensive understanding:

- **Academic Literature:** A comprehensive review of existing scholarship on Central Asian history, regionalism, and the legacies of colonialism will be conducted. Scholarly articles, books, and edited volumes published in reputable journals and by established presses will be the primary sources in English, Russian and Turkish. Online databases like JSTOR, Project MUSE, and Google Scholar utilized to identify relevant literature.

- This research primarily employs a qualitative methodology, emphasizing in-depth analysis of textual data to understand the historical legacies of colonialism and their impact on regional cooperation in Central Asia. This approach involves a comprehensive review of existing literature, including scholarly articles, books, and archival documents. These sources will be critically examined and categorized to build a robust foundation for the research. However, the study acknowledges the value of quantitative data in specific sections. Existing statistical studies, particularly those focusing on economic arguments for or against regional integration, will be incorporated to provide a more holistic understanding of the challenges faced by Central Asian states. This multi-method approach ensures that both qualitative and quantitative perspectives are considered for a well-rounded analysis.
- Subsequently, the research will shift its focus to case studies, analyzing specific instances where the legacies of colonialism continue to manifest in regional dynamics. This in-depth examination will allow for the identification of concrete arguments that support the central hypothesis: that the enduring impact of colonialism is a fundamental obstacle to regional cooperation in Central Asia. Throughout the analysis, the research will prioritize the clear articulation and defense of this hypothesis, ensuring a cohesive and well-supported argument.

3.3. Limitations

While this thesis holds the potential to offer a valuable new perspective on regional integration challenges in Central Asia, there are certain limitations to acknowledge. Due to my current role as a foreign affairs representative at the IHH-Humanitarian Relief Foundation, time constraints may impact the depth of research and writing. Ideally, a more comprehensive analysis would incorporate a wider range of sources, particularly Russian-language literature which may provide unique insights into the historical context of the region. Additionally, the chosen topic, which combines the theoretical concepts of regional integration and colonialism in a case study of Central Asia, necessitates careful attention to terminology. While some concepts may appear interchangeable, subtle differences exist and must be precisely applied to ensure a clear and nuanced argument.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

This qualitative research adheres to the highest ethical standards to ensure the responsible and respectful conduct of the study. Since the research relies heavily on existing literature and archival materials, there is no direct involvement with human subjects. However, ethical considerations remain paramount in ensuring the accuracy and responsible presentation of the findings.

First, the research will maintain the utmost intellectual honesty by meticulously citing all sources and acknowledging the limitations of the qualitative approach. This includes transparently discussing potential biases within the existing literature and the challenges of drawing definitive causal relationships based solely on textual analysis. Furthermore, the research will strive for a balanced and objective perspective, avoiding the perpetuation of stereotypes or the misrepresentation of historical events. By adhering to these principles, the research aims to contribute meaningfully to the field of regional cooperation studies in Central Asia.

CHAPTER IV

COLONIAL PERIOD OF CENTRAL ASIA AND ITS LEGACY

4.1. Introduction

Having examined the failed attempts at regional integration by Central Asian states following independence, and the explanations provided in existing literature for these failures, this chapter now shifts its focus to the central thesis of this work: the enduring legacy of colonialism as the root cause of the region's struggles with effective regionalization.

The chapter begins by addressing the question of whether the Central Asian states can be considered colonized territories. Following this clarification, we will develop our arguments in detail. Firstly, we will explore the argument that inherited security problems stem from the colonial era. Secondly, we will examine how the region's economic structure was reconstructed and transformed as a legacy of colonialism. Thirdly, the chapter will analyze the persistence of authoritarian tendencies as a product of the colonial past. Fourthly, we will investigate the impact of colonial policies on the formation of regional identities. Finally, the analysis will delve into the argument that weak statehood, itself a consequence of colonialism, has led to a shift in foreign policy priorities.

4.2. Central Asia Colonized?

The question of whether a colonial order existed in Central Asia is a crucial starting point. A critical analysis of colonialism necessitates a preliminary examination of its definition. However, achieving a universally accepted definition remains elusive, as the colonial experience manifests with distinct local dynamics across diverse regions. (Hupe & Hazard, 1958, p. 470) Broadly construed, colonialism signifies a form of domination,

entailing the control exercised by individuals or groups over the territory and/or behavior of others. Theoretical frameworks further shape our understanding: Marxist scholarship emphasizes the economic underpinnings of colonialism, while anthropological studies shed light on its cultural transformation processes.(Horvath, 1972, pp. 45–46)

The attempt to understand Russian colonialism through the lens of the above definition often leads to confusion with imperialism. While these terms are frequently used interchangeably, a closer examination reveals a key distinction. Here, focusing on the impact of capitalism provides a clearer understanding of imperialism. Key figures like Vladimir Lenin redefined both imperialism and capitalism. The abundance of capital generated by finance capitalism created a situation where domestic economies, particularly in developed nations, lacked sufficient labor opportunities to fully utilize this capital. This surplus capital, therefore, sought expansion into colonies or peripheral regions characterized by abundant labor and resource potential. Through such investments, these external actors aimed to propel their own economic growth. (Lenin, 1995) The reason for the particular confusion here is that imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism, is seen by European industrial and finance capital as rising on the shoulders of colonialism and as the end point of colonialism.

In the contemporary world, a distinction can be drawn between colonialism and imperialism. Colonialism refers to the direct seizure of territory, the appropriation of material resources, and the exploitation of labor. It also involves interference in the political and cultural structures of the colonized region or nation. Imperialism, on the other hand, encompasses a broader global system. However, the term "imperialism" carries significant ambiguity, encompassing both economic and political connotations. If we define imperialism primarily through its political structure, then the granting of political independence can be seen as the dismantling of empire and the end of imperialism itself. Under this definition, the loss of direct political control marks the demise of the imperial system. However, alternative definitions emphasize the economic dimensions of imperialism. Here, imperialism is viewed as an economic system based on market penetration and control. From this perspective, political changes, such as the granting of independence, hold less weight. In fact, such changes may simply redefine the imperial relationship. The case of "American imperialism" exemplifies this point. The United States wields significant military and economic power globally, though it often

lacks direct political control over territories. (Loomba, 2015, pp. 26–28) The debate surrounding the distinction between colonialism and imperialism finds particular relevance in discussions of Central Asia's post-colonial history. Following their independence from the Soviet Union, the Central Asian states entered a new era. However, the nature of their relationship with the Russian Federation remains a topic of debate. Russia has employed various instruments to maintain a distinct model of engagement with each of these newly independent nations.

Having established the key features of colonialism, the next step is to assess whether Tsarist and Soviet policies in Central Asia align with these indicators. This analysis necessitates a critical examination of these historical periods through the lens of colonial domination. Here, when we define colonialism as a system of control exerted by one group over another, encompassing both territorial dominion and the regulation of behavior we are confronted with a number of variables.

- Loss of sovereignty in the geography owned by the colonized
- Changing the economic structure through economic domination
- Drawing the economic structure into a complex relationship with the mother land
- Administrative arrangements for better management of the region by the mother land
- Implement assimilation policies in the region
- Carry out colonization activities in the region
- Expressing a policy of civilization in the region

A review of historical evidence suggests that Russia's occupation of Central Asia can be interpreted through the lens of colonialism. This interpretation is supported by several key factors, including: claims of dominion established through military force, economic restructuring designed to benefit the mother land, and the imposition of radical cultural changes through Russification policies targeting historical narratives, language, and religion. Additionally, administrative changes, particularly those involving the redrawing of borders and the segmentation of ethnic groups, further bolster this interpretation. The presence of a significant colonial settler movement from Russia and the invocation of a civilizing mission to legitimize Russian actions. Evidence suggests Central Asia was subjected to colonial dominance. (Khalid, 2007, pp. 466–469), (Hirsch, 2000, pp. 201–

205), (Northrop, 2003, pp. 9–23), (Michaels, 2003, pp. 23–42) (Kandiyoti, 2002, pp. 281–297)

The roots of Russian expansion into Central Asia can be traced back to the reign of Peter the Great (1682-1725). Peter recognized the strategic importance of the region, particularly the Kazakh Khanates, as a gateway to India and a potential source of wealth, especially gold. (Doğan, 2004, p. 289) While initial plans were formulated during his reign, it was under Nicholas I (1825-1855) that a more systematic policy of conquest took shape. This policy emphasized the concept of "civilizing" the region, justifying Russian intervention. (Saray, 1990, pp. 2–3) The conquest of Central Asia proceeded swiftly due to several factors. The region lacked a unified political entity, being fragmented into competing Khanates. These Khanates were frequently embroiled in warfare, weakening their collective resistance. Additionally, their isolation from global trade routes and limited military technology further hampered their ability to resist the well-equipped Russian forces. Following the successful conquest, the Tsarist regime embarked on a series of measures aimed at consolidating its control. Administrative structures were reorganized to ensure Russian dominance.

The traditional ruling class was marginalized, and a new administrative apparatus staffed by Russians was established. (Hayit, 1995, p. 159) Russification efforts in Central Asia during the Tsarist era placed a significant emphasis on education. Policies were implemented to distance the population from their national identity and assimilate them into Russian culture. The Orthodox Church and its missionaries, particularly Ilminsky, played a crucial role in promoting these policies. Ilminsky advocated for limitations on religious practices and even proposed an alphabet change to sever Muslim ties with Islam. While his attempts at religious conversion were likely unsuccessful, the Soviets later implemented his alphabet reforms. Initially, education was conducted solely in Russian. However, due to low enrollment, the authorities adopted Ilminsky's strategies and began offering education in local languages.

This strategy aimed to attract students from traditional Islamic schools (madrassas) and build a network of local collaborators who could support Russian administrative control. Missionary activity intensified during the Tsarist period, aiming to create a homogenous Russified society. Efforts to limit the spread of Islam included restrictions on religious

practices and attempts to alienate Muslims from their faith. The ultimate goal was to convert them to Orthodox Christianity. (Adilbayev, n.d., p. 79) Economic exploitation, particularly in the cotton trade, was a key driver of Russia's full-scale occupation of Turkestan. The potential for increased cotton trade and removing barriers to Indian markets were significant factors in Russia's decision to fully occupy the region. This is evidenced by the eightfold increase in the price of Central Asian cotton within four years of its introduction to the Russian market. However, cotton only constituted 31% of Russian imports from Central Asia. (Çetin, 1997, pp. 31–34)

Russia also implemented a substantial resettlement policy in the region. Estimates suggest that by 1911, approximately 1.95 million people had been resettled there. Many of these individuals had recently been freed from serfdom and remained impoverished despite their liberation, making their resettlement less problematic. However, the primary motivation behind Russian resettlement efforts was to alter the region's demographics, promote Russification, and secure land use. (Polat, 2009, pp. 18–20) While these policies also triggered the beginnings of national and religious awakening in the region, this nascent movement would be interrupted by the rise of Soviet power.

Colonial activities passed to the Soviets with the fall of Tsarism. The collapse of Tsarism in 1917 fundamentally reshaped the political landscape of Central Asia. This event can be understood within the context of simmering societal discontent with the existing regime. Pre-existing grievances, amplified by the humiliating defeat in the Russo-Japanese War (1905), fueled the revolutionary fervor that erupted in 1905. The subsequent strains of World War I further eroded the Tsarist government's legitimacy, culminating in the February Revolution of 1917. (Ekici, 2017, p. 265)

Central to this study is the role of Bolshevik ideology, particularly its emphasis on self-determination and the liberation of oppressed peoples. The Bolsheviks strategically utilized these concepts to undermine Tsarist rule, which relied on a vast, multi-ethnic empire. Recognizing the potential for dissent among the colonized peoples of Central Asia, the Bolsheviks issued decrees guaranteeing religious freedom alongside the right to self-determination. This strategy aimed to preempt potential uprisings fueled by resentment towards the Tsarist regime's colonial policies. (Şarşekov & Sharshekov, 2017, p. 221)

The establishment of the Soviet Union on December 30, 1922, marked the beginning of efforts to integrate Central Asia into the new socialist state. A key objective, often referred to as the creation of "homo sovieticus" (a new Soviet man/woman), necessitated the development of administrative systems that aligned with Soviet ideology. This ideology, inherently opposed to nationalism, initially embraced a "homeland" concept within newly drawn administrative borders. Each nationality was ostensibly tied to a specific territory within the USSR. However, the implementation of the nationalities policy in Central Asia proved to be contradictory. (Smith et al., 1998, p. 139) Over time, Russian nationalism came to occupy a privileged position within the supposedly egalitarian framework, despite official pronouncements of equality among nationalities.

The year 1924 marked a shift in Soviet policy towards Central Asia with the rise of Joseph Stalin. This new approach emphasized nation-building initiatives. As part of this strategy, the region was divided into five administrative units, ostensibly based on ethnic affiliations. (Şahin, 2023a, p. 34) The concept of the nation-state, with its emphasis on clear ethnic boundaries, was a relatively recent development in world history. Traditionally, Central Asia was characterized by regional empires and states that encompassed diverse ethnicities. These entities often sought to maintain a harmonious social order despite cultural differences.

Soviet leaders recognized that administrative reforms alone were insufficient to achieve their goals of creating a "homo sovieticus" and eradicating perceived backwardness in Central Asia. They envisioned a radical and swift cultural revolution that would fundamentally transform the minds of the population. This ambitious project aimed to establish a social structure amenable to significant change. (Khalid, 2006, p. 238) However, the 1930s witnessed a shift in policy. The initial focus on cultural transformation became intertwined with Stalin's growing nationalism, leading to a prioritization of Russification. This policy, seemingly contradictory to earlier pronouncements of cultural equality, justified the elimination of any groups perceived as obstacles to Soviet domination. The program was framed as "indigenization" and "radicalization," but in reality, it served to suppress dissent and consolidate control. (Özel, 2015, p. 108)

The formation of Soviet Central Asia involved the installation of pro-Russian communist elites in positions of power. This strategy aimed to solidify Soviet control over the region. However, this approach conflicted with the deeply ingrained Islamic identity of the majority population. Islam served as a unifying factor encompassing various sub-identities within Central Asia. Soviet policies sought to undermine and ultimately eliminate this religious identity in favor of a homogenized Soviet national identity. (Davutoğlu, 2014, p. 466) These efforts included the resettlement of Russians into Central Asia (Can, 2022, p. 2608) and the deportation of specific ethnic groups deemed potentially disloyal. Deportations, such as those targeting Crimean Tatars and Meskhetian Turks, involved immense hardship and fundamentally disrupted regional demographics. Replacing deported populations with Russians further strained social cohesion within Central Asia. Many of the deported groups were labeled traitors, adding to existing tensions in their new settlements. (Ro'i, 1991, p. 127)

Soviet language policies in Central Asia aimed to distance the region from its Islamic heritage. (Pamir Dietrich, 2011, p. 466) The initial step involved a shift from the Arabic script to a Latin alphabet. This reform was justified by portraying the Arabic script as complex and hindering literacy rates. However, this approach resulted in the loss of a significant body of Arabic literature, depriving the region of an important cultural resource. Additionally, the Latin script, designed to reflect spoken languages and regional variations, inadvertently contributed to the solidification of linguistic distinctions among ethnically diverse groups in Central Asia. Recognizing the limitations of Latinization, Soviet authorities implemented another script change in 1936, transitioning to Cyrillic alphabets based on the phonetic peculiarities of each Central Asian language. This further accentuated linguistic differences between the various Soviet republics in the region. (Schlyter, 2001, p. 129)

Initially, Soviet authorities in Central Asia adopted relatively moderate policies towards Islam, aiming to consolidate control in the post-revolutionary period. However, this approach conflicted with the long-term goal of weakening Muslim identity, which was perceived as a strong obstacle to reshaping the region according to Soviet ideals. These policies were implemented gradually due to the deeply ingrained nature of Islamic beliefs. Soviet efforts to secularize Central Asia included the prohibition of religious education, the promotion of secular schools that instilled Soviet values, and the suppression of religious practices. This suppression manifested in the persecution of religious scholars,

the destruction of mosques, and the closure of madrasas (Islamic schools). These measures aimed to sever the connection between new generations and Islamic traditions. Ultimately, the Soviets sought to control and gradually diminish the influence of religion in the region. (Şahin, 2023b, pp. 39–40)

4.3. Effects of Colonisation to Failure

4.3.1. Inherited Security Problems

The legacies of colonialism continue to pose significant security challenges for many post-colonial states. The administrative and political structures imposed by colonial powers often disregarded pre-existing social and political realities, leading to long-term instability. This is particularly evident in Africa, where arbitrary borders drawn during the colonial era have contributed to ongoing border disputes, ethnic tensions, and economic disparities like energy crisis in Nigeria. (Bello & Nwaeke, 2023, pp. 190–197) These issues, largely dormant during colonial rule, emerged as pressing security concerns for newly independent states. (Ikome, 2012, p. 4), (Alesina et al., 2011, pp. 249–252), (Posner, 2003, pp. 127–128) A similar situation can be seen in the border dispute between Afghanistan and Pakistan in the South Asian region. (Mahmud, 2010, pp. 48–53) After gaining their independence, Central Asian countries also faced 4 security challenges: border, ethnic, identity and water.

The border problems in Central Asia stem from an understanding that began with the administrative occupation of the region during the Tsarist era and continued under the Soviet Union. The territory of Turkestan, occupied during the Tsarist era, became an administrative unit called Russian Turkestan. However, the administrative structure and political status underwent significant changes throughout this period. (Hiro, 2009, pp. 32–48) After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the five newly independent republics sought to safeguard their sovereignty within the defined geographical boundaries. Border lines, in particular, became a critical aspect of their sovereignty. These artificial borders, drawn during the Soviet era without considering economic, social, ethnic, or geographical factors, have become a source of conflict between the countries. The Fergana Valley, with its dense population and ethnic diversity, is the most prominent example of these conflicts. (Rahimov & Urazaeva, 2005, pp. 16–20) In fact, the most significant border-

related anomalies in Central Asia occur in this region. Fertile throughout history, the Fergana Valley is known for its concentrated population and ethnic complexities. (*Central Asia*, 2013)

A second challenge is ethnic issues, which are also intertwined with border problems. The most prominent example is the presence of a significant Russian diaspora in the region, particularly in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. This minority population provides Russia with a rationale for involvement in regional politics. (Pieper, 2020, pp. 761–764), (Heleniak, 2004, pp. 102–104) This ethnic factor presents a double-edged sword for regionalization efforts. On the one hand, it necessitates the inclusion of Russia, an external actor, as a key player. On the other hand, Russia's involvement can complicate the nation-building processes of these newly independent states. A further challenge arising from ethnic issues is the presence of enclaves and exclaves within the region. These are pockets of territory belonging to one state that are geographically located within another. The ethnic makeup of these enclaves and exclaves often differs significantly from the surrounding population, creating a volatile situation prone to frequent conflict. (Gabdulhakov, 2013, pp. 2–4)

Countries in the region face a very real threat of water scarcity in the coming years. This water crisis is compounded by energy problems. There are two main issues related to water use: one impacting agricultural areas and the other related to energy resources. The connection between water and energy is clear: approximately 91% of Central Asia's total water consumption is used for agriculture. (Yıldız, 2016, p. 3) This situation is a legacy of the Soviet era, when the region was primarily used for agricultural production. Planning during this period prioritized a unified state, leading to the development of agricultural areas and irrigation systems based on this singular focus. Regions with more abundant water resources provided irrigation water in the summer months to areas with limited water but intensive agriculture. In winter, this exchange continued, with resource-rich states like those with oil reserves allocating fossil fuels to water-rich regions. (Zakhirova, 2013, p. 1997) However, since gaining independence, developing a common system for managing water resources and securing fossil fuel prices has proven difficult. This is due to a number of factors, including: irrigating agricultural land, negotiating fuel prices with a central authority, differing economic situations between countries, population disparities, border disputes, and climate change.

Central Asian countries possess different energy resources and production systems. Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan boast fossil fuel reserves and export capabilities, while Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan rely on imports. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, with abundant hydropower resources, utilize these resources to meet their domestic energy needs. However, the seasonal variations in water availability, as mentioned earlier, exacerbate this issue. Hydroelectric power generation capacity decreases during the summer due to reduced water resources. This decline in water, which represents a significant portion of their electricity production, leads to power outages. The unpredictable and uncertain annual rainfall further complicates resolving this challenge.

While the amount of water resources remains stagnant or even declines, the region's population and development are increasing, leading to a concurrent rise in energy demand. This situation is particularly acute for Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which had more water resources during the Soviet era. They used to store excess water during the fall and winter seasons to meet their needs in the summer when water scarcity is most severe. Additionally, during this period, they shared water with other regional countries in exchange for fulfilling other energy needs, particularly coal and electricity. (Central Asia: Water and Conflict, 2002, pp. 13–19)

4.3.2. Remaking The Economic Structure

Inheriting a colonial-style economic structure presents a significant challenge for newly independent states. Unlike structures designed for national development, colonial economies prioritize resource extraction and control by the dominant power. This creates a stark disconnect, leading to economic failure upon independence if the structure remains unchanged. Unfortunately, adapting to a new economic model is a complex process.

Central Asian countries offer a prime example. Previously governed by a centralized command economy under Soviet rule, these states faced the unexpected task of transitioning to a market-based system. While the command economy provided some degree of stability, it lacked the dynamism of capitalism, ultimately hindering long-term prosperity. Independence, therefore, triggered a state crisis. Unlike the more typical

transition from authoritarian capitalism to liberal democracies, Central Asia required a complete restructuring of both the state and its economic foundation. (Beissinger & Young, 2002, pp. 466–473), (Nag et al., 2015, pp. 10–12), (Gunes, 2004, pp. 315–323) This transition has proven arduous due to the lack of robust institutions and insufficient resources to support economic reform. The water and energy crises, arguably the most significant state crises faced by these countries, can be directly linked to the inefficiencies of the inherited command economy model.

The economic policies implemented by the Soviet Union in Central Asia were heavily influenced by the command economy model. Following socialist principles, the initial step involved the nationalization of land throughout the region. This policy was formalized through the Land Decree, which abolished private land ownership. State-owned farms, known as sovkhozes, were established on this newly nationalized land, employing workers at low wages. Subsequently, the Soviet government adopted a collectivization policy, transitioning to a system of kolkhozes. Under this system, confiscated lands were leased to groups of peasants who were expected to generate income for the state. Central to the Soviet economic model was pervasive state control across all sectors. The State Planning Committee (Gosplan) played a crucial role in managing production quotas for enterprises. Furthermore, the State Distribution Committee (Gossnab) oversaw the distribution of goods, while Goskomstat (State Committee on Statistics) maintained official economic data. (Şahin, 2023a, pp. 40–42)

Despite possessing rich energy resources, Soviet economic policy in Central Asia prioritized cotton production. This singular focus, often referred to as a "cotton monoculture," limited economic diversification and development in the region. While Central Asia boasted energy potential, it was not exploited to its full capacity. The region was primarily seen as a source of raw materials to meet the grain needs of the Soviet Union. This prioritization of agricultural output also led to unsustainable water management practices, creating long-term water scarcity issues. Furthermore, the emphasis on cotton production hindered industrialization and overall economic modernization in Central Asia. As a consequence, the region remained the least developed within the Soviet Union throughout its existence. By the 1980s, this neglect resulted in a significant economic disparity between Central Asia and other Soviet republics. (Scarborough, 2021, pp. 1–11) Even Nazarbayev, proud of the USSR's

economic achievements, complained in 1991: 'How did we confuse ends with means and turn people into inputs for an all-consuming economic monstrosity (makhina) that demands more and more while giving almost nothing in return? (Nazarbayev, 1991, p. 56)

4.3.3. Authoritarian Regimes as Colonial Legacy

A tendency towards authoritarian leadership is often observed in newly independent states following the dismantling of colonial empires. This phenomenon is not unique to Africa. The emergence of modern African states can be attributed, in part, to the enduring institutional legacies established by colonial powers on the continent. (Mamdani, 1996, pp. 25–27)

Leadership in Central Asia, even though democratic elections, often exhibits authoritarian tendencies. These leaders seek to maintain their power within a system they have established that includes themselves and a loyal inner circle. The Soviet legacy is a key factor behind the authoritarian approach of these leaders. Since the 1920s, Soviet control over the region involved the creation of national elites loyal to the regime, a process known as cadre indigenization. This policy laid the groundwork for the current situation. (Ilkhamov, 2002, p. 321) Two aspects of the Soviet legacy stand out. First, border demarcation policies during the Soviet era may have contributed to a more authoritarian understanding of sovereignty among these leaders. Second, patronage networks established under the Soviet regime, often based on kinship or shared interests, continue to influence resource allocation today. (Tunçer-Kılavuz, 2009, p. 331) This familiarity with such networks may explain the relative tolerance of these leaders by the populations of the newly established states. (Cummings & Hinnebusch, 2011, pp. 181–188)

Prior to the Tsarist and Soviet eras, the concept of sovereignty based on national identity was absent in Central Asia. This lack of national consciousness also hindered the development of national borders. Instead, social structures revolved around loyalties to clans, kinship groups, regions, and tribes. While these regional affiliations varied, belonging to identities other than national ones dominated. For instance, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan emphasized clan affiliation, Kyrgyzstan prioritized regional identity, and

Uzbekistan and Tajikistan relied on *uruğ* or regional ties. (Tunçer-Kılavuz, 2009, p. 324) Studies investigating these intricate networks offer insights into this set of relationships and the underlying conceptual frameworks. Although these structures no longer function in the same way as during feudal times, they continue to exert a renewed and nuanced influence on the region's political systems, making them challenging for outsiders to comprehend.

This was expressed in an article written by Islam Karimov as follows. State structures often reflect the ethnic composition of their underlying populations. *Uruğ*, a concept rooted in shared birthplace, exemplifies this phenomenon. It prioritizes the advancement of members from specific regions within the state bureaucracy and administrative levels, emphasizing geographical origin over shared interests or ideological convictions. The rise of "regional identity," where individuals' sense of self is primarily tied to their birthplace, forms the foundation of regionalism and ethno-tribalism. This phenomenon is particularly evident in some Central Asian countries, where regional affiliation can supersede national identity. This can be attributed to the ongoing development of national identity in these regions, where factors that unify nations are still solidifying. Furthermore, ethnic diversity persists in many countries, with populations divided not only by dialect but also by socioeconomic status. These factors contribute to the continued presence of regionalism and tribalism.

The primary reason for this situation was the Soviet government's struggle to manage tensions among ethnic groups and peoples that had persisted since the khanate period. The Soviet approach, characterized by attempts at "internationalization" and promoting national egalitarianism, ultimately failed to achieve unification. Instead, it exacerbated fragmentation. Moreover, state socialism, with its centralized planning and resource distribution, inadvertently facilitated the persistence and growth of regionalism and tribal affiliations. These pre-existing social structures adapted and gained renewed significance during the Soviet era. High-ranking officials controlled wealth distribution, resulting in a system of patronage. Local government employees, businesses, and other organizations sought favor with these influential figures. Consequently, personal loyalty often took precedence over merit, as reflected in the saying, 'It doesn't matter whether he is good or bad, a thief or honest—he is one of ours. (Kerimov, 2002, pp. 625–627)

In his article, Kerimov highlighted the risks associated with a particular approach and underscored the need to address these issues. However, he either failed to dismantle this system or chose not to do so, resulting in field studies yielding results contrary to his assertions. Notably, Kılavuz's research demonstrates that regionalism persists in both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, permeating political and social spheres. These relationships appear to be influenced by varying interests and dimensions. Specifically, the rivalry between Samarkand and Tashkent persists in Uzbekistan, while tensions between Khujand and Kokand endure in Tajikistan. (Tunçer-Kılavuz, 2009, pp. 327–328)

The persistence of these relations, while concerning, is even more problematic due to their underlying authoritarian and protectionist nature. This configuration has become a fundamental obstacle to the distribution of power within these countries. Furthermore, the Soviet involvement adds another layer of complexity. Functioning as a rigid, top-down administrative apparatus, the Soviet influence undoubtedly shaped the authoritarian character of these regimes.

4.3.4. Nation Building and Identity Problems

One of the most significant regional challenges following the decolonization period has been identity crises faced by newly independent states. This crisis finds its roots in the historical power dynamic between colonizer and colonized. As Edward Said argued, our worldview, encompassing both geography and culture, is shaped by underlying conceptual frameworks. While cultures themselves are concrete realities, it's the abstract comparison of cultures that constructs cultural identities within social, economic, and political hierarchies. Within this realm of ideas, the colonizer forged their own identity in opposition to the colonized, constructing the "other" as the target of colonization. (Said, 2000, pp. 71–74) In the process of colonization, imagery is often constructed to legitimize subjugation and define the colonized population. These images typically portray the colonized as possessing negative characteristics, such as ignorance or indolence. This discursive strategy serves to establish a binary opposition between the colonizer and the colonized, positioning the colonizer as superior and the colonized as inferior. Through this psychological manipulation, the colonized may internalize this constructed identity, reinforcing the power dynamic inherent in the colonial system. (Fanon, 1986, p. 108)

Colonization is predicated on the assumption of cultural and civilizational superiority. To achieve control, extract economic benefit, and enact a supposed civilizing mission, colonizers impose their own cultural frameworks, often leading to the fragmentation of indigenous cultures. These imposed values and ways of life are then defined and constructed through the colonizer's ideological lens. The resulting interpretation of the colonized society becomes limited and distorted, reflecting the power dynamics inherent in the colonial system. (Memmi, 1974, pp. 47–62)

The process of constructing a national identity remains a complex undertaking in these regions. Changes in language, religion, and culture can both separate these countries and lead them to pursue divergent goals. Central Asia exemplifies this phenomenon. The root of this challenge lies in the policies of assimilation or Russification implemented by both the Tsarist and Soviet regimes. While economic, administrative, and military control were established to secure dominance in the region, these efforts were deemed insufficient for lasting control. To achieve permanent domination, the social and cultural fabric of Central Asia was also targeted. This policy, referred to as the "reconstruction of Central Asia," aimed to reshape the region according to a Soviet definition of identity. Central Asian values, institutions, and religion were deemed incompatible with this vision, leading to Soviet efforts to radically transform them. (Hofmeister, 2016, pp. 414–440) These efforts took three main forms: creating political divisions between Central Asian countries, fragmenting the region along cultural lines, attempts to erase the historical memory of the region's peoples, isolation from culturally and linguistically connected geographies, and finally, the denigration and destruction of Islamic institutions. (Shahrani, 1993, pp. 128–131)

The lingering effects of historical challenges in Central Asia have hindered the development of a unified identity among various populations. Linguistic divisions, cultural differentiation, and the decline of a shared religious foundation have fragmented these communities. Furthermore, the historical narrative that previously bound them together has faded into the background, creating a sense of disconnection from their common past.

4.3.5. State Crisis: Problem of Weak State

In the aftermath of colonialism, many newly independent states experience a period of state crisis, often resulting in the emergence of weak states. This fragility can be further compounded by pre-existing security and governance challenges inherited from the colonial era, ultimately contributing to regional instability. Weak states are typically characterized by a confluence of factors: geographical or resource limitations, an authoritarian ruling elite focused on self-preservation and control, and an often-strained capacity to manage both internal societal pressures and external influences.

The foreign policy choices of weak states are demonstrably shaped by the constraints of their circumstances. Omnibalancing, a theoretical concept, provides a useful framework for understanding these policies. Unlike realist approaches that focus solely on external threats, omnibalancing recognizes the significance of internal threats in a weak state's decision-making calculus. This broadened perspective acknowledges that both internal and external security concerns influence weak states' foreign policy. Notably, while susceptible to systemic shifts, weak states, prioritizing self-preservation, also strive to maintain control over their domestic agendas. (Sari, 2008, pp. 60–62)

The omnibalancing approach represents a distinct foreign policy strategy adopted by weak states. Unlike traditional balancing tactics that target primary threats, omnibalancing prioritizes appeasement of secondary adversaries and alliance formation. This prioritization stems from the ruling elite's primary objective: self-preservation. Domestic politics, inherently more volatile and threatening to the elite's grip on power, shapes their strategic calculus. Authoritarian leaders who consolidate domestic control prioritize external partners willing to bolster their regime's stability, engaging in rational calculations to identify such patrons. (Sari, 2008, pp. 85–90) Effective leadership necessitates a multi-scalar perspective, encompassing local, regional, and international considerations. Examining decision-making frameworks can further illuminate this point. Within a balance-of-power approach, a leader concerned with systemic stability might prioritize questions regarding the policy's impact on national power or identify external allies for defense against external threats. Conversely, an omnibalancing approach may prompt leaders to evaluate how a policy safeguards their own position or identify external actors who can provide security against both internal and external challenges. (David, 1991, pp. 235–238)

Gaining independence as weak states following a legacy of colonial policies, Central Asian nations have adopted a selective approach to foreign policy alliances. Their state fragility has driven a strong emphasis on national sovereignty, often resulting in authoritarian leadership. Caught between internal threats and the need for external partnerships, these countries have prioritized relations with Russia, followed by China, while maintaining a more measured engagement with the US and European states. This strategic maneuvering has also served to bolster their regional influence.

The emergence of weak states, often a consequence of post-colonial state crises, carries significant regional implications beyond alliances with external powers. This fragility, compounded by inherited security and governance challenges, can foster a volatile regional environment. Competition for resources and regional influence intensifies in such contexts, potentially escalating into conflict. Notably, these weak states, shaped by the legacies of colonialism, may engage in regional rivalries that mirror an "omnibalancing" strategy. In this approach, states not only compete to become regional leaders and maximize their own interests, but also seek to become the most prominent power in the region, attracting the attention of international actors. This dynamic is arguably at play in the power struggle between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Both states, weakened by the effects of colonialism, are said to be increasingly drawn to China as a potential regional partner, alongside Russia whose influence may be waning in the wake of the Ukraine war.

4.4. Conclusion

This chapter delved into the historical roots of Central Asia's struggle to establish effective regional organizations. It argues that the enduring legacy of colonialism is a primary factor hindering regional cooperation. This section will first examine the colonial period and its lasting consequences on the region. It will then analyze how these historical influences have manifested in the post-independence era, impeding regional integration efforts. First of all it begins by examining the security challenges inherited from the colonial era. The analysis then contends that the enduring legacy of colonialism is the primary factor impeding regional integration. Then the chapter addresses the disruption of economic structures as a result of colonial policies. This disruption, it argues, is the root cause of the challenges in achieving economic complementarity within the region. Thirdly, the

analysis explores the impact of colonialism on the region's political landscape. It demonstrates how the colonial period fostered and sustained the development of authoritarian regimes, a trend that has persisted into the post-independence era. Fourthly, the chapter investigates the consequences of colonial assimilation policies on national identity formation. This section argues that the fracturing of pre-colonial identities during the Tsarist and Soviet eras continues to pose obstacles to the construction of a shared regional identity in the contemporary period. The subsequent chapter builds upon this analysis by arguing that the colonial experience fostered state weakness in the region. This weakness, it contends, resulted from state crises that empowered authoritarian leaders who shaped foreign policies about alignment with extra regional powers and relations in the region in ways that further hinder regional integration.



CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The post-World War II era witnessed a surge in the creation of regional organizations. These entities played a critical role in fostering peace and promoting economic development within their respective regions. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, newly independent Central Asian states faced a plethora of challenges. In response, they embarked on a series of initiatives aimed at establishing regional organizations to address these challenges. However, these efforts have yielded limited success, with many established organizations either dissolving or failing to achieve their objectives. It is noteworthy that a significant number of these organizations involve partnerships with actors from outside the Central Asian region.

This thesis has argued that the enduring legacy of colonialism is the primary factor hindering the success of regional cooperation initiatives undertaken by Central Asian states following the Soviet collapse. Five prevailing explanations for this failure were examined, including economic incompatibility, authoritarian political systems, national identity struggles, external influence, and competition for regional leadership. However, this thesis posits that these factors are secondary consequences of the historical processes of Tsarist and Soviet rule in Central Asia.

The first explanation, the concept of economic complementarity, often cited as an obstacle to cooperation in Central Asia, suggests a fundamental incompatibility between the economies of the region's states. This perspective is primarily derived from analyses of bilateral trade data. In this study, the main reason for the identified situation is presented by changing the perspective. It argues that this economic mismatch stems from the period of Russian colonization period. The Soviet Union's economic planning prioritized resource extraction and centralized control, neglecting the development of diversified and interconnected economies within Central Asia. Essentially, Soviet development policies were geared towards the needs of the central government, hindering

the creation of a more regionally integrated economic landscape. This unbalanced model continues to pose a challenge for efforts towards regional economic cooperation.

A second explanation centers on the authoritarian nature of Central Asian political regimes. This perspective posits that regime survival is the primary driver of all political actions, thereby hindering regional integration efforts. While this concern holds merit, a broader historical lens reveals deeper roots to the region's authoritarianism. The Soviet Union fostered the development of national elites loyal to the central regime, disrupting the region's delicate network of sub-identities and administrative divisions based on nationality. This intervention laid the groundwork for the persistence of authoritarian tendencies in the post-Soviet era. Recognizing this historical context is crucial for identifying strategies that promote democratic governance and regional cooperation.

The third statement examines the challenges of nation-building and identity construction in Central Asia. The newly independent states inherited artificial borders drawn during the colonial era, which often ignored ethnic and cultural realities. These artificial divisions continue to fuel tensions and hinder the development of a common regional identity. Looking at the situation from a broader perspective, colonial policies of assimilation and Russification aimed at erasing pre-existing identities are the main cause of nation-building processes in Central Asian states.

A fourth explanation focuses on the role of extra-regional powers, particularly Russia, in shaping regional dynamics. This perspective contends that the policies pursued by extra-regional powers with interests in Central Asia, aimed at increasing their influence, hinder regional integration efforts. In contrast, a historical perspective emphasizes the enduring consequences of the post-colonial state crisis. This argument suggests that the emergence of weak states in Central Asia, shaped by the challenges of the post-colonial period, has influenced their foreign policy priorities. Consequently, these states may prioritize cultivating relationships with extra regional powers over fostering deeper intra-regional cooperation, perpetuating a cycle of fragility.

The fifth explanation emphasizes the regional leadership competition between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. This approach argues that regional leadership competition hinders integration efforts in the region. However, weak states that emerged in the post-

colonial era with state crises not only compete to become regional leaders and maximize their own interests, but also seek to become the most prominent power in the region, attracting the attention of international actors.

Through a historical approach, this thesis has demonstrated how colonial policies shaped the region's political, economic, and social structures. It has further explored how this legacy continues to manifest in post-independence dynamics, thereby impeding efforts towards regional cooperation and integration. By delving into the historical roots of Central Asia's regionalization struggles, this thesis offers a novel perspective that transcends the limitations of existing explanations.

This thesis argues that the enduring legacy of colonialism in Central Asia manifests in several key challenges that continue to impede regional cooperation. These challenges include security crises stemming from colonial policies, the remaking of the economic structure in the post-colonial era, the persistence of authoritarian regimes established during the colonial period, ongoing struggles with national identity construction due to colonial assimilation policies, and complex relations with both external regional powers and neighboring Central Asian states. Each of these elements contributes to the difficulties of forging strong regional ties in contemporary Central Asia.

This research underscores the critical importance of recognizing the colonial legacy as a fundamental obstacle to regional integration in Central Asia. This recognition serves as a prerequisite for developing effective strategies to promote regional integration and pave the way for a more stable, prosperous, and interconnected future for the region. In fact, the proposals for a change in this situation that could or should occur in Central Asia can be found in the answer to the criticism of the path dependency approach, which was put forward in the past to describe the development path of the complex organization of institutions.

The main question behind these critiques has been: If decisions cannot be made without disregarding the situations that institutions face as a result of choices made, and if decisions are bound to the past and existing institutions, how will development and change occur? In this context, three approaches for change have been proposed, known as critical junctures. Central Asia will also need to adopt one of these approaches to resolve this issue.

The first of these approaches is called path stabilization. Although it argues that institutional change can occur through environmental adaptation, this approach does not allow for a departure from the fundamental principles of the past. While Central Asian states have already shaped some of their political approaches, including their institutional structures, through interactions with various countries within the framework of the current conjuncture, the essential similarity of the core structure has not led to any significant visible development or change.

The second proposed approach is known as path departure. This can be seen as one of the most suitable methods for development and change. It envisions a long-term, gradual transformation, requiring significant changes in the surrounding environment and the availability of sufficient resources for long-term gradual change. Although the initial phase remains tied to the fundamental principles of the past, over time, change will occur, resulting in a departure from the established path. In fact, Central Asian states are at a critical juncture for the beginning of this process. The ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine, and the fact that Central Asia, which Russia considers its backyard, is caught in a weakening sphere of Russian influence, constitutes a significant environmental factor. Additionally, efforts by countries like Turkey and China to exert influence in the region place these nations within the intersection of weakening spheres of influence.

However, since these Central Asian countries lack sufficient resources for this process of change, they will need to engage with external third-party countries to generate resources, entering into various efforts to establish closer ties.

The final model of change and development is revolution. While this represents a radical leap, demanding the destruction of the old system and the establishment of a new one, there are many methods and explanations in political sociology for this kind of endeavor. In the history of Central Asia, there have been many radical demands for change, which can be classified as either terrorist or civil in nature. However, most of these have been suppressed and prevented. This method has led to problematic changes in regions with such political systems.

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