



THE SCO SUMMIT
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NURSULTAN NAZARBAYEV

**Accession of India and Pakistan
to our organization marks a qualitatively
new stage in the SCO's development**

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Project director
Denis TYURIN

Editor in chief
Tatyana SINITSYNA

Deputy Editor in Chief
Maxim KRANS

Project manager
Anastasia KIRILLOVA

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English version
Natalya LATISHEVA

Chinese version
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Design, layout
Andrey KRASNOV

Technical support
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Address for correspondence:

13/2, Krzhizhanowski str., Moscow, 117218
Tel. / Fax: +7 (495) 718-84-11
www.infoshos.ru





The SCO is gaining political weight and economic power. Its voice can now be heard everywhere. Our task is to ensure that the SCO does not become an amorphous, bureaucratic organization existing only on paper.

The new reality demands that we increase the efficiency of our Organization in strengthening international security both on the regional and on the global scale.

Deepening of trade, economic, financial and investment cooperation will create the necessary conditions to later establish a free trade zone within the SCO.

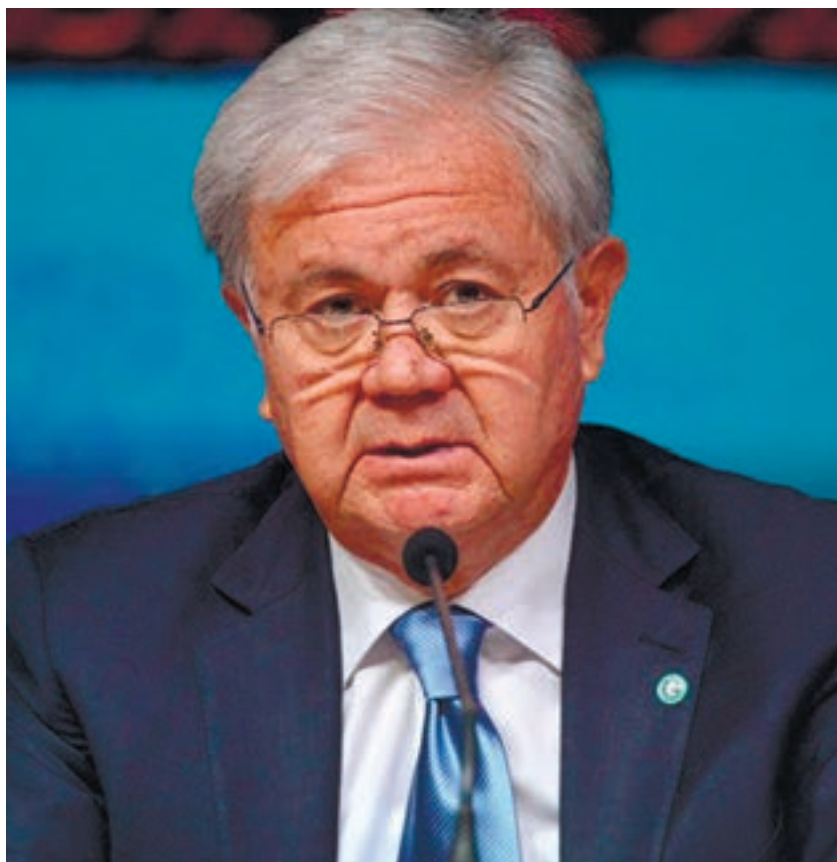
The SCO is kind of a common Asian wealth fund, and each of its member states should make a relevant contribution to it.

Accession of India and Pakistan to our organization marks a qualitatively new stage in the SCO's development, reflects the growth of its authority and importance on the international stage. After the admission of the new members, the SCO will comprise over 65% of Eurasia's territory, 45% of the planet's population and over 19% of the global GDP.

The importance of the SCO in Eurasia is immense. First of all, the organization should ensure security, encourage economic development and humanitarian cooperation and promote transport and logistic corridors between its member states.

Nursultan NAZARBAYEV
President of the Republic of Kazakhstan

RASHID ALIMOV: SCO CHARTER IS ITS SOUL AND COMPASS



The 21st century has given humankind fresh ideas, new concepts and models of international reality. A living offspring of the objective global process is the emergence of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. It was born out of a highly moral substrate - a spirit of mutual respect and trust, principles of equality, respect to national cultures, desire of joint development. No other international union has declared such fine principles of cooperation.

To mark the 15th anniversary of the adoption of the SCO Charter, the Organization's framework document, a scientific symposium was held in Beijing in March 2017, where SCO Secretary General Rashid Alimov delivered a speech. «The SCO Charter is one of the first legal document in international practice that envisages a model of universal partnership as a fundamental characteristic of an international association,» he said. «Today, no one questions the fact that the SCO Charter, having laid down the goals and key areas of cooperation, having created a solid legal framework for the Organization's functioning,

has shown the world a vivid example of a new interpretation of commonly recognized foundations of inter-state interaction. The SCO Charter is the soul and compass of the Organization.»

What are the specific features of partnership within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization? Describing them, Mr. Alimov emphasized that the SCO is «one of the few multi-functional international associations that were fully built in the format of equal multilateral partnership from the very beginning. This is the main factor of the Organization's advantage and appeal. Mutual understanding instead of an indiscriminate one-size-fits-all approach, equality and coordination instead of domination: these are the key elements of the partnership. The closer coordination, the deeper mutual understanding; the more strictly equality is observed, the stronger and more efficient the partnership becomes.»

The core factor in establishing cooperation of the six member states in the new format of regional interaction is a new notion introduced

by the Charter - the Shanghai spirit. «The SCO model functions so that no matter how acute an issue, each party is trying to reach mutual agreement, which is clearly seen in our ability to listen to, to hear and to notice each other,» Mr. Alimov pointed out. He quoted Confucius, who had described a similar system of relations, «The nobler-minded will be agreeable even when they disagree; the small-minded will agree and be disagreeable.» This testifies to the uniqueness of the Organization, where interests of each party are matched against the interests of all the others,» the Secretary General emphasized.

Guided by its founding document, the SCO sticks to the policy that rules out blocks, ideologized and confrontational approaches to resolving international and regional problems. «The Organization strictly abides by the principles set out in the SCO Charter, including its not being directed against any other countries and international organizations; it actively develops contacts and cooperation with international and regional organizations, first of all with the United Nations and its agencies,» Alimov said. «All decisions made within the SCO are the result of crystallization and combination of views, opinions and approaches of the founding members,» he stressed.

«It is the Charter that determines the principle of multi-format interaction within the Organization,» he said. «This determined four areas of the SCO's activities: cooperation in politics and security, the economic sphere, cultural and humanitarian cooperation and, most importantly, the unflinching intention of the member states to develop together... Speaking of the SCO's political philosophy, it is based on abidance by international law and the UN Charter. The Organization is transparent and willing to deal with everyone who so desires. The SCO has already passed the formation stage, and all four areas are being developed gradually and consistently... Many experts forecast that the SCO may become the stronghold of the new, safe, fair and democratic world order, and they have reasons to think so,» the Secretary General concluded.

BAKHTIYOR KHAKIMOV: THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY – TO ENHANCE DIALOG, DEVELOP COOPERATION AND IMPROVE THE SCO



*InfoSCO interviews the Russian President's envoy
to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization*

The Astana summit has already been called historical: the SCO is expanding, becoming an «eight» instead of a «six,» admitting India and Pakistan. Apparently, it will need to integrate the new members in its activities. How difficult do you think this process will be?

Admission of new members, two large countries, will be the key event of the meeting of the SCO Council of the Heads of State. A brand new era is beginning. Of course, we will need to integrate the new members in the SCO's activities. At the summit, we will need to sum up the achievements of the past, and to assess our prospects and opportunities of further development and expanded cooperation.

The figures I am going to cite are well-known and they are true: after accession of India and Pakistan, the SCO will comprise 44% of the world's population, producing about 24% of global GDP. These figures give a picture of the prospects that are opening up for the Organization. But there is another well-known fact: structures that stop developing do not have a future.

Preparation of accession documents for the two new members has taken quite some time. What are the principles of the SCO's expansion and how well are the risks assessed?

First of all, we have a policy on admission of new members, which stipulates a number of criteria potential members must comply with. If a candidate does not meet at least one requirement, the decision on starting the accession procedure cannot be made. The Policy clearly defines all

conditions candidates have to meet. The main one is that an applicant state must declare its readiness to rigorously abide by all obligations existing within the SCO's current agreements and contracts. This is what India and Pakistan have done. In their official documents and applications, New Delhi and Islamabad confirmed that they had timely and unconditionally, without any exceptions, joined the rules of the Organization mandatory for all member states and also all other documents



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(there are about 30 of them). I would like to add that both India and Pakistan met this requirement quickly and timely.

Speaking about risks, there is virtually no ground for them to arise. The key principle of the SCO – consensus – was, is and will remain unchanged. On the other hand, there have always been dissenting opinions of member states, and this is natural. The principle of consensus does not mean that throughout the 16 years of the Organization's existence, all decisions were passed instantly and readily. Many of them were not adopted for lack of common consensus, while others were simply blocked by certain states. And this is a normal process.

It should be pointed out that both New Delhi and Islamabad have repeatedly emphasized their readiness to abide by all the rules of the SCO and avoid bringing any bilateral disputes to the SCO.

The SCO could become an influential and powerful peacemaker...

I agree completely, because one of the arguments Russia used when explaining our desire to speed up the accession of India and Pakistan was that the SCO could be a convenient platform for exchanging opinions and looking for mutual understanding. There is only one way forward: to enhance the dialog.

SCO summits usually sum up the results, outline the Organization's future prospects and express a common opinion about international

events. Which moments will be reflected in the Astana Statement?

The work is still under way in preparations for the summit. Even though the Astana Statement has been adopted in principle, there may be certain adjustments of the wording and additions. Overall, it is a working document, nothing pompous or dramatic.

The final declaration, first of all, reflects the agreed upon positions and approaches to the key issues of the SCO's activities, with regard to international and regional politics. We note the common stand of the member states with regard to the need to strengthen the central role of the United Nations in international affairs, emphasize our common view of the situation in Syria and political settlement in Afghanistan, and we are ready to resume work of the SCO-Afghanistan contact group. SCO partners supported our position of ensuring settlement in Ukraine by rigorously abiding by the Minsk agreements. There is, of course, a general understanding of the need to be actively involved in economic affairs and develop humanitarian ties. But the main problem, which always arises after a document is adopted, is how it can be implemented in real life.

What Russian proposals have not been reflected in final documents of the summit?

The Russian party has the following practice: we make proposals that we consider relevant. If some are rejected, we withdraw them, believing that we

will have to do some work to persuade our partners to agree to some or other approach. Some of our colleagues are cautious in certain issues, e.g. those related to integration processes in Eurasia, support to the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union, and the One Belt, One Road initiative. Some partners believe that if they do not participate in these projects it is illogical to support them on behalf of the entire organization. At the same time, I would like to remind you that in May, Beijing hosted the One Belt, One Road Forum, which was attended by five SCO member states, and this fact should be a perfect answer to the argument about «lack of logic.»

And now let us talk about terrorism, our global problem. One of the first substantive documents adopted by the SCO declared the establishment of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS). Russia proposed to develop this format by setting up a Universal Regional Center. But the idea did not win support and was withdrawn, probably, until «better time.» How relevant is it now? Will the SCO set up a more powerful structure for anti-terrorist cooperation?

I'd like to emphasize that the RATS is functioning and is efficient. This structure is dealing with the priority task of consolidating the efforts of the SCO member states to counteract the terrorist threat. The Russian party proposed to create a universal counter-terrorist center on the basis of the RATS in order to improve it. New threats

and challenges become interrelated when terrorist activities are financed with proceeds from drug trafficking and trans-border criminals are used to recruit militants. In this connection, Russian President Vladimir Putin voiced an initiative to improve the RATS. The idea was not completely rejected, but some of our partners demonstrated their cautiousness. So the issue has not been stricken off, it is still on our agenda.

The Russian approach is based on the assumption that the nature of threats requires a common coordination center. This is a difficult task, first of all, in terms of coordination within agencies. The RATS is mostly made up of representatives of SCO counter-intelligence services, but in some countries, it is the responsibility of the Security Council, in others of the Interior Ministry, and so on. We continue working to explain the advantage of the Russian approach. As the first step, it was proposed to establish a working group to counteract terrorism financing from illegal drug trafficking. This issue is being discussed by the Council of National Coordinators, within the RATS itself, and also at relevant meetings of working groups.

Which area of the SCO activities has been the most successful, and which is lagging behind?

I would like to remind you that the SCO came to be out of talks on confidence-building measures at borders, and it is in this area that substantial experience of cooperation has been accumulated. When the SCO Charter was discussed, it was decided that the SCO should become a more universal organization, and so it happened. However, at the initial stage,

the focus was on the first construct, the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure. Later, other areas of cooperation began to take shape. For example, we actively develop humanitarian contacts, have developed a contractual base for cultural exchange and education. We have implemented the unique project of the SCO University, which unites the intellectual powers of the best universities of SCO member states. We expect that the official agreement stipulating the existence of the University will be signed on the sidelines of the Astana summit.

It is, however, too early to speak of comprehensive cooperation in the economy. But some sectors are fairly well developed, for example, cooperation in transportation. An agreement was signed recently on creating favorable conditions for road shipments, which came into force in May. Soon a commission that will administrate this work will hold a meeting in Beijing.

Of course, the SCO has its soft spots, but you cannot expect an organization that is just 16 years old to be totally successful in all areas. When the Charter was drafted, its authors drew from the experience of the already existing multilateral unions, including ASEAN. In this connection, I would like to point out that this structure had been developing for 40 years before it came to the point of adopting a charter. Our process was reverse: we first adopted the Charter and then began finding areas for cooperation.

How successful has the SCO been in establishing relations with other international organizations?

The SCO has been very proactive in this area. At the summit, Secretary

General Rashid Alimov will name numerous examples confirming this. Various documents on mutual understanding and cooperation have been signed with many countries. We signed an agreement with the United Nations, a memorandum with ASEAN, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, etc. Cooperation is consistently expanding, and this is not an exaggeration. The abbreviation «SCO» is increasingly gaining weight in the world. A separate meeting of the UN Security Council chaired by Russia was devoted to interaction of regional multilateral organizations, notably, the CIS, Collective Security Treaty Organization and the SCO. SCO Secretary General Rashid Alimov and head of the RATS Yevgeny Sysoyev participated in anti-drug forums in Vienna and were recently invited to attend some OSCE events devoted to new threats and challenges. All this shows that the world needs the SCO and listens to it.

Critics and pessimists can no longer discard the SCO, which is increasingly setting the tone of international development. Nevertheless, Western media and some experts still allow themselves to be ironic about the SCO. Where does this contempt come from, in your opinion?

I believe that it is because of lack of knowledge and understanding, or, probably, personal views of certain journalists and experts. But the crucial thing is that everyone will have to watch the SCO's activities more closely. All the more so, as India and Pakistan are joining it. In its new capacity, the SCO will become a much more powerful player on the global political stage.



ASTANA, GENIUS LOCI



Tatiana Sinitsyna

Ancient Romans believed that every place had its own «genius loci», a kind guarding spirit, which decided the fate of every sliver of land. Astana, Kazakhstan's present capital, must have had a blessing of its genius loci. It was the genius that lured the capital to the shores of the solemn Yesil river, to the epicenter of Eurasia, sent ideas to space, masterfully brought together circumstances and, finally, combined the passionate will of the Kazakh leader with the fine world of inspiring muses, whose mother is believed to be architecture. This is how the unique city, which makes one's heart skip a beat, came to be. The ultramodern megalopolis has turned 19. Just 19! When one looks at this urban miracle, it's hard to believe one's eyes.

Astana has won many international awards for its unique architecture, has earned reputation of one of the world's most exquisite capitals and has received prestigious medals and the title of the City of Peace from UNESCO. But one should not forget the state responsibilities, the role of Astana as the quintessence of the nation's spirit, the political, scientific and cultural center of the dynamically developing Kazakh state.

TENGRIONS DON'T GIVE UP

The generous Creator gave Kazakhs the steppe, endless and severe. Nomads loved their austere land in the center of Asia, the battleground of winds. Their wise men found a formula for harmonious coexistence with the nature, and the people became one with the horizonless expanses. Flying on their strong horses, little did Kazakhs know that their hooves were beating on a treasure chest...

Kazakhs gave their land the energy of many generations, invested their hard toil, dreams, joy and grief into it. From their ancestors they inherited the wisdom of Tengrianism, which declared life to be the absolute good and did not approve of despondence.

This way, with rises and falls, they lived for many centuries. At the turn of the new millennium, the life of the Great Kazakh Steppe also took a sharp turn. People had to survive in the moonscape of the destroyed Soviet Union. And these dramatic developments brought them luck. They were saved not only by the Tengrian philosophy, but also by a charismatic leader with an extensive political past and colossal intuition, a person who knew where to lead people and what

exactly to do. Nursultan Nazarbayev felt instinctively that the Kazakh luck was near and strained all his will and character to reach it.

THE CREATORS

...Both creators were courageous and daring - President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who conceived the city, and the Japanese architect Kisho Kurokawa, who agreed to take on the incredible project. But there was one difference: the former believed in the new city, but the other... not so much.

But why did he participate in the contest of designs for the future city? Most probably, he was led by professional instinct, which appreciated the daring task - to create a unique city with a Eurasian image in the steppe, a symbol, an argument, a spiritual vertical for the young sovereign state, its authentic face.

It is also possible that the Master heard his «swan song» and got caught in the magic of its tune... Astana was to become the final chord of his grand architectural symphony, the last stroke of the wing of his unbelievable imagination.

Anyway, the happy chance brought together the historical moment, the

political will, the economic opportunity and the architectural temperament. But it was he who saw the city's image in reality that really launched the process.

At first, Nursultan Nazarbayev was almost alone with his dream about the new capital, which he wanted to build in the northern part of the country, at the crossroads of the biggest transport routes connecting Europe and Asia, where there was enough room to let architectural imagination loose. People quietly grumbled, they were confused by the president's odd decision, they viewed his project as an ambitious caprice, ill-timed and dubious. Why, they would say, spend billions on shuffling capitals, when society was demoralized and everything lay in ruins? In the beginning, it was only power that made it possible for the president to move towards his goal, but soon a creative team of associates emerged, who were ready to work on the Astana project straining all their strengths and abilities.

The leader imagined the future of the new capital in every detail, understanding all of its geopolitical, practical, humanitarian and moral implications. Later, in his book *Kazakhstan's Way*, recalling the process of making and implementing the historical decision of building the new capital, Nazarbayev explained that the relocation of the center was not accidental. Despite the ruins, in which Kazakhstan, separated from the Soviet metropolis, found itself, the empty treasury and impoverished population, the head of the newborn independent state understood that his people, shaken and demoralized by loss of traditional guidelines in life, needed a new perspective, they needed the «clocks of their mind turned to a sovereign time.» To do this, it was necessary to give them a jolt, to air their brains. Otherwise, it would be impossible to make a leap to the future.

ONE OF ASTANA'S 47 IMAGES

The traditional ensemble of nine ancient muses does not include the Muse of Architecture, yet it is believed to be the mother of all arts. It must have blessed the city. There is no other explanation to the grand harmony that unites unexpected ideas of very different architects, the first creators of Astana and those who continue sculpting its image.

Some say Astana is somewhat eclectic. The ultramodern architecture of the young Kazakh capital mixes different styles, the Oriental and Western designs. And this is inevitable, since the city positions itself as «Eurasian,» and so its image should be unusual, with a strong personality. On the other hand, harmony can be found in the eclectic, too. The most important things in architecture are proportions and unity of composition.

Architects of different architectural beliefs and artistic styles were invited here – from Germany, Britain, Bulgaria, Switzerland and some Eastern countries. The basic guidelines required that the city be environmentally friendly, high-tech, intelligent, with free use of space. Almost entire global experience, both positive and negative, went into creating the new Kazakh capital.

...President Nazarbayev announced his authoritarian decision to build a new capital at the end of 1997, as a New Year present for the nation. Work started immediately. The strongest support came from young people, who flooded the shores of the Yesil. It was necessary to prepare the left shore, a primeval, wild, swampy area, for construction. The battle of architects was outstanding. A total of 47 teams fought for the right to design the city, offering a lot of innovative suggestions. The international jury had it hard, but finally selected three proposals – a Russian, Kazakh and Japanese. They were presented to Nazarbayev, and he chose the project of the outstanding

Japanese architect Kisho Kurokawa.

A renowned Kazakh architect, Amanzhol Chikanayev, who also participated in this «tender of giants» together with the Italian maestro Federico Marconi, acknowledged in a conversation with journalists that the Japanese proposal was the most striking. Kurokawa included truly revolutionary urban ideas of the 21st century, and at the same time believed that Astana should not repeat solutions tested in other parts of the world, but be completely unique.

Kisho Kurokawa is one of the founders of metabolism in architecture, and he viewed the future city through the prism of «abstract symbiosis.» Metabolists talk in incompleteness and understatement. All this implies openness of building structures for a «dialog» with the city environment, its changing architectural, cultural and technological look. Plenty of air, exquisite green architecture, ionizing fountains, alleys, parks – everything for the most fastidious taste, for a demanding human.

Kurokawa's project included certain landmarks that were to be created by internationally renowned architects, who were given the opportunity to express themselves playing «on the edge.»

The snow-white, radial ensemble of the presidential cultural center, the circus built in the form of a flying saucer, the magnificent Ak-Orda, residence of the Kazakh President, its size bigger than the White House in Washington, the Nur-Astana mosque, unlikely and surprisingly harmonious. The true masterpiece of architectural thought is the Kazakhstan cinema hall with changeable internal configuration, designed by Italian Manfredi Nicoletti. Ideas of many other architects were also brought to life to become Astana trademarks. But special recognition is given to Englishman Norman Foster, the master of high-tech. He designed the pyramid of the Palace of Peace and



Reconciliation, where big international forums are held.

The pyramid accommodates the Culture Museum, the University of Civilizations and an opera theater for 1,500 seats. All this grandeur is supported by symbolical «hands of peace.» The panoramic elevator offers beautiful views of green terraces – the hanging gardens of Astana – and the tricks of light coming from the dome.



BAYTEREK: CONNECTING EARTH AND SPACE

The Great Kazakh Steppe opened up under the incredible pressure of human toil and creativity. In 2002, Norman Foster built the inimitable Bayterek Tower, the symbol of Kazakhstan's sovereignty and revival. The mythical poplar tree Bayterek symbolizes the Kazakhs' belief about the universe, it is a tree of life growing in the center of the world, his roots reaching the heart of the Earth and its crown touching the sky. On the top of the sacred tree, the Samruk Bird, the ancestress of the Kazakhs, lays golden eggs... Of course, the idea to create Bayterek in the center of the capital could emerge only «inside the nation.» Symbolically, Bayterek is the center of the world, but geographically, it is the exact center of Eurasia. When I looked at the city from a bird's eye view, from the 105-meter mark of the shining metal «trunk» of Bayterek Tower, the city lay below open, it gave out strong young energy, its beauty captivating, its promises plentiful. From the height of Bayterek Tower, the site of the Nazarbayev University looked like a landed airliner; I could see the curving pagoda roofs of the Pekin Palace Hotel,

the glittering domes of mosques and churches. And there was also the easily recognizable style of Stalin-era Moscow skyscrapers – a Russian-style residential development.

...The place chosen for Astana was not accidental, it was favored by Kazakh ancestors long ago, which is proved by the ancient settlement Bozok situated in the heart of Astana. Once it lay on the route of the Great Silk Road. One

of Astana's avenues is called Syganak, after an ancient city that used to stand here. Artifacts found in burial mounds in the steppe date from many centuries – from the Bronze Age to the early Middle Ages (7th-8th century) to the period of the Kazakh Khanate (15th-16th century).

THE WISE MAN AND HIS CHANCE

...Once upon a time, the Kazakhs were ruled by Khans, whose thrones were the saddles of their horses and the residences – white nomadic tents. They were smart people, doing a lot for building a country and developing its code of ethics. They managed to preserve their nation, navigating it through the dangers of history. Nursultan Nazarbayev repeated this deed during the period after gaining independence. History is made by passionate people. I like this idea of Lev Gumilev, an outstanding Russian ethnologist. Gumilev gave all effort of his mind and the passion of his heart to studying historical relations between nomads and sedentary population of the continent, which resulted in the idea of Eurasianism. His name is broadly known in Kazakhstan, and Astana has

the Eurasian National University named after him.

KUROKAWA'S MISTAKE

Kisho Kurokawa, a creator «kissed by God,» worked, giving Astana, his last symphony, everything his mature talent had accumulated. He dreamed of living long enough to see the city in all of its beauty. He didn't.

Astana quickly and manifoldly exceeded all forecasts of the General City Plan. Well, even great architects make mistakes...

Kurokawa did not believe in the city he was building and openly acknowledged it. The intuition and foresight let the creator down. He did not feel the prospects, attractiveness of the project and underestimated the financial opportunities that were provided to him.

Granted, at the time Kurokawa saw the city in the dark: the country's economy had not yet recovered (it was later that it discovered its «treasure chest»). Based on the gross regional product, Kurokawa believed that the population would be small and the streets did not have to be very wide. He did not expect the city to have more than 600,000 residents. But Astana corrected him, quickly exceeding the one-million mark.

Architects all over the world update cities' general plans once in five years to see whether they comply with the new reality, trends and financial possibilities. It is necessary to avoid stagnation. However, all fundamental ideas of the great architect, his theory of abstract symbiosis are alive and growing. Astana's architecture has a strong environmental focus, remaining in harmony with the nature. Its main objective is maximum comfort – shadowed alleys, fountains, quiet and calm.

DAWN ABOVE THE KAZAKH STEPPE

...A heavy golden moon looked down from the dark-blue predawn sky, throwing its light on the dreaming, beautiful Astana. We were hurrying to catch the early flight to Moscow, moving through the peacefully sleeping city. A living image of the magnificent, daring, miraculous creation, young and ambitious, inspired admiration. And it was with wonder that the Yesil river looked at the transformation of its shores, carrying waters to the Irtys and then to the Ob and the world ocean...

POINT OF RETURN TO PEACE AND DIALOG



The reputation of a consistent advocate of peaceful talks has made Kazakhstan a unique platform for dialog

Adil Kaukenov,
CEO, Center of Chinese Studies (Astana)

The reputation of an impartial and consistent advocate of peaceful talks has made Kazakhstan a unique platform that starts and resumes dialog between previously unbending opponents. The high level of trust between President Nursultan Nazarbayev and leading international politicians ensures that Astana increasingly often serves as the world's point of return to peace and negotiations.

The Republic of Kazakhstan is a young nation, and many of its spheres are still being established. However, its foreign policy has been emphatically consistent over the 25 years of its existence. The core principle is the peaceful nature of Kazakhstan's foreign policy, oriented towards shaping a stable security system in the world.

THE ONLY WAY TO PEACE

The essence of Kazakhstan's foreign political stance in ensuring global security was accurately and succinctly formulated in Mr. Nazarbayev's declaration «Peace. 21st Century,» which he delivered at the 2016 Nuclear Security Summit in Washington. It reads, «Peaceful dialog and constructive talks based on the principles of equal responsibility for

peace and security, mutual respect and non-interference in internal affairs should be the foundation for settling all disputes between nations.»

These principles form the basis of Kazakhstan's policy towards international conflicts. Mutually acceptable solutions should be first of all based on fundamental values, and also on collective decisions and resolutions of the United Nations.

Another crucial principle of Kazakhstan's foreign policy is the

unswerving promotion of the world free of nuclear weapons. It is the consistent building of a nuclear-free world that Kazakhstan believes to be the only possible scenario of further development of humankind.

Promoting long-term goals, Kazakhstan is also active on the present-day «peaceful track.» I am referring to Astana's peacekeeping activities, its role in settling numerous acute international conflicts, and President Nazarbayev's personal



involvement in restoring understanding and mutual trust between parties of various confrontations.

ASTANA PROCESS FOR SYRIA

Astana is increasingly often taking practical steps to ensure peace in various countries and regions. The examples are numerous, and confidence in Kazakhstan as an international player able to provide all conditions for achieving peace is growing every year, while demand for Kazakh diplomats is increasing. The country also serves as a mediator in various international conflicts and provides a platform for discussing ways out.

One of the latest examples of such efforts on the part of Kazakhstan is the Astana negotiations aimed at settling the Syrian conflict. Initiated by the leaders of Russia and Turkey and supported by the President of Kazakhstan, the Astana process is of extreme importance for establishing peace in the Middle East and also for entire Eurasia, which has been affected by the conflict.

It is important to bear in mind that the Astana process has a UN mandate and is part of the Geneva agreements. Positioning itself as a country equally distant from all parties to the conflict, Kazakhstan provided them with a

platform to negotiate and find a mutually acceptable solution to the Syrian conflict. In the several rounds of talks that took place in Astana in January-May 2017, a number of important decisions were made that broke the impasse.

The main achievement of the talks is that the parties to the conflict and nations able to influence its developments managed to transition from mutual idiosyncrasy to negotiations, without which it would be impossible to stop the armed confrontation. An obvious outcome of the talks was agreement on creating a trilateral ceasefire mechanism. It is worth pointing out that it was after the talks in Astana that periods of truce became longer. The parties also made a decision to jointly counteract the ISIS (which is prohibited in many countries, including Kazakhstan). In May, the guarantor states (Russia, Iran and Turkey) signed a memorandum on creating four areas of de-escalation of civil war in Syria, which temporarily put a stop to the fratricidal slaughter in the country.

Despite the inevitable difficulties of the negotiating process and skeptical opinions, it can now be said with certainty that the Astana process, together with the talks in Geneva, laid

the foundation for shifting the conflict towards discussion.

«IRANIAN PROGRAM»

Another example of Astana's efforts to transform conflicts into talks was Kazakhstan serving as a site for discussing Iran's nuclear program in February and April 2013. After many years of futile confrontation between Iran and the West on the issue of the Iranian nuclear program, an active negotiating process began. Iran and the Six- Britain, Germany, China, Russia, the United States and France - held several rounds of talks in Kazakhstan, Austria and Switzerland. As a result, on July 14, 2015, the «Iranian agreement» was signed - the Comprehensive Action Plan, which put an end to the confrontation around Tehran's nuclear program.

Now, when the Iranian program is under joint control, Iran has been released from most of the sanctions that were imposed on it and is actively developing economic cooperation with a number of countries. During President Nazarbayev's state visit to Tehran in April 2016, his Iranian counterpart Hassan Rouhani emphasized, «Kazakhstan has always been close to us, assisting in holding two rounds of nuclear talks between Iran and the Six,



and now it provides assistance to us under the Comprehensive Action Plan.»

HAND-MADE PEACE

In the 25 years of pursuing a consistent multi-vector policy based on the principles of unwavering adherence to peaceful settlement of all disputes, Kazakhstan has earned the reputation of an impartial and reliable mediator of the most sensitive conflicts. This was to a large degree achieved thanks to Mr. Nazarbayev's personal qualities, as he repeatedly participated in many talks personally.

An important part belonged to his involvement in bringing the talks on Ukraine back to a constructive footing. Thanks to the Kazakh president's efforts, the dialog between Vladimir Putin and Francois Hollande in December 2014 was restored, and Russia and Europe resumed talks on the Ukrainian problem.

Mr. Nazarbayev's excellent diplomatic skills and the high level of trust between the Kazakh leader and other parties to the process helped to reach a substantial progress in optimization of the Norman format, which resulted in adoption of the second package of Minsk agreements.

Yet another example of the Kazakh leader's personal involvement in restoration of peaceful relations was his role in the Russian-Turkish conflict, which broke out a year after the Ukrainian «knot» was untied. After the tragic incident in early 2016,

when the Turkish Air Force brought down a Russian fighter on a mission in Syria, relations between Kazakhstan's two very important foreign political partners drastically escalated. It was then that efforts of Mr. Nazarbayev and Kazakh diplomats in Ankara helped to resume communication between Vladimir Putin and Recep Erdogan, and their political will allowed bilateral relations to recover.

«I would like to thank you for your efforts. I am talking about your mediating mission, which, as we see, has succeeded,» President Putin said at a meeting with Mr. Nazarbayev in Sochi in summer 2016. The Turkish leader also thanked Mr. Nazarbayev at a news conference in Ankara on August 5, 2016. «We will never forget President Nazarbayev's favor,» he said. «On behalf of myself and on behalf of all Turkish people I thank him for his huge contribution to the normalization of relations between Turkey and Russia.»

UNIQUE UNDERSTANDING OF RESPONSIBILITY

The summit in Astana will go down in the history of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a milestone - the Organization will grant full membership to India and Pakistan. It is worth recalling that these two nations, which still have some unresolved issues, 15 years ago returned to dialog, after escalation of tensions, in Kazakhstan. At the first summit of heads of member states of the Conference on Interaction

and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia in Asia, which took place in Almaty in June 2002, leaders of India and Pakistan Atal Vajpayee and Pervez Musharraf were able to resume talks and preserve peace between their countries.

The forthcoming summit is expected to concentrate on issues of joint security efforts and to adopt pivotal documents aimed against extremism and terrorism. Being a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for 2017-2018, Kazakhstan is playing an active part in developing solutions for these problems at the highest level. The achievements of the Kazakh diplomacy described above have definitely increased Astana's political capital and allow it to successfully promote peacekeeping initiatives both regionally and globally.

The established reputation of the nation oriented towards keeping peace and stability and respecting internal affairs of other countries allowed Kazakhstan to act as an impartial and consistent advocate when creating conditions for a number of talks, which saved many lives, kept adversaries from using force, prevented humanitarian catastrophes and brought about peaceful resolution of previously dead-locked situations. In the manifesto «The World. The 21st Century,» President Nazarbayev stressed, «Eradicating war is the most difficult civilizational task of humankind. But it does not have another sensible alternative.»



SYRIA NEEDS «COALITION OF PEACE»



Stanislav Ivanov, senior researcher, International Security Center, the International Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences

In order to settle the Syrian conflict, the diplomatic efforts of global powers should be focused on reining in the selfish interests of regional players and building a broad coalition of countries sharing the principles of fight against terrorism and a political dialog between the government and the opposition.

A memorandum is currently in force in Syria that envisages creation of four areas of de-escalation of civil war and was signed in Astana in May by the guarantor countries of the peaceful process (Russia, Iran, Turkey). This document is currently being time-tested. It is obvious that in order to settle the Syrian conflict, the diplomatic efforts of global powers should be focused on reining in the selfish interests of regional players and building a broad coalition of countries sharing the principles of fight against terrorism and a political dialog between the government and the opposition.

In accordance with the memorandum, the government troops and armed opposition shall cease any hostilities between each other, flights of any military aircraft are prohibited above the areas of confrontation. Check points will be set up on the borders of safety areas to grant access to civilians

and humanitarian aid. Also, monitoring groups will be established to watch compliance with the ceasefire regime.

Positive shifts that make it possible to look for peaceful ways to resolve the conflict appeared after the defeat of radical Islamist groups of Syrian opposition in Aleppo. Alongside the successful actions of the Syrian troops supported by the Russian Aerospace Force (ASF), substantial diplomatic efforts were used to achieve this. In order to save civilians and their houses, militants and their families were given an opportunity to leave by buses to the province of Idlib controlled by opposition and the members of Jabhat al-Nusra. The missile and bomb attacks by the ASF and Western coalition did a lot to weaken the military potential of the biggest terrorist movements - ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra (both prohibited in Russia and many other countries), and lifted the threat of shell attacks

on Damascus, while the government troops liberated tens of towns and villages from jihadist militants.

More than a hundred of militia units and representatives of moderate opposition signed a ceasefire agreement at the reconciliation center at the Russian air base Khmeimim. This, by the way, proves that the Russian troops in Syria do not take part in the internal armed conflict, but only carry out the task given by President Vladimir Putin - trying to defeat international terrorism.

The Astana memorandum can be viewed as a second important step towards stopping violence in Syria and saving Syrians from extermination. The first one was the ceasefire agreement dated 30 December 2016, which was signed between the Syrian government and armed opposition with Russia's mediation. The agenda of the talks included creation of an interim coalition

government that would have trust of all Syrians and comprise representatives of different political groups, ethnicities and religious confessions, discussion of the main provisions of the new constitution and preparation for a free and fair election to supreme legislative and executive bodies under the United Nations' supervision. Russia offered the participants theses of a draft constitution that envisage the possibility of Syria becoming a federative state.

However, both parties to the conflict repeatedly violated the agreement, while the use of chemical weapons against civilian population in Khan-Sheikhun on 4 April 2017 did not just put the previous agreements on the brink of cancellation, but also served as an excuse for Washington to deliver a missile strike against the government's air base al-Shairat. Meanwhile, the Syrian government has announced that it had nothing to do with the crime. Unfortunately, the relevant UN commission has not yet started investigating all circumstances of the incident with chemical weapons and establishing the perpetrators. An official opinion from independent experts is yet to be received.

One of the key reasons for the stalling of the negotiations is lack of concord among the motley opposition. External opposition consists of many groups (Cairo, Moscow, Riyadh, Istanbul, etc.), and inside the country there are at least one hundred groups of armed opposition. The only thing they have in common is their call for immediate political reforms and unconditional resignation of Bashar al-Assad. At the

same time, both parties to the conflict (and also Turkey and Iran) ignore the interests of the Kurd minority (which accounts for about 12% of the country's population).

External players (the United States, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan) are not helping to establish a direct productive dialog between Damascus and the opposition; Turkey is, unfortunately, being inconsistent. Each interested party is pursuing a selfish policy disguised as protection of its national interests. If Russia and Iran support the legitimate Syrian government and focus on fighting terrorist groups, Ankara still views Assad's regime and the Party of Democratic Union (Syrian Kurds) as the main terrorists.

The Turkish authorities prefer to talk to Islamic terrorists rather than to fight them. Washington and Tel Aviv consider Hezbollah, the Lebanese military and political group fighting for Assad, a terrorist organization. The leadership and NGOs of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Persian Gulf monarchies, as well as Jordan continue supporting radical Islamist groups, not deterred by their terrorist methods of waging a war.

For leaders of the Gulf countries and the overwhelming majority of Syrian opposition, Assad remains the main enemy. Taking advantage of the truce and Damascus's limited possibilities to offensive actions, the US and Turkey mobilized their allies among armed opposition to expand districts under their control by ousting ISIS militants. This tactic is in line with the US so-called Plan B: breaking Syria up into enclaves and isolating the Assad

government.

Under these circumstances, it is impossible to expect a solid lasting peace on Syrian soil. New large-scale provocations and attempts to disrupt the hard won truce cannot be ruled out. The latest attacks of the US Navy and Israeli drones against military facilities and locations of government troops prove that. The situation of «neither war nor peace» in Syria cannot last indefinitely. Otherwise, fight against international terrorism will take unjustifiably long.

Achievement of a quick consensus on the above named agenda will also become a problem, and so will resolution of the pressing humanitarian problems, restoration of destroyed infrastructure, housing, economy and creating conditions for return of millions of refugees.

Under these circumstances, the Astana memorandum proved quite timely, preventing further escalation of the conflict and resumption of large-scale hostilities in the country. The fact that the document was supported by Damascus, a significant number of field commanders of the opposition, and also the United States, Saudi Arabia and some other interested countries, allows us to hope that the peace process in Syria will go on.

Apparently, the international community will need quite some time to work out a balanced formula of Syrian settlement. The leading part here should be given to uncompromised fight against terrorism, quick restoration of peace and transition to political settlement of the conflict on Syrian land.



NEW GIANTS IN SCO ALLIANCE



Dmitry Kosyrev, political commentator

At the SCO summit in Astana in June 2017, two national flags - of India and Pakistan - will be put alongside the flags of the Organization's full members. And there will be other ceremonies devoted to the long-awaited event - their joining the ranks of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

The two South Asian countries' road to full membership in the SCO was long, and one of them - India - has undergone a dramatic change during this time. Today it is a completely different country from what it was, say, five years ago. Pakistan has remained mostly the same, but India is living out a true revolution. An ideological, political and even religious revolution. So let's try to understand what is going on in the country that has joined the SCO.

ONE PARTY

We will start with religion, namely, Hinduism, the main religion of India. It should be noted that the word «Hindu» means not any citizen of India, but an adherent of Hinduism. A Muslim or a Sikh can be Indians (or US citizens, for example), but they are not Hindu.

The essence of the revolution India has been witnessing in recent years is that its Hindu majority has

remembered its unique religious and cultural identity, has become proud of it and has been putting a lot of questions to politicians - questions that were not to be asked outside of one's circle of friends or one's street. Questions that have been eating at the stability of society for a long time.

This process, as we now understand, was underlying for the magnificent victory of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party at the general election in spring 2014. But one election, even a national one, could pass as a one-off and even accidental event, an emotional outburst of the voters.

There, however, followed an almost uninterrupted chain of victories. For example, the victory in the local election in the state of Uttar Pradesh in early March 2017 was even more convincing than in 2014. This is the country's main state in many respects, with a population of 200 million people. Now BJP has power not only at the federal level. Today it rules, independently or in coalition with local parties, in 17 states. The former main party of India, the Indian National Congress, remained in power in 4 states, and another two states are ruled by left-wing parties.

This is a complete change of the political landscape (actually, self-

destruction of the Congress). And a complete change of national ideology. It is as if after Donald Trump's victory in the US the Democratic Party would be gradually fading from the horizon, preserving influence only in California and New York. And only the Republicans were left, who are, by the way, ideological brothers of BJP in certain aspects.

Remarkably, ideologists and analysts from India (and, for example, China) say that the «Trump revolution» is global and began in India in 2014. Now the world's biggest powers have similarly minded leaders: Xi Jinping in China, Narendra Modi in India and Vladimir Putin in Russia. Plus Donald Trump in the United States and several politicians in smaller countries. What is common about them is that they all represent a rise of the national feeling and identity instead of «universal values.» The era of return of national states is here, even though it does not mean that they will love each other in any situation. On the contrary, the world may have become a more dangerous place because of it.

The new India in the SCO means many things, such as an opportunity for greater rapprochement with the alliance's members and a difficult transitional period.

OWN VALUES

The general picture of change in India can be divided into plenty of minor episodes. In Uttar Pradesh, after BJP's victory, the authorities decided to abolish state subsidies to Muslims for their Hajj to Mecca if they can afford to pay for it. Not only because no one pays Hindus for a trip to the sacred river Ganges, but because of corrupted schemes within the subsidies system. And because the Hajj is supposed to be paid for with one's own money, though no one denies the need to help the poor.

Why wasn't it done earlier? The answer found in discussions ongoing in Indian mass media is unexpected. Under the Indian National Congress, the country lived with the «universal values» idea for 70 years, believing that religion is separated from the state and that all religious communities should be equal in India. The idea is great, but its implementation was far from it. It so happened that the overwhelming majority, the Hindus, considered themselves oppressed, while minorities, in order to achieve equality, were given special rights, such as Hajj subsidies and many other privileges.

This was a replay of the situation with the black population of the US, who should not only be called with the absurd term «African Americans,» but also paid for their minority status. This creates huge ghettos of people who do not need to work, and this makes them angry and hate the white majority.

As soon as a political force emerged in India who broke the conspiracy of silence with regard to these topics, the entire country came to vote for it. The defeated Congress calls this force, BJP, a «religious» and «Hindu» party, thinking that it is an accusation. However, Germany has two parties with the word «Christian» in their names, and they are in power, and nobody seems to mind. And Germany is not the only example.

Another episode: the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh is a person from BJP, Yogi Adityanath, who is extremely popular. He is not just Hindu, he is a monk of a religious order, which did not happen often in the past. The state of Gujarat is preparing a bill under which suspects in cases of murders of holy (i.e. any) cows will no longer be released on bail.

India is building itself anew, and this is a turbulent and dangerous process. Winners behave differently,

and sometimes they are vengeful and unkind.

It is curious to see general words and mottos in Indian newspapers: «restoration of hope for reviving Hindu identity,» «be proud to say that you are a Hindu,» «wearing bindi used to be a sign of backwardness, but everything changed when the young generation confidently embraced their religion.»

It is obvious what is going on: the new generation is tired of supranational values and has remembered the traditional Indian and Hindu ones. One could talk about Hinduism for ages, but the general impression is that its key ideas are similar to those of Christianity, and also of Islam and other religions, for what it's worth. Non-violence and suppression of own anger, compromise through a dialog, belief in the good as part of the original moral world order of the Universe... By the way, thousands of Orthodox Christian pilgrims from Russia feel at home in India - first of all, spiritually.

But how does an Indian's everyday life change from realization that he or she has values distinguishing them from or bringing them closer to other nations? After all, they remained what they were, it just that in the past they, like Moliere's famous character, «didn't know that they were speaking in prose.»

Still, a lot has changed, and it seems that people now feel better. That is, we see something that has to do with organization of man, who cannot exist for no reason, without a purpose and a goal, just for the sake of living.

And a quote of the day in an Indian newspaper. They publish one daily, choosing something that relates to the present moment. This time, they chose John Stuart Mill, the British philosopher (1806-1873), who wrote, «War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things. The decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks that nothing is worth war is much worse.»

Why live if «nothing» is all there is?

SCO MAY GAIN IMPORTANCE FOR DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is building a new India. He was known as a talented manager when he was Chief Minister of Gujarat. Now his plans include kilometers of roads and bridges, new cities, surging GDP (last year, India outran China for the growth rate), a new healthcare system and garbage disposal. But why did his predecessor fail with this, why was

the country stagnated and depressed under them, even though nothing terrible seemed to happen? It is not about GDP growth and happiness being two different things. It is about what gives rise to what - economic growth to optimism or vice versa?

So, we have a new country with huge prospects, the cosmopolitan elite that has been taught a tough lesson at the elections (Congress leaders and ideologists) and the new, national elite that is securing its power. Moreover, it is a country with a new and quite active foreign policy, paying key attention to its neighbors, whom it did not consider important in the past. So it is building some kind of a big Indian world, even despite the traditionally tense, even aggravated, relations with Pakistan.

Let's not forget, however, that the application to the SCO was made by the government of the INC, but full membership was granted to a completely different government. This means at least two things. Purely logistical trouble, when the new persons in charge of the SCO relations may not know the plans of their predecessors. The same is true about the expert community, consisting mostly of INC members. That is, there will be delays, mutual misunderstandings and similar things with Indians within the SCO. Another thing is the elated, turbulent atmosphere in India, which often may not have time for the SCO.

It is clear and simple with Pakistan. The SCO needs it as a country bordering on Afghanistan, a source of trouble and business opportunities for other member states. Pakistan is a long-time partner of China, and it is overall logical to move it several steps deeper in the regional structures where China has been present from the very beginning to discuss security issues and prospects of the region's development on a par with other members.

The only thing that is clear with regard to India is that it is a very independent and big global force and that Central Asia, in theory, may prove more important for the incumbent government than it was for the previous one. The past Indian elite believed that Central Asia is something where India should generally develop its presence, but there was no hurry. The new one will be building a new policy in the region while being part of the SCO, though not only of it. Yet it is impossible to say now what kind of policy it will be.

FINANCIAL SOURCES OF TERRORISM

WHERE ARE THE TERRORISTS' COFFERS HIDDEN?



Said Gafurov, political expert

AFGHANISTAN: A TRIAL AND CHALLENGE FOR THE SCO

The situation in Afghanistan remains a common problem for the SCO member states. All of them, to a various extent, are regional neighbors of the country that has a reputation of a terrorist haven and the global drug capital.

Afghanistan's instability may quickly spread to Central Asia and beyond. The military and political influence of Afghan Islamism can be sensed not only in the bordering areas of neighboring states, it threatens the security of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region in China, the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and other northwestern areas of Pakistan, the northern states of India and other territories affected by radical Islamism.

Yet first of all, terrorism threatens the future of Afghanistan. It is no coincidence that the country links the status of a SCO observer to its hopes for more intensive joint efforts against terrorism. Kabul does not hide its interest in expanding its involvement in

the SCO and its central structures and in coordinating its policies with SCO partners. This definitely has a positive impact on prospects of stabilization in the region, but the terrorist threat coming from inside Afghanistan remains huge, and the problem of dealing with it is still a priority.

In addition to the Taliban, the country is used as a base by the notorious ISIS and other pseudo-Islamic radical terrorist organizations. Many of them do not recognize state borders on principle, declaring that they should be eliminated for establishment of a single Islamic Caliphate. To expand the territory of their influence, radical groups use such terrorist methods as religious propaganda, development of a network of terrorist cells, training centers and other affiliate organizations in the SCO region. The obvious question is: how are these activities financed? In Afghanistan, the terrorists' coffers are filled with revenue from drug trafficking. This is an important, though not the only source of their money.

TERRORISM AND COLOR REVOLUTIONS: PHENOMENA OF SIMILAR NATURE

Many Islamist groups find asylum and support in Western countries. It suffices to recall that Hizb ut-Tahrir, which started an armed rebellion in Uzbekistan, was based and financed in London, and after the rebellion was defeated and its organizers flew to neighboring countries, local security services had to take measures against its cells acting under the decorous names like the Union of the Just.

The SCO member states remember only too well the disruptive activities of the West during the so-called «color revolutions» and the «Arab spring.» At a meeting of the heads of Security Councils of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in Astana in the middle of April, they approved a new wording of the Convention on Fight against Extremism. Speaking at the meeting, Secretary of the Russian Security Council Nikolai Patrushev called for



«stopping any attempts aimed at releasing international terrorists from the sanctions of the UN Security Council and other tough punishment under criminal law.»

Obviously, it is necessary to decisively counteract the use of extremist organizations as a tool to destabilize the political situation. Silent endorsement of extremists on the part of the Persian Gulf monarchies and some NATO member states allows them to use the threat of terrorism as a means of political influence on the choice of pipeline routes, competition between mass tourist destinations, oil stock prices, etc. Unfortunately, at a time of economic crisis, many in the West find the idea of using international terrorist networks for global destabilization in order to preserve international economic hegemony quite appealing.

STOPPING FINANCING IS THE RIGHT WAY TO FIGHT TERRORISM

The experience of antiterrorist efforts in Russia, China, India and other countries shows that the most efficient tactics of counteracting this evil is destruction of its financial infrastructure.

Financial sources of terrorism include sponsorship from nations that support extremist organizations, financing from private persons that sympathize with radical ideas, and revenue from criminal businesses – arms, drug and human trafficking, smuggling, contract murders, etc. Terrorists also replenish their finances with extortions in areas they control.

The first two sources (sponsorship of governments and individuals) become one in Persian Gulf countries. Remarkably, the United States has not dared to bring charges against Saudi Arabian sponsors who actually paid for the attack on the World Trade Center in New York. The origin of financing of various deeds of Islamic extremists (in New York as well as in Chechnya) is in the Persian Gulf, formally – in local non-government funds. However, it is not only from the Middle East that terrorist organizations receive their finances; money also comes from accounts in Western countries. These accounts belong to various pseudo-religious organizations and ethnic associations, supported by local authorities.

Direct financing of terrorism becomes possible thanks to ongoing flow of finances and personnel

between pseudo-Islamic organizations and openly terrorist groups based in NATO member states and Persian Gulf monarchies. It is enough to recall how funds provided by the US to the so-called «moderate opposition» in Syria are regularly found in the hands of terrorist organizations and also reach the black markets of arms, even in regions far from Syria.

At the same time, when the Turkish troops suffered heavy losses in Syria from state-of-the-art US weapons transferred to the ISIS by US allies, Ankara managed to cut off channels (though not sources) of financial support to terrorists, and it immediately made the life of special services, even in the SCO countries, easier.

Under these circumstances, the main tool of counteracting terrorism should be prevention of criminal use of legally formed financial funds for terrorist purposes, both in Islamic countries and in Islamic communities in the West. It is through these structures that part of funds from Islamic banking comes to legal «charity» institutions and therefrom reaches terrorists, via a network of dummy firms and series of transactions.

Will the SCO's Western partners agree to this? It remains to be seen.

KOREAN PUZZLE



*Alexander Zhebin, head of the Center of Korean Studies,
the Institute of Far Eastern Studies, the Russian Academy of Sciences*

North Korea's missile launches, deployment of components of the US global missile system in South Korea and assignment of US aircraft carriers to the shores of the Korean Peninsula visibly escalated the situation in Northeast Asia. It was aggravated by the statements by Donald Trump and other high-ranking representatives of the incumbent US administration about their willingness to resolve the «North Korean problem» on their own, not ruling out the use of force. The resulting nervous atmosphere can turn into a more serious conflict by accident or mistake.

The US - South Korean scenario for resolving the problem envisages liquidation of North Korea and building a single state on the peninsula, which, Washington hopes, will join the military and political alliance between US, Japan and South Korea, which is being actively built by the Americans and may include other countries in Asia Pacific.

If the US established military and political control over the Korean Peninsula, a unique Asian region in terms of military and strategic importance, their armed forces would

come close to the Chinese and Russian borders in continental Asia, which would drastically change the military and political situation not only in the area, but in entire Asia Pacific.

Given these plans, America urging Russia and China to agree to new sanctions proposed by Washington and meant to eventually lead to elimination of North Korea are similar to attempts to make Moscow and Beijing pave a road for American troops up to their border with Korea with their own hands.

Donald Trump's meeting with Chinese president Xi Jinping in Florida showed that right now the US is trying to achieve its goal through China. As a result, the Korean Peninsula has turned into one of the most complicated knots of American-Chinese disputes. Despite its dissatisfaction with Pyongyang's moves, Beijing cannot «cede» the country to the US and allow American troops to approach the 1,360-km long Korean-Chinese border. Ceding Korea, which has been in China's exclusive sphere of influence for centuries, without putting up a fight would irreparably damage its influence and authority in Asia. The understanding that China would have to respond to

a US military campaign against North Korea in some or other way is one of the main factors that prevents Washington from use of force.

Statements about intrinsic aggressiveness of North Korea is one of the most popular and dangerous stereotypes Western politicians and mass media are pressing upon the international community. In reality, North Korea does not have military, technical or economic resources to win a large-scale conflict. Pyongyang is perfectly aware of that. The country's nuclear missile potential is of political and propagandist rather than military importance; its main purpose is to prevent the Balkan, Iraqi or Libyan scenario from being replayed on the peninsula. This means that the use of force for resolving the Korean nuclear problem either today or in the foreseeable future can only be provoked by the United States or, with its consent, by South Korea.

The attempt of the US and its closest allies in the region to use force to overthrow the regime under the disguise of ensuring non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction would pose a direct threat to the safety of

Russia and China. The fact that after the US invasion in Iraq American bombs and missiles were found in almost all neighboring countries proves that there may be attempts to replay such incidents in North Korea, as well as to use the «outdated», as in the case of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, maps for pointing US Tomahawks to target.

Security of the Far Eastern regions of Russia and their residents directly depends on developments in Korea. The country, whose area is about 99,000 sq km, has about 25 nuclear reactors. Even if at least some of them are destroyed with conventional weapons, the south of the peninsula may become unsuitable for people to live, while radioactive clouds and flows of refugees are unlikely to reach across the ocean, but will most definitely settle down in Russia (and China). The growing threat of a military conflict may increase outflow of the population from the Far East; if the conflict does break out and radioactive pollution happens, the demographic situation may deteriorate drastically.

An armed conflict in Korea would put a stop to multilateral economic projects in Northeast Asia, which are of interest to Russia and are linked to the plans of social and economic development of the Far East and integration of the country into Asia Pacific. Economic cooperation, developed by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, is also jeopardized.

Therefore, Moscow's and Beijing's response to the US attempts to use force in Korea should, it seems, be tough. Due to a number of objective

reasons, China's stakes on the Korean Peninsula are much, much higher. Still, right now the interests of Russia and China in Korea are mostly the same, their priority being prevention of a military conflict at their borders. If Russia and China develop a joint stance on the «Korean issue», it could serve to strengthen trust between Moscow and Beijing and become an example of successful interaction in resolving an international security problem that encroached on the security interests of the two countries.

The degree of Moscow's understanding of various stances and actions by the North Korean leaders, should be directly linked to Pyongyang's willingness to inform the Kremlin (in accordance with the inter-state agreement signed in 2000) about foreign political steps that could potentially touch upon Russia's interests. In the past, some actions by North Korea, such as detention of the *Pueblo*, a US spying vessel, in 1968 or large-scale incidents at the demarcation line between the North and the South, came as a very unpleasant surprise for us.

Since North Korea's incumbent leadership stakes on achieving agreement on the nuclear problem first of all with the US, no unexpected turn in Pyongyang's policy can be ruled out. This theory is corroborated by the recent «advances» towards North Korea on the part of President Trump, who said in an interview with Bloomberg that he did not rule out the possibility of meeting Kim Jong-un.

Judging by statements of the North

Korean leader, he intends to press for international recognition of the country's de facto nuclear status and will continue moving in the direction chosen in 2006 – resolving the nuclear issue «under the Indian scenario», insisting that the US and other stakeholders should give up double standards in nuclear and missile non-proliferation.

It seems that denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is unlikely even in the medium term. There could only be talk about freezing the North Korean nuclear and missile program, preventing proliferation of nuclear weapons, including technology, and also missile technology.

North Korea should be offered a deal similar to agreements prepared for Iran – a package of specific, interrelated measures. Unfortunately, the discussion of the problem at the UN Security Council at the end of April showed that it would take a long time to prepare such a package.

It is worth noting that one of the factors promoting de-escalation in the Korean Peninsula is still development of the inter-Korean dialog. International mediators should encourage direct contacts between North and South Korea, including with the potential of international and regional organizations. Asia has different formats for holding such talks, and one of them is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which is overseeing peaceful settlements in Afghanistan and recalls only too well the old Indian-Pakistani conflict.



WORLD FIGHTS DRUGS, WHILE DRUGS FIGHT THE WORLD



According to the annual report of the UN Office for Drugs and Crime, area under opium poppy in Afghanistan grew by 10% last year to 201,000 ha, and opium production grew by 43%, reaching 4,800 tons.

Ksenia Gukaeva

Another round of battle against the «opiate for the masses» took place in Vienna in February. The 13th meeting of the Consultative Group of the Paris Pact Initiative (PPI) of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime was attended by a delegation of the SCO Secretariat.

As many as 100 envoys from 35 countries and numerous representatives of a number of international organizations gathered in the Austrian capital to discuss the pressing global problem - their serious concern about the current state of affairs and possible ways of counteracting the evil threatening the very foundation of our civilization. In some countries, the image of nation is degrading, being reformatted. In the Philippines, the desperate president Rodrigo Duterte called for people to take justice in their own hands when dealing with drug addicts and drug traffickers.

The meeting in Vienna discussed measures taken by the PPI member

states against drug production in Afghanistan. They were talking about putting an end to new routes and ways of drug trafficking via Central Asia, Southeast Europe, Iran and Pakistan. New ideas on counteracting the drug business were voiced, alongside proposals on reducing the spread of drug addiction, blocking financial flows, etc.

The participants also noted «the extremely high practical results and efficiency of the steps taken under the Paris Pact Initiative to reduce production and international trafficking of opiates.» However, the optimism of the speakers was obviously excessive, and the «extremely high» assessment of the Initiative's results - exaggerated. Drug trafficking from Afghanistan continues blooming all the same.

Speaking about practical counteraction to the drug threat coming from Afghanistan, the most intensive and specific efforts are made by countries bordering on it.

Afghanistan's neighbors have adopted very tough laws against everyone involved in drug trafficking.

Iran, whose border with Afghanistan is 936 km long, has been the leader of the global anti-drug efforts for many years. It has become a real shield on the way of almost half of drugs coming from Afghanistan. Tehran spends up to \$800 million from its budget for this purpose annually, while international organizations allocate only \$15 million.

The Iranian authorities manage to confiscate up to 40% of drug substances (80% of opium and 40% of morphine) available in the world. The measures used by Iranians are extremely severe. Caught drug dealers are hanged on poles along the borderline. Of course, this is «inhuman and undemocratic» and not in line with the «European values.»

Every year, Uzbekistan launches the Black Poppy campaign, during which large batches of the destructive substance are burned in an industrial

furnace in the presence of UN representatives; the drugs burned are those that served as evidence in court trials. Offenders get really long jail sentences. It is worth noting that Tashkent is the seat of the SCO Anti-Terrorist Structure, which, among other things, fights against drug trafficking.

Tajikistan, whose border with the drug cradleland of Afghanistan is 1,300 km long, has the hard task of the buffer area, containing drug transit. The country joined relevant UN Conventions and the global anti-drug system. Ministries and agencies of Tajikistan have specialized anti-drug divisions, the State Drug Control Commission has been established. Skirmishes at the border are frequent, but since Tajikistan is a mountainous country, drug couriers have learned to bypass border posts using remote animal paths. Carrying «white death», they demonstrate unbelievable resourcefulness, hiding it in fresh fruit, pistachio nuts, almonds, shaping drugs as nut kernels or dried apricots. The imagination they demonstrate really deserves better application.

One of the key frontiers for drug trafficking is the border between Kazakhstan and Russia. «White death» is smuggled along its entire length. Experts point out several main directions of drug transit from Kazakhstan, many of them oriented towards underground wholesale drug markets in Russia. The problem is acute

and tragic, Russia understands it fully and works hard to resolve it. Still, up to one hundred thousand Russians, usually young ones, die from drug abuse every year.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan is securing its fame as the world's leading drug-producing nation. The poppy paradise accounts for 93% of the global heroin output. Annual revenue of the Afghan drug business is hundreds of billions of US dollars.

This can be possible only with well organized channels and technological and transport support for drug transit from Afghanistan to other countries.

At an SCO conference in Beijing, I asked an Afghan political scientist about the priority measures needed to change the situation. «The West must first of all stop supplying precursors to my country,» he said. A precursor is a chemical that participates in the chemical reaction that produces a substance, i.e. a predecessor of drug and psychotropic substances. Precursors are supplied to Afghanistan from outside, mostly from Western countries.

Of course, there is an efficient way to change the situation - to reorient agricultural interests of Afghan peasants. The experiment of growing cotton instead of poppy failed, because the former is a fine and difficult skill, requiring knowledge, and revenue from cotton is 40% lower than that from poppy. Another proposal has been made recently - grow saffron,

the world's most expensive spice, almost as pricy as opiates. The Afghan authorities are trying to get their peasants to like saffron: Afghan saffron has repeatedly received a top score from the International Taste & Quality Institute.

At the end of last year, Agriculture Minister of Afghanistan Asadullah Zameer told the Salam Watandar radio station that the country's saffron output had doubled in 2016 vs. 2015 and reached 6 tons. Area under saffron totaled 2,800 ha and it was grown in 31 out of 34 Afghan provinces. Afghanistan was able to find new markets for its saffron in Arab countries and sign an agreement with China, the minister said. The high price and no need for irrigation make this crop quite an attractive alternative to poppy in the eyes of Afghan peasants; growing poppy in Afghanistan is illegal.

But it should not be forgotten that the official Afghan government does not control the entire country. Some provinces are ruled by the Taliban. In 1996, when they came to power, they declared that growing poppy was not approved by Allah, and the flow of opium stopped. Later, however, having lost power after the American intervention, Taliban leaders stopped quoting Allah and saw that the poppy could be a profitable business. Today, it is the main source of financing for the Taliban, which continues its war against the official Kabul.



SERGEY KANAVSKY: NONE OF SCO BUSINESS COUNCIL'S PROJECTS HAS BEEN PUT ON THE SHELF



Daria Shulyakova

The Business Council of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is one of the SCO's core structures, which facilitates interaction between governments and business communities. Its task is to develop projects of economic cooperation between SCO member states. The Council's Executive Secretary Sergey Kanavsky told an InfoSHOS correspondent about its current activities.

The SCO Business Council facilitates implementation of business projects aimed at development of economic cooperation within the SCO. How is it done in practice and what has it achieved?

The Business Council is in fact an association of businessmen, chambers of commerce and industry and organizations of small and medium-sized businesses as the most active members of the SCO business community. Projects supported by the Business Council and areas of

cooperation defined as priorities depend on the goals set at SCO summits by heads of state and government. This combination of business interests and government strategies yields an impressive result.

In practical activities, we rely on the professionalism and authority of heads of the national parts of the Business Council, as this guarantees the efficiency of our structure today and in the future.

What areas of cooperation have produced the most successful results? Which are considered to be a priority?

Our priorities are determined by documents prepared as part of the SCO's activities, at meetings of heads of state and government and ministers of economy.

Economy is the main focus area for the Business Council, but it is not the only one. Lately, we have been addressing humanitarian cooperation, as well as culture and sports. In

the economy, priority tasks for the Business Council are promotion of trade, especially electronic trade, construction and modernization of infrastructure, transport and logistic projects, high tech, agriculture and healthcare. These are the spheres that currently attract the highest interest.

What projects has the Business Council implemented in the past year?

Our projects are aimed at building a system of business communications, assisting businesses, developing tools for cooperation. For example, creation of joint trade and exhibition centers. With support from the Business Council, exhibition centers in Russia, China and Kazakhstan managed to find a common ground and establish cooperation. Another telling example is the development of a new system for interaction between electronic trading platforms. We also have infrastructure projects, such as building a system of industrial parks. China is very proactive



in this area.

With the Business Council's coordination, Russian, Kazakh and Kyrgyz agricultural producers have begun cooperating in numerous areas, from construction of greenhouses to production of biomaterials.

The Business Council is building a comprehensive system of interaction within the SCO, which is ever growing and improving, acquiring new meanings. None of the projects we announce is put on backburner, we are working actively on all of them.

How do you develop relations with SCO observers and dialog partners?

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is a new type of structure, which equally takes into account interests of all of its members. Countries that are now part of the SCO as observers and dialog partners, are attentively watching its activities. They see it as an opportunity to establish new relations, first of all, in business. We actively cooperate with partners from Iran, Belarus, Turkey

and Sri Lanka. There are interesting proposals from Azerbaijan, Armenia and Mongolia.

We have very good contacts not only with observers and dialog partners, but also with many non-SCO regions, which are also interested in cooperation. For example, numerous events of our business program attract such Southeast Asian countries as Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines. They try to use these opportunities to establish economic partnerships with SCO member states.

How does the Business Council work with the SCO Inter-Bank Association?

Both structures were established in 2006, following the decisions made at the SCO summit in Shanghai. Today we are actively cooperating, building a common system of interaction and support for businesses based on agreements signed between us. The Business Council selects and prepares economic projects, while the Inter-Bank Association resolves issues related

to financing. We interact regularly via joint expert sessions and joint high-profile events - joint meetings of the Council and the Association.

At the Astana summit, India and Pakistan will become full members of the SCO. What do you think about the opportunities of economic cooperation now that there will be eight full members?

These countries have had the status of observers until now, so we have been in regular contact with their business structures. Now these contacts will reach a brand new level. Their representatives will have all the rights to participate not only in the work of the Business Council, but also in the work of other SCO structures - meetings of ministers of economy and foreign trade.

These countries know many of our joint initiatives well - their representatives took part in many events of the SCO's economic agenda. We hope that the new status will open additional opportunities for India and Pakistan.

What are the Business Council's plans for the near term?

Our goal is to create optimal conditions for joint implementation of projects. To achieve this, we find sources of financing, encourage business initiatives, shape innovative segments, expand the geography and areas of our work. Interest in cooperation with SCO member states is growing all over the world. And this is not a coincidence: the SCO economic space is a great place for putting in effort and achieving success in a whole range of areas.



ASTANA PRESENTS EXPO 2017



Adil Kaukenov

EXPO 2017 in Astana is one of the crucial projects for Kazakhstan, and the country is energetically and enthusiastically preparing to carry it out.

The project started on 12 June 2012, when Astana's official presentation was held among those of other candidates at the 151st General Assembly of the

Bureau International des Expositions (BIE) in Paris. Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev recorded a special video address to the delegates. In case of Astana's victory, he personally guaranteed doing everything possible to ensure that the project succeeded. Kazakhstan proposed alternative sources of energy and green technology

as the central theme of the exhibition under the title «Energy of the Future.»

Secret voting of representatives of 161 BIE member states, which took place on 22 November 2012, favored Astana as the host of the international specialized exhibition EXPO 2017. As many as 103 countries gave their votes for the Kazakh capital. This was far





from a trivial achievement: it is the first time that an EXPO will be held not just in Central Asia, but also in a post-Soviet country.

The event in Astana will last three months. It will be attended by up to 100 countries and over ten international organizations. The number of visitors is expected to be at least 2 million people.

EXPO 2017 Energy of the Future will attract the best international energy saving technologies, new developments and techniques for using existing alternative sources of energy, such as sun, wind, sea and thermal waters. Astana wants to become an efficient platform for demonstrating the world's best achievements and trends in

the area. The exhibition is expected to give a new impetus to systemic diversification of the economy and technological overhaul of the country's production facilities and scientific base.

Kazakhstan became member of the BIE in 1997 and has participated in EXPOs since 2005. At EXPO 2008 in Zaragoza, Spain, it won a bronze award for exterior and interior design of the pavilion among 104 members of the C category.

The most important aspect of the forthcoming EXPO is, of course, the economic one. In connection to development of green technologies, Kazakhstan plans significant investments in power generation

(\$50 billion by 2030 and about \$50 billion by 2050), half of which will be used to develop renewable energy sources. Hosting of the large-scale event will definitely spur the development of Astana's small and medium-sized businesses.

EXPO will be a serious quality test not only for the organizing committee, but also for the entire transportation industry, hospitality sector and services. Coping with the huge traffic of domestic and foreign tourists will require high-quality management, accurate timing and excellent coordination. But the young and creative capital of Kazakhstan is certain to be up to the ambitious task.



ACHIEVING OPTIMAL INTEGRATION OF NURLY ZHOL AND SREB



In an interview with InfoSCO, Yernar Bakenov, Kazakhstan's vice minister for national economy, talks about his country's role in the Silk Road Economic Belt project

The world is growing increasingly interested in the Silk Road Economic Belt project. A large section of the route will go across Kazakhstan. What effect do you expect it to have on the Kazakh economy?

The Silk Road Economic Belt is part of the One Belt, One Road initiative of the Chinese government aimed at developing multilateral regional cooperation on land and at sea. On September 2, 2016, in Hangzhou, governments of Kazakhstan and China signed a plan of cooperation for integration of the New Economic Policy Nurly Zhol and the construction of the SREB.

Cooperation priorities within the Plan were defined: development of transport infrastructure, manufacturing, trade, etc. Projects are envisaged to create transport corridors China - Kazakhstan - West Asia, China - Kazakhstan - Russia - West Europe and China - Kazakhstan - South Caucasus/Turkey - Europe, with a view to improve the transport infrastructure along the route connecting the northwestern and southeastern shores of China. Besides,

the Plan envisages construction of terminals in the international logistics zone of the port of Lianyungang, construction of a land terminal at the station of Incheburun and a terminal at the port of Bander-Abbas. Chinese companies are expected to become residents of special economic zones National Industrial Petrochemical Industrial Park in the Atyrau area and the Khorgos - Eastern Gate in the Almaty region.

China selected three main routes: from China to Europe (the Baltic Sea) via Central Asia and Russia; from China to the Persian Gulf and Mediterranean via Central and West Asia; from China to the Indian ocean via Southeast and South Asia. It is worth noting that the first and second routes of the Silk Road Economic Belt are complementary to Kazakhstan's New Economic Policy, Nurly Zhol, where special attention is paid to development of transportation and logistics infrastructure. Nurly Zhol includes 16 transportation and logistics projects, out of which 11 envisage construction and reconstruction of roads.

One of the breakthrough road projects is the creation of the international transport corridor West Europe - West China, which will become the shortest route to Europe, with cargo delivery taking around 10-12 days. There are also projects Center - South, Center - West and Center - East, which stipulate reconstruction of about 4,700 km of roads.

Since railway shipments of cargo will be growing, the second line between Almaty and Shu is being modernized. Construction of the second line will increase the capacity of the Shu-Almaty section and increase transit cargo shipments to China, Europe, Asia, the Persian Gulf, and back. The projected volume of cargo processing is 4.4 million tons per year.

Construction of a ferry with a capacity of 4 million tons is currently under way at the port of Kuryk. The first stage was commissioned in December 2016, and the entire complex is set to be inaugurated later this year. It will increase the total capacity of Kazakhstan's sea ports to 23.5 million tons. Construction of a land port and



infrastructure has just been completed on the border with China, in the Khorgos - Eastern Gate special economic zone.

Effect from implementation of these projects will increase the amount of transit cargoes moving from China to Europe via Kazakhstan from 16.3 to 18.1 million tons. Implementation of the SREB project creates new opportunities for boosting the two countries' export-import potential, developing manufacturing and encouraging their trade, economic and logistic cooperation.

What are Kazakhstan's specific steps in the project?

First of all, let me recall that the SREB initiative of China was first voiced by Chinese President Xi Jinping in Astana, on September 16, 2013, during a lecture at the Nazarbayev University.

Subsequent developments were as follows: on December 14, 2014, also in Astana, Kazakhstan's minister for national economy and China's president of the state committee for development and reform signed an inter-agency memorandum of understanding for joint promotion of the Silk Road Economic Belt. The goal of the memorandum was to develop and

strengthen inter-regional contacts and deepen economic activities related to transport, retail, tourism, investment and other areas of cooperation along the SREB.

The work to align the Nurly Zhol state program and the SREB began after adoption of the Joint Declaration of the heads of state of Kazakhstan and China on August 31, 2015 and the Joint Statement of heads of government on December 14, 2015. Later, in September 2016, the parties signed a plan of cooperation between the governments of Kazakhstan and China for integration of Nurly Zhol and the Silk Road Economic Belt.

By now, we have developed a draft road map for implementation of the cooperation plan in different economic sectors and sent it to the Chinese party for approval. Also, we from the very beginning supported China's initiative to set up the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, whose goal is to provide institutional assistance to the strategy of restoration of the Silk Road. Being a co-founder of this international financial institution, Kazakhstan played an important part in its establishment. The Bank already comprises 57

countries, one of which is Kazakhstan. Its authorized capital is about \$100 billion.

Promoting the SREB concept, China, together with other stakeholders, established the Silk Road Fund and the New Development Bank (formerly the BRICS Development Bank). These institutions have amassed substantial funds, for example, the assets of the Silk Road Fund total \$40 billion. This will allow building reliable infrastructure on the continent.

Could you please comment on the discussed alignment of the SREB with the Eurasian Economic Union?

The SREB project has gained broad support in Eurasia. The decision to align the Eurasian Economic Union and the Silk Road Economic Belt was made on May 8, 2015, in Moscow, by heads of state of EEU members.

The alignment will open new prospects for cooperation between EEU member states and China, and between Europe and Asia in various areas. The Silk Road Economic Belt is expected to create a new «Eurasian bridge,» to develop such economic corridors as China - Mongolia - Russia, China - Central Asia - West Asia, and

China - Indochina. So the alignment initiative is an important element of multilateral trade and economic cooperation between all countries of the EEU and SCO.

EEU member states have agreed with the rationale for promotion of the comprehensive initiative of alignment of the EEU and SREB projects. Right now, work is under way to determine the priorities and areas of interaction, as well as to prepare a road map for cooperation with China. For Kazakhstan, the most attractive areas of cooperation are energy, transportation and telecommunications.

The agreement on trade and economic cooperation between the EEU and China that is being drafted will provide the basis for alignment of the EEU and SREB. I believe that its signing will allow EEU member states to reach a new level of trade and economic relations with China and will encourage mutually beneficial cooperation in many spheres. This agreement will become the main tool of economic interaction between the EEU and China, efficiently complementing the existing bilateral interactions.

In September 2015, during the official visit of President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev to China, the two heads of state signed a joint declaration on a new stage of comprehensive strategic partnership. The document laid the foundation for joint development of cooperation in alignment of Kazakhstan's new economic policy Nurlı Zhol and the Silk Road Economic Belt.

Certain steps have already been taken to ensure successful integration of the Kazakh and Chinese initiatives,



such as operation of the logistic terminal in Lianyungang (its current turnover is about 250,000 containers, and this figure will double in the near future), construction of the West Europe - West China road, launch of the Khorgos international center, etc.

As for the West Europe - West China project, it is worth noting its importance both for Kazakhstan and the region in general. It is expected to seriously reduce the distance and time required for shipping goods from China to Europe. Travel along the West Europe - West China corridor will take about 10 days, while the route via the Trans-Siberian Railway takes 14 days and the sea route - 45 days.

By the time the project is implemented, it is expected to ship

about 34 million tons of cargo. New roads will increase the capacity by 50%, shipments, including transit, will become two times shorter, and the travel time will be down 1.5-fold.

I am positive that alignment of the EEU with the SREB project will allow our countries to reach a higher level of trade and economic relations, increase our investment appeal and help to facilitate trade across Eurasia.

Being an active proponent of integration processes, Kazakhstan will continue supporting initiatives of integration with the SREB, aimed at intensifying mutually beneficial trade and economic cooperation. Together, we will be able to counteract global economic crises more confidently and overcome various barriers more easily.



ROUTE OF DIALOG, EVEN IF NOT ALWAYS OF SILK



Naina Aminova on the 30th anniversary of the UNESCO project «Silk Roads, Roads of Dialog»

Thirty years ago, in 1987, UNESCO adopted a program titled «Silk Roads, Roads of Dialog.» The important event took place during the UN World Decade for Cultural Development and demonstrated that UNESCO tried not only to study, but also to preserve the huge legacy of the ancient world.

The Silk Roads, Roads of Dialog program envisages a comprehensive study of the history of Central Asian peoples. Its main goal is to bring closer the East and the West, about which the great Rudyard Kipling philosophically wrote that «never the twain shall meet.» It turns out, however, that the idea of rapprochement can be promoted by establishing closer cultural and economic ties.

A year after the program was adopted, UNESCO announced the start of a ten-year project titled «Integral Study of the Silk Roads, Roads of Dialog.» It envisages broad and comprehensive study of the history of civilizations, establishing close cultural contacts between the East and the West, and improving relations between numerous peoples living in Eurasia.

In 1993, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution on restoring the Great Silk Road as an important route of international cooperation in the area of diplomacy, culture, science, trade and tourism. The core components of the Road's contemporary development are transport communications and tourism.

The Silk Road is one of the most remarkable achievements of human civilization. This transcontinental route for the first time in the history

of humankind connected the West and the East, the Mediterranean and the Far East, the ancient Central Asian and Chinese civilizations. The enormous route emerged in the second half of the 2nd century BC, when the Chinese diplomat and traveler Zhang Qian discovered Central Asian lands for his compatriots. This brought together two great roads: one connected Central Asia to the West, the Mediterranean, while the other came from the East, from the Han Empire.

Gradually, systems of roads and naval routes developed in the vast region spreading from the Atlantic to the Pacific, connecting the most remote cradles of civilizations. The route went from the borders of the Roman Empire, Greece, Egypt, via the valleys of the Syrdarya, Amudarya, Tarim to the borders of the Celestial Empire, the valleys of the Huang He and Yangtze, and from Central Asia in the north to the Indus, Ganges and the shores of the Indian Ocean in the south. Later, these routes formed the backbone of the Great Silk Road.

In the early 1st millennium AD, the vast expanses between the Atlantic and Pacific merged into one single belt of cultures and civilizations. For the first time in the history of humankind, borders of various states came into contact on such a huge distance, 11,400 km from the west to the east.

It is no coincidence that it was at that time that the Great Silk Road emerged. It was needed by the circumstances and brought about by political, economic and cultural achievements of Eurasian peoples of preceding epochs.

The name «Great Silk Road» was for the first time introduced for scientific use by German geographer and geologist Ferdinand von Richthofen in the 1870s to describe connections between the Far Eastern and Western worlds. The coined term proved very successful and generally accepted: silk had been the main goods brought by Chinese merchants to remote lands since the 2nd century AD.

Due to the favorable geographic position of Central Asia, the Great Silk Road became the place of active trade, signing of diplomatic agreements and military unions, of crucial ethnic processes and interaction between cultures – Turk, Iranian, Hellenistic, Arab, Indian, Chinese, etc. History of the Great Silk Road is a history of broad cultural interaction and exchange between the people of the East and the West. It proves that only close cooperation and mutual enriching of cultures can be a foundation for achieving peace and progress for entire humankind.

UNESCO's Silk Roads, Roads of Dialog envisages comprehensive study of history of Central Asian peoples. But its main goal is to establish closer cultural and economic contacts between the East and the West, improve relations between the numerous nations populating Eurasia.

Restoration of the Silk Road that happens in front of our eyes is an amazing project that brings the East and the West closer, resuming the centuries-old dialog between civilizations... Only the captivating jingle of caravan bells has been replaced with music of the industrial era...

RUSSIA AND THE NEW SILK ROAD



Professor Yuri Tavrovsky, sinologist, the People's Friendship University of Russia

The One Belt, One Road forum, which took place in Beijing in the middle of May, is the main foreign political event of the year. It was attended by over 20 heads of states situated in the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB), including Russian President Vladimir Putin.

It was his first meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping this year, where they discussed issues related to interaction on the Silk Road. It is the SREB that creates opportunities for putting bilateral strategic partnership on a solid trade and economic foundation.

The topic of the Silk Road is barely heard in the symphony of foreign political tunes of the Russian expert community, mass media, government agencies and business organizations, tasked with ensuring integration of the Eurasian Economic Union and the SREB. This is hardly a coincidence. Russia has been unable to find its own place and interest in the SREB initiative, and Beijing has failed to offer Moscow an attractive part.

Since 1992, Russia has served as a transit area for Chinese exports to Europe, going from Lianyungang, a hub on the Yellow Sea, across China, Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus, Poland

to the German hubs in Hamburg and Rotterdam. In China, this route has received the grand name of the New Asia - Europe Continental Bridge. In reality, it is just connection of the existing railways in China and post-Soviet republics. Cargos are also shipped across Russia via the Asia - Europe Continental Bridge (the good old Trans-Siberian Railway).

The infrastructure of the SREB, which in Russia is more often called the New Silk Road, includes a large-scale project of the transcontinental highway West China - West Europe. It will be laid from Lianyungang to St Petersburg. The project, launched before 2013, has been only partially implemented. In China, a state-of-the-art high-speed road has been built, which I recently travelled at a very high speed for over one thousand kilometers from Lanzhou to Alashankou. Therefrom, the highway goes through Kazakhstan up to the border with Russia near Orenburg. There are different opinions about where the Kazakh section is completed, but the Russian one still is not seem to be invested.

Therefore, nothing essential has changed in Russian-Chinese transport cooperation in Eurasia since the

announcement of the One Belt, One Road initiative in autumn 2013. Russia continues getting paid for transit along the «continental bridges», one of which recently celebrated its 100th anniversary and the other turned 25. The potential and desirable synergy of constructive impulses of two strategic partners in the biggest infrastructure project of the 21st century has not materialized. A lot of opportunities have been missed.

ALIGNMENT OF NATIONAL INTERESTS IS NEEDED

The logical question is: what's the matter? Problems start at the strategic level. China has its long-term plan, the Chinese Dream, adopted in 2012 and meant to turn the Celestial Empire into one of the world's leading powers by 2049. The One Belt, One Road initiative is part of the plan. The SREB is its continental part, complemented with the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road.

Our strategic partnership succeeded because our national interests in the area of security matched. Our economic partnership is failing because neither party offers projects that would be in the interests of both countries.

Every person in China is aware

of the formula «i dai i lu» (one belt and one road), the initiative is being implemented in accordance with the strict schedule, with huge funds pouring in both from the state budget, regional resources and private investors. Thanks to the SREB initiative, the scarcely populated northwest region of China is becoming a «reserve» living space for the Chinese nation.

Russia's prospects of participating in the Chinese project are still uncertain. China does not see any economic sense and is not eager to invest in expanding the flow of its goods across scarcely populated areas of Russia, nor does it consider the possibility of using transport capacity of Russia's Far East and Siberia. It is indifferent to Russian transport projects, such as Moscow-Kazan, and also projects of comprehensively modernizing and extending the Russian Trans-Siberian Railway to Hokkaido and Busan lobbied by Japan and South Korea, or using the Northern Sea Route.

NEW RUSSIAN PROJECTS FOR THE NEW SILK ROAD

Focusing attention and funds on development of the SREB within China and achieving the first visible success, Beijing saw an obvious lag in routes leading to Europe and the Middle

East. Given the growing goods turnover, bottlenecks may emerge on these routes very soon.

When the New Silk Road was created, several big hubs appeared along it, connecting highways, railways and port facilities. The port of Lianyungang on the Yellow Sea became the eastern hub. In West Europe, Rotterdam and Hamburg situated close to each other represented the western hub. The role of the southern hub is obviously meant for the deep-water port of Gwadar in Pakistan, which will be connected to China not only with a new railway, but also with a strategic highway. The central hub of the entire SREB, its continental core, will be the main city of Xinjiang, Urumchi, situated next to the border crossing points of Alashankou and Khorgos.

It would be in Russia's interest to create another, northern, hub in St Petersburg. The geostrategic importance of the city on the Neva for the New Silk Road has been emphasized by the fact that it was chosen as the endpoint of the West China - West Europe highway, which is to be completed by 2023.

The highway is still under construction, but the system of ports on the Baltic Sea – in St Petersburg and in neighboring Ust-Luga, Primorsk, Vyborg and Bronka –

is functioning and is a ready maritime component of the northern hub. Ust-Luga is the endpoint of several highways, railways and pipelines and is situated close to a nuclear power plant. This transport and power generating infrastructure will serve as the basis for a huge industrial park, consisting of inter-related clusters of enterprises of different sectors. In 2016, Ust-Luga's cargo turnover was 93.4 million tons, while its design capacity is 180 million. The projected turnover of this port and the entire port system around St Petersburg exceeds the capacity of the existing routes leading to them.

Construction of a new, advanced railway from St Petersburg southeastwards, to the Urals, Siberia and then on to China, would be in Russia's national interests. Connected to the existing Asia-Europe Continental Bridge (Trans-Siberian Railway) and the New Continental Bridge, going through Kazakhstan, such route would also be in China's national interests. Access to the Baltic Sea and the transportation system of North Europe would expand its opportunities of direct trade with these countries. It should, of course, be a cargo high-speed railway, not a passenger line. In future, this northwestern route





could be extended northwards, to Scandinavia, and also to East and West Europe.

The geostrategic importance of the northwestern route is increased due to the forthcoming launch of the project of another transport corridor - Belkomur (White Sea - the Komi Republic - Urals). The starting point of the railway that will become the shortest route connecting Siberia and the Urals (and, later, reaching Central Asia and China) is currently planned to be in Arkhangelsk. However, experts and the business community are increasingly advocating the proposal to make Murmansk one of Belkomur's hubs.

This will create a connection between several strategic transport routes of global importance, which are of interest for both China and Russia. In addition to the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, which goes from China via the

Indian Ocean to the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean, another strategic maritime road is taking shape, which could be called the Northern Silk Road. Russia and China agreed on cooperation in the Belkomur project in September 2015, at a meeting of their leaders in Beijing. Construction is scheduled to start already in 2018, and will be carried out by Chinese company Poly International Holding.

It seems that, logistics-wise, the most rational solution would be to create a new line of the northwestern route, which would drastically speed up delivery of containers, take the load off the overbusy Russian highways and go through regions that are not sufficiently connected to the national transportation network. The optimal route, both in terms of length and security, seems to be the one going across Russia and China.

It could start in Urumchi and cross

the Chinese-Russian border in its western, Altay, section. Given that Altay is a natural reserve and has complicated terrain, there could be a bypass via the adjacent territories of Kazakhstan or Mongolia. Then the railway would cross the Trans-Siberian Railway and go northwards, to St Petersburg. Straightening of the route and construction of a state-of-the-art railway would reduce the time needed for delivery of goods.

China plans to start manufacturing cargo trains moving at a speed of 120-250 km per hour in 2020. The new railway would create a powerful impetus for development of Russian regions, not only connecting them to other parts of Russia, but also giving them direct access to the markets of China and Southeast Asia.

An important argument in favor of building the Russian-Chinese transport corridor between Xinjiang and St Petersburg, including the northwestern route and the northern hub, is the security factor. We have already seen precedents of shutdowns or bottlenecks on the trade routes in Poland and Belarus, which pose a potential threat to stable functioning of the way to Europe, which is becoming increasingly important for China.

One potential way to carry out the project could be the setup of a Russian-Chinese consortium like the one that was established in 2015 by China, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan in order to ship cargos bypassing Russia, along the Trans-Caspian Transport Route.

«Zavtra» newspaper



KAZAKHSTAN'S MODERNIZATION IN COOPERATION WITH SCO



Yevgeny Pastukhov

This spring, Kazakhstan once again began talking about the need to continue modernization of the country and society. This positive trend is easy to understand: the country is young, it is intensively developing and striving to improve. What is remarkable is that in the past, the Kazakh leaders drew only from successful Western experience when conducting reforms, but this time they are formulating their own agenda of economic changes and are trying to use the experience and potential of their partners in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

What is the reason for this change of vector? Having obtained sovereignty, Kazakhstan encountered numerous social, economic and political problems. The young nation could not afford to experiment and chose an acceptable model for development guided by others' success, namely, Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea.

Thanks to this strategy, Kazakhstan was able to maintain a fairly high economic growth rate for many years, moving in line with China, India and

Southeast Asian nations. Of course, there were mistakes and the painful «shock reforms.» Nevertheless, concentrating on solving the main economic problems, Kazakhstan succeeded in building the banking, pension and utility systems and created conditions for developing business and a market economy.

Consistent development of Kazakhstan's economy, recovery of big industrial enterprises and small businesses created a market community in the country, where everyone could find a niche. Economically active residents formed the middle class, which became the supporting pole for the authorities.

During the recent international financial crisis, the government quickly came up with a serious economic road map, the goal of which is to protect the middle class, modernize and industrialize the country, increasing its competitiveness on the international stage.

Today, when the global economic system is still struggling, President

Nazarbayev has again set grand tasks for technological overhaul of Kazakhstan's economy, putting it on an innovative footing, creating brand new manufacturing enterprises and research centers and improving the quality of human resources.

The close attention to the problem of modernization is due to several important factors. First of all, transformation of economic relations increased requirements to management of the country's economy. Second, the global financial crisis and political tumult in some Middle Eastern countries, known as the Arab spring, showed clearly that the economic wellbeing of the population is the key factor of political stability in today's world.

Modernization in Kazakhstan definitely has its specifics and its objective difficulties. For example, it is necessary to maintain the balance between the huge potential of liberal reforms and the strong state, able to control social and economic processes. It is for this reason that



Kazakhstan actively used not only Western experience at the initial stage, but also that of the «South Asian tigers,» which had made a fantastic economic breakthrough in the second half of the 20th century. Kazakhstan's recent history shows that its tactics of the happy medium was the right one.

Kazakhstan is the world's ninth biggest country by area and the biggest one without access to sea. But it has a goal to become one of the top 50 most competitive economies, and geography should not be an obstacle here. To achieve this goal, the country has developed programs of regional development, which were inspired, among other things, by the new challenges - the need to build a «smart economy» not dependent on commodities, but based on intellectual assets and development of the services sector.

An important tool in implementation of the program can be found in international interaction within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Dynamics of the SCO's development, its evolution and expansion testify to its great prospects, and the organization is already a crucial international structure in the region.

Thanks to the SCO, Kazakhstan can turn its geographic shortcomings into advantages. It doesn't have a sea, but it has a vast steppe! Its location in the

center of Eurasia definitely underscores its geopolitical role as a transit bridge between Europe and Asia. Kazakhstan connects Asian countries to Russia and the European Union. Transportation routes via Kazakhstan are two times shorter than sea routes.

As is well known, the state of logistics is dependent on the economic situation in general, while globalization of economic processes and the country's integration in global economy are definitely influencing Kazakhstan's logistics. And Astana is showing increased interests in projects of logistic infrastructure.

Kazakhstan is interested in

implementation of China's One Belt, One Road initiative, it has welcomed the connection of the Silk Road Economic Belt to the Eurasian Economic Union. Now Astana wants to see these initiatives come true with the help of international cooperation within the SCO.

Transport isolation was a huge problem for Kazakhstan. However, its interaction with China and Russia within the EEU and SCO opens new horizons. Turning into the region's logistic center, Eurasia's most important hub, would give the Kazakh economy new growth opportunities and encourage its overall modernization.



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LIFE BUOY FOR THE ARAL SEA



Irina Novikova

The airliner had covered half of the distance between Beijing and Moscow, when the window caught some radiant shining from the ground below. Pieces of a gigantic broken looking glass were glittering in the sunlit space. The navigator showed that we were flying above Central Asia. I clung to the window, «Oh God, this is my dear Aral Sea! That is, its splinters - one big, one smaller and plenty of tiny ones...» The sea seemed to be sending the SOS signal to the Creator.

People have been writing its obituary for more than half a century, but the Aral Sea, having lost three fourths of its water, broken into pieces as a mirror, is getting more salty, but is still alive and splashing. The last loyal inhabitant of the Uzbek part of the sea is the flounder, which loves salt water.

The dried up bottom, with ships stuck in it, is a truly cosmogonical picture, comparable only to Dante's hell. It has become a tradition to blame Soviet leaders, calling them murderers of the Aral Sea. But doesn't it give them too

much credit? After all, where are Soviet leaders and where is the sea? Mortal, sinful humans with a limited life span versus the eternal creation of Nature, which may be made disappear only by

its will, by laws of the universe.

As regards the Aral Sea, I support the opinion of academician Agadzhan Babayev, a leading Turkmen scientist and desert expert, who believes that



the disappearance of the sea has, first of all, a natural cause: it has an unknown connection to its «parent sea», the Caspian, and it may change its volume, its borders, die and come back to life depending on different reasons - geophysical, geodynamical, the level of the World Ocean.

This doesn't mean, of course, that men cannot influence the situation. They can, to a certain degree. Under President Nursultan Nazarbayev's initiative, Kazakhstan is successfully restoring the northern part of the Aral Sea. In 2002, the government took a big loan from the World Bank to

platform for the dialog. The presidents agreed to restore it.

Uzbekistan is obviously interested in the experience of its neighbor. Logically, if Kazakhstan was able to suspend the sea's degradation by blocking the Syrdarya with a dam, why cannot Uzbekistan use the same tactics against the Amudarya, the second powerful donor of the Aral Sea? The task is titanic, but all grand projects are moved first of all by a strong political and human will, and Mirziyoyev has more than enough of it.

...A few nostalgic words. I remember seeing the Aral Sea alive and healthy.



create the Kokaral dam. It was built across the canal that took waters of the Syrdarya from the Northern Aral to the Southern. In 2005, the dam was completed, and the Northern Aral began filling with water, coming back to life right in front of one's eyes. A hydrological solution has been found, the biological component in this part of the sea optimized, its shores are being populated and developed again, the traditional fish processing industry has returned.

President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev also plans to change the situation in his country's part of the sea, the Southern Aral. At a recent meeting in Astana, the two leaders signed a package of documents on cooperation and discussed the fate of the Aral Sea. The Aral Sea Salvation Foundation can become the best

At the time, I was a student of the Tashkent University and came to visit a friend, Svetlana Shaposhnikova, in Karakalpakiya. She was an anchor at the Nukus television, where her husband Lev worked as an operator. «As a future journalist, you must see the most interesting thing in this area,» he said. «Get ready, our filming crew is going to Muinak, on the Aral Sea, tomorrow. You'll be impressed, I promised. You'll remember the Aral Sea as long as you live.»

The last sentence proved prophetic. The sapphire face of the Aral Sea, shining in the generous Asian sun, seems to have left an imprint in my soul. Indeed, I remember it more often than other unique places I have seen travelling through many countries. The small hotel where we stayed stood very close to the shore. Taking off my

sandals, I wandered in the golden sand to the purest sea water... The high azure sky, the joyous sun, call of birds swimming in the sea air. How could it not be paradise?

In 1968, I came to the Aral shore, to the port of Muinak, again, this time as a correspondent. My task was to go to sea with a fishing crew and write a story. But an unexpected obstacle came up: Zholdasbek, captain of the seine-net fishing ship, did not want me on board, «We don't allow women here!» They thought it to be a bad omen. The representative of the local administration, who was accompanying me, was not able to persuade him. Then, desperately, I exclaimed, «Captain, please, let me go! I am a seaman's daughter!» It worked. Zholdasbek gave me a long thoughtful look and... nodded.

Our new seiner with the Made in GDR stamp spent a whole day in the sea, from dawn till dusk, briskly going back and forth. The fishermen kept looking in the distance, closely watching the water area. We moved from island to island (it is no coincidence that the name of the sea means «plenty of islands»). Zholdasbek answered my numerous questions, told me curious facts about the sea and local legends. When we approached the mystical island Borsa-kelmes (One who goes doesn't return), I immediately wanted to land, to walk the «forbidden» territory, but Zholdasbek was adamant, «There are too many snakes there.»

The fishermen made unbelievably delicious kebab out of fresh fish and were mopping the deck, getting ready to go ashore. We approached the port when the sun already touched the sea. I asked the question that had been nagging me all day, «Why didn't the crew do anything while at sea and is coming back without any catch? Did you go out just for my sake?» «Of course not,» the captain said. «Now I can tell you. Our task was to patrol a certain part of the sea looking for the astronaut Georgy Beregovoy. He was expected to land somewhere in these parts»...

Scientists insist that in ancient times the Amudarya and Syrdarya fell into the Caspian Sea, not into the Aral, but then, after a gigantic earthquake, the unfathomable power of nature directed their streams to the Aral Sea. Who knows, perhaps, the nature will not remain deaf to the sea's suffering and will restore its natural course...

GREAT RUSSIAN REVOLUTION: SEARCHING FOR THE TRUE WORLD ORDER



On occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Russian revolutions of 1917

Anatoly Korolev, writer

Europe and the entire world met the beginning of the 20th century with obvious enthusiasm. If you look through the newspapers or watch news footage of that time, you will see that people expected only new achievements in the quality of life. Comfort and science were the two axes around which the belief in progress was moving. Meanwhile, only three decades separated the gas attacks of World War I from the horrible atrocities of World War II, which is a ridiculously short period by historical standards.

Today we can state with certainty that the 20th century turned out the most blood-drenched and at the same time the most inspired in the history of humankind.

Before World War I broke out, Russia was the world's biggest monarchy, a forest power taking up immense expenses in the northern hemisphere - 22.4 million sq km, populated by

over 100 various ethnic groups. An Orthodox country, it kept apart from the energetic European civilization: valuing the deeply communal world order above capitalist innovations.

Russia was a riddle not only for others, but even for itself. The majority of the population of this huge country - 80% of 176 million people - were peasants. The overwhelming majority of them were diligent, illiterate people with large families and an archaic lifestyle. Literacy was prized very high among them - they eagerly hung on every smart, bright word and were ready to respond to any urge. The dark, truth-seeking, illiterate world was itself some form of intuitive socialism. It worshiped conscientious equality and open truth.

The country was looking for guidelines for development. Throughout the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, society

was in the state of unrest. Progressive people understood that it could not go on like that: the world had moved on. Everything started in 1861, when serfdom was abolished. Noblemen's estates as the symbol of nobility - the buttress of the Russian monarchy - were decaying. The great Russian writer, Noble Prize winner Ivan Bunin and unparalleled genius of Russian prose Anton Chekhov wrote a lot about it.

Every country has its fateful moments. Russia's fateful hour struck in January 1905, when Tsar Nicholas II ordered a peaceful demonstration in St Petersburg fired at. The Tsar was depressed following the defeat of the Russian army in the Russian-Japanese war, and the crowd making political demands did not help to improve his mood. Armless protesters were cruelly crushed, and the country responded with insurgencies. Social tensions, which had led to the first mass



protest against the authorities, were accumulating, creating foundation for the revolutionary explosion in 1917.

There was another tragedy, which was kept secret from the public for a long time: the long-awaited heir to the throne, Alexey, suffered from hereditary hemophilia. The royal family was in panic. All these ill-fated signs robbed the authorities of their will and they were degrading. World War I finished the ruin of the Russian throne. The country had been at war for the third year, the outcome was uncertain. The Russian Imperial family was shaking and trembling under flaring tempers. Nicholas II, the failure of a Tsar, was renounced first by his court and then by his generals, leading to his abdication... Russian society cheered at this shocking move. Easily and without any bloodshed, power in the country went to the parliament, the State Duma, and the Interim Government, which, however, soon proved a failure, too. Power was simply up for grabs...

It was at this time, in April 1917, that 29 Marxists from Vladimir Lenin's entourage, returned to Petrograd from Zurich. The rebelling Russian society immediately acquired a language of slogans and dreams of the ideal. The Bolshevik Party loudly promised to fulfill the main desire of Russian people, to give peace to the nation, land to peasants and bread to the hungry.

The tight-knit elite team of revolutionary conquistadors managed to seize power in the country and keep

it for as long as 70 years.

We know today that many popular dreams did not come true, but at that fateful hour, when hopes were high, the lure worked.

The second stage of the revolution, in October 1917, secured power of the Bolsheviks. Asserting their position, they were paradoxically destroying one another.

In certain aspects, the Russian revolution followed in the wake of the Great French Revolution, whose god was the guillotine. The Convent, however, declared power of ideals, while Russian Red Commissioners declared power over ideals. They mercilessly eradicated each other, and power was increasingly concentrated in the hands of the leader. There followed the tragic civil war, and the exodus of the «cream of the nation» - noblemen, intelligentsia, and talents.

Lenin's early decay escalated the feud between heirs of the Red power and initially, Stalin was supported by party members as the most moderate among radicals. Now, one hundred years from the revolution, his figure may be confidently put in one line with idealists of global inquisition, his demonic genius compared to the frenzy of Savonarola or Loyola.

The iron leader performed the role of the stern mentor of the young Soviet power till the very end. It is still not known exactly how many people were thrown in the furnace of the Soviet civilization. Bolsheviks were determined to strengthen the country at any expense.

Unprecedented labor enthusiasm, high spiritual ideals and... Stalin's iron hand created the mighty Soviet state. Its tenacity was tested by Nazism, which had conquered entire Europe, but was destroyed by unbelievable heroism and stoicism of Soviet people. Many political prisoners volunteered to join punishment battalions (one of them was Lev Gumilev, the famous Orientalist scholar). They fought against invaders, for their fatherland, its dignity and independence. It seemed that the Soviet power knew no exhaustion.

The international importance of the October revolution, the grand and in many aspects tragic event for Russia, was in a new path for development offered to the world. Socialist countries emerged, colonial empires were brought down, and the authorities of capitalist countries were forced to make social reforms.

The undeniable achievements of the Russian revolution include the grand campaign to end illiteracy and introduction of free education at all levels. The country built a combat-effective army and industrialized. Some consequences transpired only many years later - the first nuclear power plant, the first man in space, the upswing of science, culture and art. This cannot be denied.

The breakup of the Soviet Union was a global political earthquake of the last century. Russia performed the fate's rollercoaster loop. The full meaning of this momentous somersault is yet to be seen, but it would be wrong to view it as a historical fiasco. It is too early to draw conclusions - a historical perspective is needed.

One thing is indisputable, though: despite all the moral and physical dramas and territorial losses, Russia remains a continental superpower. It is looking for new ways of development and is bravely shaping its image on the geopolitical stage.

The ruby red Kremlin stars still shine above Moscow. Russia is walking its path, and its pace is confident.

What holds the nation together at the beginning of the new 21st century? The same thing that held it together at the dawn of the ancient Russian state - the unity of force field, bipolar energy of the universe. And there are also some moral backbone imperatives, three pillars: justice, conscience and honor. And as long as they are alive in people, Russia will be unshakable.

SOFT POWER OF IRINA ZAKHAROVA



Tatiana Sinitsyna

«A Magical Journey to Beijing» is the new charming book by Irina Zakharova. By genre, it is a fairy tale told in a fine graceful style, in essence, it is an encyclopedia full of information about China, by melodics, it is a declaration of love to the country where the author lived for over twenty years.

The plot is quite simple, it unfolds with the help of magic that is present in any fairy tale. A Russian girl, Marusya, miraculously – on a dragon's back – comes to her dream country, China. In an ancient city, the little girl discovers a beautiful and unknown world.

Irina Zakharova has a PhD degree in arts, she is a writer, translator, senior associate of the State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts. Coming to China for the first time in 1981, she, in her own words, «received a shock, as a result of which something clicked inside, creating a powerful interest in Chinese culture.» This interest then manifested itself in various artistic forms.

The Russian art expert received the unusual award «You Enchanted China,» which is given to foreigners for outstanding humanitarian deeds in China.

And now her new book, «A Magical Journey to Beijing,» has come out, and it is as beautiful in terms of contents and aesthetics as the first one. The publication, as in the previous case, was made possible by the patronage of the Chinese Embassy in Russia, and personal involvement of Ambassador Li Hui, who is doing so much for active

humanitarian exchange between the two countries and development of Russian-Chinese relations in general.

«It is a great joy for us that «A Magical Journey to Beijing» by Irina Zakharova has come out, and I am grateful to the author for this wonderful work,» Li Hui said, when opening the book's presentation at the Chinese Cultural Center in Moscow.

In recent years, plenty of books devoted to China have been published in Russia – a 10-volume encyclopedia, Chinese history in six volumes, and numerous works on Russian-Chinese relations and art, the ambassador said.

«It is difficult to write about China and it is even more difficult to write about it in a simple way, so there are few popular books about China,» says Alexey Maslov, an orientalist and a leading Russian expert on spiritual and cultural traditions of the Chinese civilization and present-day social, economic and political processes in the SCO countries. Zakharova managed to get to the essence of the Chinese spirit and the nuances of the Chinese life, he says.

She studied Chinese art at the history department of the Moscow University, getting a wide theoretical understanding of it. Destiny decided so that Irina came to China with her husband, a diplomat. The country awoke strong emotions in her, giving her an impetus to study Chinese culture in depth.

The presentation of «A Magical

Journey to Beijing» was attended by the author's daughter Maria Zakharova, a diplomat, head of the Foreign Ministry's information and press department and its official spokesperson. «Coming to China in 1981, my parents plunged into studies with abandon, studying something even the Chinese did not study at the time, because traditional culture was then covered by a thick layer of historical dust,» she recalls. «I am positive that they did a very important, selfless thing when they began opening the traditional China not only for the Russian audience, but also for the Chinese. Their art served an important cause, bringing our countries closer. It was the effect of changing reality with a «soft power» that is almost certain to produce the desired result.»

«A Magical Journey to Beijing» was illustrated by artist Yelena Yaremenko-Liu, who lives and works in Beijing. Love led her to marry Dmitry Liu, thus becoming member of a well-known family in China, which merges the Chinese and Russian culture. In the distant 1930s, Yelizaveta Kishkina, a descendant of a noble Russian family, married Li Lisan, an outstanding Chinese political figure. Their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren follow the bilingual tradition, growing up with love towards both countries, and, therefore, doing a lot to popularize the Russian and Chinese culture and promote amicable relations between the two countries.

THE SILK ROAD AND THE TURKS



Olzhas Suleimanov, poet, writer, linguist, public figure, diplomat, representative of Kazakhstan at UNESCO

The Silk Road is the oldest and longest trade route and cultural artery that for a thousand years connected two centers of the ancient world – the East and the West. Caravans with silk, porcelain and other exotic goods had to make their way through lands whose population was not always peacefully inclined.

Of course, merchants had to hire armed guards to accompany them. I believe they were found among soldiers of the Turkic Khaganate, from whose attacks the Celestial Empire was trying to protect itself by building a massive fortification now known as the Great Wall of China. In the early centuries

A.D. the Turk-Mongols invented the stirrup, and thus the cavalry, the most mobile branch of the military, was born. Heavy weapons were replaced with light sabers. The saddle with stirrups changed the clothing, too. Long dresses gave way to trousers. Boots appeared to protect feet from blisters, and they had heels to secure feet in stirrups.

The horse became everything for horse people: a means of fast travel across long distances, and mobile food storage accompanying armies. Slow wagon trains with provisions were no longer needed. Herds of cows and flocks of sheep could not keep up with warriors riding at full speed. Galloping alongside the army was now a herd of horses intended for feeding the soldiers during rest breaks. Horsemeat became the food of horse people. In regions where horses were rare and of a limited use, it was prohibited to eat their meat.

It was such Turkic parties that accompanied silk caravans. They were known as «serik» (escort). They escorted caravans to Rome. And it

is possible that the name of these formidable troops was transferred to the unusual goods the seriks delivered to the Roma. Presumably, such troops comprised the most experienced and able warriors. An ancient task force.

I believe etymologists should bear this version in mind when they try to understand the origin of the Latin words «serica» (silk fabric or dress) and «sericus» (silky). The other meaning of the adjective «sericus» is «Chinese,» because the Romans called the Chinese, from whom they got the goods, «seric, sericum.»

Turcologists need to put in a lot of effort to understand the origin of such Kazakh words as «serik» (companion, comrade in arms), and «seri» (knight, warrior). Are they related to the Turkish «erik, eri» (troops)? But I will not dwell on it here.

...The most influential etymological dictionaries have long established the academic genealogy of some European names of silk. According to their version, all roads of European silk come from Rome. The Latin word

«serik» gave birth to all variants with «mispronounced r» - from English «silk» to Russian «шелк» (pronounced as [sholk]).

But what are we going to do with the Italian «seda», Spanish «sede» or

«sidi» (silk, made of silk - Gothic), followed by «sede» (silk - Spanish), «seda» (Italian). Italians in Florence (the Florentine dialect later became common Italian) got their silk from Spain, not from Rome. It came to Spain

which were home for hundreds, if not thousands, of people hired by the Empire. Which empire? Most probably, the Middle Empire, because it was the manufacturer and seller of the product that needed such transit points most of all.

While reasoning this way, it occurred to me to try to use a Chinese dictionary to analyze etymology of ancient Germans found in the Crimea (ostgoths) and Andalusia (visigoths). The Chinese dictionary has the words «go» (state, empire), and «tu» (land, territory). They are often used in a combination, «gotu» (imperial, state territory).

I believe that the routes of the Great Silk Road were cultivated confidently for so many centuries that it is hardly possible to deny the possibility of emergence of camps set up by the Chinese, and then it is quite probable that these camps bore Chinese names. And then the economic and political name became ethnic, turning into the most ancient German ethnonym. It looks like now we know who the Goths known from the 6th century A.D. were. They were Germans that helped China to carry silk and other goods from the Crimea (Ost-Gothia) to Andalusia (Vest-Gothia). Therefrom, to Florence, silk travelled with Spanish merchants, judging by the development of its name: sidi (Chinese, Gothic), sede (Spanish), seda (Italian).

The Turkic terms were used along the Road, too. For example, the word «alban» (duty, tax) was used in the names of territories where border services and customs were established.

The area around the Chinese border, for example, is inhabited by the Kazakh tribe Alban, which might have been engaged in such activities in old times. The country on the western shore of the Caspian Sea (now the territory of Azerbaijan) was called Alban in the 3rd century A.D. I believe that one of the Silk Road's route went there: a port on the Mangyshlak shore, where one of the Gotu (but not Germans) might have been. Therefrom, the cargo was sent to Alban by tow boats. And then, on camels and horses, it travelled across Transcaucasia to Iran and Byzantium. An important point to consider: local population could have called themselves «Alban.» Is it a coincidence that the word «Albanian» in Chinese sounds like «azebay-zhen», very similar to «Azerbaijan»? Is it possible that the Turks never managed to master Chinese pronunciation? And added «r»,



Old German «sidi»? Apparently, not all European bazaars, even in the Apennines, received the fabric from Rome. Some of it had to reach these markets by other routes.

II

Let me set forth my theory. It has to be preceded by a certain logical scheme. Silk was invented and produced in China. And, presumably, this is where it got its name. Therefrom it was carried on camels accompanied by cavalry troops via foreign countries. When the merchants met dealers and buyers, how did they call their product? Would buyers (Romans) invent their own name for it? Somewhere there must have been the original name of the fabric used by merchants, of that I am certain. After all, we do not try to invent names for exotic fruits and vegetables that reach our table, but use their original names that arrive together with them - a coconut, a banana, coffee, cocoa... Could the same happen to silk? After all, the mechanism of word spreading can hardly have changed over centuries.

I looked up a Chinese dictionary: si - «silk», sidi - «silky, made of silk».

Western bazaars sold not silk, but silk fabrics, dresses and other things made of silk, so the adjective became a noun:

from the Visigoths, ancient Germans. Does it mean that the Goths received it directly from Chinese merchants? It certainly looks so.

I'd like to share a theory not found in written sources, but suggested by the history of different names of silk found in different languages.

...Starting from the 3rd-4th century, the Turks accompanied silk caravans, meeting them at the border of the Middle Empire, somewhere in Mongolia. One route (there were several) led to the Crimea, the land of the Ostrogoths (Eastern Goths). Here the cargo was loaded to ships and was accompanied by Goths to, say, the Balkan shore, where fresh camels and horses were waiting. Goths led the caravan to Andalusia, where it was taken over by Visigoths. They would spread silk across Spain, up to the Mediterranean sea, and therefrom Spanish merchants' ships would carry sede (silk) to Italy, where it would reach counters under the Italian name «seda.»

The Silk Road developed for hundreds of years. In the most convenient places of the route, villages would sprout, where people would build a caravan serai, stables, warehouses for transit cargoes, walls for protection against bandits. Presumably, there were such fortified centers on the Gothic route,



which Chinese don't ever pronounce, and turned the determinative «zhen» (person, which is added to any name or denomination of a person to distinguish from objects and animals) into «dzhan» (soul in Azerbaijani)? After all, the same determinative was used to write in Chinese such Muslim names as Mohammed, Ali, Galim, etc. In our language, they became Mukhamedzhan, Alizhan, Galimzhan, etc.

Unbelievable? But needs to be checked.

For me, the Chinese pronunciation of «Albanian» proves not only the origin of the name «Azerbaijan», but also its direct connection to the ancient name of this land, Albania. Many historians do not believe that there is any connection: Caucasian Albania is one thing, and Turkic Azerbaijan is another, which came to be much later. Now we can look at the origin of «Azerbaijan» taking into account the additional information.

The Balkan country, where one of the trade routes probably went and where duty had to be levied, was also called Albania by Turks. And people who were entrusted with the task were called Albans. Their relationship with the Turks was maintained almost till the 20th century, influencing both the language and religion of the Albanians.

III

Different offshoots of the Silk Road reached German lands, too. We've already named one of them, Gotu. There were other Germans, who had the customs authority in another area of Europe. They were in contact

with a Turkic tribe, whose language had a systemic alternation of labial consonants b/m. And they gave these Germans the name «Alman» (=Alban). Then it spread to all Germany. Unbelievable? Perhaps, but it needs to be checked, all the more so as there are no other versions of the name's origin.

If the UNESCO Great Silk Road project does not boil down to a few formal meetings, but inspires revivalist response in relevant sciences, humankind may learn a lot of interesting things about itself, which will help it to build a future.

IV

...To conclude this essay, I'd like to point out that Turkic people assimilated the Chinese name for the fabric, *sidi*, replacing the Chinese suffix of an adjective, *-di*, with their *-lik*. And what they traded was no longer *sidi* (unlike Goths), but «*silik*». This allows us to understand the routes of Chinese caravans travelling to Europe accompanied by Turkic horsemen. The Englishmen preserved the name that is the closer to the Chinese-Turkic original - *silk*. Similar forms are found in Northern German, Baltic and Russian languages. Dialectic distortions make them look like «*selk*», «*seolk*», «*selik*». And in some tongue, I am positive, this precious goods was called «*serik*». And the word spread to the guards, which, most probably, were not a peaceful lot. Their appearance must have terrified the local population, who, having heard that the *silik* (*sirik*, *cirik*, *serik*) were coming, would leave their native land, for territory to be taken up by Turkic

tribes following in their wake.

The Great Migration Period coincides with the first centuries of the Silk Road, which also became Great. Was it a coincidence that Turkic people settled down on the vast expanse between Mongolia and Byzantium along Silk Road routes? I am more and more inclined to believe that the Turkic word for silk (*si-di* > *si-lik*) became the name of accompanying guards and then was generalized. The Kazakh language preserved the earlier meaning of the word «*serik*» (escort) and «*seri*» (knight).

But the Turkic name for the fabric reached Rome distorted, and it was transferred on people bringing this fabric and their guards.

The word «*silik*» did not survive in any Turkic language. I found it only in ancient Turkic texts of the 8th century, in a set phrase «*silik kyz*» (a beautiful girl). Silk was the symbol of beauty. Ancient Turks did not know anything prettier than this shining, smooth and bright fabric. Later, when they learned to manufacture it on their own, they invented their own name for it, «*zhibek*» (from «*zhib*» - «thread»). And that's how the Kazakh poetic name *Kyz Zhibek* (Silk Girl) came to be. This is what beauties were called.

...History of silk is an amazing part of Eurasia's ancient history, and I am happy that the Decade of Cultural Rapprochement began in Kazakhstan in 2013 with a UNESCO conference devoted to the Great Silk Road. The Decade is still here. There is still a lot for linguists and historians to do to understand what divided us and what will bring us closer. Knowledge, probably.

RUSSIAN CENTER OPENS AT UNIVERSITY OF TEHRAN



Zahra Mohammadi, head of the Russian Center, teacher of Russian language and literature at the University of Tehran and translator of Russian books, speaks about why young people in Iran learn Russian and what they want to know about Russia.

How important is opening of the Russian Center for the University of Tehran?

Being the main university of Iran, we are, of course, very interested in cooperation with Russia - its universities and academic organisations. It goes without saying that our department of foreign languages and literature is really happy about it, because we are extremely interested in cooperation with Russia in the areas of culture and research. We believe that opening of the Russian Center at the University of Tehran is a momentous event.

How long has Russian been taught at the University?

For seventy years, or even more. The Russian language department was among the first to appear at the University. Now it offers education in two areas: linguistics and literature. In addition to undergraduate students, we have postgraduates and students in a master's program. Besides the department of Russian language and literature, the University has the department of Russian studies, which is more concerned with the culture, economy and politics of the Russian Federation. There are also departments

of Russian language and literature at more than ten other universities of Iran.

Where do graduates with knowledge of Russian find jobs?

At various companies that do business in Russia. The Defense Ministry needs translators from Russian. University graduates work for various organizations involved in cultural cooperation with Russia. Quite a number of specialists become translators of Russian literature.

To what extent are today's Iranians interested in Russia?

In the last fifty years, bilateral relations between our countries were more focused on military and economic ties. Cultural cooperation has, unfortunately, never been a priority. However, there has always been a dialog, and interest in Russian culture has been passed on via human communication. In the last four years, however, the government has become more active in expanding cultural cooperation between our countries. This trend definitely helped the University of Tehran to take the serious step of opening the Russian Center. Speaking about students, not so long ago they were more interested in political matters and wanted to choose this path - to go work at the embassy. But in the last two or three years, as translations of current Russian fiction have appeared, young people have become more interested

in Russian culture. Our students watch Russian films and listen to Russian music with significant interest. I believe that interest in the Russian culture is gradually growing in our society.

In the Soviet era, Iranians used to study in Russia. Many come to Russia today. What is the dynamics here?

The number of students that go to study in Russia has grown. The most popular areas of study are Russian language and literature, oil and gas, aviation technology, physics, chemistry - these areas are the most popular among our students. And music, of course. I know that in recent years many of our students were admitted to the Moscow Music Conservatory and the Gnessins Musical College.

What Russian writers and composers are best known and popular in Iran?

Pushkin, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy... Chekhov is perhaps the most read Russian writer in Iran. People also read Bulgakov, Pasternak, and Sholokhov. Tchaikovsky and Rakhmaninov are the popular composers. Contemporary music is also known.

What are the plans of the Russian Center?

We plan to organize competition in Russian language and literature for Iranian students studying Russian. I am certain that it will be very interesting.

Russky Mir

WEAVER WHO WOVE HIMSELF GLORY



Oksana Chernova

He was an amazing weaver – he wove himself Glory. His name became canonized, his life is wrapped in garlands of legends, with threads of historical truth. The philosopher weaver, the wise weaver, the poet weaver, the spirit of Indian culture, he was one of those who come to this world to make it better. Kabir chose Love as his tool – because this was something the reality in which he lived needed so badly.

The exact date of his birth is not known: researchers agree on 1440. At the time, the Indian society was being burned from inside by confrontation of Hinduism and Islam. Born by an Indian mother, but brought up in a Muslim family, Kabir deeply respected all of his origins, advocating the Hindu-Muslim unity throughout his life. He told people that God is one, he lives in the heart of every man, and all men are brothers and should love each other. He was also opposed to the castes.

Looking at the present-day world, which has still not gotten rid of castes

of different kind, where feud, social and religious contradictions continue prospering, one can only wish to have more such missionaries of love as Kabir was.

The infant born from prohibited love and left by his mother on the bank of a river (the legend has it) had no chance to survive. But a married couple accidentally found him and took him in



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- they thought they saw a shining aura above him, a sign of his «uniqueness». The adopting parents named the baby Kabir, which means «Great.»

Common weavers, they taught him their craft, and he proved to be extremely skillful in it. Kabir never got any education, he could not read or write. Everything born within him reached the world as live words during sermons and talks to pupils, who wandered after him, writing down his every word.

The words were so beautiful and wise that they remained in people's souls forever. People came to Kabir's shop to get a piece of fabric and went away wondering at the dignity and wisdom of his beautiful and poetic speeches. Kabir's lines became part of folklore, his verses were turned into hymns.

In India, the name of Kabir, his philosophical teaching and poetic legacy continue living in different levels of society - among ordinary people, in temples during service, at schools, colleges and universities where his works are studied. The Indians call him a «genius» and worship

as a saint. His tomb has become a place of pilgrimage.

India is one of the few ancient civilizations who has managed to preserve its system of values throughout long millennia. What can be said here? There have always been fewer treasures of Spirit in the world than treasures of Mind. Despite the impressive scientific and technological achievements of our «cool» epoch, its eye turned to micro and macro worlds, there are only a handful of translators on the earth able to transfer to another soil the meaning and beauty of the great works of Kabir, not losing, as he put it, «the rose's aroma in the fingers of the wind.»

Kabir happened to live in the historical space between Dante and Shakespeare, and he is their poetic brother, not only because of equal mastery, but also as the singer of love - ordinary, sinful love. More than one hundred years before Shakespeare's famous sonnets were born, Kabir created love lyrics of equal intensity and impact.

Rabindranath Tagore, the great

Indian poet, philosopher and artist, Nobel Prize winner, was the first to bring Kabir's words to the outside world. A collection of Kabir's poems appeared in English in 1915. This created a bombshell effect in the cultural landscape.

Little is known about the first person who tried to translate Kabir into Russian. The «treasury shelf» of my home library holds a small volume titled Kabir. Lyrics that was published in Moscow in 1965, translated by Semyon Lipkin. As soon as you open it, your soul gets caught by the beautiful and wise words.

...It is obvious that this extraordinary person, with his passionate spirit, could not live a quiet, settled life. Kabir's sermons irritated his haters and fanatics, arose anger and libel among the stupid and spiritually deaf. Rebellious speeches about the single god turned Brahmins, mullahs, dervishes, yogis against him. The authorities exiled him from his native Benares.

There are many legends devoted to the poet's wanderings. He was followed by crowds whom he continued to teach and enlighten. His pupils wrote down his words and verses.

Feeling the proximity of death, Kabir began getting ready for Maghar, a place where the dead reach salvation. He settled down in a small hut on the bank of the river Ami and asked his followers to bring him two bedspreads and lotus flowers and then leave him alone.

The pupils began arguing how the teacher should be buried - burned in accordance with the Hindu tradition or put in the ground as Islam requires. Kabir exclaimed, «Be careful! Do not discuss it and do not take to arms!» These were his last words...

When they came to the hut some time later, they did not find a body: only two bedspreads with flowers scattered on them. The Hindu took one bedspread with flowers and cremated it (the ash is still kept in Benares). Muslims took the other and buried it in Maghar. Later, two snow-white tombs - Hindu and Muslim - were erected there.

Kabir liked to compare the world around him to a spread canvas, he called the earth and the sky «a weaver's loom.» «The loom may break? So what, you don't need to repair it: my thread will be joined to the world's transparent fabric...» This eternal thread continues connecting us to Kabir even today.

AYGUL, KYRGYZSTAN'S UNIQUE FLOWER, BLOSSOMS IN MOSCOW



A remarkable thing happened in Moscow this April: an aygul (moon flower) broke into blossom in a yard near the Babushkinskaya metro station. The appearance of the ambassador of Kyrgyz flora in the Russian capital is nothing short of a miracle: the Red Listed endemic grows only in four places on the planet - the Hissar Mountains, Kashmir, Hindu Kush and the Batken region in Kyrgyzstan.

Mount Aygul-Too, where the beauty can be found, is an internationally popular tourist destination. The aygul breaks into flower in April and delights the eye for about 20 days. Thousands of tourists from different countries come to see the miracle of nature during this time; people in love are usually especially eager to see the aygul, because it symbolizes love and faithfulness.

Botanists' name for the aygul is *Pentelium Eduardi*. Back in the Soviet era, in 1978, it was Red Listed as a disappearing species. The plant's thick stem can reach up to 1.5 meters and is crowned with magnificent scarlet flowers in a setting of oblong leaves. Experts say it takes seven years for new sprouts to appear, and in another seven plant blossoms for the first time. Every year, it adds another new bright orange flower to its crown.

A Kyrgyz legend has it that in the days gone by there was a rich man living on Mount Aygul-Too who had a beautiful daughter named Aygul. She was in love with a brave horseman, Kozu Ulan, and her father blessed their union.

They were preparing for a wedding when trouble came. Enemies attacked the peaceful village, and Kozu Ulan fought against the intruders together with other warriors. The enemy was defeated, but Kozu Ulan was killed.

Mourning her groom, Aygul asked to hold his heart, and his friends took it out of his chest. Holding her beloved's heart, Aygul went up to a high mountain and flew herself down. In a few days, a flower of unparalleled beauty appeared in the place where Aygul had fallen. People named the flower «aygul». Remarkably, there are

always drops of dew inside the flower, which local people call «Aygul's tears». This is how the legend goes.

And then there is the true miracle of the present day: the mountainous flower aygul is blossoming in Moscow. «It broke into flower in the second half of April,» Maksatbek Abdyrazmanov, who had come to Moscow from the Kadamzhaysky district, told journalists. «I could not believe my eyes when I saw it: after all, the aygul only grows in the Batken region, but here it was, blooming in a Moscow yard. There are many labor immigrants from Kyrgyzstan in this district of the city. Some of them must have brought the flower's seeds or root with them, and the Moscow climate turned out to be quite agreeable for it.»

