



REGIONAL SECURITY AND GEOPOLITICS ISSUES

ПРОБЛЕМЫ РЕГИОНАЛЬНОЙ БЕЗОПАСНОСТИ И ГЕОПОЛИТИКИ

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Central Asia: Region's Potential and New Challenges

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Abstract. Traditionally, Central Asia is associated with a favorable geographical location and significant natural resources. These factors are of interests for the West, Russia, and China in the region. Meanwhile, the potential of Central Asian countries leaves many questions unanswered, as they face many regional challenges. The aim of the study is to identify the geopolitical and economic potential of the Central Asian countries, as well as to identify the challenges that the states have faced in recent years. A special attention is paid to the water and energy issue, which remains the most pressing problem for the whole region. In the conclusion, the author identified two of them: the persistence of economic difficulties in the development of Central Asian countries, which to a certain extent act as economic competitors, as well as the increased influence of extra-regional actors on the countries of the region.

Keywords: Central Asia, West, Russia, China, multilateral formats, energy, water resources

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Центральная Азия: потенциал региона и новые вызовы для центральноазиатских государств

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Аннотация. Традиционно Центральная Азия ассоциируется с выгодным географическим положением и значительными запасами природных ресурсов. Данные факторы усиливают интерес Запада, России и Китая к центральноазиатским государствам и в целом к региону. В то же время потенциал стран Центральной Азии оставляет много вопросов, поскольку страны сталкиваются с большим количеством региональных проблем. Цель исследования заключается в выявлении роли геополитического и экономического потенциала стран Центральной Азии, а также определении вызовов, с которыми государства сталкиваются в последние годы. Отдельное внимание уделяется водно-энергетической проблематике, которая остается наиболее острым вопросом для региона. Сделаны выводы о сохранении проблем в экономическом развитии стран Центральной Азии, которые в большей степени выступают в качестве конкурентов, а также о возросшем влиянии внерегиональных акторов на страны региона.

Ключевые слова: Центральная Азия, Запад, Россия, Китай, многосторонние форматы, энергетика, водные ресурсы

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Introduction

In recent years, the geopolitical importance of Central Asia, which includes five states: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, has increased significantly. In the context of dramatic changes in world politics, the geopolitical importance of the region has increased. For China, Central Asia represents the territory through which the supply routes for Chinese goods pass. For the West, the importance of the Central Asian states has increased in the context of the sanctions policy towards Russia. The countries of the region have faced open pressure from the United States and the EU, which are seeking a revision of their foreign policy and a weakening or severing of trade and economic ties with Russia. The goals of extra-regional actors have significant differences, but they have one thing in common: to use Central Asia in their own interests. At the same time, the rather weak economic capabilities of the Central Asian countries predetermined the nature of the foreign policy course. The leaders of the Central Asian countries are forced to maneuver between more powerful geopolitical actors, thus seeking solutions to economic issues and defending their interests.

The countries of Central Asia face significant challenges, which are determined by the level of their economic development and unresolved regional problems. In particular, this concerns water and energy development. The problem worsened after the collapse of the USSR and is accompanied by economic difficulties in each state and barriers that stand in the way of energy development; the geographical isolation of the region shows its effect.

Region's potential

As a rule, the potential of Central Asia comes down to the following: the size of the population in the region and the availability of natural resources that are in the depths of the Central Asian states and are of “global significance”¹. However, natural resources have not yet created the conditions for an economic breakthrough for the Central Asian states. The extraction of oil, gas, and other minerals, which began to be developed during the Soviet period, only partially solved socio-economic problems but did not ensure rapid economic growth. This is due to a lack of necessary technologies, a lack of funding, and a shortage of specialists. Moreover, as the situation with gas and oil production in the Central Asian states has shown, they are experiencing difficulties in saturating the domestic market and ensuring the necessary volumes for supplies to the foreign market. In 2023, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan were forced to begin gas supplies from Russia in order to stabilize the situation on the domestic market.

In discussions about the potential of the region, the emphasis is often placed on an advantageous geographical location, which provides or should in the future provide certain advantages to the countries of Central Asia. In reality, Central Asia is geographically isolated, without direct access to sea communications. Neighbouring large states makes Central Asian countries dependent on their policies.

As a rule, the region's potential is attributed to the rapidly growing population of Central Asia. On the one hand, this provides a significant amount of labor resources that can be in demand in industry and agriculture. In 2023, the number of Central Asian states reached 78 million people. By 2050, the population is projected to exceed one hundred million people². On the other hand, demographic growth has led to increased pressure on water resources. In addition, population growth poses the challenge of solving food problems and creating employment. As a result, the increase in the number of residents so far creates more problems for the countries of the region rather than providing any competitive advantages [Kasymov, Hamidov 2017]. As a result, a critical assessment of these and other

¹ *Central Asia, geopolitics and water — what awaits in the future?* (2019). Scientific Information Center of the Interstate Coordinating Water Management Commission of Central Asia (p. 32). Tashkent.

² Karmazin, I. (2023). *Squeezed out drop by drop: what will water shortages lead to in Central Asia*. Retrieved July, 3, 2023, from <https://iz.ru/1537493/igor-karmazin/vydvavlivaiut-po-kaple-k-chemu-privedet-defitsit-vody-v-tcentralnoi-azii>

parameters shows that the potential of Central Asia is not so obvious and often creates more problems for the region.

The reasons for this situation are partly addressed through internal problems. This is the uniform nature of the economy and the influence of extra-regional states, which initially, after the collapse of the USSR, determined the place of the Central Asian countries in their politics. At the same time, the history of the development of states and the presence of unresolved regional problems have demonstrated an impact.

Water and energy challenges

The key problem for the region remains the issue of water resources. This is due to the uneven distribution of water resources on the territory of the countries of Central Asia, the growing shortage of water, as well as the divergence of interests of individual Central Asian countries regarding the regime of water resource use. Here, climate change is having a significant impact as well. “In the twentieth century, human impacts contributed to widespread glacier retreat in Central Asia” [Manton, Stevenson 2014].

After the collapse of the USSR, the countries of the region signed a significant number of documents that were aimed at solving the water problem. However, despite the signing of various documents and the achievement of multilateral agreements, including within the framework of the Interstate Coordination Water Commission (ICWC), the situation in the use of water resources in the region has not changed. The countries of Central Asia have not been able to solve the problem of water resources [Zhiltsov et al., 2018b]. Accordingly, the clash of interests in the water sector has become clearly defined [Zhiltsov et al., 2008].

At the same time, in recent years there have been a number of changes in the policy of the Central Asian states in the water and energy sector, which indicate the interest of the countries in the region to solve the problem of water resources within the framework of bilateral and multilateral formats [Berndtsson, Tussupova 2020]. In 2022, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan signed an agreement “On the management, protection, and rational use of water resources of the Amu Darya River”³. The agreement states that “each of the parties, if it is necessary to construct or reconstruct hydraulic engineering or water management facilities on the transboundary Amu Darya River on the territory of its state, will coordinate its actions with the other party”⁴. Then, in April 2023, the countries signed a protocol where they emphasized the need to “study measures to reduce water losses by strengthening the banks and leveling the bed of the Amu Darya River...”⁵.

³ *Agreement between the Government of Turkmenistan and the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the management, protection and rational use of water resources of the Amu Darya River.* Retrieved September 13, 2023, from http://cawater-info.net/bk/water_law/pdf/uzb_turkm_2022.pdf

⁴ Same as above.

⁵ *A meeting of the Uzbek-Turkmen intergovernmental commission on water management issues was held in Tashkent.* Retrieved April 26, 2023, from <https://yuz.uz/ru/news/v-tashkente-sostoyalos-zasedanie-uzbeksko-turkmenskoy-mejpravitelstvennoy-komissii-po-voprosam-vodnogo-xozyaystva>

During the same period, the countries of the region “approved water withdrawal limits for the period 2023-2024”⁶. This concerned the use of water resources in transboundary watercourses: the Syrdarya and Amu Darya. In September 2023, the issue of using water resources was discussed in a five-party format at the Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of the region⁷. The countries agreed to develop regional cooperation on issues that arise during climate change [Yang et al., 2019].

Such agreements made it possible to relieve the severity of the problem and prevent its aggravation. These shifts in the position of the Central Asian countries are forced and dictated by the growing shortage of water resources in the region. It is quite difficult to accurately measure the deficit, although countries have already approached the threshold of water stress [Hill, Minbaeva, Wilson, Satylkanov 2017]. However, there are estimates that suggest that “water withdrawal per capita in Central Asia has halved compared to the Soviet period, from 3,500 m³ to 1,712 m³ in 2020”⁸.

Further analysis of water resources threatens to provoke conflicts between states in the region since it is not possible to reach a compromise [Dadabaeva 2023]. An increase in water withdrawal from Afghanistan will lead to an increase in its shortage. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, which are located downstream of the Amu Darya, have already faced water shortages in recent years. The average long-term river flow is 79 km³. In dry years, which have occurred frequently in recent decades, the volume of water resources has decreased. “In 2000, it was 41.7 km³, in 2008, it was estimated at 34.9 km³, and in 2012, it was 45.4 km³”⁹. “Since June 2022, the occupancy of the Amu Darya basin dropped to 65–85 % and remained below normal until the end of the season”¹⁰. At the same time, by the end of the first decade of the 21st century, “the volume of water consumption was estimated at 131.3–155 km³ per year, i.e., the water use regime has become extremely tense” [Klaptsov 2012]. According to the President of Uzbekistan, Sh. Mirziyoyev, “the water shortage has become acute and irreversible and will

⁶ *ICWC meeting: Important agreement on water in Central Asia*. Retrieved November 13, 2023, from <https://optimism.kz/2023/11/02/zasedanie-mkvk-vazhnoe-soglashenie-po-vode-v-centralnoj-azii/>

⁷ *Fifth Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asia in Tajikistan — Results. 2023*. Retrieved September 15, 2023, from <https://www.newscentralasia.net/2023/09/15/5-aya-konsultativnaya-vstrecha-glav-gosudarstv-tsentralnoy-azii-v-tadzhikistane-itogi/>

⁸ Vinokurov, E. Akhunbaev, A., Chuev S., Adakhaev. A., & Sarsembekov. T. (2023). *Effective irrigation and water conservation in Central Asia. Reports and working papers 23/4*. Almaty: Eurasian Development Bank. P. 9.

⁹ The water level in the Amu Darya may decrease sharply. What is the canal that the Taliban* are building? Retrieved February, 17, 2023, from <https://kun.uz/ru/news/2023/02/17/uroven-vody-v-amudare-mojyet-rezko-umenshitsya-chto-predstavlyayet-soboy-kanal-kotoryy-stroyat-taliby?ysclid=lku2931nd166377213> *The Taliban movement is recognized as a terrorist organization and is banned in the Russian Federation.

¹⁰ Tashkent is concerned about Kabul's construction of a canal in the Amu Darya river basin. 2023. Retrieved February, 16, 2023, from <https://rossaprimavera.ru/news/2ccc15cb?ysclid=lkuf6m1nd861442487>

only worsen in the future”¹¹. He added that “today, as a result of the shortage and inefficient use of water resources, the countries of the region lose up to \$2 billion annually, and the damage caused by the deterioration of the environmental situation can reach up to 11 % of regional GDP”¹². Thus, the countries of Central Asia are faced with increasing stress due to the scarcity of water resources [Zou, Jilili 2019]. In general, the problem of water resources threatens the countries of Central Asia with at least economic losses [Karthe, Abdullaev, Boldgiv, Borchardt, Chalov, Jarsjo, Li, Nittrouer 2017]. By 2050, droughts in Central Asia could cause damage of 1.3 % of GDP per year, which will lead to the emergence of about 5 million internal “climate” migrants”¹³. At the same time, interstate contradictions between the countries of Central Asia may lead to an increase in economic losses, especially in the event of a further reduction in available water resources.

Against the backdrop of an increasing shortage of water resources in Central Asia and a reduction in the area of glaciers feeding transboundary watercourses, Afghanistan has recently begun to influence the situation on this issue. At the same time, the policy of the Afghan side is causing concern in the countries of Central Asia, since the situation may worsen [Ildiz 2015].

For a long time, Afghanistan was excluded from the discussion of water issues. The countries of Central Asia negotiated on the problems of water and energy resources in a five-party format. This approach was based on assessments that Afghanistan, immersed in internal problems, receiving external financial assistance, and dependent on drug production, did not need additional water resources.

In recent years, the situation has changed. Afghanistan no longer wants to accept the fact that “most of the water flows to neighboring countries”¹⁴. A document that was prepared in Afghanistan back in 2008 noted that “states bordering Afghanistan, without consultation with Afghanistan as a source of upstream water resources, have been increasing their water consumption from transboundary waters throughout a thirty-year period of occupation, civil disobedience, and reconstruction after armed conflicts”¹⁵. As a result, in recent years, Afghanistan has begun to show interest in water resources, hoping to increase their consumption. The Kush-Tepa canal construction project is aimed at solving this problem. Its implementation will make it possible in the future to increase the “selection of water resources from the transboundary river—the Amu Darya” [Zhiltsov et al. 2018a].

¹¹ Gasimov, N., & Romanov, R. (2023). Central Asian countries discussed water shortages. Retrieved September, 16. 2023, from <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2023/09/15/995533-tsentralnoi-azii-vodnii?ysclid=lqzfh5srs943940520>

¹² Gasimov, N., & Romanov, R. (2023). Central Asian countries discussed water shortages. Retrieved September, 16. 2023, from <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2023/09/15/995533-tsentralnoi-azii-vodnii?ysclid=lqzfh5srs943940520>

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Afghanistan in 2020: COVID-19, climate change and development issues. (2020).Tashkent. Scientific Information Center of the Interstate Coordinating Water Management Commission of Central Asia.

¹⁵ *Water resources of Afghanistan* (2008). Interstate Coordinating Water Management Commission of Central Asia (p. 7). Tashkent

The construction of the infrastructure facility began in March 2022. The canal will have a length of 285 km, a width of 100 m, and a depth of 8.5 m. The canal is expected to be completed by 2028¹⁶. After its completion, water should flow to agricultural lands in the provinces of Balkh, Jawzjan, and Faryab. As a result, after the canal is put into operation, “irrigation areas in Afghanistan may increase to 1 million hectares”¹⁷.

Directing part of the water resources into the canal will have a serious impact on Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, which are already experiencing a shortage of water resources [Gulakhmadov et al. 2020]. The construction of the canal will lead to the fact that “water consumption from the Amu Darya in Afghanistan could increase from 7 km³ to 17 km³. This will be especially problematic for downstream Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, as they could lose up to 15 % of irrigation water from the region’s main river, which in turn will lead to a decrease in crop area”¹⁸. According to environmentalists, “the construction of the canal will lead to climate change and ultimately to an environmental disaster”¹⁹. The construction of the Afghan canal will further reduce the amount of water resources that will flow to the Central Asian states. It is estimated to stand at about “10 km³, which will lead to further deterioration of the situation”²⁰.

Afghanistan does not limit itself to the construction of the canal. The plans for the construction of the Dasht-i-Jun hydroelectric complex are also being discussed. “The volume of the planned reservoir of the hydroelectric power station will be 23.3 km³ of water, and Afghanistan will be able to accumulate most of the summer flow of the Pyanj River”²¹. As a result, “two large projects will lead to a sharp decrease in summer releases into the territory of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan”²².

The Afghan projects can be implemented by 2030. However, along with the construction of hydraulic structures, which is relevant to all Central Asian states, climate change is occurring at a rapid pace [Maraun 2023]. This leads

¹⁶ Boyarov, E. (2023). *Afghans are building a canal from the Amu Darya near the border with Turkmenistan*. Retrieved March, 28, 2023, from <https://daryo.uz/ru/2023/03/28/afgancy-stroat-kanal-ot-amudari-vozle-granic-s-turkmenistanom?ysclid=lkut3f0r8v185356972>

¹⁷ Zakhvatov, A.V. (2023). *An unprecedented struggle for water may begin in Central Asia*. Retrieved January 29, 2023, from https://www.ng.ru/courier/2023-01-29/11_8646_water.html?ysclid=lkusupxoa3289085189

¹⁸ *The water war is already on the horizon*. Retrieved May, 29, 2023, from <https://uzmetronom.agency/2023/05/29/vojna-za-vodu-uzhe-na-poroge.html>

¹⁹ Panfilova, V. (2023). *Tashkent shared technologies with Kabul*. Retrieved March, 26, 2023, from https://www.ng.ru/cis/2023-03-26/5_8689_asia.html?ysclid=lkur8pkze6873014216

²⁰ Karmazin, I. (2023). *Crazy drying: the Taliban* are finishing off the main river of Central Asia*. 2023. Retrieved March, 29, 2023, from <https://iz.ru/1489813/igor-karmazin/beshenaia-sushka-taliby-dobivaiut-glavnuiu-reku-tcentralnoi-azii?ysclid=lku18r5oir768706516> * The Taliban movement is recognized as a terrorist organization and is banned in the Russian Federation.

²¹ Shulepina, N. (2022). *How will the Kosh-Tepa canal being built in Afghanistan affect the Amu Darya?* Retrieved December, 10, 2022, from <https://sreda.uz/rubriki/voda/kak-povliyaet-stroyashhijsya-v-afganistane-kanal-kush-tepa-na-amudaryu/?ysclid=lku20cm5v612828344>

²² Ibid.

to a decrease in the amount of water that flows from upstream countries to downstream countries. As a consequence, the increasing withdrawal of water, which is expected in the coming years, occurs simultaneously with a decrease in its volume. Such multidirectional trends pose a threat to the aggravation of interstate relations in Central Asia. Contradictions will intensify under the influence of climate change, which will have different effects on the political, economic, and social development of individual countries [Granberg, Glover 2023]. Without fundamental changes in the policies of the Central Asian states and their multilateral interaction with the participation of Afghanistan, the countries of Central Asia will not overcome the aggravation of the situation [Zonn, Kostianoy, Semenov 2020].

External influence

After gaining independence in 1991, the Central Asian states began to pursue independent foreign policies. The conceptual foundations of a foreign policy course were developed, which were based on the so-called multi-vector approach. The countries proceeded based on the fact that diversification of foreign policy contacts would ensure not only the protection of sovereignty but also create conditions for economic development. At the same time, countries were unreasonably expected to build equal relations with extra-regional actors. Such expectations were not met. In turn, extra-regional actors quickly imposed their policies on the countries of Central Asia, including them in the sphere of their geopolitical and economic interests. The use of a wide range of economic and political instruments made it possible to expand influence in the region, essentially imposing its agenda on the Central Asian countries.

In recent years, the external factor in the development of Central Asian countries has become more pronounced. All extra-regional actors are characterized by the use of a multilateral format of interaction with the countries of Central Asia. The C5+1 format is considered by external states as a universal mechanism through which it is possible to develop common approaches. This mechanism is actively used by the USA, EU, Russia, China, India, and Japan. The UK intends to use a similar format in 2024. The report, published at the end of 2023, entitled “Countries at the Crossroads: UK Engagement in Central Asia”, essentially expresses the general approach of the West to the countries of the region. It lies in the fact that since Russia and China have become more active in Central Asia, efforts must be made to prevent this²³. This thesis clearly fits into the logic of anti-Russian sanctions and the policy of pressure on the countries of Central Asia. In turn, the countries of Central Asia do not refuse the proposed formats, considering them additional opportunities to defend their interests and attract financial resources. Such

²³ *Countries at crossroads: UK engagement in Central Asia*. Tenth Report of Session 2022–23. House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee. Published on 10 November 2023 by authority of the House of Commons. P. 8.

maneuvering between extra-regional actors is a forced step, preventing one from becoming completely dependent on any of the states.

Such a strategy for the countries of Central Asia does not ultimately allow them to fully defend their interests. Political pressure from a number of extra-regional actors, active participation in the political life of foreign non-governmental organizations in the countries of the region, and unresolved regional problems ultimately weaken the countries of Central Asia. The situation worsened after February 2022, when Russia began conducting a special military operation (SMO). Since then, interest in Central Asia on the part of the United States and the EU has increased many times over. The West began to exert political pressure on the countries of the region, demanding to join the anti-Russian policy [Kryzhko, Pashkovsky 2021].

For China and Russia, Western pressure on Central Asian countries is a serious geopolitical challenge. Russia is interested in maintaining its influence in Central Asia and forming a “belt” of friendly states interested in developing economic and political relations. In addition, under the conditions of sanctions, the countries of the region provide Russia with opportunities for the delivery of goods. For China, Central Asia is of no less importance since it also occupies a significant geographical location. It is obvious that the coming to power in the countries of Central Asia by representatives of the elite who are oriented towards the interests of the West is considered a negative scenario in Russia and China.

Central Asia: between disintegration and cooperation

The history of modern development in Central Asia shows that there are more contradictions in the region than factors that could contribute to the formation of a single geopolitical unit. In addition, the region has never represented a single geopolitical and cultural entity [Nishiaki 2023]. The key factors that complicated the formation of Central Asia as a geopolitical unit were ethnic conflicts, diverging interests in the field of water resources, and territorial disputes between the countries of the region. Accordingly, against the backdrop of these problems, integration initiatives had no chance of implementation. Thus, in the 1990s, there were attempts to create the Central Asian Union (1994) and the Central Asian Economic Community (1998). However, they were unsuccessful.

The situation began to change in 2016 after the new President of Uzbekistan, Sh. Mirziyoyev, came to power. Uzbekistan's change in approaches to interaction within Central Asia made it possible to begin a new stage of regional cooperation. The formation of a mechanism for consultative meetings of regional heads can be considered a breakthrough. The first meeting took place in the spring of 2018²⁴.

²⁴ *At the initiative of Shavkat Mirziyoyev, a consultative meeting of the heads of state of Central Asia was held.* Retrieved March, 15, 2018, from <https://president.uz/ru/1571>

At the same time, the Uzbek side moved to normalize relations with other Central Asian states: Turkmenistan²⁵, Kazakhstan²⁶, and Kyrgyzstan²⁷.

As a result, bilateral agreements complemented the multilateral format of meetings of the leaders in the region. In September 2023, the Fifth Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asia was held. The approval by the heads of state of the regulations on the Council of National Coordinators for the Consultative Meetings of the Heads of State of Central Asia can be considered a breakthrough. The creation of such a mechanism creates conditions for deepening cooperation and evaluating previously reached agreements.

The multilateral format is an important component in solving regional problems and establishing cooperation between countries in the region. It complements bilateral agreements between the countries in Central Asia. At the same time, cooperation between Central Asian states is not yet based on close economic interaction. This is evidenced by the foreign trade indicators of the two largest and most developed countries in the region. Thus, the share of the countries of the region in Kazakhstan's trade turnover in 2022 was 10.5 %²⁸; for Uzbekistan, this figure was 15 %²⁹. These data show that Central Asian countries have more developed economic relations with extra-regional actors than within the region. This situation does not create a solid basis for interaction; there are no economic incentives to solve regional problems. "The further strengthening of strategic rivalry, elements of which are already evident today in the Central Asian region, gives rise to new contradictions, but not on ideological but on geopolitical and economic grounds"³⁰.

Conclusion

The countries of Central Asia have potential and opportunities for development. Natural and human resources, as well as geographical location, provide certain chances for successful economic growth. However, the presence of unresolved

²⁵ *Agreement on strategic partnership between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan dated March 6, 2017*. Retrieved August 30, 2021, from <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/4647214>

²⁶ *Joint Declaration on further deepening the strategic partnership and strengthening good neighborliness between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Republic of Kazakhstan*. Retrieved September 13, 2023, from <https://president.uz/ru/lists/view/346>

²⁷ *Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan demarcated 1,170 kilometers of border in a year*. Retrieved September 13, 2023, from <https://tj.sputniknews.ru/20170904/uzbekistan-kyrgyzstan-demarkirovali-granitsy-1023244628.html>

²⁸ *Kazakhstan's foreign trade turnover in 2022 reached record levels*. (2023). Retrieved February 16, 2023, from https://forbes.kz/actual/stats/vneshnetorgoviy_oborot_kazahstana_v_2022_godu_dostig_rekordnyih_pokazateley?ysclid=lqzkp36ahq653098721

²⁹ *Infographics: Trade of Uzbekistan with Central Asian countries for 2022*. Retrieved January, 25, 2023, from <https://review.uz/post/infografika-torgovlya-uzbekistana-so-stranami-centralnoy-azii-za-yanvar-dekabr-2022-goda?ysclid=lqzkv8lxp42105957>

³⁰ *Central Asia, geopolitics and water — what awaits in the future?* (2019). Scientific Information Center of the Interstate Coordinating Water Management Commission of Central Asia (p. 32). Tashkent.

regional problems and the inability to agree on key issues, primarily those related to water and energy resources, are holding back the development of the Central Asian states.

The external factor plays a dual role. Foreign investment in various sectors of the economy and participation in the development of natural resources to a certain extent replaced the destroyed economic ties created during the Soviet period. Overall, however, the West has integrated Central Asia into its long-term interests. This factor has clearly manifested itself since February 2022, when the countries in the region found themselves under powerful political pressure from the West.

Thus, weak economies and dependence on external factors prevent the region from realizing its potential. As a result, countries in the region are forced to concentrate their efforts on solving regional problems.

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