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Research Article

**NEW GAME CHANGER POWER IN EURASIA:  
SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION**

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**ABSTRACT**

The Eurasian geography is a strategic intersection for great powers which are currently interested in the region. After the collapse of the USSR, the Russian Federation seemed to slow down politically between 1990 and 2000 to regain its lost power and maintain its influence in the region. Geography continues to impact states' survival and foreign policies in the Eurasian region. After the Cold War, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization became one of the critical organizations in the Eurasian region. The paper discusses the organization's influence and power in the region's geopolitical significance. Its methodology will be a comparative literature interpretation on the axis of qualitative data. The study assumes that this region remains a game-changer where great powers focus. The paper also evaluates the latest situation based on regional and global developments.

**Keywords:** SCO, Russia, Central Asia, Great Powers, Iran, China.

## INTRODUCTION

After the end of the Cold War, while the Russian Federation became the successor country of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), many new states in Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Baltic regions were integrated into the international system. Although power has become a fundamental element in the existing structure of the international arena, countries and regions reinforce this power with cooperation and make partnerships meaningful. Eurasia is a large continental area covering the continents of Europe and Asia, but it is also the centre of the oldest settlements historically. The region's rich historical and geopolitical significance results from a complex tapestry of events and processes. Its importance cannot be overstated, as it has played a vital role in shaping the contemporary world. The geography of Eurasia, which is the centre and crossroad of many commercial networks, especially the Silk Road and Route, has also been at the centre of many geopolitical theories. Undoubtedly, the most critical work on the region was embodied in *The Geographical Pivot of History* by the English geographer Sir Halford John Mackinder (1904), in which he presented the Heartland Theory. Mackinder famously said, those who dominate the region dominate the world politics. In this context, the Shanghai Five was transformed into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and became an international security organization.

Shanghai Cooperation Organization is undoubtedly one of the most remarkable organizations in Eurasian geography. The SCO, which one can interpret as an intergovernmental alliance consisting of the People's Republic of China (PRC), Russian Federation (RF), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India and Pakistan, represents a large part of the world's population, territories and resources. This power is also the background of Asia's becoming an essential player in regional power dynamics. Following the disintegration of the USSR, the Russian Federation underwent a period of political stagnation from 1990-2000 to regain its lost power and maintain control. However, this period saw the emergence of regional organizations, that also included Russia. In this context, the "Shanghai Five" was established among the former Soviet countries, mainly the members of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and the PRC in 1996. It is crucial to recognize that the influence and reach of the SCO should not be confined to any particular geographic region. Also, during the period between 1990 and 2000, Russia focused on its internal problems; therefore, its foreign policy was limited, particularly in Central Asia. In 2005, China and Moscow signed a statement to oppose the unipolar world order and the domination of one superpower. Russia aimed to push the US out of Central Asia, evident from the closure of US military bases in the region. The US's support of Color Revolutions and regional crises, such as the Russian attack on Georgia and the annexation of Crimea, increased tensions between the US and Russia. It became crucial for Russia to expel US forces from the region.

Many countries recognize the organization as a critical centre of attraction, with several participating as observers or dialogue partners. Iran, India and Pakistan are among these exemplary countries. The relationships between actors have become increasingly important and influential in today's world that has to be viewed through a lens of interdependence, as each actor's actions can greatly

impact the others. In addition, the functional scope of the organization have been increasing since its establishment. Regional security, a crucial aspect within this axis, is further emphasized by the fact that member states share borders with Afghanistan, Iran, Azerbaijan, Armenia and other regions prone to conflict. Within the scope of the SCO, which constitutes the case study of this study, security and its impact in the region constitute the main research focus. This paper methodologically focuses on the descriptive aspect of the SCO within the Eurasian geography. The main objective of the study is to highlight the SCO's ability to expand its area of influence quickly by adapting to changes and cyclical developments. The SCO is primarily focused on Asia, but it has continually evolved since its inception to address international and regional issues. In this respect, as a qualitative method, the case study focuses on SCO as a single case. Thus, this paper takes a qualitative case study approach to explore SCO in Eurasia. Firstly, a brief geopolitical and strategic definition of Eurasian geography will be provided. Secondly, it will provide historical context by explaining the power dynamics and primary strategies employed by the great powers in the region. Lastly, the emergence of the SCO in the international arena and the factors in its evaluation as an actor will be discussed. This article will examine the security measures that the SCO implements within its member states and regional activities. Hence, it will examine whether the SCO can be considered a significant actor capable of influencing the geopolitical dynamics within the context of recent developments in the region.

## EURASIA AND GREAT POWERS

To fully grasp the significance of the Eurasian region in the global landscape, it is crucial to approach it from a conceptual standpoint. In this respect, the effect of geography on international relations is an essential factor in terms of its effects on states' survival and foreign policies. When we look at the region's power, two issues draw attention; the first is its geopolitical position and the effect of its strategic importance in the context of power. In this respect, when we say geography, the concept of power creates a phenomenon that comes to mind simultaneously. An actor's behaviour in the global stage is shaped by geographical factors and the dynamics of power. As Yves Lacoste (2000) emphasizes, this situation highlights the role of geography in altering the contextual boundaries and even contributing to the ontological dimension of conflict. With Lacoste's words, is it enough to read geography, power and war, with the logic that "geography, above all else, serves to make war"? It is essential to consider that starting with certain assumptions may create conflict zones in certain areas. In his work, Lacoste (2000) contends that geography serves not only as a tool for warfare but also plays a crucial role in the development of strategic knowledge, which is closely linked to a range of political and military practices. So, by recognizing the military applications of geography from the outset and utilizing it to gain a competitive advantage in various fields.

The Eurasian region, owing to its geographical positioning, has historically been a pivotal area for different civilizations and nations, (Walton, 2007; Jackson et al., 2008) The demographic structure of this region deserves secondary consideration. Demographics significantly impact political power, similar to how water shapes rocks or wind wears them down. Besides the existing geopolitical

position of the region, it also shows how dramatically populations can change over time, according to historian Kulischer. E.M. Kulischer once highlighted the significant displacement of populations over time. In the year 900 A.D., Berlin had no Germans, Moscow had no Russians, Budapest had no Hungarians, Madrid was a settlement of Moors, and Constantinople had hardly any Turk (Jackson et al., 2008: 15). Thus, the impact of demographic mobility on the power of this region and its reading with migration movements over the centuries embodies the impact of Eurasian geography on the international system.

Although it may seem like a fact of ancient times that historical experience has contributed to the rise and fall of nations and empires (Keneddy, 1989), the region still has great demographic potential. We examine the perspectives of societies on the relationship between population and power, followed by an investigation into any lessons that history may have taught us on their interconnectedness. In this case, the demographic power of the SCO should also be kept in mind. The SCO's scope covers a region that boasts unparalleled geopolitical and demographic strength. We must include this region in our considerations. Despite China and Russia being the major global players in the region, it is essential to acknowledge the position and potential of the regional actors. Historically, 13th-century roads and transit routes passed through the Eurasian and Central Asian regions encompassing a long line in the later. This line indicates that in addition to the "Silk Road" route, the Russian steppes constitute a vital trade area in terms of northern trade. In particular, the trade routes between China and Central Asia stretch from the south of the Caspian Sea to India, Iran, the Arabian Peninsula, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean.

**Figure 1.** *SCO and Growing Across Eurasia*



Source: Sputnik, 2023

Given its significant geopolitical and demographic strength, the region under the SCO's scope must be included (Map I). We must acknowledge and leverage the potential of this strategic location. During the 19th century, the approach of the great powers to the Central Asian region played an important role in world politics with its power struggle-oriented effect. The Russians and the British clas-

hed in Central Asia when the British began thinking about their plans to invade India in 1801. British agents closely monitored Russia's activities in the region during this period. As Russia's activities in the region increased, British agents watched their every move. Through careful monitoring, the British could gather crucial intelligence and stay one step ahead of their rivals. At the same time, the British realized the potential of the Central Asian region and used the available opportunities to hinder the activities of their Russian rivals. The rivalry between the British and Russian Empires for influence in Central Asia, extending up to the Aral and Caspian Seas, was famously known as the "Great Game." Although the Great Game ended with the agreement signed between the Russians and the British in 1907, this struggle continued in the background (Ozel Ozcan, 2022). The region did not lose its global importance during the collapse of the Russian Empire and the two major world wars in which the world was hit hard on a global scale.

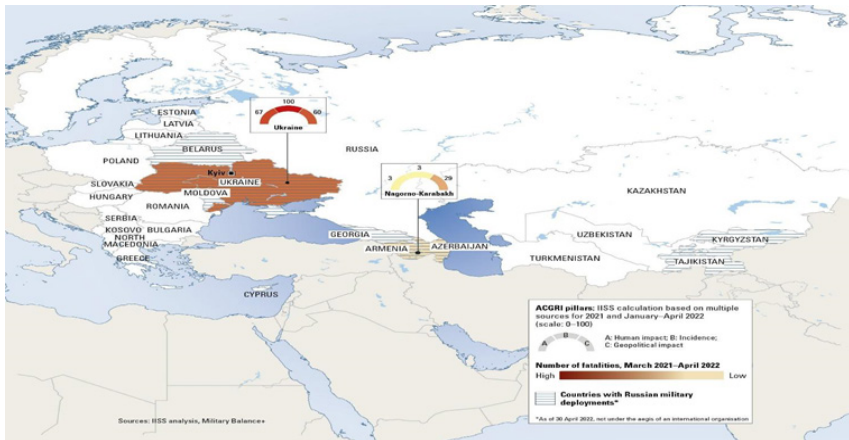
The Cold War era played a pivotal role in intelligence warfare, and its significance cannot be overstated. The tactics, strategies, and technologies developed during this time shaped the modern landscape of espionage and counterespionage. Hence, during the Cold War period, it was seen to be crucial in intelligence wars. During the Cold War period, within the scope of espionage, the U-2 plane belonging to the United States was shot down based on espionage activities in the Eurasian region. Pilot Francis Gary Powers demonstrated the region's importance during his fateful flight to the Soviet Union in 1960. At the time, there was a conflict between the USA and the USSR that also involved Türkiye, a buffer state with a high potential for conflict.

Eurasia's geography and potential have consistently made it a region of enduring significance, continually attracting the attention of major world powers. The approach of the great powers to the Eurasian region has always created an area of competition. However, the most critical issue here is that it is one of the central regions of international relations. Europe became the central world politics region after the 1648 Westphalian order. The presence of the dominant forces of the international system in Europe, the new geographical discoveries, and the Enlightenment period enabled Europe to move to a more advanced position than the rest of the world while simultaneously creating an area where this geopolitical activity was the primary centre. Today, while states struggle for regional dominance and, ultimately, global power, Eurasia is the most crucial economic, geographic and strategic region of the world (Walton, 2007: 7). According to Walton (2007), the Eurasian region is one of the three global geographic power centres. Two other centres of the world's economic and political power are emerging i.e. an area dominated by the USA, the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) and the European Union (EU) institutions increasingly dominating Europe.

On the other hand, According to Unaldilar Kocamaz (2019) Russia views the US presence in the region with suspicion, particularly after NATO's eastward expansion. Moreover, the US's support for Color Revolutions in the region, which were seen by the Kremlin as a regime change strategy promoted by the West to destabilize Russia, has further heightened tensions between the two nations. Russia aims to push the US out of Central Asia, highlighted by the closure of US military bases in the region. Despite claiming the bases were to help stabili-

ze Afghanistan, China and Russia have called for immediate withdrawal of US troops from the region. In 2009, Kyrgyzstan's Almaz Atambayev declared that the lease for the only US Central Asian air base in Manas would not be renewed. Consequently, the US closed the base, marking the resurgence of Russian influence in the region. Kyrgyzstan joined the Eurasian Economic Union, while Uzbekistan rescinded US base rights. Although the US's relationship with Central Asian countries has changed over time, Russia's influence remains permanent and challenges US influence in the region (Unaldilar Kocamaz, 2019: 131-132).

**Figure 2.** Major Conflict Zones in Eurasia



Source: IISS, 2022

Ultimately, after the collapse of the USSR, many post-Soviet countries opposed regional reintegration. However, one organization, especially in the economic field, draws attention when viewed from the regional perspective. Russian President of the Eurasian Economic Union, Vladimir Putin, called for a new regional initiative called the “Eurasian Union”, which aims to promote close economic integration and freedom of labour and capital movement, which is primarily based on the European Union. It offers a framework inspired by this context, and this New Union would be “open to the world”. Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan decided to establish the Customs Union in 2006 and agreed on a standard code in 2009. The Customs Union officially started in 2010 (International Crisis Group, 2016: 2). This way, the Eurasian Economic Union came into existence. It is essential to distinguish this union from the SCO. Due to its economic foundations, the Eurasian region experiences many conflicts in the international system. According to Map II, recent conflicts have occurred in the region, including the Ukraine-Russian War and the Azerbaijan-Armenia War.

Various conflicts have plagued Central Asia, and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan has been a significant source of concern. These developments have

resulted in a surge of casualties in 2022. These challenges have been a cause of increasing concern in the business and academic communities alike. The militarist spirit in the region is gradually increasing. In this respect, the problems centred around the war zone involve the rest of Europe and northern Eurasia. The instability of many European governments has emerged in connection with the war in Ukraine, with the governmental turmoil in the UK being just one of the most striking examples. According to Minakov (2022), the region has three military rings. The first local ring is the spillover effect of the war launched against Ukraine, which has spread to neighbouring countries. In the second ring, frozen conflicts are thawing, while in the third ring, covering Northern Eurasia, new risks and challenges are emerging around countries reacting to or participating in the deepening and protracted Russia-West hostility.

## **SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION AND ITS POSITION IN EURASIA**

The SCO was established in 1996 by the PRC, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan under the name “Shanghai Five”. In 1996 and 1997, the heads of state of the five countries met in Shanghai and Moscow. They signed agreements on “Increasing Military Confidence in Border Areas” and “Reducing Military Forces in Border Areas”. The purpose of the Shanghai Five has been defined as increasing trust between member states, ensuring the demilitarization of border areas and promoting regional cooperation. This system was named SCO with the participation of Uzbekistan in 2001. Considering this organization’s capacity and regional scope, it covers a territory with a population of 1.5 billion, constituting three-fifths of the Eurasian continent and representing a quarter of the world’s population. In addition to India and Pakistan, four observer countries and six dialogue partners have joined the organization. The summit meetings, which took place between 1998 and 2000, were held in Almaty, Bishkek and Dushanbe, respectively. In these meetings, the member countries exchanged ideas on issues such as increasing confidence in border regions and areas such as politics, economy and security. This process indicates the SCO’s efforts to deepen and strengthen regional cooperation (Albert, 2015).

In addition, the documents signed in 2005 regarding the establishment and legal status of the SCO are crucial. The union’s extensive network of collaborations with various regional organizations is a testament to its immense power and authority (See Table I). The SCO also focuses on cooperation in solving regional problems. In addition to these documents, the purpose of the organization and the actions it takes are also essential. In this context, although the SCO focuses on cooperation with international and regional organizations, the organization aims to strengthen mutual trust and good neighbourly and friendly relations among the member countries at the first stage. In the second preference, the

issue of regional peace and security includes joint efforts to maintain regional stability, and fight terrorism, fundamentalism, separatism, organized crime and illegal immigration.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 1.** Documents of Cooperation with International and Regional Organizations<sup>2</sup>

Documents	Date and Place
Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretariat of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States	Beijing, 12 April 2005
Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretariat of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Secretariat of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations	Jakarta, 21 April 2005
Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretariat of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Secretariat of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation	Dushanbe, 5 October 2007
Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretariat of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organisation	Ashgabat, 11 December 2007
Joint Declaration on Cooperation between the Secretariat of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the United Nations Organisation	Tashkent, 5 April 2010
Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretariat of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime	Astana, 14 June 2011
Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretariat of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Secretariat of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific	Zhengzhou, 15 December 2015
Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretariat of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Secretariat of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia	Shanghai, 20 May 2014
Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretariat of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)	Astana, 9 June 2017

When the structure of the SCO is examined, the Council of Heads of State and the Council of Heads of Government, which meet regularly, appear in the first stage. In addition, structures such as the secretariat, the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure and the Council of Foreign Ministers are essential system elements. While the organisation's secretariat is in Beijing, the "Regional Anti-Terrorist Organization" is in Tashkent (Bilgici, 2022). After 2014, as the SCO expanded its mandate to include joint security and economic development programs, China hosted the Peace Mission, the bloc's largest military exercise with more than seven thousand troops and advanced weapons deployed. In addition to security, establishing a development bank and deepening economic and energy cooperation are essential objectives. Indeed, when it comes to trade, it's important to bear

1. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dış İşleri Bakanlığı "Şanghay İşbirliği Teşkilatı (ŞİÖ)" <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/sanghay-isbirligi-orgutu.tr.mfa>. Accessed:11.07.2023

2. The author created this table based on the information provided on the website SCO, General information, <http://eng.sectsco.org/cooperation/20170110/192193.html>. Accessed:11.06.2023



in mind that the Eurasian Economic Union plays a significant role in enhancing regional relationships within the SCO's framework. The union has made Free Trade agreements with Cambodia, Singapore and Vietnam in ASEAN, but FTA tariff concessions have yet to be agreed with China (Devonshire-Ellis, 2020).

Although the emergence of the SCO as a political bloc has been overlooked, considering the potential of the Eurasian Economic Union, it has become an essential power in terms of trade. Establishing the SCO as a regional organization operating in security, economic and political fields is crucial. Douhan (2013) explains that this is due to implementing a comprehensive legal framework. This framework addresses new challenges and threats, such as international terrorism, extremism, crime, and the arms trade. However, the extent and effectiveness of this organization rely on the willingness of member states to collaborate. Finally, in 2023, the main areas of cooperation have been determined for international cooperation between blocs called "Integration Dialogue" organized between the CIS, EAB, SCO and BRICS. It is critical to wait for a step toward a comprehensive economic partnership where these four structures will be united with further developing the specified partnership areas (Russia Briefing, 2023).

## SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION AND GAME CHANGER ROLE

Eurasia has been a crucial region for Putin to enhance Russia's foreign policy and expand its sphere of influence since 2000. In 2011, Putin proposed the concept of the "Eurasian Union" in the *Izvestia* newspaper, which is a supranational model to establish strong ties with the Asia-Pacific and European Union regions. He announced that the formation of the Eurasian Union would be based on the principles of freedom, democracy, and market laws of Greater Europe (Lenta.ru, 2011). So, Central Asia is a region where the strategic interests of great powers intersect, resulting in active policies pursued by Russia, China and the West. In the context of regional development, evaluating the role of SCO in security is crucial. The SCO was established for long-term border negotiations between China and the Former Soviet Republics. Therefore, the initial focus of the organization was to address issues related to borders and security. Secondly, as per Akihiro, it's important to note that all SCO members grapple with significant ethnic challenges to their central governments. This underscores the SCO's fundamental purpose as an organization that provides mutual security guarantees and upholds the national integrity of each member. Another situation is that the SCO has a complex dual structure. In other words, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are in the middle power position in the axis of the asymmetrical Central Asian countries with Russia and China, which are the two great powers (Akihiro 2005). It is thought-provoking how this situation creates a difference in equality and practices. However, the formation of the SCO in the post-Cold War period has created a new security image for the Eurasian states by guaranteeing security among the member countries.

On the other hand, regional security cooperation requires shared interests among members without limiting individual pursuits. Diversity among members can be a starting point for finding common ground and avoiding conflicts that may obstruct joint gains or encourage outsiders to manipulate the region (Bailes et

al., 2007: 9). The SCO and the Russian-Chinese strategic partnership have a “multipolar world” approach. At the extraordinary Foreign Ministry meeting of the SCO in Beijing in January 2002, the member states expressed their concerns about its hegemony in Afghanistan and the world (Akihiro, 2005). SCO’s security cooperation has significantly impacted China’s security and stability, especially in the northwestern region, which was the target of more than 200 terrorist attacks by the “East Turkistan Islamic Movement” between 1990 and 2001 (Lei, 2018). This situation should be considered in terms of regional stability, resolution of problems, and its global dimension. At this point, the SCO has become an essential platform for cooperation in the fight against terrorism, intelligence sharing and military exercises. The Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) is vital in joint counter-terrorism operations between member states (CABAR, 2023). Also, The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Charter, adopted in June 2002, establishes several fundamental principles of international law as the basis for the organization. According to Bailes and Dunay these principles include the sovereign equality of states and the rejection of hegemony and coercion in international affairs (Bailes et al., 2007: 6).

We must urgently confront global risks, such as drug trafficking, cybercrime, and cross-border offenses, with determination. Neglecting to take necessary actions would lead to disastrous outcomes from exploiting human beings. In this regard, the SCO must engage in a collaborative endeavor to combat terrorism, extremism, and separatism, which are commonly acknowledged as the “three forces of evil” in security, and prioritize the promotion of peace, security, and stability in the region. Member states signed the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism in June 2001, while the organization developed a comprehensive and multi-layered approach to security cooperation and established effective mechanisms to achieve this goal (Lei, 2018). In this respect, it plays a vital role in resolving regional problems. The decision to include India and Pakistan as SCO members substantially expanded the organization’s geographical scope. It included essential security issues of South Asia, such as the Kashmir conflict, into the already expansive agenda of the SCO (Lanteigne, 2018: 124). In addition to its role in Afghanistan, the SCO called for the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan to be resolved through negotiations. According to Lanteigne (2018), while Moscow sees India’s membership as a step to control Beijing’s tremendous influence within the group, the same cannot be said for China. Because, unlike the cordial India-Russia relations under the governments of Putin and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, China-India relations have been more strained over the past decade. Russia played a crucial role in facilitating a peaceful solution to the Ladakh impasse between China and India at the SCO meeting in Moscow. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov mediated the dialogue between Subrahmanyam Jaishankar from India and Wang Yi from China. Hence, there is an effort to expedite the process of adopting resolutions and mediating in negotiations to promote stability and find regional solutions swiftly. In addition, Lavrov emphasized the organisation’s potential in political, security, economic and humanitarian issues, drawing attention to new risks and threats, including the perception of the SCO that the US is using sanctions as an aggressor (Chris, 2020). Hence, Russia primarily conducts its business with the Central Asian states on a bilateral basis. The SCO serves as a supplementary and consolidating platform for their relations. Additionally, Russia has the option of utilizing the frameworks of the CIS and the CSTO for organizing the region’s multilateral security relations (Bailes et al., 2007: 10).

On the other hand, the “Shanghai Spirit” emerges with the SCO’s approaches of mutual trust, equality, consultation, and respect for different civilizations in ensuring regional peace and stability and enhancing economic growth. It is crucial to maintain regional stability by upholding this spirit. Although there are different historical backgrounds and conditions among SCO members, it is seen that efforts are made for cooperation with consensus (Xiudong, 2018). The difference in security perceptions between member countries and the point organization’s origin has sometimes led to difficulties in determining common areas of action and targets. The SCO’s approach is also notable during colour revolutions to ensure regional stability. Beijing knew Moscow’s discomfort with ‘colour revolutions’. It was concerned of Western attempts to undermine the legitimacy of the communist government and a process often denounced as “peaceful evolution” in Chinese policy circles. According to Lanteigne (2018), the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan caused a critical internal debate on regional security in China. Beijing was not as willing to use complicated military tools as Moscow. The most unambiguous indication of this at the time was during the SCO Summit in Ufa, Russia, in July 2015, against the recommendation of Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu that the organization had to consider a more formal alliance that could serve to prevent any future “colour revolution” in Eurasia (Lanteigne, 2018: 128; Kukeyeva, 2006).

With the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic in Wuhan province in China at the end of 2019, all countries took drastic measures, and there was a shutdown. Meanwhile, with the effect of Covid-19, Russia was among the first countries to test a vaccine. It cooperated with China, India and other SCO members in the Third Stage tests, which included hundreds of thousands of people. According to Devonshire-Ellis (2020), the creation of a space where countries can act together in the environment of insecurity created by the pandemic and Russia taking the step of sharing technology with SCO members was a step that would make Russia a reliable regional strategic partner at that time.

The Balance of Power is based on competition by the realist school, involving Great Powers and superpowers. Here, in terms of classical power balance theory, it is seen that the concept of balance between actors has been tried to be provided for a long time. According to Klieman (2015), from a global perspective, alliances with changing competitive structures with imperial rivalries setting up buffer zones include all diplomatic activities from normalization to hostility and rapprochement (Klieman, 2015: 14-15). Therefore, when we consider its impact on international politics in terms of harmony, cooperation and power scales in the context of the SCO, the war between Russia and Ukraine comes to the fore. In another case, there have been explanations about the Russian-Ukrainian War process, which reflects the separation of the West and East in terms of its ongoing global effects in the Eurasian geography, namely the insecure reality of the new Cold War. Sanctions against Russia continue in this process, which we left behind for almost 500 days. Putin expressed that Russia stands against Western pressure, sanctions and “provocations” and wanted to show that Russia continues despite sanctions. Also, sanctions imposed on Russia, especially in the energy field, are tried to be bypassed by increasing trade relations with regional actors such as India, China and Pakistan, that are members of the SCO. In addition, the 23rd Summit of the SCO took place after the Wagner Rebellion and its suppression in June 2023 in the Russian Federation. Vladimir Putin’s statements were

aimed at the SCO and global public opinion. He interpreted the Wagner trial as a sign of the Russian political circles and society's unity against armed rebellion. Putin demonstrated his solidarity and sense of responsibility toward the homeland's fate (Pasricha, 2023). The other event that will affect the geopolitical balance is Iran, whose application for full membership was accepted in 2021. Its admission made it a key member of the SCO as the ninth member (SCO, 2023). Steps were also taken to strengthen Russia's geopolitical position against Western sanctions. The first is the defence of the continuity of regional trade with their currencies against the dollar. In this case, Russia would have made a new decision, especially regarding sanctions. Likewise, this commercial point is crucial not only for Russia but also for other members of the SCO. Considering the issue in the US's aim of isolating the economies of China, Russia and Iran, the economic potential of the SCO, which constitutes approximately 20% of the global GDP and a quarter of the world's population, should be reconsidered (Ritter 2023). In addition, the SCO and BRICS can act as a shield against the efforts of the US and the West to isolate these three actors in the global system. The second situation is undoubtedly the position of Belarus, which has applied for SCO membership. Putin called for full membership in Belarus and stated that the membership of Belarus would be positive for the functions of the organization. Undoubtedly, this call for the membership of Belarus has historical ties and the partnership of Belarus President Aleksandr Lukashenko and Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin, which has existed since the past. However, this call is of particular importance after the Wagner Revolt. The mediation role played by Lukashenko is vital in resolving the process between Wagner leader Yevgeny Prigojin and the Russian Federation without a conflict. If Belarus is also a member, the organization will extend to Europe and fully realize its regional Eurasian identity. At the same time, Belarus, with its prospective SCO membership, will gain regional prestige and a better position, especially in terms of economic cooperation.

## CONCLUSION

Comprehending cooperation and competition in Eurasia is crucial due to the presence of many global and local organizations. This situation has not lost its importance throughout history. When the region's coverage of a wide geographical area and its spheres of influence on the axis of member states are considered, the entire membership of the SCO reveals an area extending from the Baltic Sea to the Pacific Ocean and covering most of the territory of the Eurasian continent. China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan have been full members of the SCO since its establishment in 2001. The SCO also welcomed India, Pakistan, Iran, and Mongolia as official observer states, only for them to become full members except the later. In 2009, a new category of 'associate member' was introduced, alongside the existing "partner member" status. With this status, Sri Lanka and Belarus were considered official "dialogue partners". The SCO's agenda covers security, economic, cultural and humanitarian cooperation among its members, and the primary focus agreed upon here has been to develop cooperation among members to target transnational security issues and contribute to regional stability (Aris, 2011: 4).

The SCO's geopolitical position and demographic influence make it a significant factor in recent developments, fundamentally altering the landscape. The commercial potential and impact of the region should be added to this. However, besides every advantage, disadvantages should not be forgotten. There are lots of issue areas and frozen conflicts in the region. The strength and vulnerability of the SCO are closely linked in this matter. The organization is progressing in this direction, becoming increasingly important in response to the changing international environment. At the same time, the SCO is strengthening the bonds of trust and neighbourliness among its member states. In the structure here, the positions and powers of Russia and China make themselves felt in the organization. Especially for Russia, the organization creates an alternative to the West. In this respect, SCO members encourage cooperation in several fields, such as politics, trade, culture and economic energy. In terms of security, the most essential structure is undoubtedly RATS. The SCO's aim started as the member states' border stability. In the current process, assuming the title and role of an essential actor in creating a regional security space has become more vital. Likewise, the SCO emphasizes the need for awareness and resolution of regional problems, emphasizing security and stability against international terrorism, separatism and extremism. Therefore, establishing this organization, which started with the solution of border problems and the development of mutual friendship, has the potential to carry its regional power to different areas with Belarus and Iran in the upcoming period.

Finally, the structural and expansion dimension of the SCO is noteworthy, as it is sensitive to cyclical developments. When evaluating the organization, it is essential to consider its influence in the Eurasian region. Still, the impact of its global dimensions in the future, if not in the near term, should be felt. Especially in the context of BRICS and other organizations, the organization's future can expand into a global arena where its regional security or commercial dimension will expand. In the future, the SCO has the potential to expand globally, particularly in the context of BRICS and other organizations.

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