



THE INTERRACTION OF CHINA AND RUSSIA WITHIN THE SHANGHAI
COOPERATION ORGANIZATION*

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ABSTRACT

The end of Cold War didn't only put its mark on the international political system, but also it caused a great difference in the bilateral relations between the important actors of the system. The nature of the relations between Russia and China has changed significantly under these conditions, especially in response to the USA's claims for a worldwide hegemony. In the last three decades, the cooperation has become the central feature of this relation. The Russian dream for revitalizing her lost hegemony in the Central Asia in the post-Cold War setting hasn't seen as a threat by China primarily eager to utilise from the economic potential of the same region. By establishing the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2001, the parties gave a formal institutional basis to their cooperation in the Central Asia and enriched their cooperation efforts by integrating the regional actors into the play. This study aims to elaborate on the Russia-China relations in the post-Cold War setting by putting their cooperation under the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to the centre. In this scope, the formation and development processes of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization are examined in the first part. The balance and interaction between the actors within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is elaborated in the second part. The study concludes that the future of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization will base on the success of Russia and China in mitigating the negative influences of their conflicting interests on their cooperation.

Keywords: China, Russia, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Central Asia

ÇİN VE RUSYA'NIN ŞANGAY İŞBİRLİĞİ ÖRGÜTÜ KAPSAMINDAKİ ETKİLEŞİMİ

ÖZ

Soğuk Savaşın bitmesi yalnızca uluslararası sistemde değişimi beraberinde getirmemiş, aynı zamanda sistemin kilit aktörler arasındaki ikili ilişkilerde de köklü bir değişim ortaya çıkarmıştır. Bu ortamda, Çin ve Rusya arasındaki ilişkilerin doğasında da, özellikle ABD'nin dünya siyasetindeki tek başat güç olma iddialarına tepki olarak, büyük bir değişim gözlenmiştir. Son otuz yıllık süreçte, işbirliği iki aktör arasındaki ilişkinin baskın unsuru haline gelmiştir. Rusya'nın Orta Asya'da, Soğuk Savaşın bitmesi ile kaybolan etkisini yeniden inşa etmeye yönelik girişimleri, bölgenin öncelikli olarak ekonomik potansiyelinden faydalanma niyetindeki Çin tarafından tehdit olarak algılanmamıştır. 2001 yılında Şangay İşbirliği Örgütünü kurarak Rusya ve Çin, Orta Asya özelinde aralarında var olan işbirliğine yasal bir zemin kazandırmışlardır. Örgüte bölgesel aktörlerin dâhil edilmesi, taraflar arasındaki işbirliğini zengin kılan bir adım olmuştur. Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde Orta Asya özelinde Çin-Rus ilişkilerine odaklanan bu çalışmada, iki aktörün Şangay İşbirliği Örgütü kapsamındaki etkileşimleri merkezi konumdadır. Çalışma dâhilinde ilk olarak Şangay İşbirliği Örgütünün oluşum ve gelişim süreci üzerinde durulmaktadır. İkinci olarak ise Şangay İşbirliği Örgütü içinde bu iki aktör arasındaki denge ve etkileşim konusu ele alınmaktadır. Çalışmada, Şangay İşbirliği Örgütünün uzun vadeli performansının, Çin ve Rusya'nın aralarındaki çıkar çatışmaları ve farklılıkların, Örgüt

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çatısı altında kurulan işbirliği üzerindeki etkisini asgari düzeye indirmede gösterecekleri başarıya bağlı olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çin, Rusya, Şangay İşbirliği Örgütü, Orta Asya

Introduction

Despite the short honeymoon in the Sino-Russian relations in the very beginning of the Cold War with the transition of China to socialism, the relations between China and Russia gained a hostile characteristic by 1960s. Border disputes taking their roots from the historical expansion of Tsarist Russia at the expense of China in the 18th and 19th centuries were combined with the ideological differences after 1960s and became influential in the formation of this hostility. The rivalry had become the prevailing characteristic of the Sino-Russian relations until the end of the Cold War. In the period between 1960 and 1980, the countries came to the tug of war several times due to the border disputes. As a part of the newly adopted Chinese strategy of quietly building up her strengths through economic development in a setting of peace and preparing for making some contributions to the international system in the 1980s, China took steps to improve her relations with many countries in the world, including Soviets. In this context, the parties took steps to achieve normalization in their relations in the late 1980s. This new tendency in the relations did not come to an end after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the relations between parties showed a tremendous progress in 1990s by attaining a high number of bilateral and multilateral dimensions.

Central Asian countries were the integral part of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, these countries gained their independence in the early 1990s and a significant power hub emerged in the Central Asia. The attractiveness of the region for both regional and external players brought China and Russia closer in developing ties with the region. Throughout the history, China and Russia have become two actors trying to have a role in the power balance of the Central Asia. They tried to achieve this objective mostly in rivalry with each other. Therefore, the current attempt of the parties to become powerful in the region by establishing cooperative relations with each other constitutes a rupture from the historical continuum. However, the ongoing process bears different meanings for these actors. While Russia is the party aiming to keep her power in the region inherited from the Soviet Union; China, about to turn into one of the pivotal actors of the international politics with her rising economic and military capacities, is the one trying to construct her influence in the region from a scratch. That is, the actors did not start to cooperate in the Central Asia as equals. On the other hand, Russian dreaming for revitalizing her lost hegemony in the Central Asia in the post-Cold War setting was not seen as a threat by China willing to utilise from the economic potential of the same region, especially through achieving an access to the energy sources of the region.

This study aims to elaborate on the developments in the Sino-Russia relations in the post-Cold War setting by putting their cooperation under the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to the centre. In this scope, the formation and development processes of the SCO are examined in the first part. The balance between the actors within the framework of the SCO is elaborated in the second part.

The study concludes that the future of the SCO will base on the success of China and Russia in mitigating the negative influences of their conflicting interests on their cooperation.

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation for a New Central Asia

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, five independent states were born in Central Asia, namely Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. In this context, Central Asia emerged as one of the potential economic centres of the world in the post-Cold War era, as a large consumer market of 55 million people and a hub of valuable sources such as fossil fuels and uranium. As a result, the attention of major world powers as well as the regional actors directed to the region (Memon 2006: 86). Currently, there are several actors competing to have a greater influence in the region.

When the Chinese choice for multilateralism came together with her willingness to have good neighbourly relations and it was found favourable by Russia, a fertile ground for the regional cooperation in the Central Asia came to the fore (Liu 2017: 152). SCO takes its roots from the bilateral talks between China and Soviets in the late 1980s. The primary motivation of these two actors in that dialogue was to ensure the security of their common border by reducing their military existences across the borderline. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the process continued with the participation of the newly independent states of the region. In this scope, Shanghai Five mechanism, including China, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, was formed in 1996. The five countries concluded two very important agreements in 1996 and 1997 in Shanghai and Moscow, respectively. Accordingly, the counties agreed gradually limiting the military forces and weapons in a zone of 100 km along the borderline. They also accepted to inform each other about their military affairs across the border as a confidence building measure. Besides, three Central Asian countries gave guarantees to China in order not to support separatist Uighurs and to side with China politically on this issue (Colakoglu 2010: 390).

With the solution of the border disputes among China, Russia and the Central Asian countries under the framework of the Shanghai Five, an important obstacle for the development of the relations between these actors disappeared and an appropriate level of trust for regional cooperation was built. Besides, the changing approaches of China and Russia towards each other in the Central Asian context provided a fertile ground for the formation of the SCO. By establishing the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2001 on the achievements of the Shanghai Five mechanism, the parties gave a formal institutional basis to their cooperation with the integration of the regional actors into the play. SCO brought four of the Central Asian countries except Turkmenistan together with Russia and China. SCO provided a multilateral platform to the Central Asian countries in order to handle their relations with the two biggest states in their region. It also gave them a chance to establish a balance between these two powerful states, even by using them against each other (Colakoglu 2010: 189).

SCO is the only regional organisation that China had an undeniable role in the formation. By means of this organisation, China not only attempts to shape regional order in her neighbourhood, but also it conveys a message to the entire world about

her distinctive and alternative approach to world order, which is prioritizing economic growth and respect for diversity (Salter and Yin 2014: 858). It has the name of a Chinese city with a secretariat located in Beijing. With her high level of affiliation with the organisation, China has become the largest financial contributor of the major projects and played a vital role in driving the organisation further both institutionally¹ and ideologically². Besides, it is the member states getting the greatest gains from the organisation by means of her increasing trade, energy and economic relations with the region (Huasheng 2013: 436). The expectations of relatively better gains in comparison to other members push China to be more giving in the SCO. Additionally, any instability in the Central Asia has potential of causing instability within China, especially by strengthening Uighur separatism in north-western territories. China is behind achieving the opposite. In other words, China is working for the development of her backward north-western region together with the rising economic development and stability in the Central Asia. In this issue, there is a perfect match between Chinese ideals and Central Asian countries' objectives.

Countering terrorism, extremism and separatism, also known as three evils, is depicted as one of the important tasks of the SCO from the very beginning, since all the members of SCO are suffering from the threat posed by the radical terrorist groups. China has been concerned with the Uighur extremism in Xinjiang, Russia has had problems with the Chechens, Uzbeks have been dealing with the threat posed by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan has fought with Islamist militancy for years. On the other hand, Hizb-ut-Tahrir is a common danger for all Central Asian countries. There is also Taliban in Afghanistan, which has been seen as the primary exporter of religious extremism and terrorism in the region. With the official launch of the SCO in 2001, a convention on combatting terrorism, extremism and separatism was adopted. None of these countries can eliminate these common perils with an individual effort. SCO members established a Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) in 2001 in Tashkent (Uzbekistan) to cooperate in combatting against different forms of terrorism especially by exchanging information and experience. Despite its limited capacity, the structure helped the SCO members in preventing 250 terrorist attacks (Ahmad 2008: 3-4). In this scope, SCO members formed a limited military unit to conduct military operations against terrorism.

The other goals of the SCO are formalised with the SCO Charter adopted in 2002 and stated as, to strengthen mutual trust, friendship and good-neighbourliness between the member states; to encourage effective cooperation between them in the political, trade and economic, scientific and technical, cultural, educational, energy, transport, environmental and other spheres; and to undertake joint efforts for the maintenance of peace, security and stability in the region, and the building of a new, democratic, just and rational international political and economic order. Apart from

¹ China finances the permanent secretariat of the SCO which was established in Shanghai in 2002.

² China formulated the theoretical guidelines known as the Shanghai Spirit. It includes mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, consultation, respect to different civilizations and common prosperity. There is a remarkable similarity between the Shanghai Spirit and Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence. The latter has played a remarkable role in the design of Chinese foreign policy since 1950s.

these objectives, SCO members are also aiming to create a Central Asia free from nuclear weapons for granting security in the region. Accordingly, five permanent members of the UN Security Council concluded an agreement in 2014 in order to show their commitment to a nuclear weapon free Central Asia. When the conclusions of the annual meetings held by the SCO members are considered, it is seen that the multilateral cooperation among the SCO members gets deeper in years. Until now SCO has provided a useful platform for its members in order to promote their cooperation in different areas. However, due to the limited resources of the organisation, many of the objectives have stayed on paper (Oldberg 2007: 45).

While the first two goals of the SCO are region-centred, the last goal is very much related with the international politics. This shows the interest of the SCO members in cooperating for the design of international system in line with their own priorities. As a result, from the very beginning, SCO has become more than a regional organisation. In the annual meetings of the SCO members, both regional and international developments are discussed together with the prospects for the future development of the SCO. In the declaration published by the heads of the SCO members in 2002, the international system was defined in transition to multi-polarity and it was also mentioned that there is a need for collective action in order to handle key issues or new threats of the 21st century in staying firmly strict to the United Nations Charter and international law norms³. In the same declaration, SCO members also mentioned their concern for the Middle Eastern security. Open references were made to the Israel-Palestine dispute and Iraqi crisis (St. Petersburg Declaration by the Heads of the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation 2007). In the succeeding annual meetings, SCO members have always made references to the multi-polarity of the international system by stressing their rejection of any kinds of hegemony. Besides, SCO members also put forth their demands for a reform in the United Nations and its Security Council in a way to make them more representative and effective (Tashkent Declaration on the 10th Anniversary of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation 2010). As well as, they stated their wish for a solution in Syria acceptable for all the parties of the conflict (Astana Declaration by the Heads of the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, 2017).

SCO was widely interpreted as an anti-Western alliance of the authoritarian states in order to counter the US hegemonic claims or the US attempts to have an influence in the region. Despite the dominant perceptions in the West about the nature of the SCO, the organisation has stressed from the very beginning that it was not formed against any other states or regions (Declaration on the Establishment of the SCO 2001). Besides, SCO members also declared that they should not be seen as a bloc (St. Petersburg Declaration by the Heads of the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation 2002). Instead, the SCO was presented as an effective alternative multilateral organisation in an increasingly multi-polar world order. However, both China and Russia have hatred for the growing presence of the USA in the Central Asia. In 2005, SCO members invited the US and her allies to end their extensive

³ Primarily the norms of the equality and sovereignty of states, non-interference in internal affairs, mutual respect for territorial integrity, inviolability of borders, non-aggression, peaceful settlement of disputes, non-use of force or threat of force.

military operations in Afghanistan and put an end to their military existence in the Central Asian countries, by grounding their demands on the completion of the military phase of the anti-terrorist campaign. Besides, in the following years, the SCO members criticized the American methods relying heavily on the use of military techniques in achieving a real solution in Afghanistan (Tashkent Declaration on the 10th Anniversary of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation 2010). The calls of the SCO members produced the expected results and the US closed her last Central Asian airbase in Kyrgyzstan by 2014. That is, SCO can also be seen as a powerful bloc against the outside players, such as the USA and NATO, trying to be part of the regional politics (Bekcan 2013: 143).

SCO experienced its first enlargement, after 16 years from its launch, with the membership of India and Pakistan in 2017. Now, it has eight members in total. For a long time, SCO members stayed reluctant about the enlargement of the organisation. Instead, they opted to adopt measures to make the organisation stronger by increasing its efficiency and attractiveness (Oldberg 2007: 41). The disagreements between China and Russia about the potential new members of the SCO also played a role in this reluctance. As a result, the status of observer and dialogue partner, which are falling short of membership, were created in 2004 and 2008 respectively. Currently, while Afghanistan, Iran, Belarus and Mongolia have an observer status in the SCO; Turkey, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Cambodia are dialogue partners. None of these countries, having a status lesser than membership, has a say in the decisions taken in the organisation. The rules and procedures related to the admission of the new members to the SCO was agreed by the member states in 2010.

China and Russia within the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

China and Russia carried their relations to the level of strategic partnership in 2001 by signing the Treaty for Good Neighbourliness, Friendship and Cooperation. SCO constitutes only a part of the whole story between China and Russia. It can be classified under the multilateral tract of the relations between the parties. In the special context of the Central Asia, there is a burden-sharing between two actors. As mentioned before, China and Russia can put different meanings to the SCO. But, there are some issues that the parties agree upon about the existence of the SCO. Ensuring border security, economic interests, regional security and unrest about the rising role of the USA in the region and world politics can be listed as the main factors motivating China and Russia to cooperate under the SCO (Akman 2015: 314).

By means of the SCO, the countries aim to utilise from the potentials of the Central Asia region without having any tension in their relations. From the very beginning, China has shown a great concern for the Russian views in designing her policies targeting the Russia's near abroad (Charap, Drennan and Noël 2017: 35). Thanks to her legacy in the post-Soviet space, Russia has still the ability to influence the relations between the Central Asian countries and third parties, including China. It is very well known that Russia and Central Asian countries have a common history and a shared administrative culture. The great majority of the Central Asian populations can speak Russian. The people in these countries can follow Russian media and TV channels. There are university programmes funded by Russia, as well as pro-Russian

civil society organisations. A large number of labour force from the Central Asian countries migrated Russia. Russia has been making military assistances to these countries, poorly performing in meeting their security needs and there are permanent Russian bases in the region (Freeman, 2017: 12). As a result of these factors, despite her rising power, China has still opted to cooperate with Russia, because this cooperation has had a great share in strengthening the influence of China in the Central Asia. On the other hand, Russia wants to control the relations between China and Central Asian countries by means of the SCO, since Russia is aware of the fact that it is impossible to block the development of the relations between China and Central Asian countries and SCO gives it an opportunity of having a say in the relations of China with the Central Asian countries.

While China and Russia were trying to form a balance in their involvements to the Central Asia, the USA attempted to use the legacy of 9/11 terrorist attacks to increase her presence in the Central Asia. In the US military campaign aiming to punish the performers of this terrorist act allegedly hiding in Afghanistan, the country looked for the support of the Central Asian countries. The USA used the military bases and flight zones of the Central Asian countries in this operation. On the other hand, by means of economic and military assistances, the USA also motivated the Central Asian countries for a transition to free market economy and democracy (Aydın 2015: 5). At the beginning, Russia and China adopted a softer approach in this issue. However, China approached to the US activities in the region more hesitantly and her doubts gets bigger in time. On the other hand, Russia even supported the anti-terrorist measures adopted by the USA, because it hoped to cooperate with the USA in fighting against the international terrorism. Russia also saw this newly emerging context as an opportunity to find a legal ground to her anti-humanitarian fight against the Chechen separatists (Tannisever 2013: 12-13). After the divergent views of the two leading countries of the SCO on this issue became known, the weakening possibility of the SCO was also debated in that period. American invasion of Iraq in 2003 led to the emergence of a re-alignment in Chinese and Russian attitudes towards the unilateral actions of the USA (Eder 2014: 26). As a result, growing unrest about the rising American military and economic presence in the Central Asia created a new incentive for Russia and China to improve their bilateral cooperation as strategic partners and to deepen their cooperation in the multilateral setting of the SCO (Mansourov 2008: 8). Furthermore, both actors are not fond of the US unilateralism, especially the alleged US attempts for intervening internal affairs of some countries by means of the Western style popular revolts, which are also commonly named as colour revolutions, in order to create regimes linked closely with the West. Hence, SCO members have been paying effort to ensure the continuity of the authoritarian regimes for the sake of stability in the region without any concern for democratization (Charap, Drennan and Noël 2017: 25, 34, 37).

China is one of the biggest energy importers and Russia is one of the largest energy exporters in the world. But, they are not trading each other extensively. Due to the absence of transport and pipeline infrastructure, Russia does not play a significant role in the energy trade of China. Russia was hit hard by the 2008 financial crisis and this led to an adjustment in her approach to the cooperation with China in energy-

related matters. In this context, Russia has become more willing for a cooperation with China in the field of energy, especially by increasing her energy exports to China, because she is feeling an urgent need for the Chinese investment and loans to achieve her economic revival (Eder 2014: 30-31). The parties were able to sign a natural gas deal in 2014 after more than a decade-long negotiations. The rising tension between Russia and the West in the aftermath of the Ukraine Crisis became effective in the eventual finalisation of the long negotiation process between the parties. China has become the main financier of Russian oil and gas projects, which became the main target of the Western sanctions after the Ukraine Crisis. Russian economy is mostly dependent on the revenues coming from the sales of energy sources. Therefore, it is in need of reliable buyers, while the biggest European customers have a tendency to minimize their energy trade with Russia in the medium or long term. This urgent need has been reducing Russian capacity to play the energy card in her cooperation with China. In recent years, China has been more influential in defining the parameters of the cooperation between the parties in the field of energy (Gunes 2015: 846, 848). China is responding to the changing Russian attitude in the energy related matters by refraining from any act that can be interpreted as the exploitation of Russia's difficult position and economic weaknesses (Charap, Drennan and Noël 2017: 25, 28, 29). As China achieves economic growth, her demand for energy sources increases and this enhances Chinese energy dependency. From the Chinese perspective, on-going political unrest in the Middle Eastern region, including primary energy exporters of the country, has been adversely affecting the China's energy transfers. The country is also making her energy transfer by using a road whose security is mostly provided by the US forces and the USA has also an important role in the production of energy sources in the Middle East. China has been facing with a pressing need for alternative energy sources to enhance her energy security and to meet the energy demands of her fast-growing economy (Gunes 2015: 846).

Apart from their influence on the cooperation between China and Russia in the energy related matters, these newly arising conditions also affected the energy cooperation between China and Central Asian countries and the handling of the energy-related matters within the SCO, since Russian's control over the energy trade of the Central Asian countries created a hostile environment for the Chinese energy companies for a long time (Eder 2014: 56). After the development of the bilateral energy ties between China and Central Asian countries, Russia has become eager to add an energy dimension to the SCO to coordinate the energy policies of the SCO partners (Swanstrom 2012: 7). The newly developing energy relations between the parties will most probably produce implications for world energy markets (Liu 2017: 147). The importance of the Central Asia, composing of countries with rich energy sources, increases for China. China sees the region very vital for the diversification of her energy consumption. Therefore, she is very much enthusiastic about making investments to the energy infrastructure of the Central Asian countries, especially to Kazakhstan having the biggest resources (Oldberg 2007: 33). A pipeline connecting all five Central Asian countries to China was completed in 2009. Currently, nearly half of the Chinese natural gas demand has been met by the region. This created a further motivation in Russia to cooperate with China in the energy sector. With a deal

concluded between the parties in 2013, Russia would turn into the biggest oil supplier of China in the future (Freeman 2017: 11). This might also make Russia more willing in forming an energy club within the SCO. Otherwise, Russia may lose her monopoly in the transmission of the energy sources of the Central Asian countries to the Western markets (Karaca 2013: 72).

While China is more economic development oriented, Russia puts more value on the cooperation on matters related to security in the SCO. As a result, there is not any consensus between the parties regarding the future shape of the cooperation (Ahmad 2008: 10). The issue becomes more complex, if the interest calculations of the other SCO members are taken into account. However, after the Yekaterinburg Summit of the SCO in 2009, a division of labour between China and Russia emerged within the organisation. In this scope, while Russia becomes the primary actor of the cooperation in the security matters and in the field of energy, China has turned into a leading actor of the economic cooperation (Eder 2014: 30). However, other SCO members together with Russia have shown a great resistance to the development of the economic ties among the members, as they are afraid of a possible dumping effect caused by the Chinese goods on their markets, which is built upon their current disadvantages in trade with China. Therefore, China's decade-old proposal for a SCO free trade zone just remained on paper. By means of a free trade zone among the SCO members, China wants to have a better access to the Central Asian markets by escaping from the hampering effects of the excessive customs duties, various visa restrictions and corrupt border officials on the trade among the SCO members (Oldberg 2007: 22). Besides, there is an already established free trade zone between Russia and Central Asian countries under the framework of the Euroasian Economic Union. This shows both Russia and Central Asian countries become willing for cooperating with China, as long as they gained more than China (Oldberg 2007: 28). Therefore, the references made to the principles of mutual benefit and equality⁴ are applicable in the SCO context to a limited extent in the matters related to trade.

When China understood the limits of the possible economic cooperation under the framework of the SCO, she came up with her own project known as One Belt One Road initiative. The project is designed to achieve economic improvement of the Central Asian countries by connecting them via modernized railway infrastructure (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China, 2018). It foresees as a win-win cooperation of all the participant countries, as a result of which common development and prosperity of the participant countries would be achieved in an atmosphere of peace, friendship, mutual trust. SCO contributed a lot to the formation of this project, especially by building trust among the members. In the long run, it can continue to provide inputs to the development of the initiative further (Akıner 2010: 25). Russia approached to the China's One Belt One Road initiative hesitantly, because it was seen as a Chinese attempt for turning into a dominant actor of the international politics by using her economic power (Ozdasli, 2015: 588). After the Ukraine Crisis, Russia experienced a shift in her attitude towards the One Belt One Road initiative. By

⁴ As an example of the references, please check: Joint Communiqué Meeting of the Council of Heads of Government (Prime Ministers) of the SCO Member States, 2005.

the way, China was able to escape from facing with the obstructing capacity of Russia for the project. After the Western sanctions imposed on Russia in 2014, the initiative was started to be seen as a way of expanding Russian economy and developing the Russia's Euroasian Economic Union project with the foreseen transport and logistics infrastructure building in the region. This is because China turns into the only viable strategic option in the hands of Russia, when Russia lost her freedom of manoeuvre in her foreign policy. Russia lost her hopes for deepening trade, financial ties and technological cooperation with the West. Apart from this, Russia also sees China's One Belt One Road initiative as a step for enhancing stability of the region by means of economic development. Accordingly, the SCO members stated their support for the China's One Belt One Road initiative in 2016 by underlying the importance of the project for the regional economic cooperation (Tashkent Declaration of the Fifteenth Anniversary of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation 2016). China became content about the changing attitude of Russia towards her initiative, because it provided China an access to the market of the Euroasian Economic Union (Upadhyay 2017: 7-8).

China has been one of the major clients of the Russian weapons. With a share of 11 percent, China is Russia's third largest arms export destination (Fleurant, Wezeman, Wezeman and Tian 2017). However, Russia has an undeniable role in the expanding military capacity of China. There are some points creating a discontent in the parties on this issue. In the last decade, Russia has started to have some concerns about China's rising military power, so she showed a reluctance about selling advanced technology weapons to China. Russia has fears about a possible Chinese superiority in the military technology in a near future which is gained through the China's enhanced reverse engineering capabilities (Upadhyay 2017: 9). As a result of this, China criticized Russia for selling outdated products or refraining from selling certain types of technology and equipment. In recent years, a slowdown was observed in the arm sales between these countries owing to China's growing arm producing capacity (Liu 2017: 143). The military gap between these two countries has been lessening over the last years. Thanks to her rising military capacity, China started to give military support to the Central Asian countries (Freeman 2017: 11).

As mentioned before, disagreements between China and Russia about the potential new members of the SCO led to the design of new categories lesser than membership. Both countries wanted to integrate the countries having close ties to each other to the organisation. By this way, they aimed to limit the power of the other party in guiding the future path of the organisation. For example, while China pushed for the membership of Pakistan and Mongolia, Russia supported the membership of India and Iran. The achievement of the membership by Pakistan and India in 2017 supported by the different major powers within the SCO shows the fact that the power balance between the major SCO partners will be primarily taken into account in the upcoming SCO enlargements.

Conclusion

“The SCO member states will remain friends from generation to generation and will never be enemies against one another.”

(Shanghai Declaration on the Fifth Anniversary of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, 2006)

Despite the good intention of the SCO members indicated above and the improvements in Sino-Russia relations in the aftermath of the Cold War, the relations between the parties still have a competition dimension. Cold War tension between the parties has still had a legacy in the relations of two actors. The tendency to see the other party as a threat is more apparent in Russia, because of the growing economic and political power of China. On the other hand, China's priority is to achieve a peaceful development in a harmonious world. Therefore, China act responsibly to preserve peaceful international environment without entering into any clash with the other major powers.

As two actors closely related bilaterally and multilaterally, China and Russia still differs significantly. These differences can also be observed in their approaches towards the Central Asia region. The SCO, which was built upon the shared interests of the parties in the Central Asian context rather than shared values, has showed a great performance until now in minimizing the risk of a clash between parties in the region. The organisation provided a useful setting to China and Russia in managing their differences in the region. This is due to the fact that thanks to the SCO, China and Russia have regular meetings and consultations to exchange their views and these regular contacts ensure the building of mutual trust between them. SCO gives Russia an opportunity to revise her lost influence in the Central Asia without showing a high political will and bearing a heavy financial burden. What is more, Russia also controls the activities of China in the region without any confrontation, but staying in cooperation. On the other hand, China puts her plans for the region into action without experiencing any clash with Russia and harming the stability and security in the region.

Briefly, in the aftermath of Cold War, China and Russia showed a good performance in limiting the adverse effects of their differences on their relations. China and Russia pay effort to avoid from a potential conflict and competition in their relations as part of their current interest calculations. Hence, the parties opted to ignore the problematic aspects of their relations. Prevailing dynamics of the relations between China and Russia will be detrimental for the future shape of the SCO.

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