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THE MAIN TRENDS OF REGIONAL AND CIVIL COMMUNITY (IDENTITY) IN THE POST-SOVIET STATES OF CENTRAL ASIA

Abstract. The article analyzes the conceptual models and processes of formation of regional and civic identity in the post-Soviet countries of Central Asia. The historical and political prerequisites, institutional and socio-cultural factors influencing the formation and development of a regional and civic community are considered. Special attention is paid to the interaction of socio-economic, ethnic and civic identity models, the role of state and civil society institutions. A comparative analysis of the approaches of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan to the formation of a unified regional and civic identity has been carried out.

Keywords: regional and civic identity, Central Asia, summit, post-Soviet space, civil society, national policy, integration.

Бауржан Шериязданов

ОРТАЛЫҚ АЗИЯНЫҢ ПОСТКЕҢЕСТІК МЕМЛЕКЕТТЕРІНДЕ- ГІ ӨҢІРЛІК ЖӘНЕ АЗАМАТТЫҚ ҚОҒАМДАСТЫҚТЫҢ (БІРЕГЕЙ- ЛІКТІҢ) НЕГІЗГІ ТРЕНДТЕРІ

Аңдатпа. Мақалада Орталық Азияның посткеңестік елдерінде аймақтық және азаматтық бірегейлікті қалыптастырудың тұжырымдамалық модельдері мен процестері талданады. Аймақтық және азаматтық қоғамдастықтың қалыптасуы және қалыптасуына әсер ететін тарихи-саяси алғышарттар, институционалдық және әлеуметтік-мәдени факторлар қарастырылады. Бірегейліктің әлеуметтік-экономикалық, этникалық және азаматтық модельдерінің өзара іс-қимылына, қоғамның мемлекеттік және азаматтық институттарының рөліне ерекше назар аударылады. Қазақстан, Қырғызстан, Өзбекстан, Тәжікстан және Түрікменстанның

бірыңғай өңірлік және азаматтық бірегейлікті қалыптастыру тәсілдеріне салыстырмалы талдау жүргізілді.

Түйін сөздер: аймақтық және азаматтық бірегейлік, Орталық Азия, саммит, посткеңестік кеңістік, азаматтық қоғам, ұлттық саясат, интеграция.

Бауржан Шериязданов

ОСНОВНЫЕ ТРЕНДЫ РЕГИОНАЛЬНОЙ И ГРАЖДАНСКОЙ ОБЩНОСТИ (ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ) В ПОСТСОВЕТСКИХ ГОСУДАРСТВАХ ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ

Аннотация. В статье анализируются концептуальные модели и процессы формирования региональной и гражданской идентичности в постсоветских странах Центральной Азии. Рассматриваются историко-политические предпосылки, институциональные и социокультурные факторы, влияющие на формирование и становление региональной и гражданской общности. Особое внимание уделено взаимодействию социально-экономических, этнических и гражданских моделей идентичности, роли государственных и гражданских институтов общества. Проведён сравнительный анализ подходов Казахстана, Кыргызстана, Узбекистана, Таджикистана и Туркменистана к формированию единой региональной и гражданской идентичности.

Ключевые слова: региональная и гражданская идентичность, Центральная Азия, саммит, постсоветское пространство, гражданское общество, национальная политика, интеграция.

INTRODUCTION

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 was a key turning point for the Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. The countries and peoples of Central Asia, possessing a unique historical and cultural heritage and an important geopolitical position, are moving on the threshold of a new stage of regional development that requires rethinking common values and strengthening internal cohesion.

Central Asia has historically been distinguished by its ethnocultural diversity and complex social and economic structure. The Soviet policy of national demarcation in the 1920s contributed to the institutionalization of ethnic differences, but at the same time created the prerequisites for the emergence of nation-states. After 1991, each country in the region went its own way in building a civil nation. Despite the common Soviet roots, the degree of political liberalization, economic development, and ethnic consolidation varies, which determines the difference in identity models (Tasbolatova and

Sarkytkan 2025). The newly independent states faced the task of forming not only political sovereignty, but also a new form of community of citizens - a civic identity based on belonging to a state rather than an ethnic group. In the context of polyethnicity, cultural diversity and differences in the level of political modernization, the formation of civic identity has become a complex but vital process. In the scientific literature, this process is considered as part of a broader nation-building project aimed at consolidating society and strengthening the legitimacy of government (Anderson 2006, 2).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative and interdisciplinary approach to examine the formation of civic and regional identity in the five Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. A comparative method is used to analyze differences and similarities in national and civic identity across these states, incorporating demographic data, ethnic composition, and state policies. The historical-contextual method traces identity formation from the pre-Soviet and Soviet periods to post-independence developments, highlighting the influence of historical memory and cultural heritage. Documentary and discourse analysis is applied to official statements, policy documents, media content, and political speeches to assess how governments construct national and regional narratives. Sociopolitical and cultural analysis examines the role of language, religion, traditions, education, and civic institutions in shaping identity. Secondary statistical data on population, economic indicators, and regional cooperation provide quantitative support for comparative observations. Finally, an interdisciplinary synthesis integrates political, socio-cultural, economic, and geopolitical factors, offering a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of civic and regional identity in Central Asia.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CIVIC IDENTITY

The concept of civic identity in modern political science is based on the ideas of a civic nation as a community of equal citizens united not by origin, but by rights, duties and common values (Drobizheva 2019). Yu. Habermas considers a civic nation as a «constitutional patriotic community» based on adherence to democratic principles (Buluktaev 2012). Unlike the ethnic model of a nation, the civic model focuses on the political and legal unity of citizens, regardless of their ethnic and cultural differences.

Post—Soviet countries, including the Central Asian states, are characterized by a combination of both ethnic and civil models. On the one hand, the historical memory and language of the majority form the core of national identity, on the other hand, states strive to construct an inclusive

civic community that ensures the loyalty (equality) of all population groups (Nazarbayev 2017).

THE MAIN PART

Against the background of growing challenges, from global geopolitical instability and economic fragmentation to threats related to climate change, the formation of a common regional identity uniting the peoples of the five Central Asian countries is becoming one of the key tasks of our time.

What is behind the concept of «regional identity»? The media, covering the visits of the leaders of the countries of the region, usually emphasize the common history, culture and spiritual origins of the peoples of Central Asia. That's fair enough: Although the titular nations – Turkmen, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and Tajiks – and the indigenous peoples have their own culture, traditions, and linguistic characteristics, they share a whole range of common characteristics.

Regional identity is formed under the influence of many factors:

- long-term cohabitation in the same civilizational space;
- historical events that have influenced all the peoples of the region;
- similar natural and climatic conditions that determine lifestyle and economic patterns;
- the interpenetration of cultures, traditions, moral values and norms of behavior, etc.

However, a full-fledged regional identity arises when people recognize themselves as part of a single community. Such a sense of regional belonging can become an important resource for jointly overcoming global challenges and promoting integration in the region.

Central Asia has been a crossroads of trade routes and cultural influences for centuries. In ancient times and the Middle Ages, there were large states here – Margush, Sogd, Bactria, Khorezm, the Kushan Kingdom, etc., adjacent to numerous khanates, each of which had unique cultural features. In addition, the famous «Silk Road» passed through Central Asia. In socio-economic terms, the region was mainly agrarian, and during the years of Soviet construction it was specialized in accordance with the peculiarities of development and mineral reserves, as well as human resources. In the context of civic identity, the region's presence in the Russian Empire and then in the USSR had a significant impact. This period formed a multi-layered identity combining local traditions with elements of Russian and Soviet culture. Russian has become the language of international communication and has left its mark in the educational and cultural spheres. Islam has a great influence on regional identity, as it unites peoples according to a single

religious belief – Sunni Islam. Moreover, high religiosity in Central Asian states has occupied an important place as a unifying factor since the 12th century.

In Soviet times, a policy of cultural unification was pursued, but regional peculiarities remained. During the years of independence, the Central Asian countries began to actively revive their historical symbols and traditions, strengthening their national identity. Thus, the historical context remains the most important basis for the formation of a common regional identity, along with the modern challenges of globalization and integration.

In Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, civic identity is formed in the context of post-Soviet heritage, strong ethno-cultural and clan identity, as well as the active role of the state in shaping the national idea. In each State, there is a different degree of dependence of civil identity on national, religious and local affiliation.

- *Uzbekistan*: Civic identity largely coincides with ethnic identity, where Uzbek identity is dominant. The state actively forms a national idea based on the historical past, culture and Islamic values. According to the census data: Uzbeks make up approximately 84.4% of the population.

- *Kyrgyzstan*: Civic identity has a more multifaceted character, where ethnocultural (Kyrgyz) and regional (influence of clans and genuses) components play an important role. There is an attempt in the country to form a common civil identity based on democratic values and common state interests. According to the census data: Kyrgyz — 77.8%. • Uzbeks — 14.2% (Anderson 2006, 2).

- *Turkmenistan*: Civic identity is largely identified with ethnic identity, where Turkmen identity is dominant. The State strives to form a national idea based on national culture, history and religion, where the ideology of «eternal Turkmenistan» plays a central role. • Turkmen make up 86.7% of the population.

- *Tajikistan*: Civic identity largely coincides with ethnic identity, where Tajik identity is dominant. The state strives to form a national idea based on national culture, history and religion, where the idea of the «founder» of the Tajik nation plays a central role. • Tajiks — 86.1% according to the data (national majority group). • Uzbeks — 11.3%.

The general comparative analysis of the Central Asian countries is as follows:

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is one of the most successful models of combining ethnic and civic identity. The concept of the «Kazakh Nation», proclaimed in the 2010s, is aimed at forming a common citizenship of all ethnic groups. The Institute of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan has become a key mechanism for ethno-confessional harmony (Marat 2012). Public policy is

based on the principle of «unity in diversity», and civic identity is based on the ideas of patriotism, tolerance, and loyalty to the state.

Kyrgyzstan

Unlike its neighbors, Kyrgyzstan develops its civic identity through democratic mechanisms and institutions of civil society. After 2010, under the conditions of the parliamentary form of government, the role of civic participation and local communities has increased. There is a higher degree of dependence of civic identity on ethnocultural and regional identity (Laruelle 2012).

Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan is dominated by the «Uzbek nation» model with an emphasis on historical and cultural heritage. However, in recent years, there has been a gradual transition to a more civil rhetoric. The reforms of President Sh. Mirziyoyev include the idea of a «New Uzbekistan», where the emphasis is on civic cohesion, modernization and human rights (Juraev 2020).

Tadjikistan

In Tajikistan, civic identity largely coincides with ethnic and national identity, where Tajik identity plays a dominant role. After the civil war (1992-1997), the state identity was formed around the idea of national unity and stability. Here, civic identity is closely linked to state-patriotic values and the role of the leader of the nation (Roy 2007).

Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan is characterized by the dominance of the ethno-national model of identity, where the key element is the cult of the national leader and the ideology of neutrality. Civic identity is formal in nature and is not supported by broad civic participation (Cummings 2010).

In the Central Asian states, the leading role in the construction of civic identity is played by the education system, symbols, language policy and official ideology. At the same time, the formation of a genuine civic community requires not only state propaganda, but also the real participation of citizens through the development of civil society institutions, freedom of speech and the inclusiveness of the political process (Smith 1994).

In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, there is a gradual expansion of public discussions about civic identity, while in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, this process is still mainly initiated from above.

THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The improvement in intra-regional cooperation, which has been observed since 2016, became semi-institutional in 2018 with the launch of Consultative Meetings of the Heads of State of the region, and has a positive impact

on all Central Asian countries. It was this circumstance that influenced the formation of an intraregional «airbag», and since 2018 has pushed large and medium-sized factors to recognize Central Asia as a single region, i.e. led to external regionalization, and today the C5+1 format exists in more than 10 countries and regions. Thus, if the current positive trend of regional cooperation in Central Asia continues for 10 years, then there is a high probability of even greater and more serious cooperation in this region. To be fair, it should be noted that it is the cultural and humanitarian factor, unlike the political and economic, transit, transport, and water-climate factors, that is the weak link that generates significant risks and challenges for the integration of Central Asian countries (Rizoen). In recent years, some academic and research institutions and individual researchers in the information space of Central Asia have been systematically updating the concept of «regional identity» or «Central Asian identity». Back in the early 90s, at the suggestion of the first President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, the concept of «Central Asia» was introduced instead of the definition of «Central Asia and Kazakhstan», which was used to designate the region in Soviet times. In this paper, by Central Asia we mean five countries, since other definitions include different countries in this region. Thus, according to the UNESCO definition, Mongolia, western China, northern India, northern Pakistan, Afghanistan, northeastern Iran, regions of Asian Russia and five former Soviet republics of Central Asia belong to Central Asia.

After the launch of Consultative Meetings of Heads of State of the C5+1 region, the use of the definition of «regional identity»/ «Central Asian identity» has become widespread and is very often found in speeches by politicians, researchers, journalists, etc. Observing how the concept of «Central Asian identity» is used, it should be emphasized that this definition includes or implies different meanings that contradict this very idea, which focuses on the official country discourse or the goal that they want to achieve in the foreseeable future.

The cultural and humanitarian factor is one of the important elements of the formation of a common space, which can eventually lead to closer cooperation, i.e. integration of states. The importance of this factor, and indeed of regional integration itself, lies in the fact that it is primarily aimed at improving people's lives, improving their well-being, creating a comfortable environment and opportunities for joint development. Since the ultimate beneficiaries of integration in Central Asia are people living in the countries of the region, this factor needs to be given special attention. Thus, it is from this starting point that the cultural and humanitarian factor in the regional cooperation of the Central Asian countries should be considered.

The culture of the peoples of Central Asia is determined not only by material, but also by spiritual values, and these primarily include language,

history, religion, art, traditions, customs, science, mythology, etc. Through their representation, a cultural code is formed/displayed, which is an essential element of existing identities. In turn, identity is subject to constant changes, as it is modified with the process of transformation of socio-political relations and the expansion of the country's political and economic potential.

Today, Islam is a unifying element for all the peoples of the Central Asian countries, as a significant part of the population professes this religion. The Central Asian states have a common history, which has been interpreted in different ways under the conditions of state independence. Central Asia is also united by cuisine, where some varieties of dishes are found among all peoples. The countries of the region also share traditions, especially family ones, where honoring parents and the older generation is the norm of behavior. As for the language, with the exception of Tajikistan, all other countries are Turkic-speaking.

In the first years after the collapse of the USSR, the high level and severity of the economic interdependence of the former Soviet republics raised the question of ways to change it at the level of individual republics. In a sense, the development of Central Asia as a macroregion has receded into the background. This was facilitated by a number of factors that reduced the conflict between the Central Asian states in the post-imperial period and pushed the Central Asian countries towards intra-regional integration:

- geographical factor although the economies of the Central Asian countries were not complementary, but competitive (the countries of the region entered the world market with a similar set of natural resources), nevertheless, there is an exchange of resources within the region. Moreover, the dependence of the Central Asian countries on each other's resources has increased significantly every year. This is due, on the one hand, to the collapse of the all - Union economy, and, on the other, to the slow and difficult entry of Central Asian countries into the world market;

- The legacy of the former Soviet economic complex - economic ties, common communications, transport arteries, a common energy system, gas and oil pipelines still firmly connect the countries of Central Asia;

- demographic factor - the Central Asian countries do not yet have a single labor market. This is hindered by the registration authority, as well as imperfect migration legislation in Central Asian countries. However, migration flows reflect certain trends in the formation of the labor market within the region;

- the confessional factor is the spread of Sunni Islam of the Hanafi Madhhab in Central Asia;

- the civilizational factor - the coexistence of agriculture and animal

husbandry has always been the norm in Central Asia. The modern revival of old economic and political regions, where traditional cultural and economic forms are being restored, in a certain sense stabilizes the situation in Central Asia and mitigates existing contradictions (Anderson 2006, 2);

- the national factor - all Central Asian countries have a multinational population with a significant proportion of diasporas and representatives of titular nations from neighboring countries;

- the military factor - all Central Asian countries are in the process of forming their armies and military-industrial infrastructure.

The population of Central Asian countries is small, with an average density of 18.47 persons/km². The level of economic development is average; the market potential is low. The population of the city is 34.915 million people; the level of urbanization is 48.16%. The GDP is 277.420 billion US dollars, and the GDP per capita is 3,826.45 US dollars. Among the countries of the region, Kazakhstan is the largest country by area, occupying 68.09% of the region's territory. Uzbekistan is the most populous country in terms of population (Tasbolatova and Sarkytkan 2025).

Currently, integration issues are exclusively technical and economic in nature. But none of these regional problems can be solved without the participation of all Central Asian States and Kazakhstan. If a major political and economic problem is not solved and another one arises, therefore, coordinated coordination of socio-economic development models of all countries in the region will be required in the future. Now, when new principles of interaction are being developed, it is necessary to integrate development models and link them. The main thing is to create an equal economy. The success of integration is guaranteed if the right regional development strategy is developed. The integration of Central Asia is necessary to maintain stability and peace in the region, ensure national security, and enhance its role in solving its problems and on the world stage. On this issue, at the initiative of the Kazakh and Uzbek governments as major economies in the region, not a little has been done and is being done.

What are the main ways to balance and form a Central Asian regional identity or a single market?

First, Central Asia is turning from a set of separate economies into a single regional market, where countries complement and strengthen each other, as well as create joint competencies.

The recent meeting of the presidents of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in Tashkent, following which the parties agreed to expand cooperation in trade, industry, logistics and energy, as well as increase mutual trade turnover to \$ 10 billion by 2030, showed that the region is moving beyond bilateral contacts and is gradually forming a common economic contour. Against

this background, the idea of Made in Central Asia is more clearly evident – an approach in which development is built not individually, but through the complementarity of economies.

The architecture of the regional economy may consist of:

Kazakhstan – the financial and infrastructural center of the region: banks, stock exchange infrastructure, transit, industry, logistics.

Uzbekistan is the largest and fastest growing market, a driver of consumption and private business.

Kyrgyzstan is a flexible service and resource module: IT, services, labor, and water resources.

Tajikistan is a supplier of hydropower and human resources.

Turkmenistan is the gas base of the region, the mainstay of the energy balance.

As we can see, nothing prevents the Central Asian countries from working as a connected economic system now. All elements mutually support each other: resources from Tajikistan and Turkmenistan go to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, goods from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan go to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and transit corridors connect the entire region with China, the Caucasus and Europe.

A separate role here is played by the developed banking system of Kazakhstan, the presence of public institutions and major players, such as the Halyk Bank listed on the stock exchange, which simplifies the movement of capital within the region (Rizoen). The role of Kazakhstan is its share in the total foreign trade turnover is growing every year. This is confirmed by the facts: for example: The total trade turnover of Kazakhstan with Central Asia according to the data Exclusive.kz During the period January–August 2025, trade with Central Asian countries reached USD 5.4 billion, which is a historical record (Zhaik.su 2025).

Compared to the same period in 2024, this is an increase of 14.8%. At the same time, as Kursiv media notes, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan were the main drivers of growth — they account for more than 80% of Kazakhstan's trade with Central Asia (Kursiv Media Kazakhstan 2025). According to Eurasia 24, the share of Central Asian countries in Kazakhstan's trade increased from 2.7% in 2012 to about 6% in 2025 (Eurasia24 2025). Kazakhstan's exports to Central Asian countries in 2025 show significant growth compared to last year, especially to Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. This indicates an intention or success in strengthening trade relations with these partners.

Given the changes in the geopolitical orientation and tension in recent years, summits between major powers and regional associations have intensified in search of new opportunities where there is mutual interest: large countries need resources and markets, Central Asia and Kazakhstan

need new technologies, investments, digitalization and the introduction of AI.

In the context of global challenges, the interest of major players in Central Asia and Kazakhstan is increasing. These are the United States, the European Union, China, the Russian Federation, and other states seeking to expand their partnership with the region based on the principles of sustainable development, interconnectedness, and investment attractiveness. For the Central Asian countries and Kazakhstan, the 5+1 summits provide a unique opportunity to bring cooperation to a new level, attract investment and technology, and strengthen their position on the world stage.

Being simultaneously located between such major powers as the Russian Federation and China, the United States and the European Union, they strive to become a global player, and they are interested in Central Asia and Kazakhstan maintaining their current status quo, remaining detached, not seeking to join any of the «centers of power». Naturally, the best strategy in this regard for the world's leading countries is to offer their investment projects, trade cooperation, and their own political guarantees. This is due to the fact that the Central Asian countries and Kazakhstan have a similar position regarding all these geopolitical differences: all countries in the region advocate reducing escalation and diplomatic ways to resolve conflicts between states. There is a valid reason for this: Central Asia, located inside the continent, landlocked, but bordering two geopolitical giants at once and having very close trade, economic and political ties with the EU and the United States, is definitely not interested in becoming an arena of confrontation between these major players. Therefore, it is in their common interests to make every effort to maintain this delicate balance of multi-vector not only state, but also regional policy.

Analyzing the main international responses and assessments to the C5+1 summit, we can single out individual ones. For example, according to Reuters, the United States views the region as strategically important in terms of rare earth metals, energy, and logistics. According to The Diplomat, Washington sees this summit as an opportunity to «diversify» access to energy and minerals and strengthen its economic presence in the region — not through a military form of influence, but through investments and infrastructure. National media, for example, Orda.kz emphasizes the pragmatism of the United States: the visit of the Central Asian leaders is a response to the growing power of Russia and China in the region, and an attempt by the United States to take a more active role in the fight for supply chains. Analysts note that one of the key outcomes of the summit was the signing of memorandums of cooperation in the field of rare earth metals, uranium, tungsten and copper.

The National Interest writes that these resources are especially important for the United States in the context of green transformation and technology — and Central Asia can provide an alternative to dependence on China.

Analyzing the balance of the multi-vector policy of the Central Asian states and Kazakhstan, it is noted that the multi-vector nature of Kazakhstan (and other countries in the region) remains their main strategic advantage: they can conduct a dialogue simultaneously with the United States, Moscow and Beijing (The National Interest 2025).

Today, there are a number of conditions without which it is difficult to form an effective Central Asian regional identity (of course, if necessary). This requires the political will and maturity of statesmen and the peoples themselves for peaceful and civilized coexistence and co-development in Central Asia, and finding a balance between these phenomena:

First, there is a balance between the importance of regional integration and building national statehood. The analysis and assessment of the problem show that the search for a model of balance between regional integration, on the one hand, and the strengthening of national statehood, on the other, requires the modification of country discourses or the creation of a certain image of a particular country through language, including political, economic and cultural discourses that interact with each other and broadcast narratives through various media channels such as media, culture, or other platforms. Only time will tell how much the states of the region are ready for this. The reason for the search for such a balance is that over the past four decades, country discourses and created narratives have been based on ethnonationalism and aimed at an internal audience. Therefore, it is necessary to find a balance between regional and country agendas in this area.

Secondly, there is a balance between scientific facts and constructed elements of national identity. In recent years, the region has been gripped by debates about who owns certain material legacies, world-famous scientists and thinkers, etc. This is a sensitive topic that affects several levels and primarily concerns the cultural and civilizational heritage of the region in the humanitarian sphere. The discussion focuses on the thesis that the history of the region has been rewritten to fit the existing reality, and individuals, material and spiritual heritage, and individual historical events have been «appropriated». Such discussions are observed in certain Facebook groups, where moderators and participants, using the style of primitive nationalism, incite hatred and hostility towards their neighbors. Regardless of attempts to appropriate the historical past and publish books and other works for these purposes, it is impossible to rewrite world historical science. Therefore, in order to support the processes of regional cooperation, it is

necessary to create Central Asian forums and discussion platforms for the gradual resolution of existing issues. These are issues of historical facts and myth-making, to reduce the degree of conflicts and battles between individual historians, in general, in the historiography of the countries of the region. The main tools of this approach should be: close collaborative and interdisciplinary scientific research, public discussions of their results with the expert community, representatives of culture, art and the public, media coverage of the whole process and, as a result, the publication of books and other materials. In general, professional historians should be involved in discussing history.

In summary, it can be noted that in all Central Asian states there are similar conditions and problems: the continuing influence of states on all aspects of society and the economy, strong traditions of authoritarianism, lack of experience and traditions of national statehood, weakness of the national elite, rapid and contradictory stratification of society.

What are the key problems and prospects for the development of regional identity:

- The Central Asian Union does not exist as a full-fledged organization, instead, for a political dialogue between the countries of the region (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan), there is a format of the «Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asia», which is held regularly. The lack of legal formalization of the Central Asian states as a regional union with all packages of agreed documents hinders the effectiveness of the association;

- weak legal institutions and low level of civic engagement of the local population, with the exception of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan;

- Uneven economic, social and regional development;

- dependence on foreign policy influences (Russia, China, the Islamic world).

The prospects for civic consolidation in the region are linked to the development of education, media literacy, digital technologies, social mobility and youth involvement in interstate public initiatives.

CONCLUSION

The formation of a regional and civic community in Central Asian countries is a complex and multidimensional process that depends on historical traditions, ethno-cultural structure, and political dynamics. Despite the differences in models, the general trend of the region is to find a balance between regional, ethnic, and civic components of identity.

The success of this process is largely determined by the ability of States

to combine patriotism with inclusivity, tradition with modernization, and stimulate citizen participation in public life. In the future, it is the development of civic awareness that will become a key factor in the sustainability and integration of societies in Central Asia and Kazakhstan.

What strengthens regional identity?

- Revival and development of cultural heritage – support of traditional crafts, art, folklore and simultaneous cultural rapprochement of different parts of the region.

- The development of tourism as a tool for intercultural dialogue and acquaintance with the traditions of neighboring countries.

- Educational initiatives that include the study of the history, geography, culture and languages of the region.

- Economic convergence – coordinated unification of rules, removal of barriers to trade and investment, adaptation of business to the peculiarities of different parts of the region.

- Interethnic dialogue and participation in international initiatives aimed at the development of Central Asia and Kazakhstan.

The formation of regional identity is a dynamic and continuous process that requires consideration of both historical roots and current socio-economic and geopolitical realities of our time.

The mass media play a key role in shaping and strengthening regional identity, primarily through creating an objective image of Central Asia, forming an image of it through news, reports, documentaries and other unifying formats. In the internal information market of Central Asia, it is important, by positively highlighting local achievements and events, to form a sense of belonging and a sense of community of their lives with the fate of the region among the population of the region.

The scientific and expert community also plays an important role in shaping regional identity. Thus, deeper scientific research by scientists and experts on the historical, cultural and social aspects of the region will help to better understand its features, and based on them, develop educational programs, as well as recommendations on the preservation and development of identity. Public discussions and conferences organized by the scientific and expert community also contribute to the dissemination of knowledge about the region. For the effective formation of regional identity, it is necessary to interact with the media and the scientific community, organize joint projects and events aimed at popularizing regional culture and history.

Central Asia is a special region where there are many ethnic groups, each of which contributes to the overall cultural mosaic and to the formation of regional identity. The observed process of strengthening the identity of

Central Asia reflects the efforts of the five States of the region – Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, aimed at creating a single civilizational space based on respect for diversity, historical memory and common goals for the prosperity of our peoples. Without taking into account the above, discussions on updating the «Central Asian identity» will remain a futile idea peddled by those who, in fact or unknowingly, oppose regional integration in Central Asia.

It is now very important to progressively develop bilateral relations in Central Asia and maintain the current pace of regional cooperation. There are more important issues on the regional agenda that require urgent action. These include expanding the region’s transport potential and creating new transit corridors; finding ways to mitigate the effects of climate change and ensure access to water resources for all countries; ensuring security and joint approaches by the countries of the region to strengthen stability. In general, it is necessary to create new successful cases of both bilateral and regional cooperation for the peaceful and sustainable development of Central Asia.

In the long term, the creation of a full-fledged union of Central Asian states and Kazakhstan, based on the EU prototype, will lead to the prosperity of the region and, most importantly, will have a positive impact on improving the well-being of ordinary citizens, the formation of socio-cultural, civic and regional identity.

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