

Kazakhstan's OSCE Connectivity Ambitions: Trade Promotion and Norm Resistance

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Abstract

During the 2010s, “connectivity” became a buzzword within the OSCE’s second (economic and environmental) dimension of security as a policy tool to improve economic relations among participating States. Kazakhstan has advanced the idea of hosting an OSCE connectivity centre in its capital to provide pertinent expertise. This contribution to OSCE Insights discusses the concept of connectivity, delineates Kazakhstan’s connectivity agenda, and outlines its drivers. Beyond a material interest in the theme given its landlocked location, Kazakhstan appears to use its connectivity agenda as a vehicle to downplay commitments in the first (politico-military) and especially the third (human) dimension of security. It is argued that Kazakhstan’s initiative should be taken seriously, not only because the OSCE can indeed play a role in connectivity but also because Kazakhstan’s significant contributions to regional and international cooperation and stability deserve recognition. Yet it is emphasized that the three OSCE security dimensions cannot be played off against each other and that Kazakhstan must continue to pay attention to its commitments in the first and the third dimensions.

Keywords

Connectivity, economic relations, OSCE, Central Asia, Kazakhstan, trade promotion, norm resistance.

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Introduction

During the 2010s, “connectivity” became a buzzword as a policy tool to improve inter-state economic relations, particularly in the transition economies of South-Eastern and Eastern Europe and

the former Soviet Union. In the OSCE, the term was first used when Germany chaired the OSCE in 2016, although the theme of improving economic relations can be traced back to the second chapter of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975. According to the OSCE website, the Organization “works on creating the basis of economic connectivity between the 57 participating States, through dialogue on trade and transport”.¹

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Kazakhstan in particular has put the topic of connectivity at the centre of its foreign policy. This comes as no surprise given its landlocked location and its general isolation from global markets. Against this backdrop, the government has advanced the idea of establishing an OSCE connectivity centre in the capital, Nur-Sultan. Such a centre would give the country the opportunity to benefit from relevant expertise. As we shall see, however, Kazakhstan has further reasons to promote connectivity within the OSCE. An emphasis on this theme would serve to advance its international and regional leadership ambitions. Underscoring topics from the OSCE's second (economic and environmental) dimension of security, such as connectivity, also provides a welcome opportunity for downplaying unpleasant commitments in the other two OSCE dimensions, the politico-military and the human dimension. This is especially true with regard to the latter, where Kazakh officials remain resistant to reform, particularly as regards fundamental freedoms, elections, and the freedom of political parties. There are grounds for believing that the Kazakh government wishes to replace the current OSCE Programme Office in Nur-Sultan, which covers all three dimensions, with the proposed connectivity centre, which would deal only with the second.

In addition to discussing the concept of connectivity in general and within the OSCE, the key aims of this paper are to delineate Kazakhstan's connectivity agenda (focusing on the proposed centre), to outline its drivers, and to provide suggestions for how the OSCE should

react to this state's ambitions. It argues that Kazakhstan's initiative should be taken seriously not only because the OSCE can indeed play a role in connectivity, but also because Kazakhstan's noteworthy contributions to regional and international cooperation and stability deserve recognition. Yet it also points out that the three dimensions cannot be played off against each other and that Kazakhstan must continue to pay attention to its commitments in the first and the third dimensions.

The paper starts by introducing the concept of connectivity. The second section pinpoints how connectivity is moored within the OSCE. The following two sections demonstrate how Kazakhstan's foreign policy places emphasis on connectivity and illuminate underlying drivers. Based on this analysis, the last section offers policy recommendations for the OSCE.²

The concept of connectivity

“Connectivity”, as used in this paper, can roughly be defined as the conscious crafting of economic relations among states or regions.³ A tool of external development policy, it embodies an element of economic diplomacy that is exerted through individual states and international organizations. While early work on trans-governmental relations such as that by Keohane and Nye focused on increased economic interactions among the then industrialized nations,⁴ the economies of the former Socialist bloc states were thrust onto centre stage by both scholars

and practitioners when the Berlin Wall came down in 1989. Connectivity was seen as a major driver of economic progress for these states. Examples of connectivity initiatives undertaken include the since expired Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) scheme launched in 1991 by the then European Community, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) announced by China in 2013, Japan's Partnership for Quality Infrastructure initiative of 2015, and the European Union (EU) Connectivity Strategy for Europe and Asia, which was launched in 2018. In addition to its tangible material benefits, connectivity has the potential to serve as a confidence-building measure for fostering peaceful relations among involved states.⁵ These expectations correspond to a strand of liberal thought according to which economic exchange is conducive to stability and peace.

States support connectivity projects because they advance their material interests and/or because they serve these broader goals. Besides bringing benefits, however, connectivity also entails risks. As Keohane and Nye point out, increased economic relations may create national weaknesses to varying degrees,⁶ as evidenced by the oil embargoes of the 1970s, trade wars, and supply chain disruptions, such as those resulting from the recent spread of COVID-19. Diverging preferences regarding where and how to nurture economic relations can be a further source of friction leading to their geo-politicization.⁷ What is more, the term "connectivity" has widely diverging connotations, which may spark

disagreement. Autocratic polities – China and its BRI being a prime example – by and large frame connectivity in a non-normative, material sense, focusing on physical infrastructure and related strategic calculations. Within liberal states and international institutions, by contrast, the concept tends to be laden with normative claims, including the aforementioned liberal peace expectations. Related concepts such as good governance and sustainability entail a number of guiding principles, values, and norms within the scope of overall connectivity aims. Such principles are likewise articulated by the OSCE, to which we now turn.

The OSCE and connectivity

The relevance of connectivity to the OSCE dates back to the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, the second chapter of which is devoted to economic and environmental cooperation. Several post-Cold War milestone documents relating to the second dimension further paved the way for this field of action. The Final Document of the 1990 Conference on Economic Co-operation in Europe in Bonn calls for "sustainable economic growth" and "co-operation in the field of economics", emphasizing the "rule of law and equal protection under the law for all, based on respect for human rights and effective, accessible and just legal systems" as accompanying economic growth.⁸

The particularly important Strategy Document for the Economic and Environmental Dimension (the Maastricht Document) was adopted at the 2003

Ministerial Council (MC) in Maastricht against the backdrop of significant difficulties regarding economic transformation processes in the former socialist economies. A number of governance problems were identified, including “ineffective institutions and a weak civil society, lack of transparency and accountability in the public and private sectors, [...] poor public management and unsustainable use of natural resources, corruption and lack of respect for business ethics and corporate governance”.⁹

The MCs in 2006 (Brussels) and 2011 (Vilnius) also resulted in decisions related to economic cooperation. The theme gained significant momentum when the Swiss Chair placed it at the top of the OSCE agenda in 2014. The Decision on Good Governance and Promoting Connectivity taken at the 2016 MC in Hamburg mentioned the buzzword “connectivity” for the first time in the OSCE context, noting that “good governance, transparency and accountability are essential conditions for economic growth, trade, investment and sustainable development, thereby contributing to stability, security and respect for human rights”. This decision charged OSCE bodies with enhancing the simplification, harmonization, and standardization of rules and regulations pertaining to trade in the OSCE area. More recent documents referring to connectivity include the 2017 MC Decision on Promoting Economic Participation in the OSCE Area and the 2018 MC Declaration on the Digital Economy as a Driver for Promoting Co-operation, Security and Growth.

All of the documents mentioned above are premised on the assumption that fostering economic prosperity and related features in line with connectivity enhances security and stability in the OSCE area. However, given their various emphases and the largely diverging regime types among participating States, the OSCE’s approach to connectivity is clearly multifaceted. There is hence no consensus on how to precisely define connectivity within the OSCE.

Within the institutional framework of the OSCE, responsibility for connectivity falls on the Secretariat’s Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA). Its mandate stems from the decisions and declarations mentioned above, particularly the 2003 Maastricht Document. Its 22 staff members deal with the full range of the OSCE’s work in the second dimension, including connectivity and other closely related areas such as digitization and good governance.¹⁰

The geographic focus of OSCE connectivity lies in Eastern Europe, South-Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia. As in other OSCE fields of action, the OCEEA fulfils its mandate with respect to states’ economic cooperation largely by outlining best practices for policymakers and practitioners. For example, it has issued a Handbook of Best Practices at Border Crossings¹¹ and a publication on Inland Transport Security Forum Proceedings,¹² both jointly drafted with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). The OCEEA also organizes national, regional, and headquarters-level workshops, sem-

inars, and online events on connectivity-related themes. Events thus far have covered cross-border e-commerce, transit coordination, and paperless trade. In June 2020, for instance, a web-based meeting entitled "Safer and Sustainable Supply Chains Connecting Central Asia and Europe" was held. Whether and to what extent related OCEEA functions could be assumed by the connectivity centre proposed by Kazakhstan is thus far unclear.

Kazakhstan's OSCE connectivity ambitions

In landlocked Central Asia, which some observers deem one of the world's least integrated areas, connectivity – and transport in particular – clearly has a special importance, not least given high transit costs.¹³ For Kazakhstan, connectivity has represented a foreign policy priority for some time – one that has been further strengthened over the past few years. As a member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the country has an interest in promoting trade with other EAEU members. It is also a strong supporter of the Chinese BRI, which was announced in Kazakhstan's capital in 2013. Kazakhstan holds strategic relevance for the BRI as a corridor through which Chinese–Western transport is channelled. The BRI likewise has the potential to improve transit among EAEU members.¹⁴ The Kazakh government has linked its own Nurly Zhol (Bright Road) infrastructure programme, focusing on rail

and highway connections, closely to the BRI.¹⁵

Against this backdrop, Kazakhstan has given priority to activities related to connectivity largely because they assist in the modernization of existing routes and the diversification of its trade through the development of new routes – predominantly by helping it to lower transport costs, reap revenues from transit fees, and overcome export instability from over-reliance on just a few markets. Kazakhstan is crucial for China as a transport corridor for both imports and exports and is a source of commodities such as oil and uranium. But there have been recurring problems with the BRI and other connectivity projects, including deficient trade and transit cross-border standardization, a lack of transparency, rule of law, and accountability, and aid recipients' vulnerability to debt distress.¹⁶ As the last section will argue, these are difficulties that could be addressed by an OSCE connectivity centre.

When it chaired the OSCE in 2010, the Kazakh government took the opportunity to put economic cooperation high on the Organization's agenda, prioritizing the theme of land transport.¹⁷ It saw a further opportunity when, responding to earlier requests from several Eastern European and Central Asian participating States, the 2014 Swiss Chair paid increased attention to economic and environmental issues. Kazakhstan made use of this momentum in order to enhance its own voice regarding these themes. As a consequence, its ambitions and expectations with regard to connectivity in the OSCE intensified. Between 2016 and 2019, the

German, Austrian, Italian, and Slovakian Chairs all further nurtured the topic with different areas of focus. Italy, for example, emphasized digitization, while the German Chair linked connectivity closely to good governance.¹⁸

Kazakhstan's connectivity ambitions culminated in its lobbying for the establishment of an OSCE Thematic Centre on Sustainable Connectivity (CSC) in its capital city, Nur-Sultan. The idea was introduced in the capital in June 2017 at the Second Preparatory Meeting for the OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum and was further discussed at the Vienna MC in December. Twelve months later, on the occasion of the 2018 Milan MC, Kazakhstan's foreign minister, Kairat Abdrakhmanov, likewise voiced the idea of establishing a CSC. In July 2019, at the informal OSCE Ministerial meeting in Slovakia, the proposal was given a more definite form. The new foreign minister, Beibut Atamkulov, stated that the centre should conduct research on "connectivity in its broad interpretation". Kairat Sarybay, Kazakhstan's ambassador to the OSCE, specified "sustainable connectivity issues, [...] good governance, green economy, development of new technologies, disaster prevention, energy security, and trade promotion" as second dimension-related themes to be covered by the proposed CSC.¹⁹ The Kazakh government recommended that this institution be established in the Astana International Financial Centre, a financial hub that officially opened in mid-2018 in Nur-Sultan, halfway between the airport and the city centre.²⁰ The location would allow for the devel-

opment of synergy between the CSC and both in-house institutions and scholars from the nearby Nazarbayev University. The precise functions of a CSC have yet to be determined.

Initially, Kazakhstan suggested that it and/or a group of "friends of Kazakhstan" would cover the expenses of running the CSC. It has since insisted that the costs should be covered by the OSCE's Unified Budget.²¹ There is reason to believe that this change of mind was not (primarily) money driven. Given the OSCE's tight budget and zero nominal growth policy, which means that the budget is shrinking in real terms, it is unlikely that both the current Programme Office and a CSC will be able to exist in tandem if funded by the Unified Budget. While the South-Eastern European countries receive a large share of the latter (34%), Central Asia's share is also considerable (15%), topping both Eastern Europe (4%) and the South Caucasus (2%).²² For this reason, and absent peace-building, peacekeeping, and immediate conflict-prevention needs, a substantial increase in Central Asia's share is unlikely for the foreseeable future. Former OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger once pointed out that given the tight Unified Budget, it will be impossible for the OSCE to afford two presences in Kazakhstan. The argument currently being advanced by Kazakhstan that the CSC should be paid for from the Unified Budget logically implies that the Programme Office in Nur-Sultan would have to be dissolved, although this has not been stated publicly.

Norm resistance and leadership ambitions

Beyond the prospect of immediate material benefits, from Kazakhstan's perspective the proposal of hosting a connectivity centre represents a vehicle for escaping unpleasant normative commitments and a way to advance its leadership aspirations in the field. As noted in the last section, the CSC may be intended to replace the present OSCE Programme Office in Nur-Sultan. At the MC plenary session in Basel in 2014, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Alexei Volkov indicated in his speech that this office could be closed altogether. While this threat was not put into effect,²³ the Kazakh government later repeatedly voiced the idea of changing the mission's mandate, strongly emphasizing the second dimension while downplaying, if not entirely ignoring, the other two. Like most other field presences in Central Asia, the initial OSCE field operation in Kazakhstan (established in 1998) had already been downgraded to the current Programme Office and lost some of its competences in 2015, such as trial monitoring – the observation and gathering of information on court hearings and procedures so as to assess their compliance with fair trial standards.²⁴ Back in 2004, Kazakhstan was a prominent signatory to the "Astana Appeal", which contained complaints regarding the OSCE's alleged bias towards the human dimension and accompanying intrusions into domestic affairs. In 2018, Foreign Minister Kairat Abdrakhmanov was the first Kazakh government representative to state in writing that the Pro-

gramme Office had fulfilled its mandate and that a new focus would be necessary.²⁵

It appears that the Kazakh government views the hosting of an official OSCE body, such as the proposed CSC, as a way to refocus its OSCE engagement. It might consider the CSC initiative a welcome distraction from unpleasant commitments, particularly in the third (human) dimension.²⁶ This rationale reflects a broader tendency within the OSCE, with several participating States increasingly resisting compliance with OSCE commitments and, using their veto power, blocking the employment of unwelcome high-level officials.²⁷

Leadership ambition is yet another driver of Kazakhstan's connectivity agenda. Since the 1990s, the country has amply shown regional and international leadership by way of numerous cooperation initiatives. Among other things, Kazakhstan's first president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, proposed following the model of European integration and pressed for integration under a Eurasian Union.²⁸ Kazakhstan's chairing of the OSCE in 2010 was likewise a clear sign of leadership.²⁹ The country largely paved the way for the declaration of a Central Asian nuclear-weapons-free zone. With some success, Kazakhstan has positioned itself proactively with an ambitious diplomatic and foreign policy agenda, particularly as an honest peace broker, for example in its role as host to the settlement process on Syria.³⁰ It is perhaps no coincidence that at the aforementioned informal OSCE Ministerial gathering in Slovakia in 2019, Kazakhstan not

only announced its proposal to host a CSC but also mentioned its aim of hosting a meeting on dispute resolution in Afghanistan.³¹ To a certain extent, the country has thus become an exporter of regional and international security. Connectivity aspirations in Nur-Sultan and Vienna also aim at providing guidance and consolidating Kazakhstan's increasingly proactive role in regional and international affairs. The International Financial Centre in which the CSC would be located was set up by the Kazakh government to make the country a focal point for the global financial system.³² Modeled on previous initiatives, particularly in the Persian Gulf, it describes itself as functioning "as a global centre for business and finance, connecting the economies of [...] Central Asia, the Caucasus, EAEU, West China, Mongolia, Middle East and Europe".³³

Nevertheless, Kazakhstan's leadership is not uncontested. For instance, both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan likewise wish to host Afghanistan talks to exhibit leadership. Uzbekistan – the most populous country among the five – is generally wary of Kazakhstan's leadership ambitions, which would be enhanced by the establishment of a CSC.³⁴ When further deliberating on this initiative, it is therefore important for Kazakhstan to take seriously and accommodate the reservations of its southern neighbours.

Linked to both normative escapism and the quest for international standing, there is a good amount of status thinking at play in Kazakhstan's OSCE connectivity agenda. It appears that in Nur-Sultan, the presence of the current OSCE Pro-

gramme Office is increasingly perceived by Kazakhstan as giving the (in their view mistaken) impression that internal political conditions are deficient. This discomfort is partially understandable inasmuch as Kazakhstan stands out positively from some of its peers (such as Turkmenistan and Tajikistan) in several respects, such as investment climate, economic progress, rule of law, and overall political stability. Against this backdrop, the proposed CSC corresponds to Kazakhstan's desire to host a normal OSCE institution rather than an office for participating States in "real need". At the informal OSCE meeting in Slovakia in 2019, the Kazakh delegation stated that one of the CSC initiative's aims was to balance the geographical representation of OSCE institutions.³⁵

It is difficult to conjecture whether a CSC will materialize. Premised on sufficient funding, the Permanent Council would ultimately have to decide on this via the consensus of all 57 participating States. It appears that strong support from the remaining four Central Asian states has been lacking thus far.³⁶ In addition, a number of other participating States have been reluctant to endorse the idea, including at least one larger European Union (EU) state. For Kazakhstan and other interested parties, it is therefore important to clarify the functions that a CSC would fulfil and to make an attempt to accommodate those who remain reluctant.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The OSCE has a role to play in connectivity, and Kazakhstan has shown notable leadership in regional and international cooperation and stability. Therefore, this participating State's connectivity initiative should be taken seriously. Yet supporting Kazakhstan's connectivity ambitions should not lead to the discarding of first- and third-dimension commitments. Spillover potential across the three dimensions should therefore be utilized. Strictly speaking, connectivity is a second-dimension theme; insofar as it builds political confidence and transparency and promotes better border management, however, it also concerns the first dimension. It likewise has implications for the third, human dimension of security. In fact, both the 1990 Bonn Declaration and the 2016 MC Decision make direct reference to respect for human rights. The theme of good governance, which has third-dimension implications, has frequently been cited since the German Chair explicitly brought it to the forefront of OSCE discussions on connectivity. Although good governance is predominantly framed in economic terms in the OSCE context (anti-corruption, anti-money laundering), "full respect for the rule of law" is also demanded when good governance is implemented,³⁷ thus implying spillover to the third dimension, where the OSCE views the rule of law as lying at the core of human rights and democratization. Politico-military and human security issues remain central to holistic and sustainable connec-

tivity as it is currently understood by the OSCE, and this should remain the case.

It must be acknowledged that the OSCE is not the most prominent organization in the field of connectivity, considering its limited resources and the greater experience of other institutions, such as the EU, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the UNECE. Commensurate with its moderate clout, the OSCE should therefore act as a platform, discussion forum, or knowledge broker for connectivity projects within the OSCE area.³⁸ These are functions through which it can contribute added value. The proposed CSC in particular could function as a think tank or clearing house for sustainable trade- and transport-related projects, helping to avoid or alleviate shortcomings such as insufficient ecological sustainability and economic feasibility, poor trade standardization, and a lack of transparency and accountability. Vulnerability to debt distress is another major issue – not so much in Kazakhstan as in other participating States, such as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Mongolia.³⁹ With regard to this latter problem, a connectivity centre could, drawing on pertinent studies, counsel potential borrowers for future projects, address debt problems, and generally help to define standards for sustainable financing. In performing the suggested functions via studies, workshops, and conferences, a CSC could act as a catalyst for trade and transport in the OSCE area. This would be relevant to the five Central Asian countries in particular, which have significantly in-

creased their trade and economic cooperation since 2014 due to several infrastructure projects (such as the gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Western China via Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, built between 2006 and 2009) and are likely to add further projects.⁴⁰ Given the OSCE's modest funding and expertise in some dimensions of connectivity, a CSC would have to cooperate closely with other like-minded development, infrastructure, and financial institutions.

When honing its connectivity profile, the OSCE should also exploit its added value as a security organization compared to more technical organizations, highlighting the nexus between connectivity and security. Border management, political confidence-building measures, agreements to demarcate borders and to solve transboundary problems, and energy security are all themes that a future CSC should address.

When further lobbying to host a connectivity centre, Kazakhstan should avoid alienating other Central Asian countries with its leadership ambitions in this field. Since 2016, double-landlocked Uzbekistan⁴¹ in particular has likewise become a dedicated supporter of connectivity, with emphasis on relations among the Central Asian countries.⁴² Any initiatives undertaken by Kazakhstan to promote connectivity must integrate other interested Central Asian states rather than estranging them. This could be achieved, *inter alia*, by ensuring the sufficient representation of experts from Uzbekistan in the proposed CSC. Overall, Kazakhstan and other interested parties should spell out the functions of the CSC in greater

detail and must attempt to accommodate those who have thus far been reluctant to approve such a project.

Notes

- 1 OSCE, "Connectivity", available at: <https://www.osce.org/oceea/446224>.
- 2 The information provided in this paper stems from the quoted primary and secondary sources, one off-the-record interview, and several deep background interviews, all from July and August 2020.
- 3 Cf. Stefan Wolff, Economic diplomacy and connectivity: What role for the OSCE? University of Birmingham, Institute for Conflict, Cooperation and Security, 2018, p. 6, at: <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/government-society/iccs/news-events/2018/Osce-Report.pdf>.
- 4 Robert O. Keohane/Joseph Nye, Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition, Boston: Little, Brown, 1977.
- 5 E.g. Nino Kemoklidze/Stefan Wolff, "Trade as a Confidence-Building Measure in Protracted Conflicts: The Cases of Georgia and Moldova Compared", Eurasian Geography and Economics 3/2020, pp. 305-332; Erik Gartzke/Quan Li/Charles Boehmer, Investing in the Peace: Economic Interdependence and International Conflict, International Organization 2/2001, pp. 391-438.
- 6 Keohane/Nye, cited above (Note 4), pp. 14-16.
- 7 Nadine Godehardt/Karoline Postel-Vinay, "Connectivity and geopolitics: Beware the 'new wine in old bottles' approach", SWP Comment 2020/C 35, 2020, pp. 4-5, at: <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/connectivity-and-geopolitics-beware-the-new-wine-in-old-bottles-approach/>.

8 OSCE, Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe: Final Document of the Bonn Conference on Economic Co-operation in Europe, International Legal Materials 4/1990, pp. 1054-1069.

9 OSCE, Final Document of the Eleventh Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council, MC.DOC/1/03, 2 December 2003, pp. 14-15, available at: <https://www.osce.org/mc/40533>.

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11 OSCE/UNECE, Handbook of Best Practices at Border Crossings – A Trade and Transport Facilitation Perspective, 2012, available at: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/6/88238.pdf>.

12 OSCE/UNECE, Inland Transport Security Discussion Forum Proceedings, 2012, available at: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/b/6/99852.pdf>.

13 Richard Pomfret, The Central Asian Economies in the Twenty-First Century: Paving a New Silk Road, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019, pp. 215-223.

14 Evgeny Vinokurov, Introduction to the Eurasian Economic Union, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 134-137.

15 Nargis Kassenova, "China's Silk Road and Kazakhstan's Bright Path: Linking Dreams of Prosperity", Asia Policy 24/2017, pp. 111-112.

16 Sébastien Peyrouse/Gaël Raballand, "Central Asia: The New Silk Road Initiative's Questionable Economic Rationality", Eurasian Geography and Economics 4/2015, pp. 405-420.

17 Pal Dunay, "Kazakhstan's Unique OSCE Chairmanship in 2010", in: IFSH (ed.), OSCE Yearbook 2011, p. 53, <https://ifsh.de/file-CORE/documents/yearbook/english/11/Dunay-en.pdf>.

18 Franziska Smolnik, "Cooperation, trust, security? The potential and limits of the OSCE's economic and environmental dimension", SWP Research Paper 2019/RP 16, 2019, pp. 17-19, at: <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/the-potential-and-limits-of-the-osces-economic-and-environmental-dimension/>.

19 Elya Altynsarina, "Kazakhstan announces initiatives to reinforce OSCE goals", The Astana Times, 11 July 2019, at: <https://astanatimes.com/2019/07/kazakhstan-announces-initiatives-to-reinforce-osce-goals/>.

20 Companies and institutions registered with the AIFC (currently almost 600 in number) benefit from an advantageous tax system, modern financial regulation, and commercial laws based on English law. The AIFC has also introduced arbitration and dispute resolution mechanisms that may serve as models for the rest of the country. In this way, the government wishes to boost the investment climate and hence attract investors to Kazakhstan. See Nicolás Zambrana-Tévar, "The new Court of the Astana International Financial Centre: Promoting the Rule of Law or Giving up on the Rule of Law?", in: Central Asia Business Journal, fall/2019, pp. 37-48.

21 Interview with OSCE official from Central Asia, July 2020.

22 Figures based on the 2019 Unified Budget. See OSCE, Annual Report 2019, p. 98, available at: <https://www.osce.org/annual-report/2019>.

23 Which the government principally could have done, given that each field mission requires a renewed mandate once per year that must be consensually adopted in the Permanent Council. For instance, capitalizing on its veto power and being discontent with the OSCE Office in Baku, the Azeri government provoked its closure in 2016.

24 Sebastian Mayer, "Walking alone, walking together? OSCE-EU relations in Central Asia", Policy Brief #62,

OSCE Academy Bishkek, 2020, pp. 3-4, at: <http://osce-academy.net/upload/file/62.pdf>.

25 Interview with OSCE official from Central Asia, July 2020.

26 The current OSCE Programme Office in Nur-Sultan covers all three dimensions.

27 Walter Kemp, “Executed structures: Leadership crisis in the OSCE”, in: Security and Human Rights Monitor, 14 July 2020, at: <https://www.shrmonitor.org/executed-structures-leadership-crisis-in-the-osce/>.

28 Assylzat Karabayeva, “Leaders, Ideas, and Norm Diffusion in Central Asia and Beyond”, Asian Journal of Comparative Politics 2019, pp. 4-9.

29 Dunay, cited above (Note 17), p. 57.

30 Rachel Vanderhill/Sandra F. Joireman/Roza Tulepbayeva, “Between the Bear and the Dragon: Multivectorism in Kazakhstan as a Model Strategy for Secondary Powers”, in: International Affairs 4/2020, pp. 986-990.

31 Altynsarina, cited above (Note 19).

32 Sir Suma Chakrabarti, “EBRD’s vision for Astana International Financial Centre”, The Astana Times, 25 May 2016, at: <https://astanatimes.com/2016/05/ebrds-vision-for-astana-international-financial-centre/>.

33 Astana International Financial Centre, at: <https://aifc.kz/>.

34 Interview with OSCE official from Central Asia, July 2020.

35 Altynsarina, cited above (Note 19).

36 Interview with OSCE official from Central Asia, July 2020.

37 OSCE, “Good governance”, available at: <https://www.osce.org/oceea/446335>.

38 Cf. Wolff, cited above (Note 3), pp. 24-27.

39 John Hurley/Scott Morris/Gailyn Porte-lance, “Examining the debt implications of the Belt and Road Initiative from a policy perspective”, CGD Policy Paper 121, Center for Global Development, March 2018, pp. 16-19, at: <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/examining-debt-implications-belt-and-road-initiative-policy-perspective.pdf>.

40 Richard Pomfret, “Kooperation im Politikfeld Handel”, in: Jakob Lempp/Sebastian Mayer/Alexander Brand (eds.), Die politischen Systeme Zentralasiens: Interne Wandel, externe Akteure, regionale Kooperation, Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2020, pp. 318-322.

41 I.e. it is surrounded only by landlocked neighbours.

42 Fabio Indeo, “New Trends in Central Asian Connectivity”, in: Carlo Frappi/Fabio Indeo (eds.), Monitoring Central Asia and the Caspian Area: Development Policies, Regional Trends, and Italian Interests, *Eurasistica* 13, Venice: Edizioni Ca’Foscari, 2019, pp. 65-80; Richard Weitz, “Uzbekistan’s new foreign policy”, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, 2018, pp. 9-12, 31-42, at: <https://silkroads studies.org/resources/pdf/SilkRoadPapers/1801Weitz.pdf>.