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Dynamics of cooperation between Afghanistan and the states of its northern belt since 2001

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Introduction

Afghanistan shares borders with three Central Asian states: Tajikistan (1344 km), Turkmenistan (763 km) and Uzbekistan (210 km). Afghanistan's other borders are with Pakistan (2,430 km), Iran (936 km) and China (76 km).¹ Due to their geographic location, the three Central Asian states bordering Afghanistan to the north are sometimes referred to as its northern belt states.

Central Asian states fear a potential spread of insecurity from Afghanistan. Regional multilateral structures such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (OTSC) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) make it possible to develop cooperation in the area of border security and the fight against arms trafficking and drugs. These structures also act on the issue of the spread across borders of radical Islamist movements. Tajikistan is particularly sensitive to this problem because of its borders with Afghanistan in an area of high mountains where control is very difficult. It should be noted that Afghanistan's border with Pakistan also represents a poorly controlled area allowing the passage of drugs, weapons and humans that could spread to Central Asia and beyond.

The economic relations of the Central Asian states with Afghanistan are old but underdeveloped due to regional instability which hinders their deployment. Today, these States consider it essential to integrate Afghanistan into regional economic projects because it is through this integration, as well as through the development of economic relations with Afghanistan, that peace and regional stability can emerge. In this context, a new regional dynamic is developing, economic and energy agreements are signed. Infrastructure projects have also been launched, but the instability of the region is hampering their deployment. It is therefore essential for all the States of the region to establish a stability which holds in the long term and which should allow the economic development of each one of them. Due to its key position, at the crossroads between Central Asia and Southwest Asia as well as East Asia with the Middle East, Afghanistan would give the states of Central Asia a access to world markets as well as to warm seas.

Central Asian states have different foreign policies towards Afghanistan. Their strategies towards the latter, as well as their vision for regional security and economic cooperation, can be explained by factors such as proximity, existing ties, their vulnerability and capacity as a state, their perspectives and attitudes as well as their external policies with regional policies and the geopolitical context.²

¹ O. Gafarli, « Multi-Faceted Linkages between Afghanistan and Central Asian States, in Evolving Situation in Afghanistan : Role of Major Powers and Regional Countries », *Islamabad Policy Research Institute*, 2016, p.128, https://www.academia.edu/28750258/Multi_Faceted_Linkages_between_Afghanistan_and_Central_Asian_State_s_ (accessed 17 March 2021)

² N. Kassenova, « Relations between Afghanistan and Central Asian States after 2014: Incentives, Constraints and Prospects », *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, 2014, p.1,

Considering the states of the northern belt, Turkmenistan maintains relations with Afghanistan based mainly on energy projects. Uzbekistan, for its part, because of an Uzbek minority in northern Afghanistan, is highly sensitive to any social protest movement in the latter. It therefore pays particular attention to the stability of the region. Tajikistan shares converging views with Afghanistan, particularly in the fight against drug trafficking, terrorism and political instability.

The Central Asian states and Afghanistan represent a strategic area for foreign powers. These will take a growing interest in the region and influence the dynamics and cooperation that are being put in place. Thus, China, the United States and Russia have influenced and continue to influence the regional integration of Central Asia.³

Between the independence of the Central Asian states and today, it is possible to discern three periods in their relations with Afghanistan: the first period goes from independence to the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001. The second period runs from 2001 to 2014, the date of the withdrawal of international troops from Afghanistan, and the third period runs from 2014 to present.

This text will deal only with the last two periods and will present the significant developments in the relations between the states of the northern belt and Afghanistan as well as a greater integration of the latter in regional projects.

https://www.academia.edu/11723831/Relations_between_Afghanistan_and_Central_Asian_States_after_2014_Incentives_Constraints_and_Prospects, (accessed 30 March 2021)

³ Y. Saroukhanian., « Format C5+ : quel avenir pour le dialogue régional en Asie centrale ? », *Central Asia Analytical Network translated by Novastan.org*, 13 Dezember 2020, <https://novastan.org/fr/politique/format-c5-quel-avenir-pour-le-dialogue-regional-en-asie-centrale/>, (accessed 16 March 2021)

Cooperation for peace and stability

Dialogue and coordination forums

Central Asian states each have their own political, economic and security approaches to their dealings with Afghanistan.⁴ Their cooperation with the latter is through bilateral relations but also through multilateral institutions such as the SCO, the CSTO, the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and the Istanbul Process.

This difference in approach can be evidenced by the fact that the Central Asian States have to face particular problems which require different responses and therefore distinct memberships to the above-mentioned multilateral structures. Thus, Turkmenistan according to its status of neutrality does not adhere to any structure of military cooperation. Tajikistan is seeking support for securing its borders and Uzbekistan, vigilant to maintain independence, is instead seeking an economic development solution. The only forum that brings together all Central Asian states is the Istanbul Process launched in 2011.

The SCO is made up of all Central Asian states except Turkmenistan. This structure acts in the fight against terrorism and extremism. In 2001, the signing of the Shanghai Convention, created within the SCO, provides for an important regional anti-terrorist structure. Since 2015, it has been in coordination with the CSTO for the prevention of threats from Afghanistan. The CSTO, on the other hand, is a collective defense structure, led by Russia, and whose members are Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Uzbekistan withdrew in 2012. This structure acts in border security and in the fight against arms trafficking, drugs and organized crime. In 2001, following the spread of the Islamic movement from Uzbekistan to Central Asia, the CSTO created the Collective Rapid Deployment Force (CRDF) which aims to fight terrorism and prevent external aggression.⁵ In 2009, in order to strengthen the military part, the Collective Rapid Reaction Force (CRRF) was set up. Its role is to act in the event of a threat to sovereignty through military aggression and in the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking.

Through these structures, through military cooperation, the Central Asian states have the necessary support, mainly from Russia, in the fight against drug and arms trafficking as well as border protection. The states concerned by this support are mainly Tajikistan and

⁴ O. Gafarli, « Multi-Faceted Linkages between Afghanistan and Central Asian States, in *Evolving Situation in Afghanistan : Role of Major Powers and Regional Countries* », *Islamabad Policy Research Institute*, 2016, pp. 127-143, https://www.academia.edu/28750258/Multi_Faceted_Linkages_between_Afghanistan_and_Central_Asian_States, (accessed 17 March 2021)

⁵ N. Kassenova, « Relations between Afghanistan and Central Asian States after 2014: Incentives, Constraints and Prospects », *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, 2014, pp.17-20, https://www.academia.edu/11723831/Relations_between_Afghanistan_and_Central_Asian_States_after_2014_Incentives_Constraints_and_Prospects, (accessed 30 March 2021)

Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan having a desire for independence from Russia is seeking to diversify its partnerships.⁶ In 2012, in return for this assistance, an agreement between the CSTO and Tajikistan was signed on the use of the air base for CRRF ground operations. The agreement provides that Russia can maintain its 201 division there until 2042. In this context, military exercises are regularly held between Tajikistan and Russia. Turkmenistan, which is not a member of multilateral structures, developed in 2001 its own bilateral policy towards Afghanistan as well as towards Uzbekistan.

Despite this declaration of willingness to cooperate through multilateral structures and attempts at revival by their heads of state, the Central Asian states have favored bilateral contacts. This lack of collective spirit is linked, according to Youri Saroukhanian,⁷ to their vertical public administration system, where political dialogue is limited to personal relations between heads of state. Another explanation is offered by S. Tadjbakhsh⁸ who notes that the implementation of multilateral actions has often been lacking in large part because of a fear of domination by regional or foreign powers. States have thus favored inaction over the risk of losing part of their sovereignty.

Afghanistan considers the three border Central Asian states to be of paramount importance in regional cooperation for security and peace, including the fight against religious extremism, terrorism and drug trafficking.⁹ This cooperation must be maintained and strengthened in order to achieve regional stability. Abdul Naser Noorzad believes that this regional dynamic could suffer from the influence of foreign powers. Indeed, according to him, the presence on the one hand of NATO and the United States in Afghanistan with their influence on Afghan politics and on the other hand the influence of the SCO on the States of Central Asia could impact in a favorable or unfavorable way, the regional dynamics which are set up.

⁶ O. Gafarli, « Multi-Faceted Linkages between Afghanistan and Central Asian States, in *Evolving Situation in Afghanistan : Role of Major Powers and Regional Countries* », *Islamabad Policy Research Institute*, 2016, pp. 127-143, https://www.academia.edu/28750258/Multi_Faceted_Linkages_between_Afghanistan_and_Central_Asian_State_s_ (accessed 17 March 2021)

⁷ Y. Saroukhanian, « Format C5+ : quel avenir pour le dialogue régional en Asie centrale ? », *Central Asia Analytical Network translated by Novastan.org*, 13 Dezember 2020, <https://novastan.org/fr/politique/format-c5-quel-avenir-pour-le-dialogue-regional-en-asie-centrale/> (accessed 16 March 2021)

⁸ S. Tadjbakhsh, « Central Asia and Afghanistan: Insulation on the Silk Road, Between Eurasia and the Heart of Asia », *Research Institute for Global Studies (PRIO), Oslo*, 2012, https://www.academia.edu/3487047/Central_Asia_and_Afghanistan_Insulation_on_the_Silk_Road_Between_Eurasia_and_the_Heart_of_Asia PRIO Paper Oslo PRIO April 2012, (accessed 29 March 2021)

⁹ A. Naser Noorzad, « Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries From diplomacy to economic transaction », *academia.edu*, https://www.academia.edu/40656245/Afghanistan_and_the_Central_Asian_countries_From_diplo_macy_to_economic_transaction_ (accessed 19 March 2021)

Boarder security

All Central Asian states are affected by a potential spread of insecurity from Afghanistan. Tajikistan having a long border with Afghanistan is the most vulnerable Central Asian state to this potential threat. He fears that radical Islamist movements will spread from Afghanistan and that this will lead to the arrival of migrants on his territory. For some time now, the Badakhshan region has seen an increase in the activities of terrorist groups. This mountainous province in northeastern Afghanistan, at the crossroads between China, Pakistan and Tajikistan, is of interest, both geographically and economically.¹⁰ In view of this mounting instability, Tajikistan is forced to strengthen its border security measures. However, lacking sufficient national forces, it allowed Russia to deploy troops along its borders with Afghanistan. Uzbekistan faces the Islamist Movement of Uzbekistan (MOI), which is a major player in local instability.¹¹ Islamic radicalism operating in the territory of the Central Asian republics, according to Bayram Balci¹², finds its origins and its rear bases in Afghanistan. This element is also a determining factor in the definition of the policy pursued by each of the Central Asian republics towards Afghanistan. Thus, Uzbekistan, fearing a rise in radical Islamist movements from Afghanistan, seeks to establish security relations with China, Russia, the United States, Kazakhstan and Iran.¹³ In 2015, Uzbekistan signed an agreement with the United States on military aid to secure borders with Afghanistan.

The borders of the Central Asian states and Afghanistan are also a crossing point for drug and arms trafficking. Russia is the destination country for about a quarter of the drugs produced in Afghanistan, which experienced significant production during the Second Afghan War. There are two main heroin trafficking corridors between Afghan and Russian markets: the Balkans and the Northern Route. The latter mainly crosses Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (even Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan) to Kazakhstan and Russia. Traffic by this road is easy because the borders in this region are porous and corruption allows passage of even the most controlled areas.¹⁴

¹⁰ T. Pierard, « Des groupes terroristes ouzbeks et tadjiks présents en Afghanistan », *Novastan.org*, 28 April 2020, <https://novastan.org/fr/ouzbekistan/des-groupes-terroristes-ouzbeks-et-tadjiks-presents-en-afghanistan/>, (accessed 17 March 2021)

¹¹ T. Ciboulet, « Les enjeux de l'Afghanistan pour l'Asie centrale », *Novastan.org*, 27 March 2017, <https://novastan.org/fr/kirghizstan/les-enjeux-de-lafghanistan-pour-lasie-centrale/>, (accessed 17 March 2021)

¹² B. Balci, « Le facteur afghan et les républiques d'Asie centrale », *CERI - CNRS - Sciences po*, November 2011, https://www.sciencespo.fr/cei/sites/sciencespo.fr/cei/files/art_bb2.pdf, (accessed 16 March 2021)

¹³ A. Naser Noorzad, « Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries From diplomacy to economic transaction », *academia.edu*, https://www.academia.edu/40656245/Afghanistan_and_the_Central_Asian_countries_From_diplomacy_to_economic_transaction, (accessed 19 March 2021)

¹⁴ D. Schmidt, « Between Russia and China : Tajikistan a keystone in Central Asia », *Institute for Applied Geopolitical Studies*, April 2021, <https://www.institut-ega.org/1/between-russia-and-china-tajikistan-a-keystone-in-central-asia/>, (accessed 22 April 2021)

In the field of security, the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking, the Central Asian states cooperate with multilateral institutions such as the CSTO and the SCO. Through joint programs, aid to Tajik and Uzbek border guards has been allocated to modernize their armed forces and improve their military equipment. Cooperation agreements, bilateral or trilateral, between Central Asian states and Afghanistan have also been signed. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, aware of the need to combine their forces and in a desire to strengthen their cooperation, carried out joint military exercises to combat extremist and anti-terrorist Islamist movements. The latest joint “Commonwealth 2020” exercises follow the signing between the two states of the “Partnership 2020” agreement on military cooperation and the fight against terrorism. Tajikistan has also developed cooperation mechanisms with Afghanistan to achieve a regional approach. In 2005, a friendship treaty and bilateral agreements were signed.¹⁵ In 2007, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan signed a Joint Declaration on the Consolidation of Peace and Security. Both agree on the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, organized crime and drug trafficking which represent their major threats.¹⁶

Border security and the stabilization of the region represent a major issue not only for the states of the Central Asian region but also for foreign powers such as Russia and China. Russia has always paid special attention to its southern border area with Asia, which is highly vulnerable to any destabilization and to the passage of drug trafficking. China, for its part, fears two things: firstly, a destabilization of Xinjiang by movements linked to international terrorism such as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), a Uighur independence organization. Second, any instability in the region could jeopardize its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project. Securing Tajikistan’s borders and building regional stability is a priority for China.

Peace process

Demonstrating their willingness to participate in the peace process, Central Asian states have regularly offered formats for dialogue with Afghanistan. In June 2009, at the SCO summit, Tajik President proposed quadrilateral cooperation (Dushanbe Four) with Pakistan, Afghanistan and Russia to address issues of security and stability,

¹⁵ F. Guerin, « Tadjikistan 2005 : Entre optimisme et désillusion », *Le Courrier des pays de l'Est* 2006/1 (n° 1053), p.188, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-le-courrier-des-pays-de-l-est-2006-1-page-179.htm>, (accessed 10 April 2021)

¹⁶ A. Naser Noorzad, « Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries From diplomacy to economic transaction », *academia.edu*, https://www.academia.edu/40656245/Afghanistan_and_the_Central_Asian_countries_From_diplomacy_to_economic_transaction, (accessed 19 March 2021)

economic cooperation and trade as well as cultural exchanges.¹⁷ Turkmenistan underlined in 2010 at the 65th session of the United Nations, its willingness to assist international efforts in the resolution of the Afghan conflict. He offered to host a high-level international meeting, this being in accordance with his statute. Uzbekistan proposed in 2008 to create a 6 + 3 contact group for peace in Afghanistan under the auspices of the United Nations. This group includes Afghanistan and its six neighbors (China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan) as well as NATO, Russia and the United States. In 2012, seeing little interest in the proposal, the Uzbek foreign minister reiterated the proposal. This proposal has, according to experts, the failure to not include important external actors. Finally, lacking international support, this initiative was never mentioned again. Another initiative launched in 2016: the Moscow conference. It brings together Afghanistan and its neighboring states, namely Pakistan, Iran and China, to which the states of Central Asia joined a few months later.¹⁸ Negotiations also took place at the end of 2016 in which Uzbekistan became particularly involved in negotiations between the Taliban and the central government.¹⁹ Keen to assert its place in regional diplomacy, Uzbekistan hosted a major conference on Afghanistan at the end of March 2018 to which the Taliban were invited. The latter declined the invitation, but appreciated Tashkent's approach.

Several visions for the establishment of peace and stability in Afghanistan come together. According to the Central Asian states, a military and political peace in Afghanistan is the prerequisite for peace and stability in Afghanistan.²⁰ For Tajik and Uzbek experts, taking minority interests into account is essential in the peace process.²¹ Official statements indicate that stabilizing Afghanistan would require the development of the economy, notably by reviving certain sectors of activity and integrating Afghanistan into regional trade networks.²²

¹⁷ N. Kassenova, « Relations between Afghanistan and Central Asian States after 2014: Incentives, Constraints and Prospects », *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, 2014, p.25, https://www.academia.edu/11723831/Relations_between_Afghanistan_and_Central_Asian_States_after_2014_Incentives_Constraints_and_Prospects, (accessed 30 March 2021)

¹⁸ G. Lefeuvre, J.-M. Morel, « Afghanistan. Les pourparlers de paix, d'un enlèvement à l'autre », *orientxxi.info*, 3 November 2020, <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/afghanistan-les-pourparlers-de-paix-d-un-enlèvement-a-l-autre,4241>, (accessed 29 March 2021)

¹⁹ Y. Saidov, Saidov Y., « Qui est Abdul Rachid Dostom, leader des Ouzbeks d'Afghanistan ? », 4 Dezember 2020, *Novastan.org*, <https://novastan.org/fr/ouzbekistan/qui-est-abdul-rachid-dostom-leader-des-ouzbeks-dafghanistan/>, (accessed 21 March 2021)

²⁰ A. Naser Noorzad, « Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries From diplomacy to economic transaction », *academia.edu*, https://www.academia.edu/40656245/Afghanistan_and_the_Central_Asian_countries_From_diplomacy_to_economic_transaction, (accessed 19 March 2021)

²¹ N. Kassenova, « Relations between Afghanistan and Central Asian States after 2014: Incentives, Constraints and Prospects », *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, 2014, p.14, https://www.academia.edu/11723831/Relations_between_Afghanistan_and_Central_Asian_States_after_2014_Incentives_Constraints_and_Prospects, (accessed 30 March 2021)

²² N. Kassenova, « Relations between Afghanistan and Central Asian States after 2014: Incentives, Constraints and Prospects », *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, 2014, p.15,

Building and improving Afghan infrastructure would also contribute to the economic development of Afghanistan.²³

Despite a strong desire to participate in the peace processes in Afghanistan, N. Kassenova noted in 2014 that the Central Asian states do not have sufficient capacity to be able to influence this process. Moreover, their lack of trust and cooperation would prevent their positive contribution. To date, given the development of both economic and diplomatic cooperation, this statement could be less relevant.

In December 2014, President Ashraf Ghani referred to the situation in Afghanistan under the terms: "Either we will be the crossroads of integration in Asia, when the roads come in and out of our country to connect Central Asia, South Asia, West Asia and East Asia, either we will become a "dead end" and the forgotten piece of history."²⁴

The Central Asian States therefore now have their place to play an important role in this process by developing cooperation with Afghanistan as well as its integration into regional projects. In 2018, the United Nations Security Council "welcomes the contribution of the countries of Central Asia to the stability and development of Afghanistan as well as the intensification of their long-term cooperation, dialogues and efforts. coordination, through different joint forums and forums, including the regular holding of high-level meetings".²⁵

Economic cooperation

Commercial agreements

The conditions for the development of economic cooperation between Afghanistan and the northern belt states came in late 2003, after the Taliban was overthrown from power. Since then, Afghanistan has been a strategic partner that must be integrated into the region's economic projects with the aim of promoting stabilization of the area and enabling its economic development. The United Nations Security Council shares this vision and encourages regional cooperation as well

https://www.academia.edu/11723831/Relations_between_Afghanistan_and_Central_Asian_States_after_2014_Incentives_Constraints_and_Prospects, (accessed 30 March 2021)

²³ N. Dvalat, « Afghanistan : comment les pays d'Asie centrale peuvent-ils contribuer à la fin de la guerre ? », *Asiaplus.com*, 20 July 2019, <https://novastan.org/fr/ouzbekistan/afghanistan-comment-les-pays-d-asie-centrale-peuvent-ils-contribuer-a-la-fin-de-la-guerre/>, (accessed 15 March 2021)

²⁴ G. Lefeuvre, J.-M. Morel, « Afghanistan. Les pourparlers de paix, d'un enlèvement à l'autre », *orientxxi.info*, 3 November 2020, <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/afghanistan-les-pourparlers-de-paix-d-un-enlèvement-a-l-autre.4241>, (accessed 29 March 2021)

²⁵ Conseil de sécurité des Nations Unies, « Le Conseil de sécurité encourage la coopération régionale en Asie centrale et en Afghanistan », January 2018, <https://www.un.org/press/fr/2018/cs13170.doc.htm>, (accessed 16 March 2021)

as an intensification of dialogue.²⁶ A stable and economically developing Afghanistan would allow Central Asian states to see their economies revived. Indeed, regional instability hinders foreign investment in states that share a border with Afghanistan, as it is notably the case for Tajikistan. The establishment of stability would therefore be particularly timely for Tajikistan, which has gained in importance in the Afghan domestic market and which could use it as a base to develop its economy.²⁷ Crossroads between Turkish, Iranian, Russian, Chinese and Indian markets, Afghanistan would allow Central Asian states to open up to world markets.

In the same spirit, the Afghan government has published its National Framework for Peace and Development in Afghanistan (2021-2025). This strategy document addresses, among other things, the creation of markets and trade, as well as the exploitation of its advantages, such as its strategic geographical location. To increase exports, Afghanistan needs to develop and build the infrastructure, mainly rail, necessary for trade.²⁸

Uzbekistan has since the change of government shown a willingness to step up efforts in economic cooperation with Afghanistan. The Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan was relaunched after a long period of low activity.²⁹ Agreements have been reached in the areas of trade, transit, energy and infrastructure despite the insecurity in the region. Uzbekistan is planning, inter alia, to install an UzAuto car assembly unit in Afghanistan and to help restore a textile factory in Mazar-i-Sharif.³⁰ It supplies Afghanistan with electrical, chemical and textile products, food and fruit and vegetables, cars and trucks, agricultural machinery, mineral fertilizers, construction materials. Afghanistan exports products such as dried fruit, rugs, cotton, cereals and soft drinks mainly to Pakistan, India, China and Turkey. Afghanistan's development of trade with Central Asia and Iran could represent a good expansion of recipient states.³¹

In this dynamic, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan have created a logistics transit center comprising railways, warehouses, banks and customs

²⁶ Conseil de sécurité des Nations Unies, « Le Conseil de sécurité encourage la coopération régionale en Asie centrale et en Afghanistan », January 2018, <https://www.un.org/press/fr/2018/cs13170.doc.htm>, (accessed 16 March 2021)

²⁷ P.-F. Hubert, « Au-delà de la guerre et de la drogue, un autre regard sur l'Afghanistan », *Novastan.org*, 3 March 2020, <https://novastan.org/fr/politique/au-dela-de-la-guerre-et-de-la-drogue-un-autre-regard-sur-lafghanistan/>, (accessed 11 March 2021)

²⁸ D. Ramsay, « Coup d'accélérateur pour les objectifs commerciaux de l'Afghanistan », *P q w x g n n g u " f g " n ø pour le commerce*, CIR, 23 February 2021, <https://trade4devnews.enhancedif.org/fr/op-ed/coup-daccelerateur-pour-les-objectifs-commerciaux-de-lafghanistan>, (accessed 30 March 2021)

²⁹ B. Wilcox, « Uzbekistan Pursues Economic Partnership with Afghanistan », *Caspian Policy Center*, August 2019, <https://www.caspianpolicy.org/uzbekistan-pursues-economic-partnership-with-afghanistan/>, (accessed 28 March 2021)

³⁰ « L'Ouzbékistan et l'Afghanistan ont l'intention de lancer un certain nombre de nouveaux projets », *Gazeta.uz*, July 2019, <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2019/07/17/afghanistan/> (accessed 2 April 2021)

³¹ Société générale : <https://import-export.societegenerale.fr/fr/fiche-pays/afghanistan/risque-pays-commerce>

offices in Termez, located at their common border.³² A commercial zone on the border between these two states was also created in 2019. A working meeting took place in February 2021 during the visit to Afghanistan of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Discussions focused on new opportunities to increase interregional trade, for the preparation and implementation of joint transport and communication projects linking Central and South Asia.³³

UN Secretary-General Guterres noted with satisfaction that Central Asian governments have embarked on several cross-border initiatives. He particularly praised the Central Asia-South Asia Energy Project, a gas pipeline connecting Turkmenistan to Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, as well as a new power line between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan.³⁴

Transport infrastructures

In Afghanistan, the construction of large industrial, metallurgical and energy (gas extraction, hydropower plants in Naglu, Pol-e-Khomri and Darunta) facilities was carried out largely by the USSR. The same goes for roads, the Salang tunnel, river ports and Kabul International Airport.³⁵

The Central Asian states are now aware of the importance of building transport infrastructure and energies infrastructure to boost Afghanistan's trade and integration into regional economies. In return, this development should have a positive impact on their economies. As President Mirziyoyev said during a speech at the United Nations, "If your neighbor prospers, you prosper."³⁶ Afghanistan, meanwhile, has prospects for increased trade thanks to the rail network linking South Asia to the states of Central Asia.³⁷

Uzbekistan has participated in the construction of transport routes in Afghanistan such as bridges, railways, roads and tunnels. He built more

³² La rédaction Novastan, « Une zone de commerce ouverte à la frontière entre Ouzbékistan et Afghanistan », *novastan.org*, 26 May 2019, <https://novastan.org/fr/ouzbekistan/une-zone-de-commerce-ouverte-a-la-frontiere-entre-ouzbekistan-et-afghanistan/>, (accessed 29 March 2021)

³³ « Abdulaziz Kamilov effectuera une visite de travail en Afghanistan », *Kun.uz*, February 2021, <https://kun.uz/ru/news/2021/02/22/abdulaziz-kamilov-posetit-afganistan-s-rabochim-vizitom>, (accessed 10 April 2021)

³⁴ ONU, Conseil de sécurité, 8162e séance, 19 January 2018, <https://www.un.org/press/fr/2018/cs13170.doc.htm>

³⁵ N.Davlat, « Afghanistan : comment les pays d'Asie centrale peuvent-ils contribuer à la fin de la guerre ? », *Asiaplus.com*, 20 July 2019, <https://novastan.org/fr/ouzbekistan/afghanistan-comment-les-pays-d-asie-centrale-peuvent-ils-contribuer-a-la-fin-de-la-guerre/>, (accessed 15 March 2021)

³⁶ Naesmi, « L'Ouzbékistan optimiste pour le commerce et le développement afghans », *euronews.com*, 14 Oktober 2020, <https://fr.euronews.com/2020/10/14/l-ouzbekistan-optimiste-pour-le-commerce-et-le-developpement-afghans>, (accessed 20 March 2021)

³⁷ P.-F. Hubert, « Au-delà de la guerre et de la drogue, un autre regard sur *n o C h i j x* », *Novastan.org*, 3 March 2020, <https://novastan.org/fr/politique/au-dela-de-la-guerre-et-de-la-drogue-un-autre-regard-sur-lafghanistan/>, (accessed 11 March 2021)

than a dozen bridges on the roads between Mazar-e-Sharif and Kabul, providing the link, which had been cut, between the north and the east of the country. He also helped build a railway line from the Uzbek border, the Friendship Bridge, to Mazar-e-Charif in Afghanistan. This railway line is due to be extended to Herat, according to the January 2021 announcement by Iranian Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mohammad Eslami.³⁸ On December 11, 2020, the railway line connecting Herat to Khaf in Iran was inaugurated. It is the first railway connecting Iran and Afghanistan and it is part of an agreement among Iran, India, and Afghanistan to develop Iran's port of Chabahar. This line will give Afghanistan, India and Pakistan direct access to markets in Central Asia, and through there to Russia and China.

Turkmenistan, for its part, supported the construction of the Lapis-Lazuli international transit corridor, operational since 2018, which links Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, as well as the TAPI pipeline. In 2018, the seaport of Turkmenbachi on the Caspian Sea in Turkmenistan was also inaugurated. It liaises with Azerbaijan to lead to Turkey and Europe.

Map 1 : Lapis-Lazuli corridor



If we consider that this Lapis-Lazuli corridor is connected to the North-South corridor (China-Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran rail connection) the strategic role played by Afghanistan and the states of its northern belt becomes clear.

³⁸ L'Iran prêt à construire le chemin de fer Herat- Mazar-e-Charif en Afghanistan, *IRNA - Agence de presse de la République islamique*, 20 January 2021, <https://fr.irna.ir/news/84191134/L-Iran-pr%C3%AAt-%C3%A0-construire-le-chemin-de-fer-Herat-Mazar-e-Charif>

Map 2 : Nord-South corridor



To these networks is added the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Iran international transit road corridor (KTAI) opened in 2020, which reduces transport time and opens the region to commercial development as well as a connection with the North-South and Lapis-Lazuli corridors. Central Asia and Afghanistan lie at the heart of the connecting routes of Russia, China, South Asia, the Middle East and Europe.

Map 3 : KTAI



Cooperation with Afghanistan and its integration into infrastructure projects represents for the Central Asian states a potential for regional economic development and helps create a dynamic of openness in the region.

Energy infrastructures

The states of Central Asia are not endowed with the same quantities of natural energy resources present in their subsoils, which gives them the position of importer or exporter. The hydrocarbon exporters are Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan while Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are importers. We can therefore see that Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan do not have significant oil and gas reserves.³⁹ Tajikistan, on the other hand, has water that allows it to produce hydroelectric power.

Turkmenistan has significant gas reserves (4th largest in the world of natural gas, after Russia, Iran and Qatar) as well as onshore and offshore oil reserves. It maintains relations with Afghanistan in the area of energy projects. After experiencing difficulties during its launch due to the ruling Taliban and instability in Afghanistan, the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline connecting Central Asia to India was finally inaugurated in 2015. Another energy project integrating Afghanistan is the Turkmenistan - Uzbekistan - Tajikistan - Afghanistan - Pakistan (TUTAP) high voltage power line project.

Map 4 : TAPI



Tajikistan, with its water reserves due to its mountainous territory with many glaciers, is a supplier of electricity to Afghanistan and Pakistan. Hydroelectric power stations have been built on the rivers that originate in its mountains. It is also a subject of conflicts between the

³⁹ T. Dehais, « Les défis sécuritaires en Asie centrale contemporaine », Mémoire de Master 2, IRIS SUP, 2016/2017, https://www.academia.edu/34805507/Les_d%C3%A9fis_s%C3%A9curitaires_en_Asie_centrale_contemporaine, (accessed 14 March 2021)

so-called “upstream” states, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which are located at the source of the rivers (Amou-Daria and Syr-Daria) and those “downstream”, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, which are crossed by these rivers. Upstream states are criticized for storing water in the summer to generate energy in the winter when Uzbekistan, for example, needs water in the summer to irrigate its fields. However, due to climate change, it is possible that the hydropower plants deployed on the rivers will not be able to produce as much electricity as expected, resulting in a loss of the expected benefits. This risk of water loss could once again become a factor in conflicts between the states of Central Asia.

Several high voltage power line projects have been launched from Tajikistan to Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. These are the line from Rogoun to Peshawar (which passes through Sangtuda, Kondozi, Pol-e-Khomri, Kabul), the line from Rogoun to Peshawar (passing through Khorog, the Wakhan corridor), the line Rogoun to Faizabad in Afghanistan (passing through Kondozi, Mazâr-e Charîf, Hérat, Mechhed), and the Emam Saheb - Faizabad line (Afghanistan).⁴⁰ The CASA-1000 project, launched in February 2020, plans to export electricity from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Map 5 : CASA-1000



Uzbekistan is participating in power projects with Afghanistan. In 2008, a high voltage line between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan was completed allowing connection to the Uzbek power grid. Another

⁴⁰ N. Davlat, « Afghanistan : comment les pays d'Asie centrale peuvent-ils contribuer à la fin de la guerre ? », *Asiaplus.com*, 20 July 2019, <https://novastan.org/fr/ouzbekistan/afghanistan-comment-les-pays-d-asie-centrale-peuvent-ils-contribuer-a-la-fin-de-la-guerre/>, (accessed 15 March 2021)

project in which Uzbekistan is investing is the project for the construction of the power line connecting Surkhan in Uzbekistan to the Afghan city Pol-e Khomri.

Important energy and transport infrastructure projects have either been initiated or carried out by Central Asian states and Afghanistan. These projects required significant financing which was provided in particular by the international financial institutions. China is investing large sums in infrastructure projects in Central Asia, but also in numerous projects for the exploitation of natural resources. It provides concessional loans for BRI infrastructure projects. These are, in many cases, loans subject to the condition of access to resources for China, whose companies already hold around 60% of the shares of half of Tajikistan's gold mines and exploit 80% of the gold deposits. Moreover, these loans stipulate that at least 50% of equipment, technologies, services and materials must be Chinese.⁴¹ It therefore appears the problem of the indebtedness of the Central Asian States to finance the development of infrastructure, without forgetting that the maintenance of these infrastructures will require additional sums in a time horizon which will not have yet made it possible to repay the debt.

It is not just China investing in infrastructure in Central Asia, other states such as the Russian Federation, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the European Union, Australia and the United States are also interested.⁴²

Changes between 2001 to 2014 and from 2014 to today

Period 2001 to 2014

During the Taliban's presence in power in Afghanistan (1996-2001), there was no official relationship between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. But in 2002, a declaration of good neighborliness was signed between Afghanistan and neighboring states, marking the warming of their relations. This event led in 2002 the opening by Uzbekistan of a consulate in Mazar-i-Sharif. The same goes for Tajikistan, which hosted many refugees during the Afghan war and also opened an embassy in Kabul in 2002.

As part of the United States intervention in Afghanistan, the Central Asian States have been from 2001 of strategic interest to the international armed forces because of their geographic location. In this

⁴¹ Z. Urmanbetova, « Infrastructure en Asie centrale à travers le prisme de l'anthropologie: implications non étudiées de nouveaux projets », *Central Asian Analytical Network*, 3 September 2020, <https://www.caa-network.org/archives/20437?fbclid=IwAR35J1B-Y9gmjt7ijTI0oiW0PoMBVxwgbT28AbStkNGxvIZtDXemm6GEXfU>, (accessed 18 March 2021)

⁴² Z. Urmanbetova, « Infrastructure en Asie centrale à travers le prisme de l'anthropologie: implications non étudiées de nouveaux projets », *Central Asian Analytical Network*, 3 September 2020, <https://www.caa-network.org/archives/20437?fbclid=IwAR35J1B-Y9gmjt7ijTI0oiW0PoMBVxwgbT28AbStkNGxvIZtDXemm6GEXfU>, (accessed 18 March 2021)

context of the fight against terrorism, the latter agreed to contribute to Operation Enduring Freedom, launched by the United States, and later, to the operations of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).⁴³ For example, Kyrgyzstan allowed US and coalition forces to use the Manas air base. Uzbekistan has made available a base for US operations in Karshi-Khanabad (K2), a base for German units in Termez and a land corridor for humanitarian aid through the Friendship Bridge over the Amu- Daria in Termez. Tajikistan allowed the use of Dushanbe International Airport for refueling and hosted French forces. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have allowed overflight of their state. It was only in October 2014 that French troops left Tajikistan and the United States Bishkek-Manas airport in Kyrgyzstan.

The authorization of passage through their territory by international troops carrying out operations in Afghanistan as well as the provision of infrastructure brought substantial income to the governments of Central Asia during this period. For example, the use of their infrastructure by the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) has earned them USD 500 million per year.⁴⁴

Under Islam Karimov, Uzbekistan's foreign policy, and that of Afghanistan as well, was centralized.⁴⁵ The ruling family held the decision-making power and controlled the most profitable economic sectors. Not very multilateral, its foreign policy revolved mainly around the 6 + 3 initiative presented in 2008 at the NATO summit concerning the peace process. As mentioned in the chapter above for dialogue and cooperation forums, bilateral relations between States were privileged, although they were part of joined multilateral structures. The foreign policy of Tajikistan, ruled since independence by Emomali Rahmon, is rather multifaceted and is positioned less assertive vis-à-vis foreign powers due to the greater complexity of its situation. Tajikistan is influenced in its foreign policy by its weakness in security, which makes it linked, and therefore vulnerable, to Russia. In addition, it is economically dependent on investments from China and linked to the economic development of Afghanistan due to the export of its hydropower to the latter.⁴⁶ Like Uzbekistan, Tajikistan's relations with neighboring states were mostly bilateral during this period.

⁴³ N. Kassenova, « Relations between Afghanistan and Central Asian States after 2014: Incentives, Constraints and Prospects », *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, 2014, https://www.academia.edu/11723831/Relations_between_Afghanistan_and_Central_Asian_States_after_2014_Incentives_Constraints_and_Prospects, (accessed 30 March 2021)

⁴⁴ M. Laruelle, « Assessing Uzbekistan's and Tajikistan's Afghan Policy: The Impact of Domestic Drivers », *Central Asian Affairs* 1 - 2014, p.115 https://www.academia.edu/7896321/Assessing_Uzbekistan_s_and_Tajikistan_s_Afghan_Policy_The_Impact_of_Domestic_Drivers_Central_Asian_Affairs_1_2014_108_132, (accessed 29 March 2021)

⁴⁵ M. Laruelle, « Assessing Uzbekistan's and Tajikistan's Afghan Policy: The Impact of Domestic Drivers », *Central Asian Affairs* 1 - 2014, p.109, https://www.academia.edu/7896321/Assessing_Uzbekistan_s_and_Tajikistan_s_Afghan_Policy_The_Impact_of_Domestic_Drivers_Central_Asian_Affairs_1_2014_108_132, (accessed 29 March 2021)

⁴⁶ M. Laruelle, « Assessing Uzbekistan's and Tajikistan's Afghan Policy: The Impact of Domestic Drivers », *Central Asian Affairs* 1 - 2014, p.112, https://www.academia.edu/7896321/Assessing_Uzbekistan_s_and_Tajikistan_s_Afghan_Policy_The_Impact_of_Domestic_Drivers_Central_Asian_Affairs_1_2014_108_132, (accessed 29 March 2021)

This bilateral functioning hinders the development of regional integration and prevents a collective strengthening of forces in the face of external influences as well as a unified position to Afghanistan. This is said to be due to rivalries between the Central Asian states, their fear of loss of sovereignty and their desire to balance the power of foreign powers.⁴⁷ Uzbekistan has the will but also the capacity to have an independent foreign policy. Asserting his sovereignty over Moscow, he withdrew from CSTO in 2012 and continued to cooperate with the United States.⁴⁸

This period was therefore marked by the war in Afghanistan as well as by bilateral interstate relations between Central Asian states and Afghanistan. These elements do not allow the implementation of integration projects or regional economic development. The Chinese BRI project was launched during this period (2013), which highlights the region's strategic geographic position and leads China to deploy its investments, particularly in Central Asia.

Period 2014 to today

The withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan, the development of the BRI, and the change of power in Uzbekistan in 2016 mark a change of dynamics in the region. A greater willingness to cooperate between the Central Asian states and Afghanistan has grown. The Central Asian states believe that integrating Afghanistan into their projects and economic development of the region through cooperation would promote regional stability. Likewise, the C5 + 1 dialogue forums and the new European Union strategy on Central Asia, adopted in 2019, are part of this process of openness and cooperation. India and China have also expressed interest in this format for dialogue.⁴⁹

When he came to power, Shavkat Mirziyoyev introduced important changes in Uzbekistan's foreign policy. He has initiated major economic transformations and aims to play a more active role on the international scene. After years of weak relations with neighboring states due to disputes over issues including the sharing of water resources and the definition of borders, Shavkat Mirziyoyev expresses a desire for rapprochement and in this objective, unlike Islam Karimov,

⁴⁷ S. Tadjbakhsh, « Central Asia and Afghanistan: Insulation on the Silk Road, Between Eurasia and the Heart of Asia », *Research Institute for Global Studies* (PRIO), Oslo, 2012, https://www.academia.edu/3487047/Central_Asia_and_Afghanistan_Insulation_on_the_Silk_Road_Between_Eurasia_and_the_Heart_of_Asia PRIO Paper Oslo PRIO April 2012, (accessed 29 March 2021)

⁴⁸ N. Kassenova, « Relations between Afghanistan and Central Asian States after 2014: Incentives, Constraints and Prospects », *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, 2014, https://www.academia.edu/11723831/Relations_between_Afghanistan_and_Central_Asian_States_after_2014_Incentives_Constraints_and_Prospects, (accessed 30 March 2021)

⁴⁹ Y. Saroukhanian, « Format C5+ : quel avenir pour le dialogue régional en Asie centrale ? », *Central Asia Analytical Network* translated by Novastan.org, 13 Dezember 2020, <https://novastan.org/fr/politique/format-c5-quel-avenir-pour-le-dialogue-regional-en-asie-centrale/>, accessed 16 March 2021)

he visited the Central Asian states several times in his first year of presidency. Finally, in March 2018, at the suggestion of Uzbekistan, the Presidents of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan met for the first time in nearly 20 years at the summit of heads of state of Central Asia.⁵⁰ It was decided to make this format regular through one meeting per year. These summits provided an opportunity to address long-sensitive issues such as the demarcation of the borders between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The theme of sharing natural resources could also be addressed leading to a relaxation of Tashkent's position regarding the construction of hydroelectric power stations in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The possibility of creating common energy, logistics and transport infrastructure was even mentioned.⁵¹ Shavkat Mirziyoyev aims to bring Uzbekistan to the status of a key player in transport and logistics in Central Asia as well as in the implementation of the New Silk Roads.⁵² Since the change of power in Uzbekistan, China has granted more than USD 144 million in loans to Uzbekistan for hydropower projects.⁵³

As presented in the previous chapters, developments and reconciliations took place during this period also in trade relations and energy infrastructure. In 2018, Uzbekistan's trade with other states in the region, according to the Uzbek authorities, increased by 50%.⁵⁴ Tourism is also a sector that the Uzbek president wishes to develop through cooperation between the states of Central Asia to provide travel facilities in this region. Regional stability would make it possible to promote activities linked to this sector, especially as transport infrastructures develop.

Despite a desire for integration manifested in recent years, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are not very influential players for Afghanistan, unlike other powers such as Pakistan and Iran.⁵⁵ However, the former represent important regional economic players for Afghanistan through the exchange of electrical energy and the prospects for trade and infrastructure development.

⁵⁰ D. François, « Asie Centrale Tachkent à la manœuvre », *lecourrierderussie.com*, March 2019, <https://www.lecourrierderussie.com/2019/03/asie-centrale-br-tachkent-a-la-manoeuvre/>, (accessed 14 March 2021)

⁵¹ Y. Saroukhanian, « Format C5+ : quel avenir pour le dialogue régional en Asie centrale ? », *Central Asia Analytical Network* translated by Novastan.org, 13 Dezember 2020, <https://novastan.org/fr/politique/format-c5-quel-avenir-pour-le-dialogue-regional-en-asie-centrale/>, (accessed 16 March 2021)

⁵² T. Martignolles, « Le projet de ligne ferroviaire entre l'Ouzbékistan, le Kirghizstan et la Chine relancé », *novastan.org*, 22 May 2020, <https://novastan.org/fr/kirghizstan/le-projet-de-ligne-ferroviaire-entre-louzbekistan-le-kirghizstan-et-la-chine-relance/>, (accessed 23 March 2021)

⁵³ N. YAU, « Chinese hydroelectric investments in Central Asia: A snapshot », *Eurasianet*, 31 August 2020, <https://eurasianet.org/chinese-hydroelectric-investments-in-central-asia-a-snapshot>, (accessed 24 April 2021)

⁵⁴ D. François, « Asie Centrale Tachkent à la manœuvre », *lecourrierderussie.com*, March 2019, <https://www.lecourrierderussie.com/2019/03/asie-centrale-br-tachkent-a-la-manoeuvre/>, (accessed 14 March 2021)

⁵⁵ M. Laruelle, « Assessing Uzbekistan's and Tajikistan's Afghan Policy: The Impact of Domestic Drivers », *Central Asian Affairs* 1 - 2014 pp. 108-132, https://www.academia.edu/7896321/_Assessing_Uzbekistan_s_and_Tajikistan_s_Afghan_Policy_The_Impact_of_Domestic_Drivers_Central_Asian_Affairs_1_2014_108_132, (accessed 29 March 2021)

Conclusion

The fall of the Taliban from power in 2001, then the withdrawal of international troops from Afghanistan and the change of power in Uzbekistan in 2016, represent a favorable context for the development of a strengthening of the economic and diplomatic cooperation of the States of Central Asia with Afghanistan.

Historically practicing cooperation much more bilateral than multilateral, the states of the northern belt of Afghanistan and the latter, have demonstrated in recent years a desire to develop multilateral meetings. Indeed, the implementation of regional integration and cooperation ambitions, as well as the establishment of regional stability, require cooperation through multilateral dialogue structures. These allow coordination, in collaboration with the great powers, in the fields of border security, the fight against arms and drug trafficking, terrorism and trade. The region's economic development should, according to official speeches from the United Nations and the States concerned, promote regional stability and the economic development of all actors.

Along with economic development comes an increase in electricity needs, which Central Asian states are struggling to cope with. Energy infrastructure projects, high voltage lines and hydroelectric power plants are developed and launched as well as transport infrastructure projects allowing the transport or transit of goods. These large-scale projects require significant funding, forcing Central Asian states to turn to international financial institutions, third states and private investors to borrow the necessary funds. This situation creates indebtedness of Central Asian states which is now largely to China. Debt with the latter thus represents, in 2018, 50% of Tajik debt and 40% of Kyrgyz debt.⁵⁶ It is therefore appropriate to question the long-term influence of China on Central Asia and the exploitation of natural resources by a foreign power to the detriment of national interests.

Other foreign powers are interested in developing cooperation with Central Asia and Afghanistan. Iran, neighboring to Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, has offered Central Asian states enhanced economic cooperation. He is seeking more direct access to China, notably following the 25-year strategic cooperation agreement signed last March. According to Clement Therme, "Iran wants to use Uzbekistan as a platform to circumvent US sanctions, especially for its agri-food products which must find other outlets".⁵⁷ In terms of defense, Iran and Tajikistan are discussing about creating a defense committee to

⁵⁶ « Nouvelles Routes de la Soie : où en est-on ? » Novastan a reçu Samuel Carcanague, *Novastan France*, 20 Dezember 2018, <https://novastan.org/fr/novastan-france/nouvelles-routes-de-la-soie-ou-en-est-on-novastan-a-recu-samuel-carcanague/> (accessed 4 April 2021)

⁵⁷ E. Combier, « L'Iran a-t-il les moyens de ses ambitions en Asie centrale ? », *novastan.org*, 12 April 2021, <https://novastan.org/fr/decryptage/liran-a-t-il-les-moyens-de-ses-ambitions-en-asie-centrale/>, (accessed 15 April 2021)

strengthen regional security and stability.⁵⁸ Dependent on Russia for security, this approach would allow Tajikistan to diversify its partners in this area.

Turkey aims to strengthen its ties with the Central Asian states to develop trade and facilitate the transit of goods from China. With the coming to power of Shavkat Mirziyoyev and the opening up of his foreign policy, Turkey and Uzbekistan also addressed the issue of defense cooperation. In 2020, a military financial cooperation agreement has already been signed between the two states.⁵⁹ Turkey is also playing a role in the economic development of Afghanistan by creating a dialogue within the framework of the Istanbul Process.

The Central Asian states signed a joint declaration with the states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in March 2021. This declaration, proposed by Russia, aims to denounce the application of unilateral sanctions. They say they are "gravely concerned at the growing incidence of the imposition of unilateral coercive measures, including economic measures, not based on international law, against other states".⁶⁰ The UEE could represent, in a desire to circumvent international sanctions, an interesting trading partner for foreign powers and thereby support the momentum that is developing in Central Asia and Afghanistan.

⁵⁸ D. Regenhardt, « Le Tadjikistan et l'Iran prévoient de créer un comité de défense », *novastan.org*, 8 April 2021, <https://novastan.org/fr/tadjikistan/le-tadjikistan-et-liran-prevoient-dintensifier-leur-politique-de-securite-commune/>, (accessed 11 April 2021)

⁵⁹ « L'Ouzbékistan et la Turquie discutent de coopération militaire », *Xinhuanet*, 28 Oktober 2020, http://french.xinhuanet.com/2020-10/28/c_139471674.htm (accessed 2 April 2021)

⁶⁰ E. Combier, « L'Asie centrale inéluctablement poussée vers l'axe Pékin-Moscou ? », *novastan.org*, 29 March 2021, <https://novastan.org/fr/decryptage/lasie-centrale-ineluctablement-poussee-vers-laxe-pekini-moscou/>, (accessed 13 April 2021)

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