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Bölge ve Bölgesel Entegrasyon Bağlamında Orta Asya Devletleri'nin Birliği için Bir Model Önerisi

A Model Proposal for the Union of Central Asian States in the Context of Region and Regional Integration

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Bölge ve Bölgesel Entegrasyon Bağlamında Orta Asya Devletleri'nin Birliği için Bir Model Önerisi

Öz

Kazakistan, Kırgızistan, Özbekistan, Türkmenistan ve Tacikistan, 20. yüzyılın sonlarına doğru ortak çıkarlarını ve egemenliklerini korumak gibi nedenlerden dolayı çeşitli bölgesel işbirliklerinin içinde olmuşlardır. Sözü geçen ülkelerin liderlerinin yıllar itibariyle daha sıkı politika koordinasyonu yapmaları ve daha gelişmiş, hukuk temelli ve yapısal bir bütünleşme için uğraşmalarından dolayı 21. yüzyılda da bölgesel bütünleşme konusunun popüler olmaya devam edeceği görülmektedir. Ancak, Orta Asya devletleri bölgesel bir birlik kurma anlayış ve beklentisine sahip olmalarına rağmen şimdiye kadar pratik ve somut sonuçları olan bir birlik kuramadılar. Bu nedenle bu makalenin amacı, öncelikli olarak bölge perspektifi ile Orta Asya devletleri arasındaki bütünleşme süreçlerini analiz etmek, akabinde faydalı bir rehber olma ihtimalinden dolayı Güneydoğu Asya Ülkeleri Birliği (ASEAN) modelini Orta Asya devletlerine sunmaktır. Orta Asya devletleri bölgesel bir entegrasyon kurmak için coğrafi, dilsel, tarihi, kültürel ve ekonomik bağlara sahiptirler. Bu çalışma şunu iddia etmektedir: Özellikle coğrafi ve kültürel özellikleri göz önünde bulundurulduğu takdirde, ASEAN tecrübesi Orta Asya'da bir birlik kurulması için bir örnek olabilir. Bunların dışında, Orta Asya devletlerinin ASEAN ülkeleriyle benzer ekonomik, sınır, su, askeri çatışma ve etnik sorunlar yaşamaları da çalışmanın iddiasını güçlendirmektedir. Bu bağlamda, açıklığa kavuşturulması gereken üç husus vardır: Birincisi, bölge kavramının anlamı, ikincisi, Orta Asya devletlerinin henüz sürdürülebilir bir bölgesel birlik oluşturamama nedenleri ve son olarak ASEAN bütünleşme modelinin neden uygun olduğu hususlarıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bölge, Orta Asya, Entegrasyon Girişimleri, ASEAN Modeli.

A Model Proposal for the Union of Central Asian States in the Context of Region and Regional Integration

Abstract

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan have attempted to participate in regional cooperations to serve a variety of purposes of securing their common interest and preserving their new sovereignty in the late 20th century. Establishing regional integration for these states seems popular to continue in the twenty-first century as the

leaders of these republics are coordinating policies more frequently and thriving to search ways to consolidate a more developed, law-based and structured regional union. However, although they had already had the understanding and expectation to establish a regional union, they could not establish one which may hitherto bring about practical results and concrete outcomes. Thus, the aim of this article is first to analyze the integration process of Central Asian countries with a regional perspective, and then to purpose a model of Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to these countries as it may offer useful guidance for them. Central Asia states have geographic, linguistic, historical, cultural and economic affinities for regional integration. The study claims that though limited similarities, the ASEAN experience can be as an example for the Central Asia region due to the components of especially geographical affinity and cultural convergence. Not only the aforementioned components but also having similar issues of economic depression, boundary and water problems, armed conflicts and unresolved interethnic matters with Southeast Asian countries may be examples for strengthening the study's claim. In this article, there are three themes to be elucidated: first, the meaning of region concept, second, the reasons why these republics have not yet established a sustainable regional union, and finally why the ASEAN integration model is appropriate.

Keywords: Region, Central Asia, Integration Attempts, ASEAN Model.

Introduction

By its nature, Central Asia is a landlocked region in the world. It consists five republics which are Kazakhstan, Krygyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, and extended from the Caspian Sea to western China. As it is seen the Central Asia region has been conceptualized in many ways. The reason for this is that some may regard the region as pre-given or natural and some (especially Peter J. Katzenstein) may take it as a socially constructed and politically contested (Katzenstein, 1997: 7). For Kupchan (1997), if countries share a communal identity then they comprise a region that is generally defined as a group of states located in the same geographically specified area. Not only proximity but also cultural, economic, linguistic or political ties have been shared by the members of a region (Mansfiel and Milner, 1999: 590-591). Anderson and Norheim (1993: 26) also note that culture, language and religion play a role in forming a region.

LeRoy Bennett (1995: 230) looks at the concept of the region from the perspective of regional organizations as he describes those organizations as they are bound by a common set of objectives. These objectives are based on geographical, cultural, social, political or economic ties among countries in a

region. In other words, for regional integration in Central Asia, it might be appropriate to search for these objectives.

As the Central Asian states have several significant advantages, all of the aforementioned objectives are fully applicable to establish a successful union in the region. For instance, the region's geographical location which is an intersection between Asia and Europe, its huge underground and upper ground natural resources, the young and educated population who are not indifferent to regional and global issues are the region's key assets. Geographical proximity, historical experiences, linguistic, religious and cultural affinities, political and economic similarities are complimentary within the Central Asian countries (Kembayev, 2006: 969).

Before asking what Central Asian countries did for establishing a possible union in the region, Kazakhstan's former President Nursultan Nazarbayev reflected his message regarding the benefits of integration by giving the European Union and the Asian Tigers as examples. He stated that there were many reasons for these five countries to create such a union within the Central Asia region. Nursultan N a z a r b a y e v (AKORDA, 2005) stated that their independence was a chance to restore the economic significance of the region as the five countries were developing their transit infrastructure system. They were also emerging as a global major supplier of commodities, including oil, gas, iron ore and agricultural products. Nazarbayev said that

"We have a choice between remaining the supplier of raw materials to the global markets and wait patiently for the emergence of the next imperial master or to pursue genuine economic integration of the Central Asian region. I choose the latter. Further regional integration will lead to stability, regional progress, and economic, military and political independence. This is the only way for our region to earn respect in the world"

He believed that regional integration will advance the interests of all the common folks that live in Central Asia as these five countries share economic interest, cultural heritage, language, religion, and environmental challenges, and face common external threats. Nazarbayev further expressed that Central Asian states should direct their efforts toward a closer economic integration, a common market and a single currency.

The study will try to find answers to these questions. What did Central Asian countries do for establishing a possible union in the region? What kind of difficulties did they face? Did they understand the necessity of directing their efforts towards a closer regional integration? Have they become successful? If not, What are the reasons? Can ASEAN be an example for the Central Asian states for establishing a union in the region?

Methodology

This study has adhered to a qualitative research design that will apply data collection and analysis to find answers to the research questions as the basis for qualitative research is to gain a holistic understanding of the subject. The overall topic is located at the interface between regional integration research and a model suggestion for the Central Asian countries. Since integration is among the theoretical objects, the application of the comparative method between Central Asia and ASEAN countries will be in the foreground. That means that to analyze the positions of Central Asian states concerning a potential establishment of regional integration like ASEAN, case selection will follow a systematic control of the variable that is set up by the research interest.

What Did Central Asian Countries Do to Establishing a Union in Central Asia?

After the Soviet Union, five Central Asian states realized that acting alone in the region would pose a threat to their security and independence and thus, these states adopted the Alma-Ata Declaration on December 21, 1991 (CIS.LEGISLATION, 1991) to become the member of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In fact, Central Asian states with the same culture, language, and religion have made several cooperation attempts both to take advantage of the similarities and fill the post-Soviet power gap and overcome possible instabilities.

For instance, the Central Asian states came together in Ashgabat-Turkmenistan, on December 12, 1991, and made a statement stating that they would establish a Central Asian common market (Uslu, 2010: 230). The main reason for this movement in that period was to take part in the CIS and to prevent the Slavic countries from excluding these five states when establishing political and economic organizations (Gammer, 2000: 131). After these five countries became a member of the CIS, they continued their efforts to establish an economic union that would be valid among themselves. In January 1994, Kyrgyzstan announced that she would join Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan after they signed bilateral agreements to establish a common market and customs union. Thus, these three states established the Central Asian Union (CAU) to ensure the free movement of goods, capital, services and labor (Bohr, 2004: 486). Although these three states established the Central Asian Cooperation and Development Bank to achieve a more functional financial order, Uzbekistan has made its own way as she was not as eager as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and thus this initiative remained dysfunctional (Gren, 2001: 1156).

Central Asian states formed a Council of Defence Ministers in the last months of 1995, both within the framework of the coordination of military defense facilities and the Partnership for Peace Programme with NATO. In 1996, the CAU states established a military unit called the Central Asia

Battalion with the support of the United Nations (UN) and the American Central Command to strengthen the relationship between the country's armies, prevent terrorist attacks that may spread to the region, maintain peace and provide crisis management (Macfarlane, 2004: 452). This battalion was not activated as certain points were missing. For example, there was no common perception of threat among CAU states, and these states had a problem of trust towards each other. This lack of trust prevented joint military exercises in particular (Allison, 2004: 467-474). Also, another reason for preventing regional co-operation was regional leaders' engagement in the post-independence nation-state process and had a lack of trust in one another (Bohr, 2004: 495).

CAU states invited Tajikistan into the CAU and then the name was renamed as the Central Asian Economic Union (CAEU) in 1998. After increasing opposition and actions of terrorist groups from this period, the members of the CAEU introduced new cooperation in the political and economic field to eliminate these threats. But there was considerable disagreement, particularly over who should take action against the militants, and no CAEU state took the responsibility accordingly (Uslu, 2010: 233). CAEU states achieved no goals, even in the economic sphere, let alone in the security sphere. Neither the common currency nor the common export, common market and customs tariffs were achieved (Schneider, 2004: 19). When bombs were blasted in Taşkent by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan that broadcasted a declaration of jihad and asked for the resignation of the Uzbek leader Islam Karimov in 1999, the integration process severely deteriorated. Due to national security threats, Central Asian leaders responded by raising barriers to regional cross-border integrations (Kembayev, 2006: 974).

In 2001, CAEU states changed their name to the Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO) with Taskent Declaration. Unlike the previous cooperation initiatives, they demonstrated a common will to cooperate on economic integration, water, energy, human and drug trafficking and organized crime. The CACO Treaty put forward the following purposes:

"(1) Cooperation in the political, economic, technical, environmental, cultural-humanitarian spheres; (2) Prevention of threats to the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity; (3) Creation of the joint infrastructure of the transport and energy network systems; (4) Cooperation in the field of the tariff politics; (5) Coordination in the field of rational and mutually advantageous use of water resources; and (6) Contributing to the growth of the spiritual potential of the peoples through culture, science, education, sports and tourism." (Kembayev, 2006: 974-975).

However, these states did not strive to eliminate even partially trade tariffs, nor increase the rates of trade among the member states. They emphasized their different national interests more than their cooperation, and therefore pursued policies restricting and prohibiting trade. The CACO Treaty largely

reiterated the CAEU's institutional structure and the CACO members could not establish effective cooperation (Bohr, 2004: 486-493). Uzbekistan invited Russia to become a member of CACO in 2004. After the acceptance of the invitation by Russia, CACO was dissolved by merging with the Russian project of the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) on October 6, 2005 (Purtaş, 2008: 42).

Another factor that made the cooperation attempts unsuccessful and ineffective was the personalization of the regional regimes by the ruling elites. In other words, the interests of the state and the policies to be followed have been determined within the framework of the personnal relations of the ruling leaders (Uslu, 2010: 251-253).

The drawbacks of the failure of Central Asian states to establish a full and effective union among themselves were voiced loudly by Kazakh leader Nursultan Nazarbayev in 2005. Since these states have established strong trade relations with major global actors, turned their faces to the West at once, and strengthen their commercial and political relations with new actors, they have not needed much of a unity issue in Central Asia (Pirinççi, 2008: 224).

Nazarbayev, who knew that Central Asian states could only exist together strongly, put forward the idea of Central Asian States Union (CASU) in his address to the nation on 18 February 2005. He declared that "Regional integration will advance the interests of all the common folk that live in Central Asia. I propose therefore to create a Union of Central Asian States." (AKORDA, 2005). CASU first included Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, but later Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Although it was warmly welcomed by Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan was expected to take concrete steps and take initiative on this proposal where Turkmenistan remained neutral and Tajikistan looked cautious (Yüce and Kalkan, 2007: 10).

Moreover, there is the idea that a union to be established in Central Asia will suppress national identities and leave national identities dysfunctional. The CASU idea remains only an idea for the time being for reasons such as Tajikistan's cautious view of the Union due to her linguistic diversity, Turkmenistan's spreading propaganda that she would lose her commercial wealth if she became a member of the Union and regional leaders' problem of trust and sincerity and their skepticism about relations (Yüce and Kalkan, 2007: 12-17).

During the CACO summit in October 2005 in St. Petersburg, the CACO members disbanded their organization after Uzbekistan applied for the membership of the EurAsEC. Due to many aforementioned issues among the Central Asian states, EurAsEC provided a new impetus and this new organization became a feasible integration project in the post-Soviet area (Kembayev, 2006: 980).

The only initiative that the five Central Asian states cooperate with was the issue of nuclear weapons. These states proposed a "Central Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Agreement" in a statement issued in Almaty in February 1997, demanding that the region would be completely free of nuclear weapons and that China and Russia provide them with security guarantees (Allison, 2004: 474-475). In 2002, this proposal was drafted into the treaty and five states eventually signed the Central Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Agreement on 8 September 2006. With the treaty, entered into force in 2009, important decisions were taken as prohibiting the sale, stockpiling and production of any kind of nuclear explosives, preventing the risk of nuclear terrorism and the smuggling of nuclear equipment in the region (İbragimova, 2015).

After more than a decade-long break in regional summits of Central Asian states, in March 2018, the leaders of the Central Asian states came together in Astana to re-launch their integration activity. They called this meeting a "consultative meeting" and announced that a second meeting would take place in March 2019 in Tashkent. The event was regarded as a revitalization of the regional integration process and a cautious step toward solving regional problems. Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoev even offered to hold regular meetings every year in March on the eve of the Navruz celebration, but due to the reluctance of Central Asian leaders, they did not attend the rescheduled meeting in 2019 (Tolipov, 2019).

Investigation of ASEAN Model

The ASEAN was officially formed in Bangkok, Thailand on August 8, 1967, with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration by the founding members, namely Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and Singapore. Today there are ten members. Brunei Darussalam joined on 7 January 198. Vietnam became a member on 28 July 1995. Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar joined on 23 July 1997. Lastly, Cambodia joined on 30 April 1999. The aims and purposes of the ASEAN are:

"1. To accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region through the spirit of equality and partnership;

2. To promote regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law;

3. To promote active collaboration and mutual assistance on matters of common interest in the economic, social, cultural, technical, scientific and administrative fields;

4. To provide assistance to each other in the form of training and research facilities in the educational, professional, technical and administrative spheres;

5. To collaborate more effectively for the greater utilization of their agriculture and industries, the expansion of their trade, the improvement of their transportation and communications facilities and the raising of the living standards of their peoples;

6. To maintain close and beneficial cooperation with existing international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes." (Bangkok Declaration, 1967).

In relations of ASEAN countries with each other, they adopted fundamental principles to promote peace, friendship and cooperation among the peoples for solidarity and closer relationship. Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) of 1976 puts forward that ASEAN countries have "mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity, and national identity of all nations; the right of every state to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion or coercion; non-interference in the internal affairs of one another; settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful manner; renunciation of the threat or use of force; and effective cooperation among themselves." (ASEAN, 1976).

ASEAN has gradually over the years been institutionally developed. For instance, the ASEAN Economic Community was established in 2015 to "transform ASEAN into a region with free movement of goods, services, investment, skilled labor, and freer flow of capital." (Cornell and Starr, 2018: 43). The heads of the ASEAN member participate twice a year in ASEAN meetings. The heads of the ASEAN member participate twice a year in ASEAN meetings. As the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Visa Exemption highlights that people of ASEAN members enter other ASEAN countries without a visa for 14 to 30 days (ASEAN, 2020). ASEAN countries apply zero to five percent common tariffs for the majority of goods that have been sold among the members (ASEAN, 2020).

In Southeast Asia, ASEAN has achievements as it remains an effective functioning entity. Moreover, the region has been peaceful since the mid-1980s albeit diversity and past political conflict. It does not mean that there is no border problem as maritime territorial claims continue due to the South China Sea which demonstrates that ASEAN was born as a political-security pact in the first place and then the economy has become the agenda of all the members (Menon and Lee, 2019: 8). ASEAN adopted a "Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality Agreement in 1971 and declared that ASEAN was going to be "free from any form or manner of interference by outside powers." (ASEAN, 1971). Although the Treaty was adopted in 1971, came into force in 1997 and prohibited the utilization, production, transportation, preservation, experimenting, or removal of nuclear weapons in ASEAN members (ASEAN, 2020).

Rapid economic development and rising living standards have been another achievement of ASEAN. According to Menon and Lee (2019: 7), it can be arguable how much ASEAN as an institution has helped for economic development and rising living standards, however, "it is undeniable that the region's leaders' determination to forge more harmonious relations has helped facilitate this rapid economic development." Cornell and Starr (2018: 47) also express that ASEAN members have dialogues with foreign countries as a single unit and do not prefer an individual one. "This effectively prevents outside powers from playing one ASEAN state off against another."

There is one more important factor for the ASEAN's successful achievement of maintaining regional peace and stability and raising ecenomic development. The name of that factor is called the ASEAN Way. It is a decision-making process that consists of the principles of non-interference, non-use of force, quite diplomacy and consensus approach. This approach puts emphasis on members' equality, respecting each other, the significance of cooperation and producing peace under any circumstances. While the ASEAN Way's non-interference principle is based on cooperation and good relations with the neighboring countries, it protects each ASEAN member from other countries involving in their domestic affairs (Tekunan, 2017: 144-145).

Results

The debate of globalism versus regionalism has made the concept of the region an indispensable role in effecting the new world order after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Regional organizations have especially been regarded as a guaranteed way to protect sovereignty and stability in the Central Asia region. However, Central Asian countries have not yet become successful to establish a sustainable regional union. As it is purposed in this article, If we compare the ASEAN countries with Central Asian ones, the Central Asian states have more chances to create an effective regional union. They have much more in common than do the ASEAN states as they diverge fundamentally in languages, ethnicity, and religious traditions. Whereas in Central Asia, historical experiences, linguistic, religious and cultural affinities, political and economic similarities are complimentary within the countries.

Table 1: Intra- and extra-ASEAN Export Trade, 2017

Country			Extra-ASEAN exports		Total exports (US$million)
	Value (US$million)	% Share to total exports	Value (US$million)	% Share to total exports	
Brunei Darussalam	1.239	19,5	5.114	80,5	6.354
Cambodia	819	9,3	8.019	90,7	8.839
Indonesia	33.577	22,3	116.789	77,7	150.366
Lao PDR	2.646	71,2	1.068	28,8	3.714
Malaysia	56.169	28,2	142.989	*71,8*	199.158
Myanmar	4.444	36,4	7.754	63,6	12.197
Philippines	8.537	14,6	50.112	85,4	58.648
Singapore	118.271	32,3	248.073	67,7	366.344
Thailand	61.926	28,9	152.470	71,1	214.396
Viet Nam	18.064	11,1	143.950	88,9	162.014
ASEAN	***305.693***	**25,9**	***876.338***	**74,1**	***1.182.031***

Source: ASEAN Secretariat, https://asean.org/?static_post=external-trade-statistics-3 (01.10.2020)

Table 2: Intra- and extra-ASEAN Import Trade, 2017

Country	Intra-ASEAN imports		Extra-ASEAN imports		Total imports (US$million)
	Value (US$million)	% Share to total imports	Value (US$million)	% Share to total imports	
Brunei Darussalam	1.405	43,4	1.833	56,6	3.238
Cambodia	3.643	33,6	7.195	66,4	10.838
Indonesia	30.033	21,0	112.662	79,0	142.695
Lao PDR	1.710	56,1	1.339	43,9	3.049
Malaysia	46.679	26,5	129.332	73,5	*176.011*
Myanmar	7.023	41,5	9.884	58,5	16.907
Philippines	17.064	24,3	53.231	75,7	70.295
Singapore	63.779	21,5	232.986	78,5	296.765
Thailand	42.895	21,2	159.856	78,8	202.751
Viet Nam	23.827	14,4	141.902	85,6	165.730
ASEAN	***238.059***	**21,9**	***850.220***	**78,1**	***1.088.279***

Source: ASEAN Secretariat, https://asean.org/?static_post=external-trade-statistics-3 (01.10.2020)

ASEAN members are especially strong in import-export numbers as they prioritize to buy and sell items from each other and to each other. The members thrive to accelerate economic growth and promote active collaboration and mutual assistance on matters of common interest in especially the economic fields. For that, Central Asian states should take the example of the Association of the Southeast Asian Nations as it may offer useful guidance in this case. ASEAN countries do not interfere with each other's internal affairs, follow the ASEAN Way of non-interference, non-use of force, quite diplomacy and consensus approach. They peacefully solve their problems, carry out free movement of skilled labor, investment, good and services, have loyalty to each other, and more importantly act as a unit

against external powers. Besides these, ASEAN countries show a solid interdependence to keep external powers away from provoking the members against one another. ASEAN type of regional organization among the Central Asian countries may create a link between intentions and practical action as ASEAN has already established an effective and permanent institutional structure in Southeast Asia.

Another reason why the Central Asian states should take the ASEAN as an example is the similarities of their aims. Since the end of the Soviet period in 1991, Central Asian countries have always aimed to prevent both boundaries, water, interethnic conflicts from developing into armed conflict among themselves. They have also tried to built regional union processes to bring economic and security prosperity and to prevent the external powers from using them against each other. Since its founding in 1967, ASEAN countries have also had the same basic aims as above.

Conclusion

Establishing a sustainable regional union in Central Asia has shown that regional integration processes in this region have been constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed through interactions between the region's leaders in response to pursue their commonly held goals. The reasons behind the formation of regional integration in Central Asia are driven by a variety of the same reasons as in ASEAN. These reasons include consolidation of peace, security, stability and economic considerations. Speaking with one voice internally and rising Central Asian countries' bargaining power against external powers by securing commitment on a regional basis.

Central Asia region has historical, geographic, linguistic, cultural and economic affinities for regional integration. Though limited similarities, the ASEAN experience can be as an example for the Central Asia region due to the aforementioned components of especially geographical affinity and cultural convergence. Central Asian countries have faced similar issues of economic depression, boundary and water problems, armed conflicts, unresolved interethnic matters and being the center of the struggle of interest of the global powers as the Southeast Asian countries. Hence, It should not immediately be expected from Central Asian countries to establish a union like ASEAN as the preparation of favorable conditions for ASEAN countries took several decades.

The importance of geographic proximity, cultural and economic affinities, energy and economic potentials of the Central Asian countries both in the region and in the world provide a basis for integration among them. Although the study has demonstrated that common concerns of the Central Asian countries lead to regional convergence, the leaders of the region must believe that they can establish a commonality that must be law-based and

associated with tangible structures as in ASEAN. Hence, the study claims that Central Asia countries can be integrated as ASEAN. ASEAN countries were successful in establishing a sustainable regional union, and now it's time for Central Asian states to write a success story.

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