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MODERN RUSSIA: IDEOLOGY, POLITICS, CULTURE AND RELIGION

YURY ZININ. TERRORIST ATTACK IN CROCUS CITY HALL:
REACTION AND RESPONSE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

*Keywords: terrorist attack; Russia;
Crocus City; Middle East; reaction;
opinions; assessments; Arabs; ISIS;
Afghanistan.*

Yury Zinin,

PhD(Hist.), Senior Research Associate,
Centre for Middle Eastern and African Studies,
Institute of International Studies MGIMO MFA of Russia,
e-mail: zinin42@mail.ru

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Abstract. The article examines reaction and response to the terrorist attack in Crocus City Hall at the official and unofficial levels in the Middle East. The media, social networks and the expert community condemn the actions of the terrorists. At the same time, a review of the speeches indicates different interpretations of the event, especially that which is related to its orchestrators and curators. The author concludes that many Arab authors perceive the attack on Crocus as a challenge, projecting it onto the realities of their region. In their publications they

talk about the need to pay greater attention to monitoring terrorist actions, its roots, practices in responding to it and the fight against terrorism in the Middle East. Arguments and theses in the rhetoric of local radical Islamists are observed.

The bloody terrorist attack in Crocus City Hall caused resonance and responses in political circles, media space and social networks of the Middle East. The foreign ministries of Arab countries sent messages expressing condolences and solidarity with the Russian Federation in connection with the tragedy.

Al-Azhar in Cairo, the oldest Moslem spiritual university in the world, founded in the 10th century, strongly condemned the attack. It called it a crime against innocent people, which is rejected by "all divine laws" and threatens the perpetrators with the most severe punishment¹. The terrorist act was condemned by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the League of Arab States and others.

The media of the region are monitoring the progress of the investigation of this crime in Russia, its background, possible consequences. Views on them are divided. There are opinions that there was an international conspiracy to put pressure on Russia regarding the Ukrainian dossier, but not directly, but indirectly – "by proxy".

The focus is on the timing of the operation. It took place after the success of Russian President V.V. Putin in the elections, the emergence of signs of clear progress by Russia during the SMO in Ukraine, – the Emirati newspaper Al-Ittihad points out. This increases the likelihood of the influence of external motives on what happened.

Other authors see in it the intention to strike a blow at stability within Russia, to destabilize the multinational and multi-confessional state. Moreover, Moslems of the Chechen Republic are participating on the battlefield together with Russian troops against Ukraine. According to the Iraqi publication Al-Muraqib Al-Iraqi, ISIS is responsible for the terrorist attack in Crocus City.

However, it is only a field executor of orders from a certain side, which has long used it in its strategy of anarchy or hybrid war.

The Arab media refer to the wars in Afghanistan in the 1980s, and then in Tajikistan, Dagestan, Chechnya and Bosnia in the 1990s, to the story of the terrorist Khattab and his antics against the Russians, to Shamil Basayev and suchlike in the past, to the events in Syria after 2011 and up to the present day.

A number of authors turn to the history of ISIS. Egyptian author Mohammed I. Al-Dasuki recalls that the CIA used it as a “ferocious claw” to fight America’s greatest competitor at the time, the Soviet Union, and supplied its leader Osama bin Laden and his partners with equipment, weapons and huge sums of money.

ISIS is nothing but a modern version of “Al-Qaeda” and operates under various names with a large number of additions and “spices” due to technological development, as well as methods of attracting hired killers who are ready to provide their satanic services to customers with big money.

The expert calls it a rebellious beast that has broken free, which rushes in search of prey, never to return to its trainer².

In the responses in the region to the raid on Crocus there are different interpretations of what happened and nuances, especially regarding what is connected with the customers and curators of the action. There are several factors that make experts doubt the veracity of the claim that the terrorist organization ISIS has claimed responsibility for the terrorist attack. It is emphasized that immediately after the terrorist attack at a concert in the suburbs of Moscow, Washington, and then the West, rushed to blame it on Islamic terrorism in the person of ISIS-Khorasan, even before the latter announced responsibility for the attack.

Emirati researcher Omar Ahmed asks a number of questions on this matter. First: how can an organization rise up after its defeat in Iraq and quickly become active outside its activities, especially after its isolation in small areas of Iraq?

Second: why did it change its target this time, after we have become accustomed to seeing it attack the West in the region in recent years, including, for example, American military bases?

Third: how can the organization outmaneuver Russian security and penetrate the Russian borders to reach Moscow in light of the strength and intensity of the activities of the security forces in Russia?

Reality confirms, according to the Arabic magazine *Al-Watan Al-Araby*, that ISIS-Khorasan is concentrating its activities and operations on Afghanistan, where it is based. Its main concern is to expand the scope of its influence among the Afghans in the hope of confronting its arch-enemy, the Taliban movement. It is also recalled that Washington actually contributed to its rise to power after the withdrawal of its troops from Afghan territory.

The confessions of the suspects in the Crocus raid contradict the widespread methods of this organization and its branches, other authors note, especially when it comes to receiving assignments from unknown persons via virtual channels with the promise of cash payments. There exists a well-known practice of ISIS when accomplices leave the circle of verified personnel, carry out assignments of their leaders, but not from incognito. They usually deny that they act as mercenaries, claiming that they sacrifice themselves in order to “go to heaven” after attacks on “infidels”, etc.

The actions of terrorists, especially from Al-Qaeda and ISIS, previously reflected practices and methods borrowed from Japanese kamikazes. In the case of the attack near Moscow, this was not the case; the perpetrators had a plan to escape and leave Russian territory alive.

Hasty accusations against ISIS in the Western world for carrying out the operation were intended to protect Ukraine. The Russian investigation revealed Kyiv’s involvement in the operation, especially since the criminals tried to flee there before their arrest. However, the West continued to insist only on the Islamic connection.

The false acceptance of responsibility for the operation in Crocus by ISIS-Khorasan may be a propaganda ploy. Its goal was to attract more sympathizers to the militants, exaggerate their ability to deal a painful blow to Russia and increase their rating among similar organizations³.

This crime indicates that the goals of those behind it are not limited to the desire to increase tensions in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. The focus is on expanding the scale of the war in order to provoke Russia to increase its operations and strikes. It should be added that America and the West are interested in tarnishing the positive assessments of Russia's policy and reducing the level of its relations with the Moslem world, which has been achieved in recent years⁴.

At the same time, Arab experts note that as soon as the Russian authorities revealed the involvement of four individuals of Tajik nationality in the crime, Western media rushed to publish reports about Tajikistan's terrorist past. For example, the France 24 website published a report detailing that Tajikistan is fertile ground for jihadists and that it is one of the main suppliers of personnel for the Islamic State.

The report was based on information from French intelligence and the opinion of researchers specializing in "Central Asian societies" in order to confirm the Western theory that the Islamic State bears sole responsibility for the terrorist act, emphasizes Lebanese author Samir Zureik in his article on the influential Middle East portal Elaf.

One of the questions raised around this terrorist attack, to which Western media turned a blind eye because of possible undesirable answers: why were people from Tajikistan recruited only to carry out a terrorist attack, knowing that they are not connected with ISIS and have no previous examples of such actions?

At the same time, Western media forgot to mention the close cooperation between the Russian authorities and their Tajik colleagues, especially in the fight against terrorism⁵.

As for social networks in the Arab region, the picture here is mosaic, as evidenced by the flow of responses and comments from account owners, bloggers on the barbaric terrorist attack near Moscow. It reflects a fusion of political, ideological preferences and the views of the “Arab street”.

Most authors condemn the actions of the Islamists and the sponsors behind them. According to internet users, some narrow-minded Moslems are “easily recruited in exchange for promises of money, or by inciting them against Russia’s policy in Syria”... “Important note: IS has nothing to do with Islam, our true religion is the religion of mercy, humanity and charity, the user writes... We, all Moslems, renounce this lost monster: bloody, barbaric and savage, which corrupts the earth until the Day of Judgement.”

“Is it a coincidence that we see IS fighting on the lands of countries and organizations hostile to America? – the blogger asks. Where are these people in Gaza and what are they doing in Moscow?”

According to Arab observers and researchers, today the world and the expert community are waiting for new details in the investigation of what happened in Crocus City Hall from Russia.

The Terrorist Attack in Crocus is a Challenge for the Arab World

After the terrorist attack in the Moscow region, the media discourse has seen an increase in the attention of experts and political scientists to monitoring terrorism, its roots, methods of action and their prevention in the region. Many of them perceived the attack on Crocus as a challenge, projecting it onto the realities of their region.

In the circles of Islamic scholars, especially in the Persian Gulf countries, they point to an underestimation of the dangers of

the spread and propaganda of extremism, violence and hatred in society.

Radwan As-Sayed, a politician and professor of religious studies at the Lebanese University, believes that "the subject of concern for many among us and among our friends is hatred. Hatred is an inability to make an objective judgment, and it is useless for solving problems, whether in religious or cultural discourse," this authority in the field of Islamic studies states⁶.

The terrorist attack near Moscow was discussed by experts on international extremism. One of the participants, Saudi professor Abdullah bin Bajad Al-Otaibi, called the study and assessment of the goals, methods and attitudes of Islamist movements, the role of their allies, who underestimate the nature and risks of extremism, a "black hole".

Saudi media figure, General Manager of the Al Arabiya TV channel Mamdouh Al-Mhini touched on the basic aspects of the actions of these movements. The main thing that unites them is the claim to represent the entire religion. Islam, according to the author, is a great faith that gave birth to civilization and empires.

Islamists have distorted it, dressing up in its toga to cover up their credo - the seizure of power, the implementation of narrow programs on the path of violence. In their eyes, those who disagree with them are "infidels" and are subject to pressure, including physical elimination.⁷

The search for an enemy, its exposure and elimination is the dominant theme in the rhetoric of Islamists, who have built their priorities of action. Today, ISIS with all its branches loudly presents itself as the defender of Islam and Moslems from the Crusaders, the "West", the Jews, and, of course, the "apostates" among Moslem and Arab rulers. However, according to the theses of the Islamists, "the campaign against Israel, for the liberation of Palestine, will begin only after the "heretics and hypocrites" are exterminated.⁸

What is currently happening in Gaza, which is being hit by Israeli military strikes, the researcher concludes, should not blind

Arabs to the dangers of these takfiri groups (“fighters against atheism”) in the Middle East region. They are ready to sacrifice the security and stability of states for the sake of their reckless political projects⁹.

Particular attention should be paid to the issues of ideology and worldview. Extremist ideology, whatever it may be, may weaken but not die, says a researcher from the UAE. If given a new chance, it quickly revives. According to analysts and experts, today it is necessary to act selectively in order to penetrate the hidden guts of radical Islamic movements.

A number of authors consider the idea of conspiracies and conspiracy thinking, popular in modern Arab discourse, to be extremely harmful. It used to be commonplace and was cultivated by previous generations, but today it has been picked up by new, growing societies. The authors call this idea a convenient way to escape from reality due to the fear of facing the truth. This is especially true for religious issues. It is difficult to prove, researchers and political scientists interpret, that the sectarian confrontation between Moslems in a number of countries arose and continues because external demons have distorted their consciousness. We must not forget that interfaith excesses existed even before the Arabs got to know the West in its modern form, and ISIS, Hezbollah and Al-Qaeda will not leave the arena if Britain or France suddenly disappears tomorrow¹⁰.

The articles call for meticulous monitoring of religious discourses in school programs, on social media platforms, etc. The thesis goes on about the need to put a barrier to the penetration of extremist ideas into classrooms and classes or through other channels, which imperceptibly pushes young people to reconcile with harmful radical ideas.

Society is also responsible for turning a peaceful teenager into a heartless monster, says Saudi political scientist and researcher M. Al-Mukhaini. If he had lived in an environment that instilled in him from a young age at home, at school, in the mosque the values of tolerance and understanding the human

essence of all religions, then he would hardly have become a terrorist.

“Let’s not forget,” the scientist points out, “that Russia has become the target of a bloody attack, but it is Moslem countries that have suffered the most from attacks by the terrorist underground, and it is their citizens who are the victims, whether they are the killers or the killed¹¹.”

Now, according to the Saudi newspaper *Ash-Sharq Al-Awsat*, the issue is about snatching this great religion from the hands of a vile group of extremists, relying on a spiritual and civilizational narrative, accompanied by economic prosperity, but it will take decades to fulfill this mission, the publication writes¹².

Thus, there is a need to study the incubation environment that nurtures extremists, the methods of processing new adherents under the auspices of various mentors, soul catchers of the caliphate project, etc. All this poses threats to the Arabs that must be stopped and not remain in the “black hole” zone¹³.

Experts, analyzing the raid in the Moscow region, do not ignore such a phenomenon as Islamophobia. They believe that the crime plays into the hands of those who stand behind it in different countries. Its apologists, speculating on the facts of violations and crimes of a handful of extremists, attribute to Islam as a whole religion such extremes as intolerance of “infidels”, a tendency towards cruelty and anti-humanism, provoke prejudices hostile to Moslems, etc.

In Arab circles, the media and the scientific community, they reject the poisonous essence of Islamophobia, and strive to rebuff the theses that are spread by the heralds of the “Moslem danger” syndrome in various countries of the world, especially in the West, which mislead the local population.

The bloody raid on Crocus City Hall, in the opinion of the authors, brings grist to the mill of the most vicious enemies of Islam. According to the Egyptian Islamic scholar and media figure Samir Al-Araki, it meets the desire of some to return Islamophobia to the forefront. Their plan is to dampen the wave

of sympathy for the Palestinians that has arisen in different parts of the world against the backdrop of the suffering of the population during the conflict in Gaza and the actions of the Israeli military machine.

In particular, the Moroccan community in Europe fears that the far right will benefit from the “attack near Moscow” and is using it to intensify attacks against Islam and immigrants, pedaling Islamophobia¹⁴.

Ahmed Ban, an expert on fundamentalist movements in Egypt, reports that after the Moscow raid, ISIS has intentions to redistributed the forces of its structures through branches to carry out attacks on stadiums in Europe. After all, at one time the organization threatened to disrupt the World Cup in Russia in 2018.

The author refers to the “Al-Azhar Observatory for Combating Terrorism” (one of the specialized institutes of the Cairo Al-Azhar University). At the time, it warned that IS, aware of the huge popularity of football, was trying to attract fans to its dirty work, using this sport.

The Observatory called on European countries to take the necessary preventive measures. “Large crowds open up the possibility for it to use unconventional means, such as vehicle collisions, to cause more deaths and injuries.¹⁵”

Almost 10 years ago, during the rise of IS, the author of this article noted the factors that played into the hands of this organization at that time. These include, in particular, the contradictions between the local players involved in the conflict, rivalry of the region’s regimes in their struggle for influence, internal strife, turbulence generating instability.

It is fueled by fragmentation based on ethnic and religious affiliation. The region is home to various national minorities, plus part of the population is influenced by archaic traditions of the tribal way of life. Many societies in the region can be classified as deeply divided.

This gives IS and others like it the chance to weave and maneuver in the whirlpool of political storms and upheavals in the

region, to mimic, while remaining a beneficiary of existing contradictions and conflicts. All this complicates the joint counteraction to extremist movements and currents in the region¹⁶.

Today, the picture in the region in terms of the balance of power, the hierarchy of power and elites in the Arab world is ambiguous and confusing.

The escalation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict after the outbreak in Gaza on October 7, 2023, the activity of various non-governmental armed groups in Lebanon, Yemen, Syria and Iraq, and the exchange of blows between Israel and Iran are fraught with the transfer of violence to the plane of religious and sectarian confrontation.

This fuels the alienation and mistrust of people, and the polarization of forces in the political space is evident. In this atmosphere, various opportunistic alliances of opposing forces arise, unprincipled deals between them open up space for the actions of factions, including under the guise of Islam.

Populist rhetoric is in use in the media and social networks. It seems, and many researchers agree, that the slogan "Islam is the solution to all problems" remains popular and is being promoted in the Arab and broader Islamic world. It resonates with various layers of believers, society, the mass consciousness, and the political establishment of the Middle East. This simple formulation plays into the hands of the ISIS, other similar organizations and their henchmen.

In addition, extremist forces do not refuse revenge, their generations are changing. It is obvious that yesterday's terrorism is different from today's terrorism and, perhaps, from tomorrow's.

At the same time, recruits from among refugees, displaced persons, people of different nationalities from neighboring regions, including Central Asia and the Caucasus, deceived by promises, are increasingly being drawn into the funnel of conflicts in the Middle East.

Regional and international actors use them as obedient pawns in the implementation of their plans and designs.

Therefore, behind the backs of those who committed the crime in the Moscow region, there could have been various elements, including hostile people from outside Russia, or political opponents opposing the government in the Kremlin, or ISIS, as was announced, – summarizes the Emirati publicist and political scientist Dr. Abdullah D. Al-Haj¹⁷.

In the media and scientific circles of the region, one can find opinions that the terrorist attack in Crocus City Hall serves as a warning bell about the need for international cooperation and solidarity in the fight against the phenomenon of cross-border terrorism. The efforts of one country are not enough to put an end to extremism and its branches; to eliminate their toxic influence, this requires initiating coordinated international measures.

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PLACE AND ROLE OF ISLAM IN REGIONS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, THE CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA

ILДАР НАСЫРОВ. COOPERATION OF RUSSIAN REGIONS
WITH INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS: FORMATS
AND OPPORTUNITIES ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE REPUBLIC
OF TATARSTAN (Part 2)

*Keywords: international relations of
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of external relations; multipolarity.*

Ildar Nasyrov,
DSc(Political Sciences), Professor (Associate),
Institute of International Relations,
Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University,
ORCID: 0000-0001-7117-3636
© I. Nasyrov 2024

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Abstract. The article studies the issues of interaction between the
constituent entities of Russia and international organizations, the

importance of this type of international cooperation for the socio-economic development of the regions and for the implementation of the Russian foreign policy. The possibilities of participation of the constituent entities in the promotion of national interests on the world stage in the context of increasing external pressure on Russia are considered. The analysis of the issues of political and legal regulation of international and foreign economic relations of the constituent entities of Russia is given, including the questions of participation in the activities of international organizations. The article introduces a classification of formats for the interaction of regions with international organizations and characterizes the features of their implementation; the transformation of the international activity of the regions is demonstrated, according to the evolution of the foreign policy priorities of the state.

To evaluate the performance of models of cooperation with integration institutions of various types, the experience of Tatarstan is being studied. The importance for socio-economic development and improving the quality of life of the population by participation of the regions in the activities of international organizations as part of the Russian representation in them, or building relationships with international associations at the level of regions and local authorities, as well as holding events under the auspices of international organizations is confirmed. Alternatives for involving the constituent unities in the implementation of essential areas of Russian foreign policy are proposed. The positive role of the regions in maintaining contacts between Russia and a number of leading international organizations is also discovered, along with the search for new low-politicized formats of cooperation, such as partnerships with international associations and structures at the level of local authorities. The potential of the regions appears highly-demanded in the implementation of Russia's consistent policy to form a multipolar world order.

Goals and Forms of Cooperation with International Organizations at the Level of Tatarstan

Being one of the components of integration into the world community, cooperation with international organizations introduces extra aspects to the formation of international relations, taking into account geopolitical, economic and other interests of the participants [1, p. 33].

When building ties with international organizations, regions, as a rule, are focusing on advancing social and economic development; building foreign economic and humanitarian relations; boosting regional competitiveness in an open economy; increasing the living standards and quality of life of the population; studying and implementing the best world practices in territorial development; and other issues relevant to particular federal subjects.

As part of international integration mechanisms, regions can also contribute to the implementation of the 'soft security' policy, which is relevant to national interests [2].

When examining the forms of interaction between regions and international organizations, it is necessary to differentiate between membership in an organization and participation in the implementation of individual projects of international organizations, especially regional ones. At the regional level, there is also a widespread practice of implementing recommendations and proposals of international organizations, as well as participating in programmes and projects initiated by them. Participation of a delegation or representatives of the region in events held by international organizations can be viewed as a form of cooperation that requires minimal interaction with international organizations and limited impact on their work.

Permanent membership in an organization implies regular participation in its activities and comes with both rights (including involvement in decision-making) and responsibilities

(including providing financial or other support for the organization).

Over the 30-year history of the development of international and foreign economic relations, Tatarstan has accumulated significant experience from being an Observer in the Assembly of European Regions (AER) and the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TÜRKSOY), as well as being part of the Russian delegation in the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe [3, p. 233–239]. However, since the spring of 2022, there has been a clearly negative trend towards anti-Russian politicization of the work of some international organizations, which in some cases has become a determining factor. NATO and EU unfriendly countries' abusing a supermajority vote in the Council of Europe resulted in Russia's decision to withdraw from the oldest international organization in Europe [4].

In the eastern direction, Tatarstan has been greatly invested in the activities of the international non-governmental organization, the Strategic Vision Group "Russia – Islamic World", since it was founded in 2006. In June 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin assigned Rustam Minnikhanov, the President of Tatarstan, to lead and reorganize the Strategic Vision Group "Russia – Islamic World". The Group's activities are aimed at promoting relations between Russia and Muslim countries through the coordinated efforts of civil society, businesspeople, religious associations, as well as the expert and journalistic community. They are working to establish contacts with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and associated organizations. The Group's action plan includes dozens of public, scientific, business, religious forums and events that are held annually both in Russia and abroad [5]. The leading event is International economic summit "Russia – Islamic World: KazanSummit", which has become the major platform for economic interaction between Russia and the countries of the Islamic world.

The fact that regions contribute to establishing relations between our country and Muslim states confirms their role in the implementation of Russian foreign policy in an area, which domestic researchers consider one of the most relevant at the present stage [6, p. 96]. As part of the Strategic Vision Group "Russia – Islamic World", Tatarstan not only addresses the major challenges facing the Group, but also strengthens business, cultural and humanitarian ties with Muslim countries and Islamic organizations, and continuously works to promote the region abroad, advertising its economic potential, cultural heritage and human capital. The headquarters of the Eurasian branch of the world organization United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) is located in Kazan. In November 2021, Ilсур Metshin, Mayor of Kazan, was elected President of the UCLG. Earlier, in November 2019, he was also elected President of the United Nations Advisory Committee of Local Authorities (UNACLA). This is the first time that a Russian representative has been elected President of UNACLA.

Kazan is a member of the Organization of World Heritage Cities (OWHC) and the League of Historic Cities (LHC). In 2021, the capital of the Republic of Tatarstan also participated in projects and events of the Organization of Islamic Capitals and Cities (OICC), the International Assembly of Capitals and Cities (IAC), the International Association "Sister Cities" and several others.

The constant exchange of experience and best practices in urban development has greatly contributed to the dynamic development of the capital of Tatarstan; facilitated the successful implementation of a number of regional programmes aimed at creating a modern urban environment, building public spaces, and improving courtyard areas; and supported projects for the development of urban infrastructure throughout Tatarstan. At the time of difficult foreign policy situation, the long-term work with international organizations at the level of local

authorities depends on the local government bodies' commitment to relevant issues.

Holding events under the auspices of international organizations on the territory of the constituent entities of the Federation. We believe that this activity can be legitimately considered as international, since organizing and hosting such events involve keeping in touch with foreign partners; finding new opportunities for cross-border cooperation; adapting and implementing world standards and promising practices in relevant areas; and reinforcing the international image of the regions. At the same time, social and economic development gains momentum, which leads to an increase in the overall competitiveness of the territories.

For example, preparation for the XXVII Summer Universiade in Kazan in 2013 transformed the capital of Tatarstan; the event was organized by the federal authorities in cooperation with the International University Sports Federation (FISU). More than 150 facilities were built and about 380 more venues were reconstructed specifically for the Universiade; these include 36 new sports facilities (including a stadium for 45 thousand seats, the Aquatics Palace of Water Sports, the Rowing Centre, etc.), the unique Universiade Village, the Kazan International Airport infrastructure, two railway stations in Kazan, 11 transport interchanges, 39 pedestrian crossings, 3 metro stations and other modern, cost-effective facilities. In the historical centre of Kazan, over than 300 buildings were restored, 212 kilometres of roads were repaired and built on 149 city streets, more than 20 new hotels were opened, which promoted the development of tourism industry in the region.

Sports facilities constructed for the Universiade are widely used for the development of physical culture and mass sports, hosting international and all-Russian competitions. Many sports complexes, as well as residential and public buildings in the Universiade Village, were transferred to Tatarstan universities. All this gave a new impetus to the development of the higher education system in the region.

The intangible part of the Universiade heritage also includes the establishment of specialized organizational structures staffed by highly professional personnel with experience in preparing and conducting major public events, and the development of volunteering in Russia. Founded in 2009, the Directorate of the Universiade subsequently organized more than 120 international and all-Russian sports and other events, currently operating as ANO Directorate of Sports and Social Projects.

The Directorate implemented several significant projects, including the 45th World Professional Skills Championship according to *WorldSkills* standards, held in 2019 in Kazan. More than 1,300 contestants from 63 countries took part in the event, organized jointly with the international non-profit association *WorldSkills International*. The legacy of the world championship of blue-collar professions was the International Exhibition Centre “Kazan Expo” and a large amount of high-quality equipment and inventory that was subsequently transferred to vocational schools. Together with the international experience with competition within certain professions, all this prompted the transition to modern standards of personnel training in Tatarstan and the spread of best practices in this area in other Russian regions. A material and technical base and platforms for training specialists according to the standards of the non-profit association *WorldSkills International* were created in Tatarstan. By the end of 2021, over 6 thousand people had passed demonstration exams according to *WorldSkills* standards.

Involvement in international projects that have an educational focus and encourage the exchange of advanced management technologies helps to improve the quality of regional and corporate management, bringing the level of training to international standards and advancing human potential in general. These factors are essential for increasing the investment attractiveness of the regions [7, p. 128].

Constructed specifically for the *WorldSkills* championship, Kazan Expo is one of the largest international exhibition centres

in Russia; its opening was a milestone in the development of the regional infrastructure of exhibition and fair activities, since the platform was designed for hosting business events at the all-Russian and international level. The capacity of the complex is more than 10 thousand people.

Thus, the modern practice of holding major international competitions in Russian regions gives a new meaning to the traditional concept of the tangible and intangible heritage of events [8].

It should be noted that in an open economy, the competitiveness of the regional social and economic system can be boosted through recommendations and proposals of international organizations, as well as participation in their programmes and projects. Status of international organizations with which regions can collaborate in this area is very extensive, ranging from the UN to international industry associations and professional communities.

The Investment Development Agency of the Republic of Tatarstan actively cooperates with the UN and its intergovernmental organizations, such as UNCTAD, the United Nations Association of Russia (UNA-Russia), the UN Information Centre in Moscow (UNIC), etc. In February 2020, the presentation “Russian Regions: Republic of Tatarstan – Sustainable Development Goals” was made at the UN headquarters in New York. Through UNCTAD, in particular, specialists in the field of attracting investment are trained according to the latest methods. Experts from the UN organizations are invited to Tatarstan for the exchange of experience and the advanced professional training of personnel. In order to improve the work of public-private partnerships (PPP) in the region, a joint report on the potential for using PPP in the Republic of Tatarstan was prepared in cooperation with the UN Economic Commission for Europe.

As for the development and promotion of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN, active members of Tatarstan youth organizations interact through participation in educational initiatives and involvement in global reports on the

youth agenda and achievement of the SDGs. Kazan (Volga region) Federal University regularly holds the Kazan International Model UN with the participation of Russian and foreign students.

The Republic of Tatarstan has been cooperating with UNESCO for many years. Tatarstan is the only Russian region with three properties on the UNESCO World Heritage List: the Kazan Kremlin (2000), the Bolgar Historical and Archaeological Complex (2014) and the sites of the town-island of Sviyazhsk (2017). Mintimer Shaimiev, the first President and State Councilor of Tatarstan, has been named UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Intercultural Dialogue. There are UNESCO departments operating in the Republic, and joint youth and educational projects are implemented. The Republic regularly hosts major international events organized by UNESCO. Kazan is part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN). Tatarstan became one of the first Russian regions to sign a communiqué on cooperation with UNESCO (2003). UNESCO supported events dedicated to the 1000th anniversary of Kazan (2005) and 200th anniversary of Kazan University (2014). The fact that the contacts of the republic with UNESCO are rather diverse reaffirms the increasing role of Russian regions in the development of relations between our country and this particular international organization [9, p. 11].

Youth policy is becoming an important connecting link of international partnership. Multiple youth initiatives and projects in the field of entrepreneurship, science, volunteering, and public diplomacy are being implemented within the BRICS group. In October 2020, Kazan hosted the V Global Forum of Young Diplomats of the BRICS countries. In July 2015, the First BRICS Youth Summit was held in the capital of Tatarstan; the heads of the Ministries of Youth Affairs of the BRICS countries took part in the event. It should be noted that, according to many analysts, BRICS can become the main pole of the emerging multipolar world [10; 11].

Moreover, a representative office of the Global Shapers Community (GSC) of the World Economic Forum operates on the basis of the Academy of Youth Diplomacy of the Republic of Tatarstan, a public organization based in Kazan.

With the support of the Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum (ICYF), an international non-profit organization of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the Republic of Tatarstan regularly hosts joint events, such as the Kazan OIC Youth Entrepreneurship Forum, the International Youth Model of the OIC and the Forum of Young Diplomats of the OIC countries, supported by the Council of Young Diplomats of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Since 2012, the “Selet” Tatarstan Republic Youth Social Fund has been a membership organization of the ICYF. In 2022, the Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum chose Kazan as the youth capital of the countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. The fact that Sergey Lavrov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, participated in inauguration ceremony of Kazan as the youth capital of the OIC underscores the significance of this event for cooperation with Muslim states.

Tatarstan is also working to strengthen ties with foreign industry organizations.

Foreign economic relations. The Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Republic of Tatarstan cooperates with the Association of Turkish Machine Manufactures and the Business Advisory Council for Libya, as well as participates in the events organized by the Council for Interregional Cooperation in the Volga-Yangtze format.

For 10 years, the Tatarstan Investment Development Agency has been a member of the World Association of Investment Promotion Agencies (WAIPA), an international non-governmental organization established in 1995 by the UN Conference on Trade and Development. Representatives of Tatarstan take an active part in events under the auspices of WAIPA.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Food of the Republic of Tatarstan cooperates with the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC), working on the implementation of joint cooperation projects with partners from member states of the Eurasian Economic Union.

Healthcare. In October 2021, Kazan conducted exercises of international teams of rapid response to emergency situations of a sanitary and epidemiological nature. Co-sponsored by the World Health Organization (WHO), the event was attended by approximately 100 people from 11 countries of Europe and the CIS.

Healthcare organizations in Tatarstan are accredited according to international industry standards and conduct external quality assessments of medical laboratories under international programmes. With the support of global professional associations, Kazan holds international master classes, attended by employees of medical research and educational centres.

Culture. Tatarstan actively cooperates with the international Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA) under the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. In Tatarstan, joint exhibitions, seminars and conferences are held regularly, and the educational funds of universities are being replenished with art literature.

As part of collaboration with international theatrical associations and unions, in 2010, the Tatarstan Union of Theatre Workers started to hold the International Theatre Festival of Turkic Peoples “Nauruz” in Kazan. The Tatarstan Union of Composers has been organizing the international “Pearls of Tatar Music” concerts where leading foreign orchestras perform the music of Tatarstan composers. Kazan annually hosts major international theatre and music festivals. Together with foreign cinematographic organizations, the Tatarstan Union of Cinematographers has been holding the Kazan International Festival of Muslim Cinema (KIFMC) since 2005; it has become one of the hallmarks of the region.

International sports federations and organizations. Tatarstan prepares and holds international competitions in cooperation with more than 15 international sports federations.

Conclusion. Promising Areas of Cooperation

Lately, the system and structure of international relations has been under serious consideration. Russia successfully involves the potential of the regions in implementing the consistent policy towards creating a multipolar world. This is facilitated by the established system of international cooperation at the level of federal subjects and the extensive experience of coordinated work with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russia. The system is resilient to the negative impact of the U.S. sanctions policy against Russia, since the current formats of cooperation at the subnational level persist and continue to develop. Regions also actively contribute to the implementation of the key directions of Russian foreign policy.

Among all the forms of international cooperation of Russian regions, interaction with international organizations is of utmost importance; while federal subjects are authorized to engage with said organizations, this particular type of work is not sufficiently widespread and explored. A study of the experience of Tatarstan in this area reveals ample opportunities to boost economic and social development of territories through cooperation with international organizations. This demonstrates viability of this form of external relations, which additionally ensures that federal subjects are promoting national interests in the world.

Increased external pressure on Russia due to the situation in Ukraine makes it necessary to diversify and adjust the focus of international cooperation. We can see two promising directions of expansion of foreign relations for the region, based on the historical multilateral ties between Tatarstan and the East and West, as well as the established cooperation of the Republic with international organizations and integration structures. These

directions of foreign relations – namely, cooperation with the countries of the Islamic world and the Middle East and participation in Eurasian integration processes – are among Russia's current foreign policy priorities. In both areas, Tatarstan has laid a significant groundwork: the level of business, economic, social and cultural ties is high; there are foreign representative offices of the Republic; and contacts have been established with officials and the business community. Tatarstan promotes cooperation with Muslim countries at the level of international organizations, including the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and its structures. Extensive work is also carried out within the framework of the Strategic Vision Group "Russia – Islamic World". The Eurasian vector covers not only neighbouring countries, but also Turkey, China, and several other Asian countries with which Tatarstan has strong business relations. The Eurasian direction of cooperation is supported by many integration mechanisms created with the participation of Russian authorities. It should be noted that Kazan regularly hosts international events of the highest level, including the CIS, EAEU and other Eurasian structures. This adds momentum to the regional level of cooperation. In these vectors of cooperation, long-term work with industry and humanitarian associations and structures (including youth organizations) is quite promising.

It should also be noted that regions promote links between Russia and a number of international organizations, for example UNESCO, and help to establish new forms of cooperation, such as partnerships with international associations and structures at the local government level.

In conclusion, international relations at the level of local authorities, including cooperation and exchange of municipal practices within international organizations, are the least politicized, which is highly relevant at the present stage. Thus, cooperation with international organizations has become an important factor in strengthening foreign economic and humanitarian ties of regions in a number of priority directions of

Russian foreign policy. It remains a significant driver for regional development.

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BORIS KHEYFETS, VERONIKA CHERNOVA. A NEW VIEW OF RUSSIA'S ECONOMIC INTEGRATION STRATEGY WITH CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES IN MODERN GEOPOLITICAL REALITIES OF WORLD ECONOMY

Keywords: Central Asia; EAEU; economic integration; regional integration associations; economic development; cumulative integration; intra-regional integration; foreign policy; economic cooperation.

Boris Kheyfets,

DSc(Economics), Professor,
Chief Research Associate,
Institute of Economics, RAS,
e-mail: bah412@rambler.ru
ORCID: 0000-0002-6009-434X
Scopus Author ID: 57199177482

Veronika Chernova,

DSc(Economics), Senior Research Associate,
Institute of Economics, RAS,
e-mail: veronika_urievna@mail.ru
ORCID: 0000-0001-5951-9091;
Scopus Author ID: 57191925715

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Abstract. The article analyzes the current state of integration processes in Central Asia (CA). It demonstrates that Central Asian countries, i.e. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and

Uzbekistan are in the focus of interests of several major actors of world economy with opposing geopolitical and geo-economic interests. The goals and results of the presence in Central Asia of the U.S., China, the EU, Turkiye, and the Persian Gulf states are analyzed. Their strategies are based on the C5+1 scheme. The exception is China, which interacts with CA countries within the framework of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The article shows the specifics and new trends of each of the partnerships of CA countries with external players. Among the new trends, the intensification of integration processes between the CA states themselves is noted, which between 2018 and 2023 held 5 summits aimed at deepening their regional interaction. Special attention is paid to the problems and prospects of cooperation between Russia and the CA states, which are its long-standing foreign economic partners. The article substantiates the expediency for Russia under the conditions of tough interstate competition in Central Asia to actively use a strategy based on the principles of flexible accumulative integration. Its key feature is the use of a variety of flexible formats of interaction that most closely consider the specific conditions of cooperation and the specificities of the countries of the region. Cumulative integration does not imply the assumption by its participants of rigid obligations to open their markets, as it happens in most regional and transregional economic partnerships built on the principles of classical integration. It will require concentration of efforts on implementing joint projects and stimulation of initiatives both at the macro level ("integration from above") and at the corporate and regional levels ("integration from below").

Introduction

In the context of rapidly changing geopolitical and geo-economic conditions of modern development and intensifying external competition among the players, Central Asia (CA) is becoming an increasingly important region of world economy. At the same time, the consolidation of individual states of Central Asia strengthens. As Kazakh political scientist G. Abishev notes,

the Central Asian leaders realized that in this format the region's negotiating positions are stronger, and many problems cannot be solved single-handedly [Belenkaya, Konstantinov 2023].

For Russia, Central Asia is a region that plays a strategically important role in ensuring both internal and external economic security. CA, like all of Eurasia from economic and political points of view is a region difficult for integration, with different endowments of resources, with different levels of economic development, with conflicting goals and indifferences, low level of mutual trust. The situation is complicated by the growth of divergent interests of such global and regional economic actors such as China, the U.S., the EU, Turkiye. All this determines the need to find new ways in Russia's foreign economic policy in Central Asia. The article proposes one of these possible strategies – flexible cumulative integration.

Central Asia as an Arena of Rivalry between Major Powers

Central Asia has been an arena of rivalry between major powers since the second half of the 19th century. Then the Russian Empire and Great Britain were the main rivals for geopolitical and military influence in the region were. The stop to the great game between two major rivals was put by the October Revolution in Russia, however, after the collapse of the USSR in the 1990s, when Russia, due to its internal economic problems and the taken Euro-Atlantic course in foreign policy, abandoned its influence in the Central Asian countries, a vacuum of influence in the region was quickly filled with new actors, primarily the U.S., the EU, China. Central Asia again began to be considered as an important geopolitical periphery for both national security and for the Russian economy, in the early 2000s.

Today, the Central Asian countries – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are in the focus of interests of several large countries with often diverging

geopolitical and geo-economic interests. The Central Asian countries occupy a strategic location in the centre of Eurasia, have rich natural and labor resources (their population exceeds 77 million people) and are a dynamically developing consumer market. So, for 2001–2022 Regional GDP in real terms increased by an average of 6,2 per cent, reaching \$347 billion, and the volume of their external trade increased 7 times, amounting to almost \$190 billion in 2022 [Kulbatyrov, Haidar 2023]. The GDP (by PPP) per capita grew almost 4 times in 2001–2022 in Kazakhstan; 3,6 in Uzbekistan; 3,3 in Kyrgyzstan; 4,7 in Tajikistan, while the same indicator for the world economy increased 2.6 times [World Development Indicators 2023].

Interest in Central Asian countries on the part of the United States and the goals of their presence in the region were outlined in the American Strategy for Central Asia for 2019–2025. The U.S. openly declared the goals of their presence in Central Asia to be an opposition to the influence of Russia (and China) in the region, limiting the military-political presence of Russia and reducing the economic dependence of Central Asian countries on Russia, threatening secondary sanctions, on the one hand, and devoting significant financial means– on the other.

The main dialogue platform for the United States with Central Asian countries is “C5+1”, launched in 2015. At the end of February 2023, at the next summit of the foreign affairs ministers of the Central Asian countries with the U.S. Secretary of State E. Blinken Central Asian countries for terminating cooperation with Russia, first of all for refusing parallel imports, were promised \$25 million in addition to the \$25 million promised previously [News Central Asia 2022].

An equally significant goal of the U.S. presence in Central Asia is to weaken Chinese influence. At the end of 2022, the trade turnover between China and CA countries exceeded \$70 billion, having increased 40 per cent compared to 2021, and ranges from 10 per cent (for Tajikistan) to 65 per cent (for Turkmenistan) of

the total trade turnover, and the total investment volume is \$15 billion.

The EU also brings pressure on Central Asian countries to curb their cooperation with Russia. The eleventh package of EU sanctions provides imposing sanctions against countries and companies that facilitate Russia's circumvention of restrictive measures of Western countries. At the Second EU Summit in the "C5+1" format, which was held in June 2023, not only the theoretical state of affairs and prospects for political, trade, economic and cultural and humanitarian cooperation were discussed, but also dissatisfaction was expressed about the growth of trade flows, from EU countries to some Central Asian countries, primarily to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and from these countries to Russia. A significant increase in exports in 2022 (by 86 per cent) from European countries to Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan), as well as to Armenia and Georgia, after a sharp reduction in export volumes from the EU countries and the UK to Russia, is largely due to the import of sanctioned goods [Chupilkin 2023].

Central Asia is of great importance for Turkiye, which initiated the creation of the Organization of Turkic States, uniting Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkiye, and Uzbekistan (Turkmenistan and Hungary have observer status). The creation of such a union will strengthen Turkiye's position as a regional political and economic leader.

A new feature was the increased attention to Central Asia from the oil-rich Gulf countries. In July 2023, the first summit of five Central Asian countries and six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. At the summit, much attention was paid to deepening economic interaction between the two regions and a joint five-year action plan for the period 2023–2027 was adopted. It provides strengthening cooperation in the field of green energy, digital economy and investment, new technologies, as well as the

development of transport corridors connecting Central Asia and the GCC.

It is especially necessary to note the significantly increased role of China in Central Asia. Despite the fact that the shares of all Central Asian countries in the foreign trade turnover of Russia and China are relatively small, both countries attach great importance to the Central Asian countries in their foreign policy.

The interests of the PRC in Central Asia are primarily economic in nature and are focused on ensuring access to energy resources and minerals, building infrastructure and expanding trade and investment opportunities. The Central Asian countries, being an important link in the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), play an important role in creating the “New Silk Road” route. From a geopolitical point of view, China seeks to reduce the influence of large Western countries, primarily the United States, in the region, and to balance Russia’s influence on the Central Asian countries. At the same time, China is building its relations with the Central Asian countries on a bilateral basis, but does not exclude regional integration under its own initiative, as evidenced by its integration initiatives with the participation of all Central Asian countries, including through the construction of transport corridors to Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Africa [Defraigne 2020] and participation in the work of international associations. China's approach to integration with Central Asian countries differs from that of the West: it does not require improved human rights, economic liberalization, or the introduction of strict environmental restrictions. The peculiarity of the Chinese approach is manifested even in the terminology it uses: instead of the term “development assistance” used by Western countries, China uses the term “strategic partnership” [Tian 2018]. The key principle of China's “strategic partnership” is non-interference in internal affairs. Its assistance comes in packages that include aid, concessional loans, trade and investment deals, and often includes conditions such as “resource loans,” where loans are

repaid using natural resources [Tian 2018]. Many of these financial flows are not reflected in the reports of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Bank for International Settlements, or the World Bank. Not being a member of the Paris Club of creditor countries that exchange information on official lending, China does not publish any reports on official lending on the debtor side, which is important for the elites of Central Asian countries, who find the principle of non-intervention and opacity of assistance attractive conditions [Horn 2021, Melnikovova 2020].

Thus, China in Central Asia demonstrates a rather soft and broad approach to integration policy [Mattoo et al. 2020]. In fact, such a strategy is an example of consistent cumulative economic integration, which does not require participants to undertake strict obligations to open their markets, as happens in most regional and transregional economic partnerships built on the principles of classical integration. The strategy of cumulative integration makes it possible to involve in agreements such countries for whose national business a significant reduction in customs duties is unacceptable or there are other equally sensitive issues [Kheifets 2023a].

Intraregional Integration Processes in Central Asia

Despite their geographical proximity and common economic heritage from the Soviet era, the Central Asian countries have differences in their development strategies, which is reflected in the lack of coordination of their intraregional and foreign policies, weak intraregional integration and cooperation between the countries. This is evidenced by contradictions over the use of water resources, transit access to external markets, the lack of mutual assistance between countries during the energy crisis in the winter of 2022, the presence of unresolved border issues between Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and internal political instability. Insufficient intraregional integration

is due to the weak economic interdependence of the Central Asian countries. The share of intraregional trade in Central Asia in 2020 was only about 8.4 per cent, while, for example, in the EU countries, intra-union trade accounts for more than 60 per cent of trade turnover [Krapohl 2020] (Table 1).

Table 1

**Share of Mutual Trade in Total Trade Turnover
of Central Asian Countries in 2020, per cent**

	<i>Share of mutual trade in total trade turnover, per cent</i>	<i>Share of Russia in foreign trade turnover of Central Asian countries, per cent</i>	<i>Share of China in foreign trade turnover of Central Asian countries, per cent</i>
Kazakhstan	5,5	21,4	18,1
Uzbekistan	13,3	15,5	17,7
Kyrgyzstan	21,0	27,6	13,8
Tajikistan	28,3	21,3	10,4

Source: compiled based on data from: [Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan, National Statistics Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Agency for Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Trade statistics for international business development]

There are no Central Asian countries among the largest importers and exporters of Kazakhstan in 2022, while their presence in Uzbekistan's foreign trade turnover is quite significant (Table 2). The foreign trade of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan is less focused on the regional market due to the predominance of hydrocarbons in their exports, which are mainly supplied to non-CIS countries (European countries, China), and most of the imports also come from these countries.

China's trade turnover with Central Asian countries increased from \$41.9 billion to \$70.2 billion in 2022. Kazakhstan became the leader among them, accounting for \$31.1 billion in 2022. The EU's trade turnover almost doubled and amounted to

\$47 billion. Russia also increased its trade with the region, from \$35.7 billion to \$42 billion [Politics 2023].

Table 2

**Shares of the Largest Foreign Trade Partners
of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in 2022, per cent**

<i>Kazakhstan</i>				<i>Uzbekistan</i>			
<i>Export</i>		<i>Import</i>		<i>Export</i>		<i>Import</i>	
China	15,6	Russia	34,7	Russia	15,9	China	20,9
Italy	16,4	China	21,9	China	13	Russia	20,2
Russia	10,4	Germany	4,5	Turkiye	7,8	Kazakhstan	10,6
Netherlands	6,5	USA	3,8	Kazakhstan	7,1	South Korea	7,5
Turkiye	5,6	Turkiye	3,2	Kyrgyzstan	5,1	Turkiye	5,6
Others	45,5	Others	31,9	Others	51,1	Others	35,2

Source: compiled based on data from: [Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan]

In Russia's trade turnover, the share of Central Asia is about 5 per cent and is characterized by stable growth rates. Thus, in 2022, exports from Kazakhstan grew by 25 per cent, and in January-February 2023, growth was 32 per cent year-on-year, which is 60 per cent higher than in 2021, which is largely due to parallel imports entering Russia through neighboring countries [Salikhov 2023].

The economy of the Central Asian countries depends on the export of agricultural products, gas and oil to foreign markets. Trade with China, the EU countries and Russia is of much greater importance for the Central Asian economies than their intraregional trade, as well as the development of mutual cooperation.

Although some steps towards strengthening intraregional integration are being taken and have had some success [Vinokurov 2022, Vinokurov 2023], they are aimed at developing integration with other countries. The Central Asian countries are pursuing a multi-vector policy that involves diversifying the geographical structure of foreign economic relations and

reducing political risks. Thus, in 2023, the Central Asian countries, with the support of the German Agency for International Cooperation “Trade Promotion in Central Asia”, signed a document on the interaction of national trade promotion committees and launched the Central Asia Gateway trade information portal [Kulbatyrov, Haidar 2023]. By combining information from trade facilitation portals across all countries, the Trade Information Portal provides businesses with access to information on cross-border trade formalities within and beyond the region, thereby strengthening regional trade relations with foreign partners. Like many developing countries, the CA countries have poorly diversified economies that rely on the export of a narrow range of primary commodities and are dependent on investment and trade with more developed countries that have the capital and technology to invest and can provide significant amounts of development assistance. In addition, developed countries are major export markets for primary commodities and provide employment within their territories, which ensures large flows of remittances into national economies. These factors fundamentally distinguish regional integration of developing countries from regional integration of developed countries. While the benefits of European integration are generated within the region, through the effects of scale, specialization, and mutual exchange in a liberalized single market, the benefits of regional integration of CA countries can be generated by improving the region’s position vis-à-vis extra-regional actors [Krapohl 2020].

The cooperation of CA countries with the EAEU is largely determined by the development of their cooperation with Russia, which accounts for more than 87 per cent of the total GDP of the EAEU. The total GDP of CA countries is 6 times smaller than Russia's GDP. However, on a global scale, the share of the total GDP of the EAEU (less than 4 per cent) is not significant. This limits the ability of the EAEU to act as an economic magnet to counter the economic influence of neighboring China and the EU,

each of which represents a much larger market. A certain parallelism in the export specialization of Russia and the Central Asian countries (hydrocarbons, minerals, and agricultural products) also does not contribute to regional integration, since in the extractive sectors of the economy, regionalization of the production process is not a significant or even necessary step to achieve competitiveness. In addition to competition with strong international companies from third countries, Russian businesses faced unfair competition from local producers supported by national authorities. Therefore, before the start of the SMO and the strengthening of sanctions pressure on the Russian economy, Russian private businesses lacked significant incentives to develop integration, and in other Central Asian countries there are no companies that are large or international enough to become leaders and act as catalysts for regional integration.

Another obstacle to the development of integration with the Central Asian countries was the fact that now Russia, unlike in the Soviet era, has ceased to be a technological leader for them, as Germany and other Western EU members were for Eastern Europe, the United States for Latin America, and Japan for ASEAN. And the Central Asian countries, like Russia itself, continue to rely on Western or Chinese technologies in many areas. Although Russia has preserved industries and even segments of industry, as well as individual enterprises that are not at all lagging behind their main competitors and compete with them quite successfully, including in global markets [Bodrunov 2012], there is still a significant technological lag in dozens of sub-sectors of the Russian economy. An additional negative factor hindering the integration of Russia and the Central Asian countries is the behavior of national elites, who unquestioningly submit to foreign capital both politically and economically [Defraigne 2020].

To explain the inability of some countries to industrialize their national economy and emerge from the economic periphery, political economy theorists have developed the concept of

comprador capitalists [Latypov 2015], who are antagonists to the development of a high-tech national economy, strengthening the country's independence, defense capability and prestige. The post-Soviet states of Central Asia are no exception in this regard. Various studies show that the former Soviet republics are affected by this phenomenon to a greater extent than many developing countries. While developing countries such as China, Vietnam or South Korea are also characterized by high levels of corruption and nepotism, most of their business profits are reinvested in domestic industry [Ang 2020].

At the same time, Russia, as the largest economy in the EAEU, is the only country that can act as a “regional treasurer” and provide financial, military and other types of assistance to the Central Asian countries. This is evidenced by the activities of the Eurasian Development Bank (EDB), created to develop integration in the Eurasian space, Russia’s share in the share capital of which until 2023 was 65.9 per cent. In 2023, in order to minimize the risk of falling under sanctions, Russia’s share was reduced to 44.7 per cent and was redistributed in favor of other countries. According to the results of the redistribution of shares in the authorized capital, the share of Kazakhstan is about 37.3 per cent, Belarus – about 5.2, Armenia – about 4.3, Kyrgyzstan – about 4.3, Tajikistan – about 4.3 per cent [RBC 2023].

Search for a New Integration Strategy with Central Asian Countries

The radically changed conditions of Russia's economic development over the past two years have required significant changes in its foreign economic policy, including the search for new forms and directions of interaction between Russia and the Central Asian countries. The general outlines of such changes are outlined in the Russian foreign policy strategy approved on March 31, 2023 [Administration of the President of Russia 2023].

The basis of the new course of Russia's foreign policy is pragmatic cooperation, in accordance with the principles of sovereign equality and respect for each other's interests, respect for the sovereignty of countries in choosing development models.

One of the priority regions for the development of sustainable long-term good-neighborly relations is Eurasia, as a space of peace, stability, mutual trust, development and prosperity. In order to form a comprehensive, open, multilateral, equal security architecture and mutually beneficial cooperation in the region, Russia seeks to ensure pairing of the EAEU, including Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, with the Chinese BRI project. The same approach applies to interaction with other Central Asian states.

At the same time, as shown by modern world practice (IPP, Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, BRICS, SCO), in order to intensify the economic rapprochement of groups of interested countries, there is a move away from classical forms of economic integration to the use of a strategy of "cumulative integration", which does not set the main goal of maximum liberalization of mutual trade and investment. Such a strategy objectively slows down the integration process, but has a number of advantages. Cumulative integration is a compromise form of developing cooperation between countries, for the use of which there are currently a number of objective factors: the search for new allies and partners in the context of increasing fragmentation and polarization of the world economic space and increasing uncertainty in the further development of the world economic system, a sharp increase in competition between the largest players on the world stage and the aggravation of problems associated with the limitation of national sovereignty in existing integration associations; the formation of groups of countries interested in economic cooperation in the presence of strong differences in economic development and the definition of their development strategies [Kheifets 2023b]. An important effect of cumulative integration is the growth of trust between countries in

the course of implementing an increasing number of joint projects. At the same time, an important condition is the activation of business cooperation, or integration from below.

An important result is also the fact that the strategy of cumulative integration allows us to limit the risks of the expanding application of secondary sanctions against Russia's foreign partners, since it involves a selective choice of projects and conditions for cooperation.

In the Central Asian region, as noted above, there are other reasons that indicate the advisability of strengthening the priorities of cumulative integration for countries that are already members of other unions, even of the classical integration type – the EAEU and the CIS, where Russia also participates (Table 3).

Table 3

**Involvement of Central Asian Countries in Regional
and Interregional Organizations and Platforms
Where Russia Participates**

Organization Platform/	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Uzbekistan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan
	<i>Members / Observers</i>				
CIS	+	+		+	+
CSTO	+	+		+	
EAEU	+	+			
5+RF	+	+		+	+
SCO	+	+		+	
IPP	+	+		+	

Source: compiled by the authors

Such unions will not only not interfere with the application of the cumulative integration strategy, but will also contribute to its successful implementation. This is due to the flexible nature of this strategy, which does not use the strict requirements of classical forms of integration, which can even slow down the development of integration processes. In other words, cumulative

integration can complement classical integration and give it a new impetus.

The cumulative integration model allows for economic interaction to be established even if there are serious contradictions and conflicts between the countries using it. Moreover, it allows for finding common interests and bringing the parties' positions closer together in various areas.

An additional argument for Russia's choice of this strategy is that all projects of multilateral cooperation between Central Asia and other global players in the C5+ format are implemented according to the cumulative integration model.

The cumulative integration strategy makes it possible to adequately respond to modern geopolitical and economic challenges for the Russian economy. This is also evidenced by Russia's somewhat belated attempt to create its own C5+1, when its summit with Central Asian countries was held in Astana in October 2022. In particular, at this summit, such integration projects as the restoration of the regional unified energy system and the creation of new trans-Eurasian corridors were discussed.

Russia also proposed that Central Asian countries more actively join Russian import substitution programs and projects related to the development of advanced technologies. Such decisions are especially relevant not only due to the increased competition among global players, but also in connection with the growing economic and political consolidation of the Central Asian states themselves. In 2018, they held their first summit without the participation of Russia and other foreign countries, and over the next four years, three more such summits were held, which were called "Consultative Meetings of the Leaders of Central Asian Countries". At such a summit in Cholpon-Ata (Kyrgyzstan) in July 2022, the "Treaty on Good-Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation for the Development of Central Asia in the 21st Century" was adopted. On September 14, 2023, at the fifth summit of the Central Asian countries in Dushanbe, the readiness of the countries of the region to accelerate the

development of integration processes between them was confirmed. A number of joint documents were approved, including the Joint Statement of the Heads of State, which emphasizes that the primary task is to develop cooperation in the trade and economic sphere and create favorable conditions for trade and investment, the Agreement on Strengthening Land Transport Connectivity in Central Asia, and the Roadmap for Supporting Health and Well-Being in Central Asia for 2022–2025 [Briefing on the Results of... 2023].

In this regard, Russia faces a new task. To pay more attention to the urgent needs of the Central Asian countries and to stimulate its national businesses to participate in integration projects implemented by the states of this region, and not only to put forward its own large-scale investment initiatives, which often do not arouse interest in the small Central Asian states. A smart strategy of cumulative integration allows this to be done.

Conclusions

Russia has a major strategic goal of maintaining close ties and developing integration with the Central Asian countries, which are its long-standing foreign economic partners. Central Asia, like all of Eurasia, is a difficult region to integrate from an economic and political point of view, with varying levels of resources, different levels of economic development, conflicting goals and interests, discrepancies in their development strategies, and a low level of mutual trust. This is due to both isolation from many European partners and the existing unrealized opportunities in the region, as well as the accumulated positive experience of mutual cooperation in past periods. Many problems in Russia's relations with this region have become significantly worse due to Western sanctions and increased competition of global players. In this regard, it is necessary to develop a new strategy for interaction with the Central Asian countries, which in the economic sphere could be a model of cumulative integration.

The key feature of cumulative integration is the use of a variety of flexible interaction formats that most closely take into account the specific conditions of cooperation and the specifics of the countries in the region. Cumulative integration with the Central Asian countries can be implemented at two levels – the macro level of states (formal) and the micro level of enterprises (informal integration or integration “from below”). As a result of stimulating integration and providing various preferences at the macro level, a reorientation of part of national production and foreign trade flows (micro level) to the integrated market occurs. Thus, cumulative integration, like classical integration, will lead to the “creation of trade”, although this will be a slower process. At the same time, cumulative integration allows avoiding the negative consequences of “trade diversion” (switching trade flows from a more efficient partner from a third country to a partner receiving preferences within the framework of classical integration agreements). This is very important in the Central Asian region, which is saturated with integration-type associations, whose states pursue a multi-vector foreign economic policy and are members of various unions.

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KSENIA ATAMALI. AZERBAIJANIS OUTSIDE AZERBAIJAN (Part 2)

Keywords: Azerbaijan; diaspora; diaspora organizations; migration; Azerbaijani diaspora; Azerbaijanis in the CIS countries; Azerbaijanis in the U.S.; Azerbaijanis in Great Britain; Azerbaijanis in France; Azerbaijanis in Germany; Azerbaijanis in Europe; Azerbaijanis in Canada; Azerbaijanis in Georgia.

Ksenia Atamali,
Research Associate,
Center for Interdisciplinary Research,
INION RAN
e-mail: mrsxeniya@ya.ru

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Abstract. The article examines the life of Azerbaijanis outside Azerbaijan, the activity of Azerbaijani diasporas around the world, the activities of diaspora organizations, the history of migration and territorial distribution. Of the 50 million Azerbaijanis around the world, only one fifth of them lives in Azerbaijan itself. The article pays special attention to the Azerbaijani diasporas in Europe (especially those in Germany, Great Britain and France), the U.S., Canada, the CIS countries and Georgia. Information on numerous Azerbaijani organizations, communities and cultural centres operating abroad is also provided.

The first part of this article examined the historical background and major waves of migration of Azerbaijanis, and also reviewed the activities of diaspora organizations both at the regional and international levels. The three largest Azerbaijani diasporas in the world were also discussed: in Iran (32 million), Türkiye (over 3.3 million) and Russia (2 million). In total, more than 50 million Azerbaijanis currently live in 70 countries around the world, with less than 10 million in Azerbaijan itself. The second part of the article is going to focus on the diasporas in Europe, the U.S., the CIS countries and other states where a significant proportion of Azerbaijanis live.

Azerbaijanis in Georgia

There are an estimated half a million Azerbaijanis living in Georgia (233 thousand according to the 2014 Census) [1]; they are the second largest ethnic group in the country. They mainly live in the south, southeast, and central parts of the country, especially in the regions (*mkhare*) of Kvemo Kartli (224 thousand), Kakheti (40 thousand), Shida Kartli (5,5 thousand), and Mtskheta-

Mtianeti (2,3 thousand). There is also a historical Azerbaijani community in Tbilisi (15 thousand) [2].

Azerbaijanis first arrived in Georgia in the late 15th – early 17th centuries, when they began to establish settlements on the southern outskirts of the country [3]. Gradually, they spread throughout other areas. During the Russian Empire, Azerbaijanis were called “Tatars” here; later on, during the Soviet era, several thousand Azerbaijanis were forcibly deported. In the 1980s, tensions between Georgians and Azerbaijanis escalated, although an armed conflict never broke out. In Kvemo Kartli, Azerbaijani families were evicted from their homes, while Azerbaijani officials were removed from administrative posts; there also were a number of clashes. In the early 1990s, many Azerbaijanis emigrated, and Azerbaijani geographical names were replaced with Georgian ones [4].

As for diaspora organizations, the National Congress of Azerbaijanis in Georgia was founded in 2008, and the Azerbaijani Students’ Association of Georgia (GATA) was founded in 2009 [5]. Since 1922, the “Gürçistan” newspaper has been published in the Azerbaijani language, and there is also the State Azerbaijani Drama Theatre, founded in 1909 in Tbilisi. Azerbaijanis in Georgia profess both Shia and Sunni Islam, and speak the Borçalı dialect [6].

Azerbaijanis in Europe

Of all the countries in Europe, the largest number of ethnic Azerbaijanis live in Germany (280 thousand), followed by France (75 thousand), with Sweden in the third place (30 thousand), and the Netherlands in the fourth (20 thousand). In other European countries, their number does not exceed 10 thousand people.

It is worth noting that the Congress of European Azerbaijanis (CEA), which was established in Berlin in 2004, significantly improved the organization of diaspora associations around the world. More than 50 diaspora organizations from

28 countries are members of the CEA. The main objective of the Congress is to protect national and cultural values, as well as ensure political and legal interests of Azerbaijanis outside Azerbaijan. Among other things, the Congress is engaged in supporting and sponsoring various studies, research centres and other projects related to Azerbaijan. The organization cooperates with diaspora associations in the CIS countries and other regions [7].

We should also mention Azerbaijani societies and organizations in Sweden and the Netherlands, where there are several tens of thousands of citizens of Azerbaijani origin. The Swedish community mainly consists of Iranian Azerbaijanis, who immigrated between 1980 and 1985. In 2001, they founded the Azerbaijan-Sweden Committee. A year earlier, the Azerbaijan-Sweden Association was created, uniting 14 Azerbaijani communities.

Since 1993, the Azerbaijan Turkish Cultural Association has been operating in The Hague, which works to familiarize the general public with the culture of Azerbaijan. Also, since 2003, the Azerbaijan-Netherlands Society has been active and publishing the "Benelux" newspaper. Speaking about the Baltic countries, most Azerbaijanis migrated here due to Soviet economic ties. In 1988, Azerbaijani societies were founded in Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn [7]. In total, at the moment, less than 10 thousand Azerbaijanis live in all three republics [8].

Data on the number of Azerbaijanis living in **Germany** varies significantly. In 2019, the German ambassador to Azerbaijan mentioned 25 thousand people [9], while other sources put their number at 280-300 thousand [10]. One way or another, the German Azerbaijanis are concentrated in Berlin and arrived from Türkiye, Iran and Azerbaijan. In the 1920s, soon after the collapse of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic and the influx of Azerbaijani migrants, magazines such as "Iranshahr" (1921), "Istiqlal" (1932-1934) and "Qurtulush" (1934) were launched in Germany [11]. The next wave of migration occurred in the 1960s. In the early 1990s, Azerbaijanis also fled to Germany

following the beginning of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, an increase in the number of refugees in Azerbaijan and deteriorating economic situation in the country.

Most of the German Azerbaijanis work in the service sector and in the construction industry; however, there are also noticeable cultural figures, for example, Vugar Aslanov, a famous journalist and writer. In 2013, in Berlin, Azerbaijani journalist and former political prisoner Emin Millie founded an independent media organization Meydan.TV targeting the Azerbaijani community [12].

The Azerbaijani diaspora in Germany is considered to be one of the largest in Europe. Today in Germany there are more than 30 Azerbaijani organizations, including the Azerbaijan-German Academy (since 1986) and the Azerbaijan-German Society (since 1988); both established in Berlin. Large Azerbaijani societies exist in Berlin, Cologne, Stuttgart, Nuremberg and many other cities. They are promoting Azerbaijani culture, arranging courses in the Azerbaijani language, holding national holidays, as well as providing legal and financial assistance to migrants and helping with integration into German society. In 2014, in Frankfurt, the delegation of the State Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan held a meeting with the heads of the Azerbaijani diaspora organizations of Germany, discussing the life of German Azerbaijanis [13].

According to approximate estimates, the number of Azerbaijanis in **France** reaches 70-75 thousand people [10]. Azerbaijanis in France are mainly concentrated in Paris, Alsace, Bordeaux and Marseille. The first wave of immigration to France took place early in the 20th century. In 1919, the Azerbaijani intelligentsia formed the Franco-Caucasus Committee and published a number of bulletins and books about Azerbaijan in French. The second wave happened in the years after the Second World War, while the third wave came in the 1970-1980s. It consisted mainly of economic migrants and Iranian Azerbaijanis, fleeing the Islamic Revolution [14].

There are a number of diaspora organizations operating in France. In 1990, the Azerbaijan Cultural Centre was opened in Strasbourg, specializing in the organization of cultural events and national holidays. In 1999, the Society of Azerbaijani Students of France (SASF) was also created there, the purpose of which was not only to unite Azerbaijani graduates and students, but also to spread information about events such as Black January and the Khojaly massacre. In 2003, a group of Azerbaijani students founded the Azerbaijani-French Youth Association (AFYA), which works to promote intercultural relations between the two countries. In addition, the Azerbaijan Cultural Centre has been operating in Strasbourg since 2005, uniting several communities [7].

Many prominent politicians of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic received education in France and later lived there in exile: Chairman of the National Assembly Alimardan bey Topchubashov, Minister of Industry and Trade Mirza Asadullayev and Minister of Agriculture and Labor Akbar agha Sheykhulislamov. We should also mention Robert Hossein, a French actor of Azeri origin; Reza Deghati, a world famous photojournalist, who fled from the Iranian Revolution; and Adile Aliyeva, a French-Azerbaijani pianist, who in 2022 became the recipient of the Knight of the Legion of Honour, the highest French order of merit [15].

The Azerbaijani diaspora in **the UK** is rather small, numbering only 17 thousand people [8], who reside mostly in London. The diaspora consists of Azerbaijanis from Azerbaijan, as well as Iran, Turkiye, Armenia, Georgia, Central Asia and Russia. It should be noted that major migration of Azerbaijanis to the UK started in the middle of the 20th century [7].

British Azerbaijanis actively participate in the public life of the country. In 2006, the Azerbaijan House Culture and Friendship Centre was founded in London; also, in 2011, Leyla Aliyeva, the daughter of Ilham Aliyev, launched the English language version of the "Baku" magazine [16]. Some artists of Azerbaijani origin have achieved considerable popularity in the UK.

For example, Sami Yusuf, a British singer and composer with Iranian Azerbaijani roots successfully performs Islamic religious songs [17]. Among the athletes, there are Jennifer and Jessica Gadirova, the bronze medallists of the 2020 Olympic Games and promising artistic gymnasts representing Great Britain [18]. Although the British Azerbaijanis hold no significant government posts, they remain politically active [19]. In London, the Azerbaijani community pickets [20] and protests [21] against the “Armenian aggression”.

Azerbaijanis in the U.S. and Canada

The main wave of Azerbaijani immigration to the U.S. occurred in the 1940s and 1950s. Among them were also refugees who left for Iran and Turkiye after the fall of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1920, and now moved to the U.S. in search of better opportunities. They settled mainly in New York, as well as in northern New Jersey and Massachusetts, and later in Houston, Texas and San Francisco, California. It is worth noting that there is a large Iranian community near Los Angeles, mainly consisting of Iranian Azerbaijanis. Data on the number of Azerbaijanis in the U.S. varies, according to some estimates, their number reaches 450 thousand people (mostly emigrants from Iran) [8].

Today, there are over 30 diaspora organizations operating in the U.S. The first one – the Azerbaijani Society of America – was founded in 1957 in New Jersey and remains one of the most influential institutions of the Azerbaijani diaspora to this day [11]. Over the years, Azerbaijani houses, cultural centres and associations have been established in New York, Texas and California to help Azerbaijanis in America maintain ties with their homeland. It is worth mentioning the U.S. Azerbaijanis network, an influential organization founded in 2007, which is engaged in protecting the interests of American Azerbaijanis at all levels. It also unites and coordinates the activities of Turkic

diaspora organizations, societies and associations [22]. As for the media, English-language magazines about Azerbaijan are published in New York, Washington and California. In 2004, the pan-Turkic television channel GünAz.TV, broadcasting in Azerbaijani, was launched in Chicago; the channel also runs a news website [23].

Politically, American Azerbaijanis became active in the late 1990s, speaking out in defence of interests of Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The activities of the diaspora even caught the attention of the U.S. Congress [24].

According to the 2021 Census, less than 10 thousand Canadians claimed Azerbaijani origin [25]. However, other estimates suggest that the number of Azerbaijanis in the country may reach 170,000 [8] (of which 50,000–60,000 are Iranian Azerbaijanis). According to data provided by the diaspora, the majority are Iranian Azerbaijanis and reside in Ontario. The Azerbaijani diaspora can be divided into two parts: refugees from Iran after the 1979 Revolution and economic migrants from Azerbaijan after the country gained independence in 1991 [26].

There are a number of Azerbaijani public organizations in Canada that were founded in the 2000s and 2010s. They are mainly involved in introducing people to Azerbaijani culture and organizing national holidays and events; they are also engaged in charity and provide assistance to migrants. We should also mention the Network of Azerbaijani Canadians (founded in Toronto in 2020), a relatively new but influential politically oriented organization in Canada [27]. Moreover, Azerbaijani Canadians regularly hold pickets and protests against Armenian provocations [28].

Azerbaijanis in Other Countries

There are about 90,000 Azerbaijanis (0,5 percent of the total population) living in **Kazakhstan**, primarily in the southern regions of the country (a third live in the Turkestan Region), as

well as in large cities such as Almaty, Astana, and Aktau. Azerbaijanis voluntarily resettled here in the early 20th century, but later they were also deported here from Georgia and Armenia; in the 1950s–1980s, they arrived to work in the oil industry. The Azerbaijani diaspora is one of the fastest growing diasporas in the country. Most of them are Shi'ites, but there are also a small number of Sunnis and Christians [29].

As for diaspora organizations, since 1992 the Turan Azerbaijani Cultural Society has been operating in Almaty; its purpose is to develop interethnic relations in Kazakhstan and promote Azerbaijanis in the public and cultural life of the country. Soon other ACCs were established in many regions. In 2000, the Turan Society was transformed into the Turan Congress, which has been publishing the “Vatan” newspaper since 2007.

Azerbaijanis are the 10th largest ethnic group in **Kyrgyzstan** (17,2 thousand as of 2009) and make up 0,3 percent of the country's total population [30]. Unlike the Azerbaijani diaspora in Kazakhstan, virtually the entire diaspora in Kyrgyzstan consists of descendants of Azerbaijanis deported from Transcaucasia in the 1940s. Most Azerbaijanis live in rural areas, primarily in the Chüy Region (10 thousand), although the percentage of urban residents is gradually increasing. The diaspora is growing mainly through natural increase [31]. In 1992, the Azeri organization was established, which is engaged in protecting the rights of Azerbaijanis in Kyrgyzstan, participating in the country's public life, and maintaining ties with their historical homeland. The Kyrgyz National Television and Radio Broadcasting Company has the Azeri department [7].

Today, over 40 thousand Azerbaijanis live in **Uzbekistan**. The first Azerbaijanis arrived here in the 16th century, and then actively relocated here at the beginning of the 20th century; some Azerbaijanis were also deported here in the 1940s during Stalin's repressions. In addition, Azerbaijanis helped to rebuild Tashkent after it was destroyed by an earthquake in the 1960s. The

diaspora in Uzbekistan is remarkably close-knit; there are seven Azerbaijani cultural and national centres in the country [32]. The Association of Azerbaijan Cultural Centres was established in 2003; in Tashkent, there are also the Brotherhood Azerbaijan Culture Centre and the Azerbaijan House, where a museum named after Heydar Aliyev is open to public [7].

There are about 54,000 Azerbaijanis in **Turkmenistan** [33]. They are concentrated mainly in Türkmenbaşy, Balkanabat and Ashgabat, where there are entire Azerbaijani districts. With the collapse of the USSR, Azerbaijani-Turkmen relations soured, and coupled with the difficult economic situation this led to a mass outflow of Azerbaijanis from the country. The situation was further worsened by the policy of Turkmenization, due to which many Azerbaijanis and representatives of other ethnic minorities were dismissed from their jobs. We should also mention the assassination attempt on the President of Turkmenistan in November 2002, which was blamed on Azerbaijani citizens. After the incident, Azerbaijanis were deported from the country en masse [34]. Over time, relations between the two countries improved [35], and holding Azerbaijani cultural events is now allowed in Turkmenistan [36].

After the start of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, almost all Azerbaijanis (85 thousand as of 1989) left the territory of **Armenia**. As of 2001, only 29 Azerbaijanis were registered in the country [37], now their number may be as high as several hundred [38]. They live mainly in rural areas in mixed families; most have changed their names to avoid discrimination [39].

One of the largest Azerbaijani diasporas is located in **Ukraine**. According to the 2001 Census, 42,2 thousand Azerbaijanis were registered in the country; according to other estimates, their number may reach 280 thousand. [8] They are scattered throughout various regions, concentrating in large cities. Since 1999, the Ukrainian Congress of Azerbaijan has been operating in the country, which protects the rights of Azerbaijanis and works to preserve national and cultural traditions. There are

branches of the Congress in many regions; the “Voice of Azerbaijan” newspaper is being published in Kyiv [7].

The Azerbaijani diaspora in **China** is about 30 thousand people. Close trade and economic relations between China and Azerbaijan, as well as the importance of the latter for the Belt and Road Initiative, contribute to the growth of the Azerbaijani diaspora. We should also mention the high mutual interest between the two countries [40], not only economic, but also cultural. In addition, student exchange programs are encouraging migration.

There are about 80,000 Azerbaijani Jews living in **Israel**. Most of them emigrated here from Azerbaijan and Dagestan in the 1990s. [41] Friendly and economic ties (especially in the oil sector) between Azerbaijan and Israel have a positive effect on the dynamics of repatriation to Israel. There are large Azerbaijani communities in Tel Aviv and the suburbs of Haifa; there are also the Israel–Azerbaijan International Association (Aziz) [42] and the Azerbaijan House, which organizes national events and protests against Armenian aggression [43].

Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be noted once again that only one fifth of Azerbaijanis live in Azerbaijan, while around 40 million ethnic Azerbaijanis live outside of it. The largest diaspora is in Iran, reaching 30–32 million. However, statistical data for Iran and most other countries vary greatly, so it is impossible to accurately estimate the number of Azerbaijanis settled around the world.

There are a large number of regional and international diaspora organizations operating worldwide, some of which have great influence in the countries where they are located. The organizations provide financial, legal and social assistance to migrants; preserve national culture, traditions and community in a foreign country; promote Azerbaijani culture and Azerbaijan's

interests abroad; strengthen the position of members of diaspora in state structures; hold national holidays, events, festivals, etc. Many Azerbaijani cultural centres, associations and public organizations in different cities and even countries are united in alliances, federations or committees for better management. Congresses and conventions of diaspora organizations are held in different countries, where delegates exchange experiences and discuss the problems of Azerbaijanis around the world.

Thus, Azerbaijanis are never alienated from their historical homeland regardless of their place of residence, remaining a close-knit community even abroad.

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ISLAM IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES

VLADIMIR AVATKOV, DANIL KLIMENKO. TURKEY-EU
ENERGY COOPERATION IN THE CONTEXT OF GEOPOLITICAL
CHALLENGES OF THE 21ST CENTURY

*Keywords: Turkiye; EU; political
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pipelines; LNG.*

Vladimir Avatkov,
DSc(Political Sciences),
Head of the Department of the Middle
and Post-Soviet East,
INION RAN;
e-mail: v.avatkov@gmail.com

Danil Klimenko,
Junior Research Associate,
ANO "Centre for Oriental Studies
and Intercultural Communications";
e-mail: klimenkodaniel@gmail.com

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the evolution of Turkish-European relations in the context of energy cooperation in the first quarter of the 21st century. It explores the strategic priorities set by

Turkiye and the European Union in the development of their energy policies and the priorities for ensuring energy security. Particular attention is paid to the high degree of interdependence of both parties on external supplies of liquefied natural gas, which becomes a pivotal point of contact and collaboration. A comparative analysis of the energy policies of the EU and Türkiye is conducted, common features and differences in their priorities and strategies are highlighted. The key factors contributing to the convergence and intertwining of the energy interests of Türkiye and the EU are identified. Türkiye's political and economic rapprochement with Russia is shown as well as the influence of this factor on the relationships with the EU. Geopolitical priorities of Türkiye, such as the "Turkish Stream" and the "Blue Stream" and their role in the country's energy strategy are discussed. The article conducts an analysis of key joint energy projects undertaken by Türkiye and the EU in the 21st century, including a study of mutually beneficial aspirations, as well as factors that may hinder their successful implementation. Much attention is paid to the political confrontation and differences in views on energy issues between Türkiye and the EU, especially in the context of changing geopolitical dynamics in recent years, which impede the productive development of cooperation. Türkiye's potential role as a transit hub for energy supplies to Europe, especially from Asia and the Middle East, is shown. In conclusion, possible options and prospects for the development of Turkish-European energy cooperation are presented, taking into account Türkiye's role as an important energy hub for Europe. It is stated that in order to understand the current evolution and predict the future of energy cooperation between Türkiye and the EU in the context of changing global energy map, it is important to take into account all of the above aspects.

During the past two decades, Türkiye and the European Union have considered energy as a key area of mutual strategic interest for cooperation. Moreover, until the end of the 2010s, when a political gridlock emerged between the two sides regarding Türkiye's European integration aspirations, Ankara

and Brussels contemplated energy not only an area of political rapprochement, but also a fundamental platform for strengthening bilateral dialogue.

Energy security, specifically the diversification of gas supplies, is one of the main areas of bilateral cooperation between Türkiye and the EU. Since 2003, Türkiye has become the central core of the EU's most ambitious foreign energy policy initiative, the Southern Gas Corridor* (the project provides for the transportation of natural gas at a distance of 3500 km, from Azerbaijan through Georgia, Türkiye and Greece to Italy; in addition, the Southern Gas Corridor is associated with two other major pipeline initiatives launched to connect the Caspian region with Europe - the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) and the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (Trans Adriatic Pipeline, TAP) [What is Southern..., 2023]). At the same time, Ankara has repeatedly stressed that the contribution to the energy security of Europe is one of the priorities of its own national energy strategy.

Recently, in view of the strong interest of both sides in energy cooperation, the dialogue between Türkiye and the EU touches upon a wide range of topical issues, going beyond the discussion of exclusively supply security issues. This is due to the convergence and integration of electricity and gas markets, the requirements for their adaptation to the goals of the "green transition" and the tasks set in the EU for decarbonization, as well as the degradation of Russian-European energy cooperation and the subsequent EU efforts to find new suppliers of energy resources that can fill the vacuum formed after the rupture of mutually beneficial relations with Russia in early 2022.

* A pipeline network initiative launched by the European Commission aimed at improving the safety and diversity of EU energy supply by delivering natural gas to Europe from the Caspian and Middle East regions.

EU and Türkiye Energy Development Priorities

The difference in energy opportunities (due to various available energy sources, models of their diversification and demand for them) is a key reason that the process of convergence of the energy policy of Türkiye and the EU has not been completed yet.

At the end of the global financial and economic crisis of 2008–2009, the active recovery of the EU economy had a definite impact on the increase in demand for energy resources. Although at first the combination of effects of the economic crisis and the “green” decarbonization policy being promoted in the European Union led to a reduction in energy consumption in the EU (in 2014, energy consumption in the European Union was still at the level observed until the 1990s [Gross inland..., 2017]), by 2016 the level of energy consumption in Europe recovered. Nevertheless, according to forecasts made by the European Commission in 2016, by 2040 the demand for energy within the European Union should begin to decline again [EU reference..., 2016].

Since 2015, the European Commission began to promote the strategy of a “green” energy transition, within the framework of which the EU energy system, dependent on external supplies and based on traditional energy sources and fossil fuels, should be transformed into a more low-carbon, flexible and self-sustaining system [Making the energy..., 2017]. The new EU approach takes into account several complementary and interrelated factors: energy security (in this context, relations with Türkiye can play a vital role); market integration; energy efficiency; decarbonization; innovation and competitiveness [Communication..., 2015]. This approach forms the “new rules” of foreign policy and implies a systemic adaptation of the EU to the new conditions. According to A. Kadomtsev, in these conditions, an important priority for the EU states is “a significant reduction in fossil fuel imports from certain areas” (“low level of strategy” connected to interaction with individual energy imports) with an

output of 25–40 per cent of energy imports by 2030 (“high level of strategy” associated with a cumulative decrease in the consumption of traditional energy resources) [Kadomtsev, 2021]

The European Green Deal initiative, launched in 2019, is aimed at far-reaching reforms in the European socio-economic system, primarily its energy sector, so that by 2050 Europe can become a “carbon-neutral economy” [Communication..., 2019]. The necessary steps to achieve this goal include lowering the emission limit, increasing annual emission reduction rates, accelerating the transition to zero emissions in transport, increasing the share of renewable energy production to 40 per cent by 2030, reducing the average level of emissions by 55 per cent by 2030 and by 100 per cent by 2035, amending the taxation laws of energy products.

“The Ukrainian crisis” and the beginning of the special military operation of the Russian Federation in 2022, as well as the development in the European space of conceptual and practical approaches to the possible limitation of cooperation with Russia in the energy sector, have become key factors that determine the maximum reduction in the EU’s dependence on the supply of Russian energy resources. However, experts note that the implementation of EU plans to weaken dependence on the traditional energy resources supply from countries such as Russia may lead to an increase in EU dependence on the countries of the Middle East and Western Asia (in particular Turkiye) and the emergence of new threats in the field of energy security, which will be difficult to prevent even if supplies are diversified (since diversification may not lead to a real decrease in dependence, but simply to a redistribution of the spheres of influence of importers in European markets) [Mohseni-Cheraghlo, 2022].

Thus, at the moment, the EU has focused on the energy markets liberalization for its member states and their full integration into a single European energy market. The implementation of this program is a prerequisite for ensuring energy security and independence of the European Union and, in

any case, occupies an important place in the pan-European energy agenda.

As for Türkiye, major changes have taken place in its energy policy over the past two decades. Since the 1990s, Ankara's energy strategy has included, first of all, ensuring its own energy security and supporting various projects for the construction of pipelines crossing its territory, with a view to become a key player on the regional energy stage. Türkiye's economic growth by the end of the 2000s (in 2000–2014, the country was one of the fastest growing world economies with an average annual growth rate of about 5 per cent) stimulated energy demand: electricity consumption in Türkiye from 2000 to 2020 increased by almost 90 per cent, and gas demand increased from 22 billion m³ to 48 billion m³ per year [Ergur, 2022]. According to the forecasts of Turkish experts, despite the weakening of macroeconomic trends after the COVID-19 pandemic, in the future, the demand for energy resources in the country will grow rapidly: the reason for this is not only the growth of the Turkish economy, but also the increasing of living standards of citizens. It is expected that Türkiye's dependence on external supplies of carbohydrates (in recent years, their imports already account for about 90 per cent of total domestic oil demand and almost 100 per cent of domestic gas demand) will continue and will only increase [Şengül, 2019].

Given the country's strong dependence on external energy exports, the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources of Türkiye in the country's Strategic Energy Development Plan for the period 2015–2019 noted that it is necessary to focus on the development of energy security policies and diversification of supplies at the domestic, regional and international levels [Strategic plan..., 2015]. To achieve this goal, Türkiye is determined to act in two directions. First, it focuses on the deployment of nuclear power plants and the revival of electricity production based on traditional resources (primarily coal, which, as indicated in the Turkish Energy Strategy, will help meet the

growing demand for electricity and reduce natural gas consumption [Turkey presents..., 2017]). Secondly, Türkiye has developed a regional integration plan linked to the transit of hydrocarbons. In the oil sector, such a plan has already been successfully implemented due to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline (2006), as well as the Khurmali-Dahuk-Faish Khabur regional government pipeline (2013). The gas sector focuses on natural gas supplies via the Trans-Anatolian gas pipeline (TANAP, launched in 2018) from Azerbaijan to the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean.

Among other issues, in order to ensure the supply of energy resources, Türkiye seeks to develop its own oil and gas fields. One example is the recent discovery of a new gas field in the Black Sea for 58 billion m³ [President of Turkey..., 2022]. Other ways to ensure energy independence are to increase domestic energy production through renewable resources, nuclear power, and processing of brown coal [Zachmann, Tagliapietra, 2017].

The current program on the national policy of Türkiye in the field of energy and mining, presented in 2017, includes three main strategies: nationalization; enhance of power supply safety; ensuring a predictable energy market [National energy..., 2017]. Thus, Türkiye's energy policy is aimed primarily at reducing the country's dependence on imported energy resources [Turkey 2021 energy..., 2021]. This is also stated in the Strategic Plan of the Turkish Ministry of Energy for the period 2019–2023, which particularly emphasizes the need to ensure the safety of energy supply by increasing local energy production and diversifying its sources [2019-2023 Stratejik..., 2019]

It should be noted that renewable energy sources (RES) and other domestic energy sources are increasingly mentioned in government reports and political speeches by Turkish officials as the main priority of the country's energy policy in the modern period. Nevertheless, although Türkiye ratified the Paris climate agreement in October 2021 and set an aim to achieve zero emissions by 2053 [Turkey's new..., 2022], about 85 per cent of the

country's total energy consumption still falls upon fossil fuels [OECD environmental..., 2019]. In addition, Türkiye's energy strategy, in principle, does not provide for a gradual rejection of coal. In turn, Türkiye does not have a clear strategy for decarbonization of its energy and economy. Traditional energy sources are no less important for it than renewable energy sources, and in this case the political choice of the government is quite obvious: first of all, the country's energy policy should contribute to ensuring its energy security, taking into account maintaining a balance of competitiveness and costs.

Türkiye-EU Energy Tandem: Internal and External Factors

As noted above, over the past two decades, the key area of the bilateral cooperation between Türkiye and the EU in the field of energy has been ensuring security of supply, especially diversification of gas sources; both sides needed access to new reliable sources of gas resources and the opening of stable transit routes.

The growing challenges to maintaining EU energy security have increased Türkiye's value as a kind of "energy bridge" between East and West. In this context, the launch of the European pipeline initiative "Southern Gas Corridor" in 2003 to transport natural gas from the Caspian region to Europe, bypassing the territory of Russia, strengthened EU energy cooperation with Türkiye, giving Ankara a central role in the European energy diversification strategy*. Further economic growth in Türkiye, as mentioned above, led to an increase in domestic demand for energy, which forced it to increase LNG

* The key role of Türkiye as a transit country was first noted during the implementation of the 1994 international agreement on the joint development of the Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli oil fields in the Azerbaijani sector of the Caspian Sea. Transit through Turkish territory opened a safe and profitable path for Azerbaijani oil to international markets, bypassing the congested Bosphorus Strait.

rates from abroad – especially from Russia, which over time has become the main supplier of energy for the Turkish market [Kudryashova, 2010] (for example, in 2021 Russia supplied about 27 billion m³ of gas to Türkiye, i.e. almost 45 per cent of the country's total imports [Solovyov, 2023]; in 2022, supplies fell to 21,5 billion m³ [Turkey in 2022..., 2023]).

The strengthening of energy ties between the Russian Federation and Türkiye caused serious concern in Brussels, especially given the degradation of the political dialogue between the Russian Federation and the EU with the beginning of the SMO. Concern that Russia could use energy resources as a “weapon threatening Europe” [Donmez, 2022] prompted the EU (back in 2014, at the very beginning of the deterioration of relations) to develop its first Energy Security Strategy, launching the initiative to form its own Energy Union. A special place in this strategy was given to strengthening ties with Türkiye in order to “limit Moscow's energy pressure” on EU member states, especially on the states of Central and Eastern Europe [Communication..., 2014].

Türkiye's strategy for cooperation with the EU, especially in the field of energy, the key strategic element of which is the Southern Gas Corridor, has also undergone certain changes. If ten years ago the country's leadership tried to present Türkiye as a bridge between the continents, as an absolute strategic partner of the “collective” West, today Ankara is aspiring to achieve strategic autonomy, which requires ensuring economic solvency and energy self-sufficiency. In the 2010s, Turkish politicians often noted Türkiye's irreplaceable role for Europe's energy security, stressing that this state of affairs strengthens the country's position in the EU accession process: “the prospect of membership and EU accession negotiations were the driving force for the implementation of joint projects between Türkiye and the EU that increase security of supplies” [Koranyi, Sartori, 2013].

Recent and gradual freezing of negotiations, as well as the uncertain status of Türkiye in the accession process, along with

political tensions and complicated relations between Ankara and Brussels, prevent the deepening of energy relations between the two parties. The high-level energy dialogue between Türkiye and the EU, an important platform for deepening energy cooperation, launched in March 2015 [Turkey-EU..., 2015], was blocked due to political differences after the suspension of negotiations on Türkiye's accession to the European Union in 2018 [Scazzieri, 2021].

Although the official framework and institutional cooperation initiatives still exist, and Türkiye's role as a key transit country is not questioned, the new power balance between regional players has effectively changed the direction of further development of the Southern Gas Corridor. The project has been repeatedly revised for political, geographical, industrial and commercial reasons, and its current structure is very different from that originally assumed.

Initially, it was planned that the Southern Gas Corridor would ensure the integration of different pipeline systems through which LNG would be transported from various sources, and not from one monopoly supplier. Iraq, Iran, Azerbaijan, and potentially the states of the Middle East and North Africa were considered as suppliers. In the initial version proposed by the European Commission, the main pipeline providing the Southern Gas Corridor was to be the Nabucco gas pipeline with a length of 3825 km, intended for the annual delivery of 30 billion m³ of LNG through Türkiye to Southeast and Central Europe [Die Gas-Pipeline..., 2009]. However, due to insufficient demand for LNG in the target markets of Central Europe, the Nabucco project was not implemented.

Türkiye played a major role in abandoning the Nabucco project, proposing an alternative option - the launch of the Trans-Anatolian Gas Pipeline (TANAP) to transport gas from the Caspian fields of Azerbaijan to the Turkish-European border. A project worth \$6.5 billion and an initial capacity of 16 billion m³ per year was officially launched at the end of 2019. A gas pipeline with a total length of 1850 km passes through 20 Turkish

provinces, and the Turkish company BOTAŞ Petroleum Pipeline Corporation, which owns 30 per cent of the shares, became one of the key participants in the project [Cevrioğlu, 2023]. According to the announced plans, by the end of 2023 the TANAP capacity will be increased to 24 billion m³ per year, and by 2026 – to 31 billion m³ per year [TANAP transports..., 2022].

As a replacement for Nabucco, the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) is considered with a length of 878 km and an initial capacity of 10 billion m³ per year for transporting Azerbaijani gas from the Turkish-Greek border to Italy through Greece and Albania. Due to two additional compressor stations, it can double its throughput capacity to 20 billion m³. The peculiarity of the pipeline is that it has the option of physical gas reverse and, if necessary, will be able to supply gas from Italy backwards.

Ankara's greater attention to Caspian hydrocarbons is primarily due to the fact that Türkiye is not giving up plans to expand its presence in the Caspian. Türkiye's participation in the Trans-Anatolian and Trans-Adriatic pipelines implementation allows it to "count on becoming the most important energy hub at the intersection between the Caspian region, the Middle East and Europe" [Kim, Blank, 2015].

Thus, with the bringing into service of the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline, the Southern Gas Corridor project received its final implementation. At the same time, the EU, acting in compliance with the policy of diversifying hydrocarbon supply routes, gained access to Caspian energy resources, and Türkiye had the opportunity to control LNG supplies to European countries.

Old Problems and New Opportunities of Turkish-European Energy Cooperation

So, relations between Türkiye and the EU have recently undergone significant changes that impede the deepening of cooperation between the parties in the field of energy. Although Türkiye has always stated its commitment to cooperation with

the EU within the framework of the Southern Gas Corridor, it is also developing political and economic relations with Russia. Examples of Türkiye's new geopolitical priorities in the energy sector are the Russian-Turkish gas pipeline – the Turkish Stream which is considered the main competitor of the Southern Gas Corridor, as well as the Blue Stream gas pipeline. Acting in this context and taking into account the opportunity to assume the role of mediator in the dialogue between Europe and Russia, Türkiye aims to become an energy hub through which Russian energy resources could enter the European market.

However, there are a lot of technical issues that make the implementation of such a strategy quite problematic. In particular, Türkiye is unlikely to be able to increase imports of Russian LNG significantly. The capacity of the Blue Stream is only 16 billion m³ of LNG per year, and almost all of this volume is used to cover the domestic needs of Türkiye [Temizer, 2018].

Turkish Stream has a total capacity of 31,5 billion m³, its first line is for LNG supplies to domestic consumers in Türkiye, and only the second line is intended for transporting Russian gas further to Europe through the territory of Bulgaria [Tagiyeva, 2022]. But these capacities will not be able to replace even at a minimum more than 110 billion m³ of gas arteries laid between the Russian Federation and Europe, such as Nord Stream and the unrealized Nord Stream-2. In addition, even if the capacities of two Russian-Turkish gas pipelines are summed up, then, most likely, they will be able to provide only a small market for the countries of Southern Europe – Greece, North Macedonia, Serbia, as well as Hungary – while it will be economically and logistically inappropriate to deliver resources to the main European consumers of Russian gas (such as Germany) through these pipelines.

As for the hypothetical construction of new pipelines in the Black Sea, which is currently considered a war zone, this will require ensuring safety and significant investments, as well as the introduction of advanced technologies for deep-sea marine

construction, and all participants in such construction may become potential targets for new sanctions from the EU [Gaber, 2022].

Currently, when the EU is actively looking for new suppliers of energy resources from Asia and the Middle East to replace the supply of Russian LNG, Türkiye's geographical position – between Europe and such gas-rich countries as Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Iran and Iraq – gives it significant advantages, therefore, it is quite expectedly that the EU's efforts to find alternatives to Russian gas increase Türkiye's attractiveness as a transit hub for transporting energy to Europe.

Of course, Ankara's political leadership will want to use this opportunity to make Türkiye a key transit country for European markets. For example, after the Extraordinary Summit of NATO Heads of State and Government on March 4, 2022, Turkish President R. Erdogan noted that the geopolitical situation and the energy crisis in Europe “will open new doors for Türkiye in the field of energy” [Cumhurbaşkanı..., 2023].

At the moment, Türkiye and the EU are exploring the possibilities of connecting Iranian, Turkmen and Iraqi-Kurdish gas to the Southern Gas Corridor (through the Trans-Anatolian and Trans-Adriatic routes), but the construction of new pipelines may become a decisive contribution to strengthening energy cooperation between the parties.

So far, the only “non-Russian” gas reaching the European continent through the territory of Türkiye is Azerbaijani gas. Europe's need for Russian LNG is still extremely high. The share of Azerbaijani gas entering Europe through the two branches of the Southern Gas Corridor, connecting Azerbaijan with Italy through Türkiye, accounts for only 2,5 per cent of gas consumption in the EU. However, South Gas Corridor can still be considered as an important element of diversification of energy sources in the domestic markets of the EU countries [Muradov, 2022].

Azerbaijan plans to increase the export of its gas to the EU by at least 2 billion m³ in the near future [Can the EU..., 2022].

However, according to Deputy Energy Minister of Türkiye A. Bayraktar, it is possible to increase significantly the capacity of the Southern Gas Corridor only if the gas supply system is modernized and new compressors are added [Tavsan, 2022]. Accordingly, in order to increase gas exports to Europe, Azerbaijan will have to develop and launch new production projects, which is hardly possible in the short term.

Another hypothetical option to strengthen Türkiye's transit role as an EU energy hub is the transportation of LNG from Turkmenistan through Iran or the Caspian Sea through Azerbaijan. In May 2022, specialists from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) made an exploratory trip to Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Georgia to study the possibilities of increasing trade along the Trans-Caspian route as an alternative route for transporting resources from Central Asia to Europe [USAID explores..., 2022]. The trans-Caspian international transport route, known as the "Middle Corridor," is a rail freight and ferry system connecting China with Europe. It is built in China, passes through Kazakhstan, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey and, depending on the destination, reaches South or Central Europe. The United States is considering the possibility of creating a regional centre "Middle Corridor" in Tbilisi with its International Development Finance Corporation [Boltuc, 2022].

For Europe, which has long been trying to access Turkmen gas, the implementation of the proposed Trans-Caspian gas pipeline project is especially important. Previous attempts to lay pipelines across the Caspian Sea failed, mainly due to disagreements between the five Caspian states over the sharing of the seabed. Although in the end the legal status of the Caspian Sea was settled in 2018 through the Aktau Convention [Convention..., 2018], Russia added some environmental directives to the agreement that could allow Moscow and Tehran to oppose the construction of the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline (for more details see: [Antagonisms..., 2020]).

After the discovery of significant gas fields in the Eastern Mediterranean, this region was also considered as an alternative to Russian gas in the context of Europe's energy security [Bowlus, 2020; Montanari, 2022]. Here Türkiye, due to its geographical position, could also play an important role in the transfer of this gas to European markets [Ackerman, 2022], although in this case we still have to solve a lot of political, technical, financial and infrastructure issues.

In the spring of 2021, Türkiye and the EU initiated a so-called "positive agenda" to de-escalate the crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean. Several meetings were held, but this did not contribute to the resumption of the high-level energy dialogue. It can be assumed that, even taking into account the reduction of tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean, European sanctions against certain persons and companies of Türkiye involved in the exploration of hydrocarbon deposits in this region will remain in force, and the High-level Energy Dialogue will continue to be blocked. According to the experts of the German Institute for International Relations and Security, Ankara's policy in the Eastern Mediterranean and the associated increase in tension are manifestations of Türkiye's new military-political position, which may have far-reaching consequences for its relations with the EU. Analysts emphasize that "the current exclusion of Ankara from the East Mediterranean Gas Forum and the competing maritime claims of Türkiye, Greece and the Republic of Cyprus require further discussions on energy cooperation between the EU and Türkiye" [Tastan, 2022, p. 5]. All this makes Türkiye's participation in various energy cooperation initiatives in the Eastern Mediterranean highly doubtful in the near future.

Thus, despite the high energy potential of the territories of Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Iraq, the Eastern Mediterranean, none of them (with the exception of Azerbaijan, which already

supplies LNG to Europe) will be able to supply energy resources to the EU through Türkiye in the short term. The most optimistic scenario assumes that in order to obtain significant volumes of LNG supplies from these countries and regions, it will take more than a dozen years and significant investments. To finance such infrastructure, Europe will need to conclude long-term gas contracts, but this seems impractical given the EU's attitude towards the transition to green energy. The lack of full political confidence between Türkiye and the EU is also a destructive factor in the implementation of long-term projects. And although the escalation of the "Ukrainian crisis" to a certain extent led to a geopolitical rapprochement between Türkiye and the EU, the full strengthening of political relations between the parties did not emerge.

At the moment, energy cooperation, based on the transportation of fossil fuels, especially LNG, through Türkiye to Europe, is not a priority for either Brussels or Ankara. Now both actors are highly dependent on imported natural gas, so their energy cooperation is likely to focus on renewable energy.

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OLGA BIBIKOVA. THE SITUATION OF PALESTINIAN REFUGEES LIVING IN ARAB COUNTRIES OF THE MIDDLE EAST. (Part 2)

Keywords: Palestinians; refugee camps; UNRWA; HAMAS; problems of adaptation and identity.

Olga Bibikova,

PhD(Hist.), Senior Research Associate,

Centre for Interdisciplinary Research,

INION RAN

e-mail: olbibikova@mail.ru

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Abstract. There are currently more than five million Palestinian refugees in the world. Most of them live in the Arab countries of the Middle East: Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. The UN has secured in numerous documents the right of Palestinians to create their own state. However, the United States offers Arab countries to accept Palestinians as their citizens. Palestinian political organizations have rejected the plan because they believe it would call into question their rights to return to their land.

Palestinian Diaspora in Syria

According to the UN, the number of Palestinians living in the SAR is about 486 thousand people [Comments by of the department..., 2023]. The first camps for the Palestinians in Syria were created back in 1948. Assessing the fact of creating refugees' camps, the Ali-Manar Lebanese channel, noted that "Syria, who once accepted the Palestinians, actually created potential of Islamists' bases" [More than half..., 2013]. Even then, the authorities stated that 7 camps were "under the control of the Salafis". Appearing in these camps, people who spoke the Arabian dialect gradually poured into a local society, married local women, made friends. Further they began to preach Wahhabi Islam and the observance of Salafi customs: they demanded that women wear a hijab, and men refused smoking. Then they tried to preach the idea that the territory of Syria, supposedly, is the land of Palestine, to which the Palestinians have the right, and it must be liberated [More than half..., 2013]. Thus, they provoked a split between Palestinian refugees, the population of Syria and its authorities.

On the eve of the Civil War in Syria (which began in 2011), weapons appeared in the camps of the Syrian refugees, the Salafites¹ organized military training for young Palestinians. When in 2011 the riots began in Dara², the armed Palestinians joined the rebels. However, not all Palestinians shared the opinion of the Salafites. The detachments of the Palestinian self-defense committees Salafites in a number of camps acted against Salafites. There were clashes between the Palestinians themselves, belonging to different political organizations. Thus, the Palestinian movement turned out to be split.

The relative independence of the Palestinian camps in Syria led to the fact that even in 2012 it became clear that the Yarmuk³ camp, located inside the municipal borders of the capital of Syria, is controlled not by municipal authorities, but by the militants of the HAMAS⁴ organization and also other radical groups, for example, Ansar Beit Al-Mukaddas.

Over time, the Yarmuk camp, in which up to 150 thousand Palestinians lived, turned into a refuge of terrorists of the Islamic State group, who managed to keep the camp under its control for 700 days. The Lebanese army was forced to bombard the camp, as a result of which there were many victims among civilians. But most of the inhabitants of the camp fled.

The main part of the Syrian Palestinians is dissatisfied with the regime of B. Assad, which predetermines their sympathy for the Sunni brothers from the opposition (primarily to HAMAS). For the country's leadership, the fact that the Palestinians in Syria chose to focus on supporters of radical forces became a big problem [Mardasov A. ..., .2016].

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the Syria government granted Palestinian refugees the right to use state medical institutions, provided their children with free education in municipal schools. Those who wanted to get an education abroad, as well as the Syrians (as it was before the beginning of the fighting) had the opportunity to receive funding from the government of the country. Just as in other countries, Palestinians

can engage in entrepreneurship, but they are denied the purchase of agricultural lands, as well as real estate (you can own only one apartment). At the same time, Syria authorities developed a list of posts banned for Palestinians, which included about seventy positions, mainly in the state apparatus and the army.

However, the Palestinian boys in Syria are subject to conscription in the army. The right to refuse military service, paying a certain amount (3 thousand dollars)⁵ is applied to them. It is believed that the defense of Syria should be carried out by all living in the country.⁶ Nevertheless, after the beginning of the armed conflict in Syria, 43 thousand Palestinians of draft age left Syria [Ahbar al-yuum..., 03/12/2017]. In total, according to UNRWA, the number of Palestinian refugees who fled from Syria to neighboring countries from the beginning of the Syrian conflict amounted to 120,000 people [Réfugiés Palestiniens..., 2023].

Problems of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon

More than 480,000 Palestinian refugees registered by UNRWA live in Livan in 12 camps. Most of the camps were created shortly after the outcome of the Palestinians from 1948 to 1952 [Réfugiés Palestiniens..., 2023].

Palestinians are perceived by part of the Lebanese Socium as one of the reasons for the civil war in Lebanon (1975–1978). The Civil War began on April 13, 1975, after the militants of the police of the Right-Christian Party of the Cataib shot a bus with the Palestinians, which was an answer to the attempt of the Palestinians to kill Pierre Zhmael (1905–1984), the leader of the Lebanon Maronite community. Twenty seven Palestinians were killed. From that time on, military operations began, which soon spread to the northern and eastern parts of the country. Later, the Palestinians took control of the Lebanese – Israeli border and began regularly shelling Israel from there. Naturally, this was negatively perceived by the Lebanese and contributed to the formation of a negative attitude towards the Palestinians,

especially since the southern regions of Lebanon began to be subject to retaliatory attacks from Israel.

Lebanon became the first country to which Palestinian refugees flocked after the outbreak of the civil war in Syria. However, since the onset of the economic crisis, the situation of Palestinians in these camps has become much worse than in Syria: access to medical facilities is limited, social services are minimal. There are also employment restrictions. Every six months, a refugee must register and confirm knowledge of their responsibilities and rights.

Most refugees depend on UNRWA, the only international agency responsible for helping them. In Lebanon, the rights of refugees are limited, so only this organization can provide assistance in obtaining medical care. It also runs schools for Palestinian children. There are restrictions in terms of employment: Since Palestinians in Lebanon are considered foreigners, they are subject to employment restrictions in accordance with the adopted law on foreigners [Myths and Facts..., 2011]7.

Camps organized more than half a century ago were created for temporary residence of Palestinian refugees. However, the number of refugees increased markedly after the events of the Black September 1970 in Jordan.

As in Syria, the Palestinians in Lebanon are limited by employment in a number of professions. Initially, the list consisted of seventy-three positions, but in connection with the economic crisis and mass emigration of qualified personnel (especially after the elevator explosion in the Beirut port – 04.08.2020), the list was reduced to twenty positions. As a result of repressive policy, the Palestinians made up the poorest layer of the country's population. The number of beggars increased in the country, the criminal situation, theft and prostitution among refugees have become exacerbated.

Dorothy Klaus, a representative of UNRWA in Lebanon, speaking about the living conditions of the Palestinians in the camps in an interview with the French newspaper Figaro noted

that 63 schools, 28 medical points “work inside the camps. In connection with the unprecedented economic crisis in Lebanon, the UNRWA currently provides 160,000 refugees, (that is, 65 per cent of them), a small amount of \$50 each quarter. The poverty level among Palestinian refugees is estimated at about 80 per cent ... UNERWA also works to improve the basic infrastructure in camps, that is, it deals with the problems of sewage, water supply, power supply ...”. And further: “However, as the clashes between the Lebanese Hezbollah and Israel continue in the south of Lebanon, the Palestinians are preparing for the worse in the country of cedar” [Le Stradic S. ..., 2023].

A new flow of refugees that arose after the appearance of ISIS and the outbreak of the civil war in Syria scared the Lebanese authorities. Fearing the expansion of the Palestinian presence, the government refused to create new camps for them.

It is important to note that statistics on the number of Palestinians in Lebanon do not coincide with the data of the UNERWA agency, which counted in 2019 470 thousand refugees [Palestinian refugees..., 2019]. They also do not coincide with the data of the reports of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Lebanon and municipalities, which indicate the presence of 510 thousand Palestinians in Lebanon [Kontzelman G. ..., 2014]. These assessments cannot claim accuracy, since these two sources (UNERWA and local authorities) do not exclude from statistics the refugees which may have left Lebanon or passed away.

In 2017, the administration of the Prime Minister of Lebanon published a report “General census of the population in the Lebanese camps of refugees and Palestinian communities in 2017”, which indicates the figure ... 174 thousand people, 45 per cent of them (78,897 people) live in the camps [Palestinian refugees..., 2019]. The census did not take into account those Palestinians who live outside the refugee camps.

The report published by the administration of the Prime Minister of Lebanon in 2017 dispelled the myth of the half-

million presence of the Palestinians in the country. Moreover, it became obvious that the Palestinians are not a threat to Lebanon.

The fact is that the camp administration traditionally consists of the Palestinians themselves, who are interested in submitting high data on the number of people living in refugee camps. This procedure was introduced during the discussion of the Palestinian issue at the UN at the initiative of the Jordanian King Hussein (1935–1999).

The polemic that the presence of the Palestinians “erodes the Lebanese identity” began during the preparation of the law, according to which a Lebanon woman, who married a foreigner (including Arab), cannot transfer Lebanese citizenship to her child.

Palestinians have repeatedly caused the deterioration of the domestic political situation in the country. Thus, the civil war in Lebanon began on April 13, 1975, when, after a wave of small local incidents, a militant of the phalangist (ortho-Christian) police opened fire on a bus, with mainly Palestinian passengers, killing 28 passengers.

Since the beginning of the events in Gaza (10.10.2023) several rallies were held in support of the Palestinians. in the camps and around them at the rallies there sounded accusations against the Arab leaders of abandoning Palestinian case in favor of strategic rapprochement with Israel, especially against Iran.

Palestinian Presence in Iraq

Until 2003, the Palestinian diaspora in Iraq totaled about 90 thousand people [Strack D. ..., 2005]. The rights of this category of Iraq residents were limited. In particular, Palestinians were forbidden to acquire housing [Palestinians living in..., 2019], but they were exempted from paying for utilities and drafting into the army⁸. Saddam Hussein often used the Palestinian factor in his speeches, called for destruction of Israel and creation of the Palestinian state.

In the post-Saddam time, it turned out that the support of the Palestinians in Iraq was not universal. In May 2010, the Jordanian newspaper *Ad-Dustur* reported that a campaign was deployed in Iraq against the Palestinians living here. It also said that 70 per cent of Palestinians in Iraq live behind the poverty line [Palestinians living in..., 2019]. Nevertheless, disparaging the Palestinian population in Iraq, Baghdad still did not forget to make high-profile statements in favor of the OOP, as it was in 2008-2009. During the “Cast lead” operation, which Israel conducted against the movement of HAMAS in the Gaza Strip

Activities of UNRWA

The affairs of Palestinian refugees are officially handled by UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East). Beginning in 1949, on the territory of states neighboring Israel, UNRWA began to create camps in order to preserve the Palestinian people, as it turned out later, under the mythical promise that they would one day be able to return to their land and create their own state... Thus 66 per cent of Palestinians (726 thousand people according to 1950 data) who lived in the territory of historical Palestine in 1948 became refugees [5.9 million Palestinian refugees..., 2018].

After the Arab-Israeli war (1967), the number of refugees was already 780 thousand. Naturally, today there are more than 5 million people... These are already “hereditary refugees” with a special mentality.

The agency has been criticized for a lack of accurate statistics, mismanagement of funds and the fact that its staff is overwhelmingly Palestinian. By the way, today it has been established that some of the employees are connected with terrorist organizations or are directly involved in terrorist activities, since military training of militants is openly carried out in the camps, and relevant literature is printed and distributed.

It is known that the administration of the Rukban camp (on the border of Syria and Jordan) is preventing the departure of refugees. This can be explained by the desire to receive more funding from the UN. Further evidence of corruption in UNRWA's activities is the apparently deliberate overestimation of the number of refugees in a given country. Let me remind you that UNRWA claimed that there were half a million refugees in Lebanon, while there were 174 thousand of them.

Over the entire history of Palestinian refugees in the Middle East, 58 (59-?) camps were organized, including in Jordan - 10, in Lebanon - 12, in Syria - 9, in the West Coast - 19, in the Gaza Strip - 8 [Nikolaevsky M. ..., 2023]⁹. The funds that UNRWA spends on helping refugees come from UN member countries, as well as charities and individuals. In 2010, 25 per cent of UN funds - 1,23 billion - were spent on UNRWA [Middle East Agency..., 2023].

UNRWA's recent decision to reduce its services following Trump's refusal (10/21/2018) to contribute to the organization's activities has caused extreme concern in Jordan and other Arab countries. Some states have also reduced their assistance, citing mistrust in the camp administration. Representatives of these states directly cite the "dominance" of Palestinians among the employees of these organizations as the reason [Kessler G. ..., 2006].

Bassam Eid, founder of the Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group, believes that UNRWA's work is to ensure that "the Arab people of Palestine continue to exist... under false pretenses and the plausible promise of a 'right of return' to the 1948 villages that no longer exist..." And further: "The more Palestinians suffer, the more funds flow to UNRWA, which allows it to attract uncontrolled funds from humanitarian funds..." B. Eid believes that "UNRWA seeks to perpetuate refugee status" [Proud Palestinians..., 2014].

Let me quote another statement from Ralph Garroway, one of the leaders of UNRWA, although this was said back in 1958: "The Arab states do not want to solve the refugee problem. They

want this problem to remain something of an open wound, to be a challenge to the United Nations and a weapon directed against Israel. Arab leaders don't care whether refugees live or die..." [Jewish Bubba..., 2009].

In fact, there is a complex of reasons, including the desire of the United States and its allies to maintain their presence based on Israel in the Middle East. This idea lies at the heart of the Controlled Chaos theory.

Conclusion

The question arises: why don't the Palestinians themselves try to take citizenship of any Arab country? However, some countries have passed laws limiting this possibility... However, in Israel itself there are about 2 million people who identify themselves as Palestinians. In fact, there are much more of them, but the statistics in the countries of the region are very conditional. Once upon a time G.A. Nasser, in an interview given on September 1, 1961, said: "If refugees return to Israel, Israel will cease to exist" [Myths and Facts..., 2011]. It is this idea - to destroy Israel in order to solve the problem of Palestinian statehood - that inspires the leaders of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), HAMAS and other organizations...

Thierry Meyssan, a French political scientist, assessing the current situation, writes: "The Arab-Israeli conflict, which was initially a consequence of European colonial rule, subsequently began to be used as a means to prevent the unity of Arab peoples..." [Jared Kushner..., 2019]. Assessing today's events, it can be stated that, indeed, the West remains interested in creating collisions in the Middle East that impede the unity of the Arab peoples.

Thierry Meyssan draws attention to the actions of Jared Kushner, who was a confidant of his father-in-law, the President of the United States. He believes that J. Kushner's efforts in the Middle East in 2020¹⁰ were intended to restore "the alignment

that existed before the six-day war of 1967, when Jordan, and not the Palestine Liberation Organization, represented the interests of the Palestinians, and also controlled the Western bank of the Jordan River and East Jerusalem..." [Meyssan T. ..., 2014]. In the same article, T. Meyssan quoted Jordanian Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour, who stated (02/02/2014) that "Jordan can accept the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza into the federation, but not at any cost... King Abdullah II will grant Jordanian citizenship to three million Palestinians already living in the country and four million from other territories... subject to international assistance of \$16-20 billion." [Meyssan T. ..., 2014].

But what will happen to the Gaza Strip? And will the Palestinian leadership agree to hand over the levers of power to the Jordanian king?

By the way, in his last interview (October 2023), Henry Kissinger expressed distrust of the idea of creating the state of Palestine. He proposes to give the territory of the West Bank to the Kingdom of Jordan for the purpose of settling Palestinians there. But then hardly anyone will envy the Jordanian king...

P.S. The Australian authorities propose a completely different solution: to collect refugees from Africa and the Middle East (including Palestinians) and settle them... in Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan has been proposed as a model country due to the fact that the population density there is low and the majority of the indigenous population professes Islam. If there is not enough space, it is proposed to create camps on the territory of the other Central Asian republics [Evstigneev A. ..., 2016].

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Notes

1. Salafis are supporters of traditional (conservative) Islam, promoting a return to the original traditions of Islam.
2. Daraa is a city near the border with Jordan, one of the initial centers of the uprising (2011). In the Omari Mosque, instigators created a weapons depot. The city was liberated 7 years later by government troops.
3. The Yarmouk camp, founded in 1957, is the largest in Syria, located just 8 km from the presidential residence.
4. The Islamic Resistance Movement is a Palestinian Islamist (Sunni) movement - created in 1987.
5. You need to pay \$3,000. This is the annual salary of a Syrian officer. As a rule, men over the draft age, that is, reservists or those who work abroad, pay for refusing to serve. However, students caring for sick parents can get a deferment. This measure is valid even in wartime.
6. Upon reaching the age of 18, Syrian youths are conscripted into the army for 18 months, provided that they have brothers, otherwise they are considered the breadwinners of the family and are not subject to conscription. There are rules for deferments, but men must fulfill their duty until they reach 40.
7. In 2005 and 2010, the Lebanese legal framework changed for the better: Palestinian workers were given the right to contribute to the National Social Security Fund. In addition, work permits are now provided free of charge (Laws 128/2010 and 129/2010). Law 296/2001 prohibits Palestinians from purchasing real estate in Lebanon.
8. After the overthrow of S. Hussein, almost 1,500 Palestinians were evicted from their homes, as landlords decided that they could now get rid of them or raise rent.
9. According to other data, "in Syria, 0.5 million people were officially registered in 11 Palestinian camps, in Lebanon – the same number ... in 12 camps, in Jordan – 2.5 million people in 13 camps."
10. This is about Trump's plan to offer Arab states to accept Palestinian refugees as their citizens in exchange for a substantial reward. Palestinian political organizations rejected this plan, because they believe that it will call into question their rights to return to their territory.

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ALEXANDER LOKSHIN. ARABS IN ISRAEL. SOME ASPECTS OF THE ETHNOCONFESSIONAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE OF ARAB-ISRAELI SOCIETY

Keywords: Palestinian Arabs; demography of the Arab population in Israel; Islam; Palestinian refugees; Arab political parties in Israel; confessional structure of Arabs in Israel.

Alexander Lokshin,

PhD(History), Leading Research Associate,
Department of Israel and the Jewish Communities,
Institute of Oriental Studies, RAS,
e-mail: ale-lokshin@yandex.ru
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Abstract. In the article, the author, based on the works a number of Russian and Israeli researchers, presents the confessional structure, some aspects of the legal status, political aspirations of the Arabs in the state of Israel, the emergence of the Palestinian refugee problem. The chronological framework of the article mainly covers the last decades, but, if necessary, by 1948–1949 – the time of the formation of Israel and the first Arab-Israeli war. In the context of the ongoing large-scale armed conflict between Israel and the Hamas movement, the sharp aggravation of the internal political situation in Israel itself, and the situation in the Middle East as a whole, real opportunities for reaching a compromise in the near future in solving the problem of Arabs in Israel seem unlikely.

Ethno-demographic Factor

The total population of the State of Israel, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) of the country, at the end of 2023 was 9 million 842 thousand people. Of these, 73,5 per cent Jews, 21 per cent Arabs, 5,5 per cent – others. In 2023, the population of Israel increased by 179 thousand, which meant a population growth of 1,9 per cent. The increase in numbers was due to natural growth and 28 per cent due to repatriates. However, when compared with 2022, the growth rate decreased. About 75 per cent of the Jewish population today, is made up of native Israelis, and more than half are second-generation (at least) Israelis. According to CSB forecasts, by the end of 2024, the total population of the country will reach 10 million people [1].

The Arab population of Israel currently numbers about 2 million 100 thousand people. About 213 thousand people in Israel are foreign workers. And without them, the Jewish state is the 100th most populous country in the world. Jewish immigration is the most important factor influencing the country's population growth.

The CBS report states that in 2023, about 45 thousand repatriates arrived in Israel, while in 2022 – 73 thousand. In 2023, 70,3 per cent came from Russia, 4,5 per cent – Ukraine, 3,8 per cent – Belarus, 2,1 per cent – France [2]. Since the fall of 2023, there has been a decrease in the rate of repatriation, which can also be explained by security problems associated with the military actions of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) against the Hamas movement.

7 million 208 thousand people are defined as “Jews”. According to published data, official Israeli statistics imply those who fall under the traditional religious definition of Judaism, namely, children of Jewish mothers and persons who have undergone giyur (religious conversion to Judaism). At present, about 75 per cent of the entire Jewish population are native Israelis, and more than half are Israelis in at least the second

generation. The CBS includes in the category of so-called “others”, i.e. non-Jews and non-Arabs, members of mixed families who arrived in Israel on the basis of the Law of Return, adopted by the Knesset - parliament in 1950. These are the children of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers, grandchildren of Jews and non-Jewish spouses of Jews / Jewesses, as well as non-Jewish spouses of children and grandchildren of Jews.

De facto, all of these individuals are part of the extended Jewish national community, which is the ethnic basis of the State of Israel. For some of them, especially those born in Israel, Hebrew is their native language. For the majority of those born abroad, the native language is Russian.

The official Israeli statistics also include representatives of a number of small, long-standing ethnic groups that retain their specific ethnic languages in the category of “others”: Circassians, Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians, and Arameans. The latter group was recognized by the Israeli Interior Ministry as a special nationality several years ago. It includes mainly Arabic-speaking followers of the Maronite Church, whose religious language to this day remains Aramaic. Previously, they were registered as Arab Christians.

Arabs and Other National and Religious Minorities

The Arabs are the most significant ethnic minority in Israel, and currently they make up approximately 20 per cent of the country's population. Traditionally, Arabs profess Islam and a small part of them – Christianity.

In Arab sources, the Arab population in Israel is often referred to as the “Arabs of 1948”, indicating that they have been under Israeli occupation since the end of the first Arab-Israeli war. In Israel itself, Arab residents are usually called Arab-Israelis or simply Arabs.

The traditional language of most Arabs in Israel, regardless of religious affiliation, is Levantine Arabic. The language of the

Arab minority in the Jewish state is often defined as the Israeli dialect of Arabic. The Lebanese Arabic dialect is spoken in the north of the country, Palestinian Arabic in central Israel, and in the southern part of the country throughout the Negev - Bedouin dialects. The Arabic language in Israel has absorbed many loan words and phrases from Hebrew. Most Arabs in Israel are bilingual, their second language being Hebrew.

The absolute majority of the Arab population professes, as already noted, Islam. They are joined by a small group (about 3-4 thousand) of Moslem gypsies. They live mainly in Jerusalem and are not considered a separate nationality by official Israeli statistics. The overwhelming majority of Arabs in Israel are Sunni Moslems. In addition to them, the country is home to several thousand followers of the *Ahmadi* Moslem sect (mainly in Haifa) and a closed ethno-confessional group of Alawites (in the village of Rajar, located in the north of the country on the border with Lebanon and Syria). They are nominally classified as Moslems in Israel. This allows representatives of these groups to register marriages, since the institution of civil marriage does not exist in Israel. The bulk of the *Alawites*, including the clergy of this community, are concentrated in Syria.

Israeli statistics also include more than 300,000 Arabic-speaking Christians of various confessions among the Arabs, most of whom are Greek Catholics and Orthodox, as well as Druze. However, most Druze in Israel do not consider themselves Arabs. This is facilitated by both the closed ethno-confessional nature of the Druze community and the fact that Druze (only men) are called up for military service in Israel along with Jews and Circassians.

It should be noted that not all Arabic-speaking residents of the country have the status of Israeli citizens; some of them have the status of permanent residents or officially registered temporary residents. When referring to official Israeli statistics, it should also be taken into account that they include up to half a million Israeli citizens living in Jewish settlements on the West

Bank of the Jordan River, a territory that is under Israeli occupation and is not legally part of the State of Israel. The Arab population of the West Bank, estimated at more than one and a half million people, is not included in the population of Israel. They have the status of residents of the Palestinian National Authority, which claims political independence, and at the same time have Jordanian citizenship. Many Arabs in Israel maintain family ties with the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as with Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and other countries. The Palestinians who lived in the territories occupied by Israel during the Six-Day War of 1967 were offered Israeli citizenship by the authorities. However, most of them, unwilling to recognize Israel's claims to these territories, refused it. They became permanent residents without being granted citizenship. However, they retain the right to apply for Israeli citizenship, they can also hold administrative positions, and they have the right to vote in elections.

The Arabs of East Jerusalem have the status of – “permanent residents” of Israel, but not citizens, and they retain Jordanian citizenship. Before the Six-Day War of 1967, East Jerusalem was under Jordanian jurisdiction. In recent years, some Jerusalem Arabs have begun to convert to Israeli citizenship, but in this case, they would have to renounce their Jordanian citizenship, which many wish to retain.

The Palestinian Refugee Problem

According to various estimates, from the time of the adoption of the UN General Assembly resolution on the partition of Palestine in November 1947 until mid-May 1948, when the State of Israel declared its independence, at least 400,000 Arabs in Palestine became refugees. As a result of the Arab-Israeli War of 1948-1949 (known in Israeli historiography as the “War of Independence” and in Arabic as the “Nakba” – “Catastrophe” in Arabic), the number of refugees exceeded 800,000. One of the

researchers of this problem, Israeli historian Benny Morris, who belongs to the group of the so-called "new historians" who resolutely do not accept the official concepts of Israeli historiography, published a number of documents. In one of them, a report by the IDF intelligence service of that time, among the reasons for the mass exodus of Palestinian Arabs, along with orders for evacuation from some Arab structures, hostile actions of the Israeli armed forces against Arab villages, psychological warfare aimed at intimidating Arab residents and other operations were named. B. Morris noted: "Ben-Gurion is pursuing the idea of a transfer (of Palestinians – A. L.). There is no written order or developed policy, but an atmosphere of transfer has been created ... Ben-Gurion was right. If he had not done this, the state would not have been created ... Without the expulsion of the Palestinians, the Jewish state would not have arisen here" [3].

G. Meir recalled those tragic events quite differently: "In April 1948, I stood for hours on the Haifa coast and literally begged the Haifa Arabs not to leave... I talked and talked until I was hoarse, but in vain. Why did we want them to stay? There were two reasons: ... we wanted to prove to the world that Jews and Arabs can live together – no matter what the Arab leaders trumpeted – and, secondly, we knew very well that if half a million Arabs left Palestine now, it would cause a revolution in the entire economy of the country" [4].

During the war, about 400 Arab villages, towns and cities were destroyed. Almost all the Arabs left the cities of Haifa and Jaffa, as well as Safed, Tabaria and Baysan. A small part of the Arab population remained in Acre, Ramle and Lod.

Thus, one of the acute and complex issues of modern world politics arose – the problem of Palestinian refugees. The most realistic number of Palestinian Arab refugees in 1948–1949 – about 750,000 thousand – is given in the official report of the UN Department for Palestine Refugees [5].

The Policy of the Authorities towards the Arabs of Israel

The policy of Israel towards the Arab population of the country is based on three principles, which, as the modern Russian political scientist T.A. Karasova notes, are in fact mutually exclusive: the democratic nature of the state, its Jewish-Zionist orientation, and security requirements. "While the first of them declares the equality and integration of Arabs into the life of Israeli society, the other two exclude Arabs from the process of this integration. The fact, that Israel was created by Jews and for Jews, places the Arabs outside the process of formation of a modern national state. The ties that connect Israeli Arabs with the Arab world and, in particular, with the Palestinians, give them the status of a "hostile minority". Relations between Arabs and Jews can be characterized as formal, asymmetrical and leading to alienation and frictions." [6].

Geographic Distribution and Number of Arabs in Israel

We will present a brief description of a number of Arab and mixed (Arab-Jewish) settlements in Israel, primarily cities, some settlements located in the north - in the Galilee, in the centre of the country and in the south, in the Negev, as well as some aspects of their recent history and population.

Arabs make up more than a quarter of the population of almost 46 thousand residents of the city of Acre – an important tourist centre of the country. In the modern city, Arabs mainly populate its old part, where they make up to 70 per cent of the total population of Acre. Many of them complain of discrimination and attempts by local authorities to "Judaize" the city. In 2008, violent clashes between Jews and Arabs on national and religious grounds lasted in Acre for five days. Similar incidents took place later.

The largest Arab city in Israel is Nazareth, located in the Lower Galilee. In 2011, Nazareth had a population of about 74,000 people, the vast majority of whom are Arabs. Nazareth is effectively an Arab metropolis. It also includes the adjacent villages of Mashhal, Kfar Kana, Jaffa and others. More than 150,000 Arabs live in this conglomerate, which is about 10 per cent of the entire Arab population of Israel. The city of Natsrath Elit with a Jewish population is closely adjacent to Nazareth. Its residents are mainly immigrants from post-Soviet states. Natsrath Elit was founded in 1957. The city was viewed by the Israeli authorities as a new centre for the Northern District of Israel and a counterweight to the purely Arab Nazareth, which has repeatedly become the scene of clashes between local residents and the Israeli police. Due to an attempt to build a mosque over the tomb of Sheikh Shihab ad-Din on the square opposite the Basilica of the Annunciation, in 1997 and 2003, an acute conflict arose between Moslems and Christians.

Nazareth is one of the major centres of Israeli-Arab culture. Several Arabic-language periodicals are published in the city, including the influential newspapers *al-Sinnara* and *Kul al-Arab*, and the Arab radio station of Israel broadcasts. Museums (including an ethnographic museum) and art galleries have been opened in Nazareth, and a local ensemble of Arabic classical music is also well-known. A college opened in 2009.

The city of Haifa is the third largest city in the country. In 1946, more than 79,000 Arabs and more than 74,000 Jews lived there. During the first Arab-Israeli war, most of the city's Arab population left it. Mostly Christians remained. In the following years, a significant number of both Moslems and Christians settled in Haifa. Currently, Arabs make up approximately 10 per cent, i.e. more than 27,000 people [7]. More than half of them belong to various Christian communities. The largest are the Orthodox, Greek Catholics and Maronites. Among the Moseims of Haifa, the inhabitants of one of the Kababir quarters stand out, who are mainly members of the *Ahmadiyya* sect.

The city of Ramla, located near the Mediterranean coast, was purely Arab until 1948, and today is a city with a mixed Jewish-Arab population. Arabs make up 20 per cent of the population. Relations between the Arabs and Jews of Ramla are quite tense. In 2000, Arabs in Ramla set fire to several synagogues, and in response, the Jews attempted to set fire to one of the city's mosques. In 2004, the police arrested a group of Arab teenagers who were again trying to set fire to synagogues.

Currently, Arabs make up more than a third of the population of the ancient coastal city of Palestine, Jaffa, which is now part of Tel Aviv. In 2008, Jaffa had a population of 46,000, of which 16,000 were Arabs [8]. Most are descendants of the Arab population that lived here before the formation of Israel. In the 1990s, Among the Arab residents of Jaffa, a significant increase in anti-Israeli sentiment has been noted. In 1994, riots were accompanied by attacks on Jews, stoning of buses and cars driving along the streets of the city. Arab demonstrations were repeated in 2000. At the same time, anti-Arab demonstrations broke out, a crowd of Jews tried to attack the Hasan-bek mosque. Both sides later continued to exchange accusations of striving for the "Jewishization" or, conversely, the "Arabization" of Jaffa. In 2008, mass demonstrations against discrimination against the local Arab population by the Israeli authorities took place in the city. To this day, a significant number of Christians – Arabs and non-Arabs – also live in the city. The share of Christians in the population of Jaffa, as in most other cities with a significant Arab population, is constantly declining [9].

The largest city in Palestine in terms of Arab population is Jerusalem. In January 1950, the Knesset declared Jerusalem the capital of Israel. In 1980, the Knesset declared Jerusalem "the united and indivisible capital of Israel." Israeli sovereignty over the eastern part of the city and the status of all of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel are not recognized by a significant part of the international community, which regards East Jerusalem as Palestinian territory occupied by Israel. The status of Jerusalem

remains one of the central issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. According to the Israel Central Bureau of Statistic, the population of Jerusalem at the beginning of 2000 was 936,425 people. With its suburbs, the population of Jerusalem is more than 1 million. Among the Arab districts, the largest are Beit Hanina (35,800 residents), the Moslem quarter of the Old City (28,200 residents), and Ras al-Amud (24,640 residents). In 2018, 60,5 per cent of the population were Jews, 38 per cent were Arabs (of which 96,3 per cent were Moslems and 3,6 per cent were Christians) [10]. Jerusalem is a holy city for Jews, Moslems and Christians. It is one of the oldest and most important cities in Palestine with a rich and turbulent history. A great many books have been written about Jerusalem [see, for example, Narkiss, 1978; Jilbert, 1996; Nosenko, 2006; Armstrong, 2011]. The Arab population of the city suffered greatly during the battles for Jerusalem in 1948. By the end of the hostilities, out of 67 thousand non-Jewish residents who lived in the eastern part of the city a year before the war, 33 thousand remained. And in its western part, all the Arab neighborhoods were abandoned by the majority of its residents. At the same time, most of the members of the noble Moslem families living in the Old City and its immediate environs left Jerusalem – representatives of the Husseini, Nashashibi, Khalidi and other clans. The Christians of Jerusalem also suffered greatly. At the same time, immediately after the war, refugees from the destroyed villages near Jerusalem and Ramla began to settle in Jerusalem, especially numerous were the settlers from Hebron. The latter even to this day make up about two-thirds of the Arab population of Jerusalem. As Russian orientalist T.V. Nosenko notes: “The Arab social infrastructure preserved in East Jerusalem in the form of cultural, educational, trade union and other institutions provided a basis for close interaction between religious, civil, cultural organizations and the administrative apparatus of the Palestinian Authority... By the end of 1995, 11 institutions of the Palestinian Authority were located in the eastern part of the city, including the Ministry of

Religious Affairs, the Broadcasting Council, the Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction..." [11].

In 1948, dozens of Arab villages were destroyed in the outskirts of Jerusalem. Among them was Ain Karem, at that time its population was 3,689 people. Now on its lands the Jerusalem quarter of Ain Karem and the Jewish settlements of Even Sapir and Beit Zait are located. According to Christian tradition, Ain Karem is one of the main Christian shrines of the Holy Land, it was there that John the Baptist was born and spent his youth. The village of Beit Itab, with a population of 628 people. Now in its place the Jewish settlement of Nes Harim is located. In 1948, the Arab village of Beit Mahsir had a population of 2,784 people. They were engaged in agriculture, growing olives, fruit and grain crops.

During the war, the village was the main base of the Arab armed forces. During one of the bloodiest battles, the Jewish armed forces captured Beit Mahsir. Its inhabitants abandoned the village. Almost all the houses were blown up. Now the Jewish settlements of Beit Meir and Mesilat Zion have been built on its lands. In 1948, the population of the village of Deir Yassin (Dir Yassin - Hebrew), located 9 km west of Jerusalem, was 708 people. During the fighting, more than a hundred people were killed. These events greatly affected the situation throughout the country. They caused mass panic among the Arabs and became one of the main factors leading to the mass flight of Arabs from the war zone. Under the name "Deir Yassin Massacre", these bloody events have firmly entered the consciousness of modern Palestinians and Israelis. They still evoke various emotions and remain one of the most ambiguous and terrible pages of the Arab-Israeli war of 1948-1949.

Mutually Exclusive Trends

In the Arab sector, two mutually exclusive trends have been observed in recent decades, which are developing in parallel. These are Israelization and Palestinianization. Already in the late

1970s, a trend began to emerge in Israel that indicates increasingly noticeable differences between the Arab inhabitants of the country and their fellow tribesmen in the territories. Although the Arabs of Israel did not want and do not want to fully identify themselves with Israel, the influence of the state on their way of thinking and behavior is beyond doubt. This is evidenced by the following facts: in the Histadrut (General Federation of Workers), the share of Arabs corresponds to their share in the labor market, which is 15 per cent; at least three quarters of Israeli Arabs speak Hebrew, and slightly fewer are those who can read and write it; more than half of Arabs regularly read the Hebrew-language press. In the early 1990s, 64 per cent of Arab respondents living in Israel said they felt more at home in Israel than in any Arab state. And the number of those wishing to move to a Palestinian state after its creation in the West Bank and Gaza fell from 14,4 per cent to 7,5 per cent [12].

In 1988, 13,5 per cent of Arabs in one of the sociological surveys denied Israel's right to exist. In 1976, another 20,5 per cent held this opinion. Some signs of a positive attitude towards Israelization and distancing from Moslem Arabs were observed among some Israeli Christian Arabs.

The opposite trend – the Palestinianization of the Arabs of Israel is manifested in increased solidarity with the Palestinians in the occupied territories and support for radical movements.

Mass protests by Palestinians and Israeli Arabs against Israeli occupation and discrimination, which resulted in the first and second intifadas (translated from Arabic as “deliverance”, “shake”, “liberation from the yoke”) became a serious obstacle to the process of Israelization. The first intifada began in December 1987. It was catalyzed by a traffic accident - the driver of an Israeli truck drove into a crowd of Palestinians, four were killed and seven were injured. Hundreds and thousands of people, mostly young people, took to the streets and began throwing stones and bottles at Israeli patrols. From the very beginning of the intifada, the Israeli armed forces responded harshly to the

protests. As a result of their suppression from 1987 to 1993, over a thousand Palestinians were killed and tens of thousands were wounded, thousands of Palestinians were detained, transferred to Israeli prisons, and many were deported.

The Second Intifada began in September 2000. It was triggered by Ariel Sharon, the leader of the Israeli right-wing Likud bloc, visiting the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, which was considered a legitimate act by the Israeli leadership, since under the terms of the peace agreements, access to the Temple Mount was open to believers of all religions. For this reason, the Second Palestinian Intifada is often referred to as the "Al-Aqsa Intifada" (named after the mosque located on the Temple Mount). Unlike the First Intifada, known as the "War of Stones," the second was distinguished by the use of suicide bombers who attacked crowded places: bus stops and the buses themselves, markets, shops, entertainment venues, cafes, and hotels. Among the largest attacks were explosions at a discotheque and a billiards club in Tel Aviv (June 2001, May 2002), a pizzeria in Jerusalem (August 2001, a bus stop and a restaurant in Haifa (December 2001, March 2002). As a result of an explosion on March 27, 2002, in a hotel in Netanya, 30 people who had gathered to celebrate the Jewish holiday of Passover were killed and more than 100 were injured. Militants from radical Palestinian groups also attacked Jewish settlers and soldiers, and fired at Israeli settlements from the Gaza Strip. On October 17, 2001, Israeli Tourism Minister Rehovaam Zeevi, a hard-liner on the Palestinians, was killed in Jerusalem. Israel's response was limited mainly to a blockade of the territories. At the same time, Arab political activists in Israel did not feel like participants in the intifada and limited themselves to expressing moral support. Of course, Israeli Arabs supported and continue to support the creation of a Palestinian state in the territories. But at the same time, they proceeded from the fact that they were faced with other tasks, different from those that needed to be solved by their Palestinian brothers.

Based on the data of sociological surveys of Arab respondents conducted in the 1970–1990s, a researcher from the University of Haifa, S. Smuha, divided the Arab residents of Israel into 4 groups in relation to the Israeli state. 1. Arabs who accept Israel in its current form and are ready to cooperate with it (11 per cent). 2. Arabs who advocate changes to the existing system of government and radical reforms within the framework of existing legislation (39 per cent). 3. Arab citizens who recognize Israel as a state, but do not accept its Zionist character (40 per cent). 4. Arabs who deny Israel's right to exist (10 per cent) [13].

Arab Political Parties

In the first decades of statehood, the Arab population of Israel did not have its own political parties. The first party representing the interests of the Arab minority was the Communist Party of Israel (CPI). After the split in 1965, the New Communist List (RAKAH) was founded. In order to expand its electoral base among the Jewish population and to maintain its position as a party representing the interests of the Arabs, RAKAH created a new political bloc in 1977 – the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (HADASH). That same year, HADASH received 50 per cent of the votes of Arab voters participating in the Knesset elections. But later, the influence of this organization among the Arabs significantly decreased.

Before the intifada began in December 1987, the views and statements of Arab Knesset members were generally too radical. Arab MKs generally expressed loyalty to the state. CPI MK Tawfik Toubi served in the Knesset for forty years and was known as an uncompromising defender of the rights of the Arab population. But at the same time, he assumed that there was no contradiction between his Arab nationality and his Israeli civic identity. His position was typical of the views that had been widespread among Arab leaders in Israel for several decades: the

future of the Arab minority largely depended on the extent to which it accepted the basic principles of living in a Jewish state.

In the 1980s and 1990s, a new generation of Arab intellectuals emerged, many of whom actively participated in political life at the national and municipal levels. Independent Arab political parties also emerged at that time. The views of such well-known Arab figures as A. Bishara, A. Tibi, M. Barakeh, and A.-M. Dehamshe were notable by their radicalism. Although there were other views. Nawaf Masalha (1943–2021) – an Arab member of the Knesset, a representative of the Labor Party, a trade unionist and statesman, a member of the Central Committee of the Histadrut and the *Avoda* Party, Vice Speaker of the Knesset of two convocations, Deputy Minister of Health and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel, took a different position. He proposed a more balanced solution to the problems of the Arab minority. Masalha fought against discrimination against Arabs in Israel, but did not demand radical state reforms and said that he did not want to identify himself with the enemies of Israel.

The ideological and social origins of the Arab parties, as well as some provisions of their political programs, differ significantly from each other. But many representatives of the new generation of Arab politicians came to a consensus on their attitude towards the state of Israel itself. The essence of their position was to deny the political and moral justifications for the existence of Israel, to express sympathy and often support for acts of violence and terror against it and its citizens.

The Progressive List for Peace and the Arab Democratic Party (ADP) gained influence. This is the first independent Arab party in Israel, founded by Abd al-Wahab Darawshe. The Arab Democratic Party (Mada), the first Arab party in Israel, was founded in 1988. Like other non-religious Arab parties that came to prominence a little later, the party put forward the slogan "Peace and Equality". It advocated for the realization of the Palestinians' right to self-determination and the creation of their own independent state with Jerusalem as its capital. In addition,

it called for the dismantling of settlements and the right of return for Palestinian refugees. At the same time, the party demanded equality for Jews and Arab citizens living in Israel.

In 1992, the United Arab List (Ra'am) was formed. This party, which presented itself as a religious party, took a right-wing, very conservative position. Ra'am is actually the political wing of the Islamic Movement. In Israel, they have two wings - an irreconcilable northern one and a more moderate southern one, which Ra'am represents in politics. In 1999, the list received five seats and became the largest Arab faction in the Knesset. The opposite wing was occupied by the radical Arab party, the Democratic National Union (Balad). This party was founded in 1996. It advocates the rejection of the "Jewish character" of the state, including its official symbols, and believes that Israel should become a democratic "state of all its citizens", in which Arabs could enjoy cultural autonomy and equal rights with other ethno-religious groups. In foreign policy, Balad calls for the creation of a Palestinian state with its capital in East Jerusalem. Balad is headed by A. Tibi and A. Bishara. After the 2003 elections, Tibi left the party and founded the Arab Revival Movement (Ta'al). In one of his speeches, Tibi said: "the Jewish national character of the state of Israel must be abolished. We cannot accept an exclusively Jewish hegemony that does not take into account the interests of the 20 per cent of the population who are not Jews...our self-determination must be based on belonging to a state; therefore we fully support the idea of a "state for all its citizens" ... It is impossible to speak simultaneously of a democratic state and a Jewish state - here there is only one of the two. Personally, I prefer a democratic state" [14].

Harsh criticism was directed against those Arabs who seek to integrate into Israeli society and prefer to cooperate with it. These are the Druze and Bedouins serving in the Israeli army, Arabs who sell land to Jews, and Palestinians who provide Israeli authorities with information about terrorist organizations in the occupied territories. The MKs called them all traitors to their

people who should be destroyed. Daraushe said that Arabs serving in the IDF are committing a crime. Bishara noted that "Israelization and the rejection of national identity" lead to the fragmentation of Arabs in Israel. The most important condition for reconciliation in the region of Arabs and Jews, Tibi emphasized, is the recognition of the right of return of Palestinian refugees. Bishara believed that Arab leaders should not neglect the interests of "an old man from Safed who now lives in the Yarmouk camp – even in exchange for any political compensation that the Palestinian Authority might receive" [15]. Although Bishara refused to recognize the rights of Jews to self-determination, after the creation of the State of Israel and the emergence of a Jewish-Israeli nationality united by a common language – Hebrew, he believed that Israel possessed some legitimacy. Nevertheless, although the statements of Arab MPs vary in shades and directions, often depending on the audience, place, time and circumstances in which they were made, they are unanimous in their complete rejection of the Jewish-Zionist character of the State of Israel and the legitimacy of its existence. It seems paradoxical that in the 1990s, when the process of Arab integration was particularly successful, when child benefits were being provided to Arab families in increased amounts and the law on state health insurance was extended to all citizens of the country, the views of Arab leaders in Israel became radicalized. Sometimes, Arab members of the Knesset openly disapproved of terrorist actions against Israel. They often did so out of fear of losing their seats in parliament, losing parliamentary immunity and being brought to trial.

The above said in the article allows us to note that the situation of the Arab minority in Israel is determined by many factors. In the context of the ongoing large-scale armed conflict between Israel and the Hamas movement, the sharp aggravation of the internal political situation in Israel itself, and the situation in the Middle East as a whole, real opportunities for reaching a compromise in the near future in resolving the problem of Arabs in Israel seem, unfortunately, unlikely.

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THE MOSLEM WORLD: THEORETICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS

OLGA CHIKRIZOVA. PECULIARITIES OF INTERRELIGIOUS
DIALOGUE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA
REGION

*Keywords: Islam; Christianity;
intention; stereotypes; religious phobia;
Islamophobia; Middle East.*

Olga Chikrizova,

PhD(History), Associate Professor,
Department of Theory and History
of International Relations,

RUDN University

e-mail: chikrizova-os@rudn.ru

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Abstract. The article tries to identify the key features of
interreligious dialogue (in particular, Christian-Muslim dialogue) in
the Middle East and North Africa. Stereotypes influencing this
dialogue, as well as factors determining the course and trends in the
interaction of Christians and Muslims in the region are examined.

Throughout history, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has been at the epicenter of the struggle between the West and the East, experiencing the influence of both. Social and political life in the MENA region is the convergence and mutual influence of civilizations, a vivid example of the East-West dichotomy, which manifest in various aspects of the functioning of Middle Eastern societies, including religion and interreligious dialogue. The study of the MENA in the context of interreligious dialogue is especially noteworthy since the Middle East is the place of origin of all three Abrahamic religions, in particular Islam and Christianity, the interaction of which is the focus of this article.

According to the definition given by S. Melnik, interreligious dialogue is “building connections between followers of different religions, including ensuring that these relationships are directed to a peaceful and constructive course” [1, p. 8]. Based on the criterion of ‘intention’, the scholar identifies the following types of interreligious dialogue:

- *polemical dialogue* is “an interaction based on the desire to spread one’s faith or defend it, to demonstrate its advantages; this type of dialogue takes the form of a dispute”;

- *cognitive dialogue* is “brought about by motivation for knowledge, the desire to understand another religion”;

- *peacemaking dialogue* is “aimed at developing harmonious relations between followers of different religions”;

- *partnership dialogue* is “based on the believers’ vision of multiple problems and suffering in the world, along with the desire to engage in joint activities to solve them” [2, p. 17–18].

Interreligious dialogue in the MENA region is possible, taking into account the following factors.

Firstly, there is a rich history of Christian-Muslim relations in the region, which “developed in four main spheres: economic, military-political, cultural and religious” [3, p. 12]. In addition, we should not forget that European Christians often acted as patrons of Middle Eastern Christians¹, who were surrounded by

Muslims and lived under their rule; they also incited inter-communal contradictions in order to promote the political and economic interests of European states in the Middle East. This mainly applies to the period of Ottoman rule in the region. As the relations between Christians and Muslims were developing, a number of persistent stereotypes and prejudices were formed, which continue to influence the mutual perceptions of representatives of the two religions. Some of these stereotypes will be discussed below.

Secondly, it is impossible to consider Christian-Muslim dialogue in isolation from the foreign policy, i.e. the relations of Muslim countries with Europe and the U.S. This is due, firstly, to the inseparability of the secular and spiritual & the political and religious components in the Islamic mentality; secondly, due to the colonial past of the Muslim countries in the region, which has an impact on their interaction with their former metropolises; and thirdly, due to the orientalist and Islamophobic discourses that have dominated Middle Eastern and Islamic studies conducted in the West for many years.

Finally, when analyzing interreligious dialogue in the MENA region, we should take into account the Israeli factor since, as noted by J. Meri, the general public in the region perceives initiatives for interreligious dialogue as inextricably linked to diplomatic initiatives aimed at reconciling the Arab world with Israel (as was the case after the Abraham Accords) [4].

Taking into account the above-mentioned factors, we are going to identify the key factors influencing the implementation of four types of interreligious dialogue in the MENA region, using examples from Christian-Muslim relations.

Polemical Dialogue

Polemical exchange between Christianity and Islam is the most ancient form of dialogue, which was initiated by Muslims

with the aim of converting Christians to the 'only true' religion, but later became a weapon wielded by Christians.

The Christian world having a number of 'phobias' about Islam is due to the fact that the Bible does not contain and could not contain anything that would unambiguously define the attitude of Christianity to Islam. In turn, in the holy book of Islam – the Quran – Christians are referred to as "people of the Book", who are supposed to be taken under protection (the status of *dhimmi*, meaning 'guarded'). Christians are also allowed to profess their religion. In addition, as the leading Russian researcher of Christian-Muslim relations A. Zhuravsky notes, "the feeling of spiritual closeness that developed among the first Muslims, the Arabs, the feeling that was nourished by the consciousness of the superiority of their religion and their language helped them overcome the hegemony of the Christianized worldview in the Middle East even before they fully comprehended the very existence of this worldview" [3, p. 14].

During the polemical Christian-Muslim dialogue, the amount of polemical works written by Christians and containing condemnation of Islam is many times greater than the number of works written by Muslims about Christianity. It is worth noting that "medieval works on Islam were primarily written by theologians who relied on a wide variety of sources: folk legends; stories told by knights and pilgrims; apologetic writings of Eastern Christians; accounts of Muslims themselves; and translations of Muslim authors. However, in most cases, they were biased while selecting information; the facts were sometimes intentionally, sometimes unintentionally distorted" [3, p. 25]. It was in this distorted form that these facts took root in the European consciousness.

In the Middle Ages, the Christian world focused first on the Jews, whom Maximus the Confessor called "perfidious people who are preparing the coming of the Antichrist" back in 640. This can be explained by the historical resentment of Christians against the Jews for the treatment of Jesus Christ and the Virgin

Mary. However, after the emergence of Islam and the beginning of the Arab Caliphate's conquests of numerous territories, very contradictory ideas about Islam began to take root in the Christian world. In this regard, A. Zhuravsky notes that "having established through Abrahamic monotheism their connection with it [the Judeo-Christian tradition - *O. Ch.*], but at the same time radically opposing Christianity (through the unconditional absolutization of this monotheism, which excluded the possibility of the Divine Incarnation and rejected the idea of the Trinity), Islam disrupted the order and consistency of medieval Christian ideas about the divine plan of history; it was a kind of religious and historical challenge for them" [3, p. 13-14].

In the Christian world, the idea of Islam as an aggressive religion spreading violence appeared very early on, and Islam itself "was a 'challenge', it demanded a response and constant attention" [3, p. 15]. In this context, the publication of "The Clash of Civilizations" by S. Huntington in the 1990s seems to have been a timely (given the need for a new external enemy for the West after the collapse of the USSR) appeal to the first exposure of Christians to Islam, which was based on the concept of the 'Islamic challenge'.

This attitude of medieval Christians towards the young religion is due to the following reasons.

1. After Muhammad started preaching, messianic moods spread among the Jews, which were associated with the belief that the Jewish Messiah was coming. Christians reacted sharply to these sentiments: for example, the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius I even passed a law on the forced baptism of Jews [5, p. 43].

2. Initially, Christians perceived Islam as a punishment for their violation of the Gospel commandments. This idea, forgotten for a time after the West managed to achieve a significant military, political, economic, technological and cultural superiority over the Muslim East, would be later "revived" during the Reformation, which coincided with the rise of the

Ottoman Empire and the growing 'Turkish threat' to the Christian world.

3. For a long time, Islam (Mohammedanism, cf. Nestorianism) was considered one of the many heresies that had to be fought, condemned and eradicated. This idea already appeared in the works of John of Damascus, who gave the earliest Christian interpretation of Islam in "Concerning Heresy"², and then spread in the works of numerous authors up until the 20th century. An analysis of the attitude of medieval Christians to Islam and the Prophet Muhammad is one of the "pillars" of the concept of orientalism developed by E. Said [7, from p. 109].

Another Christian way of looking at Muslims was to perceive Islam not as a heresy, but as a form of paganism; it was developed by Thomas Aquinas: "As pagans, Muslims are in some respects less sinful than heretics (for example, because they never recognized the authority of the Gospel); and in some respects, they are more sinful, since their judgment is erroneous on a much broader range of issues. Controversy with pagans must be based on the arguments of reason, and not on the authority of Scripture. In addition, pagans should not be converted to Christianity by force, since a person cannot be forced into something that is the highest good" [3, p. 32].

The listed above ideological attitudes, as well as later stereotypes (about the "diseases" of the Prophet Muhammad, his carnal intemperance, etc., see [7, p. 109; 3, p. 27–30]) have taken root and have survived in a slightly modified or supplemented form to this day, negatively affecting the Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Cognitive Dialogue

As already mentioned, the medieval Christians' understanding of Islam and Muslims was rather contradictory, which was due to, on the one hand, the fear of a new, unknown power from the East, and on the other hand, to the necessity to

learn from Muslims, who at that time were intellectually surpassing the representatives of the Christian world.

Later, these two motives were supplemented by the desire to colonize territories inhabited by Muslims, coupled with the intention to convert the colonized peoples to Christianity, as well as a sincere but short-lived interest in the wisdom and spirituality that the East (in the broad sense – both the Near and Far East) symbolized for Europeans.

A. Zhuravsky notes that “after “One Thousand and One Nights” translated by A. Galland was published in 1704–1708, all of Europe became fascinated with the East. It was seen, first of all, as an endless source of romance and exoticism” [3, p. 40]. The apogee of the European fascination with the East was the 1002 Nights costume ball (1911) hosted by fashion designer Paul Poiret in his Parisian mansion. On the wave of oriental trend, P. Poiret also released several fragrances (for example, “Aladin” and “Le Minaret”), which were in great demand among wealthy French people of the early 20th century.

It should be noted that the prejudices and stereotypes identified in the analysis of the polemical exchange also had an impact on the cognitive dialogue; they allowed Christians to place themselves above Muslims according to the logic of the official Church’s relations with sects or heretical groups. Colonialism and the academic and applied oriental studies, which were formed under its direct influence only made the situation worse by adding all those Western stereotypes about the East that E. Said cites in his fundamental work “Orientalism” to Christian-Muslim relations. Moreover, A. Zhuravsky notes that, “after dispelling some of the myths about the East, Islamic studies in Europe went on to create many new ‘myths’ about Islam, sometimes only making old misconceptions, prejudices and stereotypes sound scientific” [3, p. 42].

Later, when European countries contributed to the formation of a modern education system in the Middle East by opening schools and colleges (that would become universities),

they would transmit their own ideas about Muslims and Islam to Middle Eastern Christians. The latter, in the time of coexistence with Muslims, would face the facts both confirming these ideas and refuting them. However, it seems that close contacts with Europeans, which did not cease even after decolonization, would only encourage perceiving evidence to the contrary as an exception that proves the rule. Western partners interfering in the internal affairs of the MENA countries would more than once spark interreligious clashes in the region. One of the most striking examples, in our opinion, is Lebanon. It was artificially created at the suggestion of France in order to become a "Christian state" in the Muslim Middle East; Lebanon is suffering from inter-communal and intra-communal contradictions, confessionalism and the undue influence of religion on politics.

Nevertheless, we should also highlight positive aspects of cognitive interreligious dialogue. Thus, there have been cases where studying another religion facilitated a deeper understanding of one's own religion. For instance, this happened with the French scholar Louis Massignon, who was able to comprehend the deep meanings of Christian doctrine through studying Sufism (in particular, the works of the Sufi al-Hallaj); this is evidenced by his writings (for example, "The Three Prayers of Abraham" about the dialogue of the three Abrahamic religions).

Speaking about Muslims studying Christianity, they showed no interest in it for a long time: the translation movement in the Arab Caliphate (late 8th–10th centuries) did not translate Christian theological treatises into Arabic because they simply saw no practical benefit from it. However, later, just at the height of the polemical dialogue, there was a need for a good understanding of Christian doctrine in order to successfully and reasonably debate with Christians about the inconsistency of their religious views.

At present, the cognitive Christian-Muslim dialogue is influenced by the colonial legacy (the sense of superiority that the

Christian world imbues its works on Islam and the Middle East with); Orientalism (the representation of the image of the East according to E. Said; the dominance of Western studies of the East and Islam); as well as Islamophobia, which leads to giving a certain negative connotation to something related to the study of Islam (for example, discrediting of such concepts as 'jihad').

Peacemaking and Partnership Dialogues

Peacekeeping and partnership dialogues in the MENA region are closely connected, since achieving harmonious relations between followers of different religions often requires conflict resolution first, which in turn calls for joint efforts. In addition, both Christians and Muslims are currently equally affected by the activities of radical terrorist groups such as Daesh (ISIS, IS; banned in Russia), which eliminate anyone who does not share their views, no matter whether they are 'infidels' or not. In fact, we are talking about the genocide of Christians in the MENA region, as well as the annihilation of entire (moderate) Muslim communities in a large area of the MENA region and in some African countries (for example, in Ethiopia, where the religious landscape has changed dramatically).

The spread of radical ideologies, as well as so-called 'religiously motivated'³ terrorism, leads to the problem of 'religiophobia', i.e. a negative reaction to any displays of religiosity, regardless of the religion in question. Religiophobia is a common problem for Christians and Muslims (as well as other faiths), requiring a quick solution and careful consideration.

However, in order to understand future scenarios of interreligious dialogue in the MENA region, it is also essential to answer the following questions. Who will speak on behalf of the Christian world in dialogue with the Muslims of the MENA region, the Orthodox (who are by no means united), the Catholics (represented by the Vatican), or representatives of the non-Chalcedonian churches of the East, many of which have been

specifically targeted by radical Islamists like ISIS? Which part of the 'Muslim world' will participate in this dialogue – Sunni or Shi'ite?

All these points need to be systematically addressed, since the success of interreligious dialogue depends on the answers to these questions.

Moreover, the ever-present conflict potential in the MENA region also calls for a change in the approach to teaching the history of Islam, the basics of Islamic ethics, etc., with the objective of encouraging people to see Islam as a religion of peace [9], which can also serve the purposes of peacemaking.

Notes

1. A good example is France's support for the Maronite Christians of Lebanon in their opposition to the Druze in the second half of the 19th century. With European intervention, the Maronites went from being a separate group within the community of Middle Eastern Christians to forming a union with the Roman Catholic Church, and then fully accepting Catholic dogma and rituals, which may in fact mean the loss of their own identity and uniqueness.
2. Can be translated as "About Heresies". See [6].
3. One of the reputable Western researchers of terrorism, D. Rapoport, calls the fourth wave of terrorism a "religious wave," and following his cue, many authors are using the wording "religious terrorism," with which we strongly disagree. See [8].

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