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## THE LATEST TRENDS IN THE EVOLUTION OF THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION

*The article is devoted to the analysis of the evolution of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as an international organization (hereinafter SCO) and the identification of the latest trends in its formation at the end of almost twenty years of its history.*

*The author states that the very existence and the activities of the SCO are currently assessed by the world community ambiguously. The expansion of the SCO through the inclusion of two nuclear powers of Pakistan and India is seen as a kind of demarche of the main members of the Organization, which has a deep geopolitical implication. The factor of participation in the SCO of Russia and China gives this organization an ambitious character in the eyes of the world community in terms of geopolitics. But, in the author's opinion, we should not forget the participation in it of such countries as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, for whom the SCO membership means the aiming for ensuring national and regional security in the most essential aspects – from economy to the threat of terrorism and extremism. Because of the proximity of a dangerous source of insecurity such as Afghanistan, these Central Asian countries naturally try to fit into systems promising to maintain security at the national and regional levels. In parallel with economic issues, over time, the need appeared to address the emerging non-economic cross-border threats in the region, mainly of a terrorist nature. Thus, without a clearly defined military component, the organization is forced to pay increasing attention to security issues, which means the use of armed intervention.*

*Over time, the SCO has become a universal organization, which delays its development as a classic intergovernmental organization. An Organization that, by name, should be multilateral, is essentially not such: the SCO has remained the platform for bilateral relations between its members.*

*In an analysis of the economic cooperation in the framework of the SCO, attention is drawn to the conjugation of the Organization's activities on expanding economic relations between the member countries with the Chinese program "One Belt, One Way".*

*Thus, today it is difficult to characterize the SCO as an effective mechanism for realizing economic interests and ensuring security for each participating country.*

**Key words:** *Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Central Asia, China, economic cooperation, "One Belt, One Let" (OPOP).*

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## НОВІТНІ ТРЕНДИ В ЕВОЛЮЦІЇ ШАНХАЙСЬКОЇ ОРГАНІЗАЦІЇ СПІВПРАЦІ

Статтю присвячено аналізу еволюції Шанхайської організації співробітництва і виявленню новітніх трендів в її становленні упродовж майже двадцятирічної історії існування.

Автор констатує, що світовою спільнотою діяльність і саме існування ШОС оцінюється неоднозначно. Розширення ШОС за рахунок включення двох ядерних держав – Пакистану та Індії – розглядається Заходом як своєрідний демарш з боку основних членів організації, що має глибокий геополітичний підтекст. Фактор участі в ШОС Росії і Китаю в очах світової спільноти надає цій організації амбітний характер з точки зору геополітики. Але, на думку автора, не слід забувати про участь у ній таких країн, як Казахстан, Узбекистан, Киргизстан, Таджикистан, для яких членство в ШОС означає прагнення до забезпечення національної, регіональної безпеки в найбільш нагальних аспектах, починаючи з економіки і закінчуючи загрозою тероризму, екстремізму. Маючи по сусідству таке небезпечне джерело загрози безпеці, як Афганістан, ці центральноазіатські країни закономірно намагаються вбудуватися в системи, що обіцяють підтримувати безпеку на національному і регіональному рівнях.

При аналізі еволюції ШОС авторка звертає увагу на суперечливі аспекти діяльності цієї організації. Як відомо, у 2001 році для розвитку економічного та гуманітарного співробітництва шість країн: Китай, Росія, Казахстан, Узбекистан, Киргизстан і Таджикистан створили Шанхайську організацію співпраці. Паралельно з економічною проблематикою з часом проявилася необхідність вирішення неекономічних транскордонних викликів у регіоні в основному терористичної спрямованості. Однак, не маючи чітко вираженої військової складової, організація змушена, тим не менш, приділяти дедалі зростаючу увагу питанням безпеки. Згодом ШОС перетворилася на універсальну організацію, що і затримує її розвиток як класичної міжурядової організації. Організація, яка, згідно з назвою, повинна бути багатосторонньою, по суті такою не є: ШОС так і залишилася майданчиком для двосторонніх відносин між її членами.

Безліч питань викликає характер економічного співробітництва в рамках ШОС, яке останнім часом стало асоціюватися з реалізацією китайського проекту «Один пояс – Один шлях». Отже, на сьогоднішній день охарактеризувати ШОС як ефективний механізм для реалізації економічних інтересів і забезпечення безпеки кожної країни-учасниці складно.

**Ключові слова:** Шанхайська організація співробітництва (ШОС), Центральна Азія, Китай, економічне співробітництво, «Один пояс – Один шлях».

According to most experts, the SCO is a new type of interstate organizations model, the essence of which is that the members of the organization, in accordance with the principle of regional security, establish and develop partnership rather than bloc relations. If in the period of formation the SCO was aimed at strengthening the confidence in the military sphere in the border areas and the emphasis was placed on the struggle against the “three evils”: terrorism, national separatism, religious extremism, and then the programs on trade, economic, integration, energy, transport and humanitarian cooperation were initiated. Thus, the Organization soon became universal, covering all aspects of interaction between participating countries.

In our opinion, one of the well-known approaches to the analysis of the SCO in the academic community in the West is the following understanding of the purpose of this Organization: “...to create the potential to act independently of the unipole or at cross with it” (International Relation Theory and the consequences of unipolarity., 2012). And the nature of this Organization, defined by its members mainly as economically, is understood differently by Western researchers. For example, M. de Haas, in his article on the Organization, emphasizes its focus on security issues: “...the SCO’s development towards a full-grown security organization i.e., on its way to an alliance with a span of activities and a depth of cooperation similar to that of NATO” (Marcel de Haas., 2008). Today, when more than 18 years have passed since its inception, it is obvious that the SCO is not an international organization of the classical type. Over the years of its existence, it has not evolved into a typical association with developed multilateralism. Despite the presence of the necessary attributes of the international organization, it really represents a platform for the establishment and development of bilateral relations between its members. As Neil MacFarlane defines: «The organization provides a forum for regular communication that assists in minimizing potentially dangerous misunderstandings... members see value in the SCO as a venue for consultation on the region, for exchange of information, and for coordination of policy where interests coincide» (Neil MacFarlane., 2017).

There is a self-positioning of the SCO as a unique unification in the world. The “Shanghai spirit” is called upon to promote the idea of a democratic, innovative character of the Organization. «The Shanghai spirit Cooperation in the framework of the SCO is distinguished by the spirit of mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, mutual consultation, respect for the diversity of cultures and the desire for joint development. These principles, called the “Shanghai spirit,” will continue to lie at the heart of relations between the SCO member states». This explanation is given to this phenomenon in the “Development Strategy of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization till 2025” (“Development Strategy of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization till 2025”). As we know, there is not a single international organization in the world, whose basic documents do not specify such principles of activity. Therefore, it is impossible to talk about the uniqueness of the SCO in this respect. The declaration of “equality, mutual consultation, respect ...” is confirmed only by the fact that all members have the right to preside in the Organization and no one has the prescribed privileges

for decision-making. It's not a secret that decisions on matters of principle are taken at the highest level, during bilateral meetings of leaders (although not only in the SCO, but in the entire world practice the decision-making process is not yet fully transparent).

Certainly, the fact that Russia and China are the members of the SCO attaches geopolitical ambitions to the Organization in the eyes of the international community. It is impossible to deny the fact that for China and Russia, the SCO is a geopolitical project designed to serve, first of all, their interests. R. Rouden expresses a common opinion in the expert community about this: «In the crudest sense, the core of the SCO is based on the Russia-China strategic bargain – Russia has the guns, and China has the money. Together, they are seeking to dominate Mackinder's World Island» (The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: the biggest international organization you've never heard of., 2017).

The geopolitical effect of the Organization is reflected in its perception by the world centers in terms of national interests. As James Poulos assesses: "The main question officials should ask and answer – again and again as events unfold – is how much the SCO is adding stability to the international system without imperiling key American interests. So far, the evidence is decidedly mixed. Over a decade ago, a U.S. bid for observer status at the organization was unceremoniously denied, so analysts and policymakers can't be as sure as they'd like of what goes on behind closed doors. Nevertheless, much of what will shape strategic prescriptions will flow from the group's most obvious moves. Consider the current slate of new and potential full members: India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey" (James Poulos., 2017).

The following controversial features of the SCO are noted by the experts:

- the polarity of the attitude of the leaders of the SCO – China and Russia to the joining of new members (the first particularly supported the entry of Pakistan, the second – India);
- different perception of the Organization's activities (Russia focuses on security, China on the economy);
- the lack of a unified position in the evaluation of events in the international arena: for example, the assessment of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict in 2008 and the participation of the Russian Federation Air Force in Syria (N. Mamedova., 2016).

Also we should not forget the participation in it of such countries as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, for whom the SCO membership means the aiming for ensuring national and regional security in the most essential aspects – from economy to the threat of terrorism and extremism. Because of the proximity of a dangerous source of insecurity such as Afghanistan, these Central Asian countries naturally try to fit into systems promising to maintain security at the national and regional levels. The closest international environment represented by two major actors in the international politics such as China and Russia that almost seal off the region, does not leave much choice to these countries. Some experts consider efforts of Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan and other countries in the region to defend their positions and security by di-

versifying their international relations at least as short-sightedness and an inconsistency in their foreign policy course. Most likely the SCO is a variation of ways to ensure their national security for the Central Asian countries. To date, the multifactor security system has cemented its place in Central Asia, where the Collective Security Treaty Organization and NATO are involved in addition to the SCO. NATO's presence in the region creates counterbalance to Russia's domination (Russia participates in both CSTO and SCO), giving countries in the region a chance to diversify the ways of ensuring their security underpinned by national interests. R. Allison justifies the participation of the Central Asian countries in the SCO in the following way: «The US military presence in Central Asia since autumn 2001 may tempt Moscow and Beijing to try to instrumentalize the SCO as a regionalbalancing structure against Washington. But this goal will not be accepted by its Central Asian members, keen on exploring the limits of their new bilateral security ties with the United States. In any case, for these regional states the uniqueness of the SCO lies in the opportunity it offers to bandwagon with both Russia and China in a framework where the Chinese presence increasingly offsets any Russian efforts to impose unwanted aspects of its integration agenda on the Central Asian states, while the Russian presence equally provides reassurance about Chinese policies and therefore enables the SCO to act as a vehicle to incorporate Chinese interests in developing joint responses to selected security challenges in Central Asia. In this arrangement the Central Asian member states retain some latitude to advance their own priorities and leave their imprint on the agenda of the SCO». (R. Allison, 2012).

But on the other hand, it is also obvious that the participation of these countries in regional security structures is not obligatory for military cooperation on a bilateral basis. For example, if we draw parallels with the Collective Security Treaty (hereinafter the CSTO), Uzbekistan had temporarily suspended its membership in it, but this did not in any way affect the Russian-Uzbek military cooperation. On the contrary, with the administration of the new president of Uzbekistan Sh.Mirziyev, the military cooperation between the two countries has been intensified. An agreement was signed on the development of military-technical cooperation and Uzbekistan was given the opportunity to purchase, repair and modernize weapons at domestic prices, and train officers in Russian military universities. In addition, it became possible for the Uzbek military to participate in Russian military festivals, joint military exercises (the first in 12 years was held in October 2017), send delegations to exchange experiences. In fact, Uzbekistan received the same privileges as CSTO members, only Russia does not have formal duties to protect Uzbekistan, as it does under the SCTO (M. Starchak., 2017). In the case of the SCO, the situation would be similar: if any member of this organization leaves temporarily or permanently, China will still continue to maintain bilateral relations with it. That is, regardless of membership in the SCO or the CSTO, the Central Asian states will be in close contact with Russia and China in a bilateral format. It turns out that in this case the SCO is a convenient tool for China to optimize its relations with these countries and a marker that outlines its zone of interests in the region to the

West from it. It was China from all the members of the Organization that first benefited from the establishment of this organization: the harmonization of delimitation and demarcation of borders between the Central Asian countries, on the one hand, and China on the other. However, border contradictions, closely related to the water and energy pool of problems within the region, remain frozen, and the organization is not used as an effective institutional mechanism for their resolution, despite the fact that one of the principles prescribed in its Charter is precisely the peaceful settlement of disagreements among the participating countries, and one of the areas of cooperation is the provision of rational use of water resources. (Hartiya Shanhayskoy Organizacii., 2002). It turns out that the solution of interstate problems in the CAR, which a priori is possible within the organization, is not a priority or completely uninteresting for China?

The participation of the CAR countries in the SCO can be analyzed on the basis of neoclassical realism, which echoes the Thucydides' formula, that "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must" (Gideon Rose, 1998). Proceeding from this, two assumptions can be made: first, the membership of weak states in organizations with the participation of stronger ones is imposed by the first to the seconds; second – within the framework of the organization, weak states have the role of obedient performers without any pretensions. If neoclassical realism sees in weak states the executors of the will of superpowers, then liberal institutionalism leaves them chances for some independence. The strengthening of globalization processes, whose central idea is liberalization, promises the further development of liberal institutionalism. "The institutionalist research program in international relations is a promising one. The logic of institutionalist theory, with its focus on the informational role of institutions, appears solid" (Robert O. Keohane; Lisa L. Martin., 1995). With the strengthening of the role of the institutional foundations of interstate relations, weak states using their membership in international organizations may play their role as a equal member of the international community in the future. Being the members of certain international organizations, such states, along with obtaining a guarantee of economic, military security, get a hypothetical opportunity to set medium and long-term objectives for the realization of their national interests.

Military cooperation within the SCO is one of the most controversial aspects of the Organization's activities. On the one hand, such cooperation is not among the priorities of the Shanghai Organization. On the other hand, it is of great practical interest for all participating countries, primarily Russia and China. However, in Russia, military contacts in the vast post-Soviet space are more associated with the CSTO, which already has Collective Rapid Response Forces for these purposes. Military ties of China with Russia and the Central Asian republics are realized at the collective level, mainly, using the potential of the SCO. It is in the sphere of military cooperation of the SCO that a conceptual "discrepancy" arises. The Organization that does not have a clearly expressed military component and positions itself as "not political", especially as "not military-political", systematically conducts military exercises. Such

expressions as the “Second Warsaw Pact”, “Eastern NATO”, characterizing the SCO in the world political discourse were caused precisely by these military exercises. Perhaps the following description of the essence of the SCO by British researchers is closer to the reality: “Is the SCO a potential opponent of the Western order? Not necessarily...The SCO is no ‘club of autocrats’, despite some superficial similarity. Nor is the SCO a stepping stone for a new ‘international order’ led by China — their concerns about separatism, extremism and terrorism (the ‘Three Evils’ of the SCO Charter) reflect a broadly pro-status quo attitude. After all, China, Russia and India do not want to change the basic rules of a system from which they have largely benefited. They would rather look for a more important role within the current system. Additionally, the budget is extremely small — less than US\$4 million in recent years (the exact current true international organization” (Ernesto Gallo., 2017).

Today the SCO covers a wide range of activities from military security to economic cooperation. Here it should be noted that the increase in the intensity of the implementation of cultural and humanitarian programs within the SCO in the last 3 years. Marathons, youth summer camps, competitions among students of the SCO countries, attract attention by their constancy and far-reaching goals. Experts, scientists from member countries gather on an ongoing basis to discuss current problems in the SCO zone. “The University of SCO” became a network for the spread of the “Shanghai spirit”. One important feature of all these cultural and humanitarian activities is that they are mainly financed and hosted by China.

The contradictory nature of the Organization makes it difficult to achieve the goals set out in its basic documents. Agreements on key issues in the SCO are largely achieved through a series of bilateral contacts between leaders of member states and representatives of the great powers. Also, during its existence the Organization was not involved in resolving interstate conflicts in its zone. When the conflict situation on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border arose in 2016, Kyrgyzstan appealed for help to the CSTO, but not to the SCO. The SCO also did not respond to the clashes between India and Pakistan in 2018. Therefore, the question of the real expediency of the SCO as a guarantor of security in its area of responsibility remains open.

Economic cooperation within the SCO also raises many questions. In September 2003, the heads of government of the SCO member states signed a detailed program of multilateral trade and economic cooperation, designed for 20 years. This program set the task in the medium term of stable, predictable and favorable conditions in the field of trade and investment, norms and rules of economic cooperation were worked out. During the immediate implementation of this program, issues were identified that needed to be resolved at a non-interstate level. So, to facilitate the customs procedures in 2007, the “Agreement between the SCO member states on cooperation and mutual assistance in customs matters” was adopted. In 2010, the “Agreement between the SCO member states on cooperation in the field of agriculture”, and next year the “Agreement between the SCO member states on cooperation in the field of health” were signed.

In 2008 the spheres of economic cooperation and interaction within the SCO were expanded in accordance with the updated plan of activities for the implementation of the above program. In addition to trade and investments, the following directions were announced: customs, cooperation in the application of technical regulations, standards and conformity assessment procedures, financial and taxation spheres, transport, fuel and energy complex, agro-industrial complex, science and technology, information and telecommunication technologies, nature management and protection environment. In 2012, the documentary base for economic cooperation was again clarified – the Council of Heads of State signed “The main directions of the SCO development strategy for the medium term».

As the experts note, despite the programs and documents adopted by the SCO, which call for “expanding”, “deepening,” cooperation within the organization does not go at the pace that was planned when they were adopted. The overwhelming majority of these projects implemented in the SCO space are clearly bilateral. All reports on the activities of the organization and the participation of members in it contain mainly bilateral, and to a lesser extent, multilateral projects. At the same time, according to A. Lukin, “having only the attitude to the SCO that members are involved in them” (A. Lukin., 2007). Also, the characteristic features of these projects are that “more and more projects are carried out not in an intergovernmental format, but in the corporate sector” (K. Barsky., 2013). To date, any projects of an economic nature, for example, between Russia and Kazakhstan, can be attributed equally well both to the sphere of cooperation in the Eurasian economic union, and similar topics within the SCO framework. The Chinese idea of creating a free trade zone suggests gracefully avoiding such acute angles in the result of their conjugation. According to K. Syroezhkin: “Formally, this looks like a proposal for the integration of the economic space of the EAEC and the SCO.” But he believes that “even in the long term, the realization of this idea is possible only under strictly stipulated conditions, otherwise, China will simply swallow the entire economic space of the SCO” (K. Syroezhkin., 2006).

Economic cooperation within the SCO is assessed critically by experts. According to S. Luzyanin, “the SCO multilateral cooperation program” has remained on the paper” (S. Luzyanin., 2015). D. Orlov calls what is happening in the SCO, “an” imitation of the stormy activities “undertaken by China” (Vzaimodeystvie v ramkah SHOS., 2012). From the total failure in the sphere of economic cooperation, the SCO is saved by the fact that all successful projects implemented by the member countries fit into the framework of the organization. For example, a successfully launched oil transportation project between Kazakhstan and China. Today, this pipeline delivers Kazakhstani and Russian oil to China and can be considered “Shanghai” only by the composition of the involved countries. The autocorridor “Western China-Western Europe”, thanks to which the trade turnover between the countries along it has increased, has the same attitude to the SCO.

The Chinese project “One belt, one way”, announced in 2013 and conjugated with the SCO, became an indicator of what actually is the SCO and what

happens there. This project includes a development plan aimed at exporting China's production capabilities through improving logistic links with Europe, South Asia, Oceania and Africa. There are two ways – land and sea ones:

1. The economic belt of the Silk Road: the development of infrastructure in Eurasia, the Middle East and Europe.

2. Sea Silk Road: the connection of China's ports with Southeast Asia, Oceania and East Africa. (Boston Consulting Group. Review., 2016).

There are several available sources of financing for the Chinese transport initiative: the Asian Bank for Infrastructure Investment, the BRICS Development Bank and the Silk Road Fund. In addition, of course, Chinese state and private structures are making financial injections into the projects of the «One Belt, One Way» In essence, this means that in the course of implementing this project, China acts as a financial, investment driver in regions lying in three directions to the north-west, south-west, south-east from its borders. The SCO zone practically covers all these directions, as direct members, observer countries, partner countries for dialogue are located on them.

Special optimism about the future of the project is expressed by Chinese experts: "The initiative on the construction of the belt and the way proposed by China in 2013 gives new chances for the development of the SCO. Joint planning and participation in the implementation of this project will contribute to the creation of new points of economic growth and will increase its dynamics" (Yan Yu., 2016). It is doubtful to talk about the possibility of joint planning, because it is unlikely that China will finance projects that are not profitable in terms of its economic interests.

The SCO member states have reached unanimity on the joint construction of the "One Belt, One Way" and have written it in the declaration of the summit in Ufa (2015); the heads of China, Russia and Mongolia signed the "Planned Summary on the Construction of the China-Mongolian-Russian Economic Corridor". At the Tashkent summit (2016), the leaders of the SCO member states expressed their intention to seek the integration of national development strategies and supported the China's initiative to jointly form the Economic belt of the Silk Road as one of the tools for activating regional economic interaction. In September 2016, at a symposium of the think tanks of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Beijing, experts from different countries supported and approved proposals for the implementation of the initiative of the belt and the way within the SCO (Silk Way-Review., October 2016).

According to the official website of the Bank of China, as of the end of March 2017, the Bank of China carried out about 460 large projects along the Belt and the Way, the total investment exceeded 472.2 billion US dollars, the volume of targeted credit support exceeded \$ 100.5 billion USA. (Silk Way-Review., January 2018).

Over the past 4-5 years China and the countries of Central Asia have simplified trade procedures, so that their trade relations have become even closer. At present, China has become the largest trading partner of Kyrgyzstan, the second largest trading partner of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. According to the statistics of Chinese customs, trade turnover between China and

Central Asia in January-September of 2017 amounted to 299 million US dollars, the annual growth was 6, 61%. Trade and economic cooperation between Kazakhstan and China is very intensive. In 2016 annual growth in agricultural trade between countries reached 39%. In the same year, Kazakhstan imported 295,000 tons of wheat from Kazakhstan, which was a record indicator. Kazakhstan, for its part, for the first time exported flour to China. According to the data by the end of the first half of 2017 China invested in Kazakhstan a total of about 42 million US dollars. Thus, Kazakhstan has taken the 1-st place in terms of Chinese investment in the countries of the "Belt and Way". The parties have already agreed on 51 projects of cooperation in the field of production capacities. In June 2017, during the visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Kazakhstan, the "Zhongxin" Bank of China with the participation of the Chinese investment company "Shuangwei" concluded an agreement in Astana with the People's Bank of Kazakhstan on the transaction, acquiring the rights to the shares of the latter. The Kazakh part did not see anything out of the ordinary in this activity of China. Kazakhstani experts are sure that such policy is common for China and Chinese investments are extremely beneficial for our country. The former president of Kazakhstan N. Nazarbayev initiated the integration of the Kazakhstan program on the development of the transport and logistics system "Nurlyjol" with the "Belt and Way" project.

Inclusion of Pakistan in the SCO seemed to expand the geography of economic cooperation within the Organization. But in fact, what was happening between China and Pakistan in the economy and investment, successfully blended into the framework of the SCO. It's about the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). «CPEC is a flagship project under One Belt One Road (OBOR) and will provide natural connectivity link to SCO member states. It is already connected to six routes of SCO through the nodal point of Kashgar. CPEC-SCO connectivity would further enhance economic cooperation. Moreover, special economic zones along the length of the Corridor would spur growth and economic opportunities for the entire region» (CPEC-SCO connectivity to further boost economic cooperation: Aziz..., 2018).

The current situation of the SCO is somewhat paradoxical in view of the fact that the whole regional organization for cooperation has turned into an instrument for realizing the geo-economic goals of one power. «The organization is an important platform for the joint construction of the "One Belt, One Way". This expression can often be found in the latest official documents of the Organization. The SCO, in fact, facilitates China's way to wide-scale trade and economic expansion in the SCO zone and beyond and promotes the implementation of its policy on the dispersion of both economic capacities and human resources around the world.

As A. Kortunov stresses: "In practice, the role of the SCO has been reduced mainly to the fact that individual subregional economic projects of a bilateral or trilateral level have been brought under the roof of the Organization. Probably, such a multilateral "roof" helped somehow camouflage China's economic dominance in the region, but it did not change the essence of the processes" (A. Kortunov. ShOS – kamen'...2018)."The SCO will become more a symbol of

Chinese dominance in Central and South Asia than a structure protecting the western borders, as it has been so far," said Erica Marat, an expert on Central Asia and professor at the National University of Defense in Washington.

"It will be used even more for Beijing's plans to expand its economic presence from China to Europe" (V chemsmsylShOS....2018).

During the Qingdao summit in the summer of 2018, China set itself the task of strengthening economic partnership and cooperation within the framework of the SCO. At the same time, the Chinese side announced the launch of a targeted loan program in the amount of £ 3.5 billion under the SCO and proposed the creation of an economic cooperation zone (Summit G7: edinyi....2018). "China will go all out to ensure four home-field diplomatic events in 2018 are a success in a bid to "open a new chapter" for win-win cooperation between China and other countries". – Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi pledged in an exclusive interview with People's Daily. He stressed that China will increase its efforts to engage in global governance, and make economic globalization more open, inclusive and beneficial to more people" (China to open new chapter...2018). By the end of 2018, China had created seven state-level trade and economic cooperation zones in the territories of the SCO member states, and the total investment in the organization's member countries exceeded \$ 86 billion (Spetsial'nyireportahz...2018).

At the 19th meeting of the heads of the SCO member states in June 2019 in Bishkek, more attention was paid to economic cooperation than to other aspects. The participating countries have once again expressed their support for the plans for the implementation of the Chinese project "One Belt and One Way". According to the decision of this meeting, a new plan for trade and economic cooperation within the SCO has been developing in the last months of this year. And there is hope that the new plan of cooperation will take into account the interests of all participating countries and bring economic benefits to all parties.

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