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POLITICAL MECHANISMS OF THE "GREEN" ECONOMY AND CLIMATE DIPLOMACY IN CENTRAL ASIA

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Abstract: This article analyzes the political-institutional mechanisms of the "green" economy and climate diplomacy in ensuring regional security in Central Asia. The transboundary nature of issues such as climate change, water scarcity, desertification, glacier retreat, environmental degradation, and energy security is placing cooperation among the region's states onto a new political agenda. The study examines the concept of the "green" economy not merely as a tool for addressing environmental problems, but as a political mechanism that interlinks economic, energy, environmental, and human security. Furthermore, the article highlights the significance—from a security perspective—of the Consultative Meetings of Central Asian Heads of State, CAREC, the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea, water-energy cooperation, regional environmental initiatives, and the activities of international climate institutions. It also analyzes Uzbekistan's role in regional "green" diplomacy and its initiatives to bring the Aral Sea region crisis to the international agenda.

Keywords: Central Asia, "green" economy, climate diplomacy, regional security, environmental security, water diplomacy, energy security, Aral Sea region, climate change, political-institutional mechanisms

In the 21st century, the concept of international and regional security has expanded beyond the scope of traditional military security to encompass economic, environmental, energy, food, and water security. Climate change, in particular, is becoming a factor that directly influences the economic and political parameters of interstate relations. This situation is of particular importance for Central Asia, a region characterized by limited natural resources, the presence of transboundary rivers, and high vulnerability to climate change.

In the Central Asian region—comprising Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—water, energy, agriculture, and ecological systems are inextricably linked. According to World Bank data, climate change in the region is exacerbating water scarcity, land degradation, droughts, floods, and other natural hazards. Meanwhile, agriculture remains one of the primary sectors for freshwater consumption. Consequently, there is a growing need to manage water and energy issues not in isolation, but as a single, interconnected system.

In Central Asia, the impact of climate change on security is primarily linked to water resources. While Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan—located in the region's upper reaches—play a crucial role regarding water and energy resources, certain areas of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan are heavily dependent on water resources for irrigation and agriculture. This interdependence necessitates a simultaneous approach to water, energy, and food security. From this perspective, the "green"

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economy and climate diplomacy in Central Asia are transcending the narrow confines of environmental policy to become political-institutional tools for ensuring regional security. The concept of the "green" economy is a key component of the modern sustainable development paradigm. The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) defines the "green" economy as an economic system that significantly reduces environmental risks and natural resource scarcity while enhancing human well-being and social equity. Its core characteristics include low-carbon development, resource efficiency, and social inclusivity. Based on this, the "green" economy is not limited solely to the development of renewable energy. It entails restructuring economic production, energy, transport, agriculture, water management, urban planning, waste management, and investment policy based on environmental criteria.

In the context of Central Asia, the security dimension of the "green" economy is particularly significant. This is because issues such as water scarcity, energy shortages, or environmental degradation do not remain confined to specific sectors but can impact interstate relations.

Climate diplomacy involves states coordinating their efforts to address shared challenges related to climate change through diplomatic negotiations, international organizations, regional agreements, and joint projects. Under the Paris Agreement, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) represent the commitments states make to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change. Consequently, a key function of climate diplomacy is to harmonize national interests with shared regional interests.

Regional Security Complex Theory serves as an important methodological framework for analyzing this process. According to this approach, certain security issues are not confined by state borders; instead, geographically proximate states are interconnected within a security system. The water, environmental, energy, and climate challenges facing Central Asia possess precisely this kind of transboundary nature. Therefore, the article suggests that the interconnection between the "green" economy and climate diplomacy can be represented by the following chain: climate change – environmental risks – water and energy pressures – economic and social risks – intersection of interstate interests – diplomatic dialogue – institutional cooperation – regional security.

Central Asia is one of the regions facing the complex consequences of climate change. Rising temperatures, retreating glaciers, and the intensification of droughts and extreme weather events in the region are directly impacting water, food, and energy security. ESCAP assesses Central Asia as a region vulnerable to climate-induced pressures regarding water resources, noting that the region's arid geography and reliance on glacier-fed rivers exacerbate the risk of water scarcity. Under these conditions, water resource management is not merely an issue of environmental policy; it impacts agriculture, energy, food security, employment, and interstate relations. The issue of transboundary rivers, in particular, is a crucial area for political and institutional cooperation in the region. The fact that water resources originate in the territory of one state but are utilized in the territories of others reinforces the interdependence of interests. Furthermore, the Aral Sea tragedy clearly demonstrates the transnational nature of environmental security in Central Asia. According to ESCAP data, the surface area of the Aral Sea has shrunk by more than 90 percent since the 1960s, while climate change is further exacerbating existing environmental pressures. The issues facing the Aral Sea region encompass not only water and ecology but also public health, agriculture, employment, migration, and

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human well-being. Consequently, ensuring environmental security in the Aral Sea region can be viewed as part of a regional human security framework. ESCAP studies highlight the need to formulate a regional water policy for the Aral Sea region, improve cooperation mechanisms within transboundary river basins, expand the use of water-saving technologies, and develop early warning systems. Thus, the issue of climate security is a complex challenge that is difficult to resolve solely through the individual political actions of Central Asian states. The effectiveness of the transition to a "green" economy in Central Asia depends not only on technological capabilities but also on the level of development of political and institutional mechanisms. The first such mechanism is interstate political dialogue. In this context, the Consultative Meetings of the Heads of Central Asian States are becoming a vital platform for discussing regional issues at the interstate political level. Attention within this format is also directed toward ecology, climate change, and the challenges facing the Aral Sea region. Joint statements issued during these meetings emphasize the need to coordinate efforts regarding environmental protection, the mitigation of climate change impacts, glacier melting, and Aral Sea-related issues. A second mechanism is water-energy diplomacy; in this sphere, water and energy constitute an inseparable system within Central Asia. Upstream hydroelectric potential and downstream irrigation needs are interconnected. The World Bank's CAWEP program is specifically aimed at strengthening regional cooperation on water and energy security, as well as fostering data exchange, institutional capacity, and political-technical dialogue. The third mechanism is the development of renewable energy; the effective utilization of solar, wind, and hydropower potential within this framework can strengthen the energy security of Central Asian states, reduce dependence on fossil fuels, and help cut carbon emissions. Furthermore, large-scale renewable energy projects facilitate energy integration and the exchange of electricity among the countries. The fourth mechanism involves strengthening regional environmental institutions. The first Regional Environmental Summit, held in Astana in 2026, marked a new stage in the institutionalization of environmental cooperation in Central Asia. Initiatives regarding the circular economy, glaciers, biodiversity, air pollution, and climate-related regional cooperation were put forward during the summit. This process enables environmental issues to shift from the national policies of individual states to the regional political agenda. The fifth mechanism is cooperation with international financial institutions. Transitioning to a "green" economy requires substantial investment; therefore, the activities of the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and other international financial institutions are crucial for driving institutional changes in the region. For instance, the ADB's CAREC Climate Action Plan for 2025–2027 identifies climate risks, water-energy-food security, low-carbon development, and a regional climate platform as key areas of focus. One of the primary objectives of climate diplomacy in Central Asia is to transform environmental challenges into opportunities for cooperation rather than sources of interstate conflict. Water diplomacy plays a particularly important role in this regard. Regular political and technical dialogue among states regarding water resources helps prevent disputes, identify shared interests, and develop long-term agreements. ADB's regional climate studies also emphasize that addressing climate issues in Central Asia requires coordinated regional action across the water, energy, agriculture, transport, and disaster management sectors. Uzbekistan occupies a pivotal position in climate diplomacy due to its central location in the region and its direct connection to key river basins, irrigation systems, and the Aral Sea region. The issue of the Aral Sea region holds special significance within Uzbekistan's environmental diplomacy. The consequences of the Aral Sea tragedy are not limited to the territory of Uzbekistan but affect the entire

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Central Asian ecosystem. Consequently, bringing the issues facing the Aral Sea region to the international and regional agenda is a key priority of Uzbekistan's environmental diplomacy. Another vital aspect of climate diplomacy for Uzbekistan is the strengthening of political trust among Central Asian states. Regular dialogue on climate, water, and environmental issues can also lay an institutional foundation for cooperation in other political and economic spheres. To further develop the "green" economy and climate diplomacy in Central Asia, it is essential to both strengthen existing political institutions and establish new mechanisms.

In Central Asia, climate change is transcending the realm of environmental issues to become a multidimensional factor affecting regional security. Water scarcity, glacier retreat, desertification, the Aral Sea ecological crisis, energy needs, and food security are all inextricably linked. From this perspective, examining the "green" economy and climate diplomacy as political-institutional mechanisms for regional security is of both scientific and practical importance. Analysis indicates that the key elements of this mechanism comprise interstate political dialogue, water diplomacy, energy cooperation, renewable energy, climate finance, environmental monitoring, scientific-technical cooperation, and partnerships with international institutions. Consultative meetings of Central Asian heads of state, CAREC mechanisms, the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea, water-energy programs, and new regional environmental cooperation initiatives established in 2026 are expanding the institutional foundations of this process. The promotion of new regional partnerships regarding the circular economy, glaciers, biodiversity, and air pollution at the 2026 Regional Environmental Summit further demonstrates that environmental issues are increasingly occupying a prominent place on the regional political agenda. The article's primary scientific conclusion is that, in Central Asia, the "green" economy and climate diplomacy represent not merely a distinct policy for managing environmental problems, but rather integral components of regional security—encompassing economic, energy, water, and ecological dimensions.

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