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A POSSIBLE MODEL OF INTEGRATION OF THE CENTRAL ASIAN STATES

Erkinov Sardor Elmurod ugli
Independent Researcher
E-mail: erkinov.se.me@gmail.com
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Abstract. The thesis proposes a phased intergovernmental model of integration for the Central Asian states, based on functional cooperation and differentiated participation. The model envisages strengthening permanent coordination without prematurely creating rigid supranational institutions.
Keywords: Central Asia, integration, regionalism, functional cooperation, intergovernmental model, trade, security.

INTRODUCTION

For the Central Asian states, mechanically copying the European or Eurasian integration model appears to be of limited practical value. The countries of the region differ in their foreign-policy priorities, the structure of their economies, and their participation in international organizations. Therefore, a realistic model should combine voluntariness, the intergovernmental nature of decision-making, functional cooperation, and the possibility of participating in individual projects at different speeds.

MAIN PART

A possible model should be structured as a four-tier system. The first tier consists of regular meetings of heads of state that define strategic priorities. The second tier is a compact permanent coordination mechanism comprising national coordinators, a rotating secretariat, and a unified system for monitoring the implementation of decisions. These very elements of institutional strengthening were proposed by the President of Uzbekistan at the Seventh Consultative Meeting in November 2025 [3]. Their advantage is that they strengthen implementation discipline without transforming the regional format into a rigid supranational organization.

The third tier should include sectoral councils and project platforms for trade, transport, energy, water, digitalization, and climate. The economic basis for such rapprochement is expanding: according to official data, mutual trade among the states of the region reached USD 10.7 billion in 2024, while the aggregate volume of investment in Central Asia increased by 17% [3]. In these circumstances, practical integration should begin not with a single currency or a common customs tariff, but with compatible electronic customs procedures, simplified transit, cross-border trade, mutual recognition of selected documents, and coordinated infrastructure projects.

The fourth tier is a system of regional public goods: security, sustainable water use, energy reliability, environmental protection, and emergency prevention. In November 2025, the heads of state adopted the Concept of Regional Security and Stability and the Catalogue of Security Risks in Central Asia for 2026-2028 [4]. The existence of agreed documents makes it possible to move integration beyond the economic sphere toward a comprehensive model of regional resilience.

Economic projects can rely on existing financial and expert mechanisms. CAREC brings together 11 countries and development partners; by December 2025, USD 57.9 billion in investment had been

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mobilized under the program [1]. For Central Asian integration, this means that there is no need to create a separate large fund at the initial stage; instead, existing mechanisms for preparing and financing cross-border projects can be used and supplemented with the region's own priorities.

The proposed model should remain open while retaining a clearly defined Central Asian core. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan should retain primary responsibility for the rules of internal cooperation, while external partners participate in individual projects and formats. The adoption by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 May 2026, without a vote, of Resolution 80/260 on strengthening regional cooperation and economic integration in Central Asia provides additional international legitimacy for this course [2].

CONCLUSION

The optimal integration model for Central Asia is not an accelerated transition to a union with rigid supranational powers, but a consistent process of functional integration. Its logic can be expressed by the formula “coordination - common rules - joint projects - sustainable institutions.” Under this approach, the depth of integration will be determined by genuine mutual benefits and the implementation of adopted decisions, rather than by the formal number of institutions created.

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