



GEORGIA, MOLDOVA AND UKRAINE: NOT IN THE COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES ANY MORE, NOT IN THE EUROPEAN UNION YET

Since recently, Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia have been engaging in active mutual cooperation in their pursuit of European integration. All three states signed their respective association agreements with the “European Union (“EU”)” in 2014. On June 24, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the three countries held meetings with the EU High Representative for Foreign Policy Josep Borrell in Brussels within a new format of cooperation called “Associated Trio”. This has been presented as a new format of cooperation during the previous talks held between the Foreign Ministries of the three countries and the EU on May 17, 2021. The new framework allows a more intense phase of economic integration of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia with the EU leading them towards integration into the EU Internal Market. Although the three countries also used to be referred to as a Trio previously, this is a new stage of cooperation that takes the European integration of the Trio countries to a new level.

Prior to that, in December 2019, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia signed a joint statement on the establishment of a so-called EU+3 format that highlighted the dedication and progress that these countries had demonstrated since joining the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative, which had been launched by the EU in 2009. Thus, the EU recognized the efforts and strong determination of the three states among the six members of the EaP (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) on their path of the European integration. In other words, the EU has shown its readiness to cooperate with Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia slightly in a different format than with Belarus, Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Certainly, these acts of recognition by the EU towards Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia were hailed as a clear success by governments and peoples of the Associated Trio. It should be mentioned that the Trio countries made notable success on their way of European integration compared to other countries since the beginning of the EaP initiative. For instance, the EU allocated €3.4 billion funds for reforms and

development projects to the EaP countries for 2014-2020. The Trio countries received nearly 82% of this sum partially because the allocation of the funds was based on merit-based principle.

It is worth mentioning that this came as a result of considerable achievements in democratization in these countries. To illustrate, the democratically elected governments and Presidents in these countries have acted in line with the increasingly pro-European public sentiments and demands. In addition, the new Constitution that came into force in December, 2018 requires authorities to take all necessary measures to ensure a full integration of Georgia into the EU and NATO. In Ukraine, a special structural unit has been created in the Office of the President of Ukraine that will engage in European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine. Hence, European integration is an essentially important commitment of the current authorities of the countries of Trio.

However, there were also other factors that incentivized Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia to develop a common agenda for European integration separately from the rest of the EaP members. In particular, Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia all have seen relations deteriorating with Russia over the last several years. All three also have unresolved territorial issues and disputes with Russia, which do not seem to be resolved any time soon as Russia firmly stands by its position. This became a stumbling block in Russia-Georgia and Russia-Ukraine relations in 2008 and after 2014 respectively. Therefore, the rising political and public antagonism towards Russia’s anti-European stance partially became a common ground for consolidation around the European integration. Moreover, the priority of an active European integration and engagement in European affairs of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia was manifested by the reluctance of all three states to participate in regional organizations in the post-Soviet space. Georgia has abandoned the CIS in 2009 after a sharp deterioration in relations with Russia. Ukraine started suspending agreements signed within the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 2015 and formally

left the organization in 2018. Although Moldova is a full member of the CIS, it has been much more active in negotiating with the EU than engaging in affairs of the CIS. Taking into account Moldova’s determination and firm actions in accomplishing its objective of European integration, Moldova will not engage itself in the CIS any further than does it now.

In spite of gaining a new format of cooperation with the EU, it has to be acknowledged, though, that the prospects of accession to the EU in the near future look highly uncertain for all three post-Soviet states. Firstly, the Trio countries play important roles in regional security in the context of the current increasing tensions in the relations between the EU and Russia. This is a significant factor of unnecessary geopolitical risk that the EU will not be willing to take at least in short term perspectives. Secondly, Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia must conduct a very extensive work in doing reforms in key areas such as economic development, good governance, rule of law, security, connectivity, private sector development and others. These are reforms that require many years to complete and prove their effectiveness in promoting sustainable development. This is an important factor that will determine the degree of success of the Trio countries in their European integration projects.

The new Associated Trio format of cooperation gained by Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia will definitely provide more efficient ways of cooperation with the EU and realization of European integration prospects. At the same time, the policies of detachment from Russia and CIS conducted by the Trio countries can be a negative factor limiting their cooperation with former Soviet states. Given that the alignment on European laws and norms can only be accomplished in long-term timeframes, the Associated Trio format should also function as a platform for close cooperation among the three members of the Trio, which would facilitate their European integration and help them to respond to common challenges.

Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- The Presidents of Kazakhstan and Tajikistan recently had a telephone conversation. The Heads of States reviewed the implementation of the agreements reached following President Tokayev's official visit to Dushanbe in May 2021. The Presidents mentioned an importance of boosting trade and implementation of joint projects in various industries. President Rahmon expressed gratitude for the provision of humanitarian aid to Tajikistan. The Presidents reaffirmed their readiness to coordinate joint actions both in the bilateral format and within the multilateral structures (Kazinform, 23.06.2021).
- On June 23, 2021, 53 armed soldiers of the Afghan border troops and local militia fighters crossed into the territory of Uzbekistan. After all necessary investigations, Uzbekistan returned these Afghan citizens to their homeland. Recently, Uzbekistan's Foreign Ministry officially responded to the aggravation of the situation in the neighboring country. According to the Ministry, the situation in Afghanistan is extremely worrying. Nevertheless, the Ministry noted that any attempts to illegally cross Uzbekistan's territory would be severely suppressed (UzReport, 24.06.2021).
- During the meeting with the delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Turkic-Speaking Countries (TURKPA) in Tashkent, the First Deputy Speaker at the Senate of Uzbekistan, Sodiq Safoev, announced that Uzbekistan decided to join the Parliamentary Assembly of the TURKPA. Participants of the meeting also discussed cooperation in areas such as trade, tourism, science, culture and others. The delegation, headed by a Deputy of the Turkish Parliament Ismet Ucma, included Members of Parliaments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey (Tashkent Times, 23.06.2021).
- The Foreign Minister of Tajikistan Sirojiddin Muhriddin met his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif in Turkey on the sidelines of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum 2021. The Ministers exchanged views on the perspectives of bilateral relations between the two countries, the situation in Afghanistan and the implementation of regional projects. The sides also paid attention to the issues of expansion of bilateral political, trade, economic and cultural relations between Tajikistan and Iran (ASIA-Plus, 21.06.2021).
- Mongolia's President-elect Ukhnaagiin Khurelsukh was officially inaugurated in the Great Hall of the State Palace in Ulaanbaatar as the 6th President of Mongolia. During the solemn act of inauguration, the new President took the presidential oath, with his right hand on the Constitution of Mongolia and received the state seal from the outgoing President Khaltmaagiin Battulga. In the presidential elections held on 9 of June, 2021, Ukhnaagiin Khurelsukh received 72.02% of the votes (Montsame.mn, 25.06.2021).
- Moscow hosted the 9th Moscow Conference on International Security. The event brought together heads of defense departments from around hundred countries. The participants discussed issues of global and regional security, military-technical cooperation and the topics of combating the COVID-19 pandemic. The conference consisted of a total of seven plenary sessions. The President of Russia Vladimir Putin greeted the participants and guests of the conference by addressing a video message (Kremlin.ru, 23.06.2021).

Economy, Finance, and Energy

- According to the Director of the Institute of World Economy and Politics under the Nursultan Nazarbayev Foundation Yerzhan Saltybayev, bilateral trade between Kazakhstan and China reached \$5 billion during January-April 2021. The trade turnover increased by 10% compared to the same period last year. China remains the second largest trade partner of Kazakhstan and one of the key investors. During the past 12 years, China's investments in Kazakhstan amounted to \$19 billion. The number of companies with Chinese capital exceeded 2.700 (Qazaq TV, 24.06.2021).
- The Prime Minister of Uzbekistan recently visited Moscow where he had a meeting with his Russian counterpart Mikhail Mishustin. During the meeting, the heads of the governments agreed to expand the volume of trade turnover to \$10 billion. In 2020, bilateral trade between the countries amounted to \$5.6 billion. After the meeting, the parties signed more than 10 documents. Uzbekistan and Russia agreed to deepen cooperation in customs, financial, and information and communication technologies. The countries will also collaborate in education and labor protection (UzReport, 24.06.2021).
- Azerbaijan's Small and Medium-sized Business Development Agency Chairman Orkhan Mammadov and Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Gennady Chizhikov signed an agreement on the establishment of the Ukrainian-Azerbaijani Business Council. The Council includes 70 representatives of businessmen and civil servants. This step will expand trade and investment ties between the two countries. It is expected that the Council will have a positive effect on bilateral trade, which, during five months of 2021 amounted to \$373.5 million (AzerNews, 25.06.2021).
- Head of the Department of Regulated Spheres of the State Agency for Antimonopoly Regulation of Kyrgyzstan Sagyn Mamatomarov held a press conference, where he announced that oil refineries in the country were idle. According to Mamatomarov, the country has two oil plants, which correspondingly produce 800 thousand tons and 400 thousand tons of fuels and lubricants. Due to reduction in oil supplies to 50 thousand tons, the plants cannot cover internal demand (Kabar, 24.06.2021).
- According to Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk, the Eurasian Economic Union can experience positive economic growth in 2021. According to estimates, the EAEU's economy can grow by 3.2%. Overchuk noted that the downturn in the EAEU was lower than that of the European Union. In particular, the economic drop in the EAEU amounted to 2.9%, while the EU's GDP decline equaled 6.3%. The official mentioned that stress testing of economies of the EAEU member-states in 2020 demonstrated their viability (TASS, 23.06.2021).
- Ukrainian Energy Deputy Minister for European Integration Yaroslav Demchenko participated in the fifth meeting of the Ukrainian-Turkish working group on energy. During the meeting, the two countries reached an important agreement on energy cooperation. In particular, the countries agreed to cooperate in the diversification of natural gas supplies to Ukraine, which includes the development of liquefied natural gas terminal infrastructure. The parties will cooperate in transportation of natural gas through the Trans-Balkan pipeline in both directions (Ukrinform, 25.06.2021).

- The President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan launched the construction of the Istanbul Canal, which will run parallel to the Bosphorus. According to prior estimates, navigation on the Istanbul Canal will be 13 times safer than on the Bosphorus strait. The length of the Istanbul Canal will be 45 km, the minimum base width of the canal would be 275-m. The depth is determined at more than 21 meters. The canal is expected to start functioning in 2023 (Centralasia.media, 26.06.2021).

Society and Culture

- Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan Mukhtar Tileuberdi met with the President of the International Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation Gunay Efendiyeva on the sidelines of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum. The sides discussed the prospects of further development of cooperation between the organization and Kazakhstan, underlining the importance of joint work on the promotion of long standing traditions and rich history of the Turkic countries. The parties also emphasized and praised the declaring Turkestan as the spiritual capital of the Turkic world and Shusha as the cultural capital of Azerbaijan (Kazinform, 22.06.2021).
- During the meeting of the tourism ministers of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-speaking states Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Tourism and Sports of Uzbekistan Aziz Abdulkhakov proposed Uzbekistan's city of Kokand to be declared as the tourism capital of the Turkic Council. Minister Abdulkhakov also emphasized the necessity of developing the transport system between the member states of the Council and the observer states (Uzreport, 24.06.2021).
- Turkistan hosted the higher education-themed forum titled "Central Asian Higher Educational Area: Regional Cooperation, National Reforms". During the forum, the ministries of education of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan agreed to create a unified higher education area in the region that would entail an exchange of knowledge, students and academic staff between their higher education institutions. The agreement will be implemented according to the principles of the Bologna process and it is expected to expand regional cooperation in education through exchange of knowledge and collaboration on joint research projects (Astana Times, 21.06.2021).
- The International Turkic Academy and Al-Farabi Kazakh National University signed a memorandum of mutual cooperation. The parties agreed to strengthen mutually beneficial partnerships in science. The document envisages holding joint scientific events on agreed topics, exchange of experience between employees, sharing important information and scientific publications. The memorandum will also enable the students of the Al-Farabi Kazakh National University to complete scientific internships at the International Turkic Academy (Twesco.org, 21.06.2021).
- A Turkish state-run aid agency Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) was honored by the Mongolian government with a Mongolian state award the Nairamdal Medal for contributing to improving relations between Mongolia and Turkey. The award was presented to TIKA's program coordinator in the capital Ulaanbaatar, Emrah Ustamer, by State Secretary of Mongolian Foreign Ministry Ankhbayar Nyamdorj on behalf of the Mongolian President Khaltmaagiin Battulga. Since 2004, TIKA has carried out over 700 projects in cooperation with local authorities and non-governmental organizations in Mongolia (Anadolu Agency, 24.06.2021).