

REGULATING BORDER ISSUES AND STRENGTHENING THE ENVIRONMENT OF MUTUAL TRUST IN CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES

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Abstract: *This article analyzes the processes of delimitation and demarcation of state borders between Central Asian countries, the resolution of problems arising in border areas, and the formation of an atmosphere of mutual trust in the region.*

Keywords: *Central Asia, state borders, border issues, delimitation, demarcation, border territories, international law, diplomatic negotiations, mutual trust, good neighborliness, regional security, regional cooperation.*

Annotatsiya: *Mazkur maqolada Markaziy Osiyo mamlakatlari o'rtasida davlat chegaralarini delimitatsiya va demarkatsiya qilish jarayonlari, chegaraoldi hududlarda yuzaga kelgan muammolarni tartibga solish hamda mintaqada o'zaro ishonch muhitini shakllantirish masalalari tahlil qilinadi.*

Kalit so'zlar: *Markaziy Osiyo, davlat chegaralari, chegara masalalari, delimitatsiya, demarkatsiya, chegaraoldi hududlar, xalqaro huquq, diplomatik muzokaralar, o'zaro ishonch, yaxshi qo'shnichilik, mintaqaviy xavfsizlik, mintaqaviy hamkorlik.*

Аннотация: *В статье анализируются процессы делимитации и демаркации государственных границ между странами Центральной Азии, вопросы урегулирования проблем в приграничных территориях и укрепления атмосферы взаимного доверия в регионе.*

Ключевые слова: *Центральная Азия, государственные границы, пограничные вопросы, делимитация, демаркация, приграничные территории, международное право, дипломатические переговоры, взаимное доверие, добрососедство, региональная безопасность, региональное сотрудничество.*

In his speech at the international conference "Central Asia: One History and a Common Future, Cooperation for Sustainable Development and Historical Progress," held on November 10, 2017, in the eternal city of Samarkand under the auspices of the United Nations General Assembly, he stated the following:

"By resolving border issues, we will create a solid foundation for further expanding cooperation between our countries in the trade, economic, cultural, and humanitarian spheres." We believe it is necessary to continue our joint work, consistently and deeply thought out, to resolve the complex problems that arose during the negotiations on the delimitation of the state border. I am confident that we will quickly resolve this extremely pressing issue on the basis of reasonable compromise and mutually equal agreement,

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taking into account our mutual interests."[1] As seen from the above considerations, one of the important and pressing issues awaiting resolution among Central Asian countries is the completion of democratization and delimitation work on the border territories between the states of the region.

The historical roots of the border-territorial problems between the modern Central Asian republics date back to the USSR era. In the national-territorial delimitation conducted in Central Asia in 1924, the administrative-territorial division was carried out without taking into account that the indigenous Uzbeks, Tajiks, Turkmens, Kyrgyz, Kazakhs, and Karakalpaks were distributed across various regions of the region (according to some researchers, deliberately for the purpose of inciting conflict between them in the future). As a result, national-territorial delimitation was carried out not based on the mentality and wishes of local peoples, but through the orders and instructions of the "Center." For this reason, this event has acquired an extremely complex and contradictory significance, triggering a new geopolitical wave of demographic problems. It should be noted that the boundary line is drawn from the place where the population of one nationality is the largest and the highest percentage, and the lifestyle of the nomadic and semi-nomadic population is not taken into account.

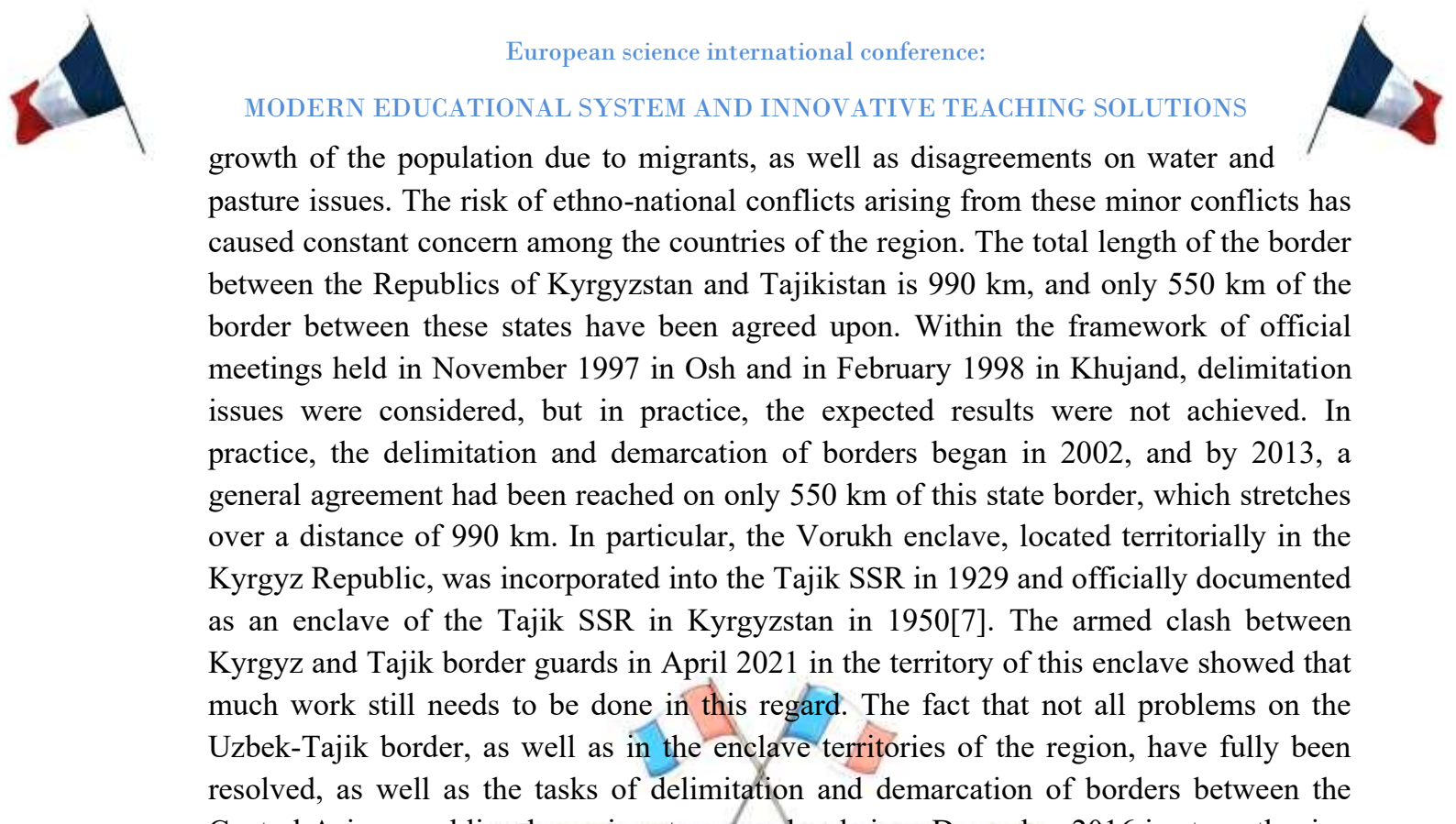
After the period of independence of the republics of the region, conflicts and contradictions began to take on a serious form, and measures related to the official registration of enclaves were applied. In particular, conflicts arose as a result of redistribution processes, such as the transfer of the Surkhandarya region of the Republic of Uzbekistan to Tajikistan and the city of Khujand of the Republic of Tajikistan to Uzbekistan. Groups promoting ideas such as "Big Uzbekistan" and "Little Tajikistan" emerged, and discussions began regarding the inclusion of Turkmenistan's Chardzhou (today's Lebap) and Tashkhan regions, as well as Southwestern Kazakhstan, into the "Big Uzbekistan." In turn, proposals and demands related to the inclusion of the South Uzbekistan, Bukhara, and Samarkand regions into the Tajik SSR emerged. Historically, the territory of the Chardzhou region has been disputed between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. From the point of view of this period, history is a witness to the fact that Turkmenistan objects to Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan to Uzbekistan on territorial and border issues. Throughout the entire period of Soviet rule, border conflicts took on a conflict-prone character, and relations between the Central Asian republics were not resolved positively. As a result, attempts were made to resolve the issue of territories in enclaves through measures to create districts in these areas. As an example, the Sokh district was formed in 1955 as part of the Fergana region. For information, the Sokh district was formed on the territory of the Batkent region of the Kyrgyz Republic, with an area of 325 square kilometers, and 90% of the population is Tajik. The transport highway leading to the district is controlled by Kyrgyzstan from the west. In short, the Sokh district is located within the territory of the Kyrgyz Republic within Uzbekistan, and the majority of its population consists of Tajiks. The Kyrgyz-Tajik border (length is 990 km) passed through the mountains, and in 1958, a special commission worked on this issue and was completely unable to resolve the border issues between the states[2].

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Central Asian territorial-border problems remained a heavy legacy for the republics of the region that gained independence from Soviet power. During the final years of Soviet rule (1989–1991), ethno-national conflicts intensified in various regions of the country, leading to bloody clashes between nations. The Fergana Valley emerged as the epicenter of conflict-prone problems, where extreme population density, low living standards, high unemployment, rapid demographic growth, the intensification of social problems, water scarcity, land scarcity, and disputes over pastures influenced border-territorial conflicts. Especially, the delimitation and demarcation of the border line in the existing enclaves in the Fergana Valley (actually 8 enclaves, 10 disputed zones) between the Republics of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan has become an urgent problem. Each state approaches the aforementioned problem from its own position, and the idea is put forward that "shifting borders one step forward or back will lead to national conflicts."

In the last decades of the 20th century, a number of political processes, national-ethnic realities, as well as conflicts occurred in the territories near the borders of Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan-Tajikistan. In particular, the Osh massacres of 1990, the civil war and migration wave in Tajikistan from 1992 to 1997, and the terrorist events in Tashkent in February 1999 forced the implementation of a number of measures such as strengthening security at border posts in neighboring countries, improving customs procedures, strengthening border lines using wire fences, strictly controlling the movement of the population from one country to another, and sharply increasing the number of border guards[5]. Also, the Republic of Uzbekistan has strengthened control on the borders of Uzbekistan-Tajikistan, Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan, and mined the borders after the events of 1999. Although this situation does not fully comply with the norms of international law, the government of Uzbekistan has taken such a strict course because religious extremist and terrorist groups have crossed from Kyrgyzstan to the territory of Uzbekistan. Between 2001 and 2002, 13 Nadar individuals who attempted unauthorized passage through the minefield were killed on the spot.[6] Although the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border was cleared of mines in 2003 through negotiations with the intervention of international organizations in the region, control was further strengthened on the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border, saying that Kyrgyzstan had an influence on the chaotic events that occurred in Andijan in May 2005.

By 1998, a special commission had been established on the Kyrgyz border, and work on delimitation and demarcation began in 2002. Specifically, in the Fergana Valley, there are 58 disputed territories on the Uzbek-Kyrgyz-Tajik border, and according to some data, there are 70, of which 49 have been delimited. The next stage of these negotiations was held in 2005–2011, and finally, in 2011, a general agreement was reached on the 103.8 km to 984 km section of the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border. However, this was not the end of the matter. In particular, various conflicts occurred due to the territory between the rivers of the Uzbek enclave Tavagasay, which passes from the Kyrgyz village of Barak to Shakhimardan, the transport corridor leading to the Sokh district also passes through the borders of neighbors, the low standard of living of the population in this area, the rapid



growth of the population due to migrants, as well as disagreements on water and pasture issues. The risk of ethno-national conflicts arising from these minor conflicts has caused constant concern among the countries of the region. The total length of the border between the Republics of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan is 990 km, and only 550 km of the border between these states have been agreed upon. Within the framework of official meetings held in November 1997 in Osh and in February 1998 in Khujand, delimitation issues were considered, but in practice, the expected results were not achieved. In practice, the delimitation and demarcation of borders began in 2002, and by 2013, a general agreement had been reached on only 550 km of this state border, which stretches over a distance of 990 km. In particular, the Vorukh enclave, located territorially in the Kyrgyz Republic, was incorporated into the Tajik SSR in 1929 and officially documented as an enclave of the Tajik SSR in Kyrgyzstan in 1950[7]. The armed clash between Kyrgyz and Tajik border guards in April 2021 in the territory of this enclave showed that much work still needs to be done in this regard. The fact that not all problems on the Uzbek-Tajik border, as well as in the enclave territories of the region, have fully been resolved, as well as the tasks of delimitation and demarcation of borders between the Central Asian republics, have risen to a new level since December 2016 in strengthening integration processes by establishing reliable good-neighborly relations. Speaking of this new stage, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, took the initiative to create an atmosphere of friendly relations with neighboring countries in Uzbekistan's foreign policy. From April 2016 to March 19, 2017, 10 intergovernmental meetings and negotiations were held on the issue of the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border. On March 19, 2017, a unanimous intergovernmental agreement was reached on 49 out of 58 disputed plots in Osh. Currently, delimitation and demarcation measures are being carried out in these areas.

In September 2017, an agreement was signed between the heads of state of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan on the delimitation and demarcation of the borders of the two countries. Between the end of 2016 and October 2020, 30 official documents were signed between the two countries aimed at expanding border cooperation, bilateral trade, the rational use of irrigation and water resources, transit opportunities, cooperation, and interbank ties. Specifically, regarding the issue of the Uzbek-Kyrgyz state border, 31 consultative meetings and councils were held with the participation of delegations from various levels of the two governments, along with 96 meetings of various working groups and 2 meetings of working groups on legal issues[8]. As a result of the above measures, a common agreement was reached on issues related to 95% of the borders between the Republics of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan[9]. The Ungar-Too, which attracted attention as a disputed territory, was occupied by Uzbek military personnel during the period of the First President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov. In 2017, the current President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, withdrew the military and vacated the disputed zone. In the same year, the Uzbek-Kyrgyz vice-premiers signed a memorandum in Andijan aimed at a good-neighborly strategy.



Consultative meetings of the heads of state of Central Asia are of particular importance in resolving border issues between the countries of the Central Asian region. In particular, at the first of these meetings, an agreement was signed on the territory of the point of contact of the borders of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, which has been problematic for several years, and the Republics of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan reached an agreement on 85 percent of their state borders. Furthermore, within the framework of the Fifth Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asia, organized on September 14-15, 2023, in Dushanbe, Republic of Tajikistan, a proposal was put forward to begin developing an Interstate Program for the protection and strengthening of the borders of the region's states.

In 2019, 413 hectares of land belonging to the Arvan district of the Osh region of the Kyrgyz Republic were replaced with the same amount of land of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the basis of legal documents. By the autumn of 2020, officials of the Uzbek-Kyrgyz intergovernmental commission, the council of border districts, and the mahalla council were granted the authority to conduct bilateral relations. It should be noted that events following these agreements have demonstrated that interstate delimitation and demarcation measures are a complex and time-consuming process. Specifically, on May 31, 2020, in the Uzbek-Kyrgyz enclave of Sokh, peasants from the Kyrgyz village of Chemi (belonging to the Kadamjay district) and the Uzbek village of Chashma (belonging to the Sokh district) failed to reach a mutual agreement on the distribution of water resources on the border of the Batken region and clashed with each other. As a result of this clash, 187 Uzbeks and 25 Kyrgyz people were injured, and 1 citizen of Kyrgyzstan died in the hospital. On June 1 of the same year, the heads of state of the two countries met at the Chemi motor transport checkpoint in the Bokent region and began resolving existing issues through negotiations[10].

In conclusion, it should be noted that the tasks of the Central Asian countries regarding the delimitation and demarcation of mutual borders have not yet been fully resolved. In this regard, the fruitful negotiations of the heads of state show ways to systematically solve the aforementioned problems.

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