

The main problems of Shanghai Cooperation Organization enlargement at the present stage

Serik Stambulov¹, Shotbakova Lyazzat², Zhabina Zhansaya¹, Gulnur Orazbekova³

¹ Department of International Relations, Kazakh University of the international relations and world languages named after Abylay khan, Muratbaev Street 200, Almaty, Kazakhstan

² Department of Archeology, Ethnology, and National History, Karaganda State University named after Evnei Arystanovich Buketov, Universitetskaya Street 28, 1000028, Karaganda, Kazakhstan

³ Department of World History and International Relations, Karaganda State University named after Evnei Arystanovich Buketov, Universitetskaya Street 28, 1000028, Karaganda, Kazakhstan
serstam@mail.ru

Abstract: Today, the most acute question in Shanghai organization is the organization's enlargement, and a possibility of acceptance of new members to its membership, and if so, what states will have the status of SCO full members. Theme of enlargement does not lose its special relevance since 2004-2005, when Mongolia, Pakistan, India and Iran received an observer status. The growing importance of SCO observer states' issue is a reference point for analyzing the fact why four such different states, besides mutually antagonistic, as India and Pakistan, should see the benefits in cooperation with SCO, and why SCO accepts them. Article analyzes the interests of SCO observer countries, as well as the importance of these countries for the SCO. Also is considered politics of China and Russia concerning observer countries. Authors show that prospects for expanding of SCO are quite controversial and prove, that, currently, SCO is not ready to expand due to Iran, Mongolia, India and Pakistan, and come to conclusion, that in the near future expansion of the SCO will not happen, the problem of expanding the organization is still far from its decision.

[Serik Stambulov, Shotbakova Lyazzat, Zhabina Zhansaya, Gulnur Orazbekova. **The main problems of Shanghai Cooperation Organization enlargement at the present stage.** *N Y Sci J* 2025;18(9):56-60]. ISSN 1554-0200 (print); ISSN 2375-723X (online). <http://www.sciencepub.net/newyork>. 03. [doi:10.7537/marsnys180925.03](https://doi.org/10.7537/marsnys180925.03)

Key words: SCO; foreign policy; SCO observer-countries; security; regional security; economic cooperation; Central Asia; South-east Asia.

1. Introduction

According to Article 13 of the Charter, Shanghai Cooperation Organization is an international organization open to countries, interested in cooperation and undertake to abide by the purposes and principles of the Charter, and provisions of other international treaties, adopted in the framework of SCO. Organization is also ready to cooperate with other international and regional organizations [1].

Act regulating relations between Shanghai Cooperation Organization and observer-countries is «Document about rights of SCO observer states», adopted in 2004 at a summit in Tashkent. The decision on admission of new members to the SCO is made by Council of heads of states, advised by Council of ministers of foreign affairs on the basis of an interested state's official request [2].

Despite the fact, that not for the first year, the question about enlargement of SCO member states' number is on the agenda of organization, no decision has been made. At the SCO summit in Shanghai in 2006 was declared a temporary moratorium on the expansion of the organization [3]. In 2007, at the SCO summit in Bishkek, none of the observers have got permanent membership, new observers were not invited.

If previously the inability acceptance of new members into the SCO existed due to technical reasons, today mechanism of accession, essentially, is created: relevant documents are adopted and transparent procedure of applicants admission is designed. In June 2010, in Tashkent was approved Regulation on the admission of new members. This document contains clear criteria that must be met by a new member of the SCO. According to the Regulation, state, wishing to become a full member of Shanghai Cooperation Organization should be located in the Euro-Asian region, has diplomatic relations with all member states, have observer status or dialogue partner, to develop trade and economic relations with the member states, as well as not be under UN Security Council sanctions. Regarding the scope of security and international obligations of states, applying for membership in the organization, they must not contradict with international treaties and other documents, previously adopted by SCO. In addition, pretender country should not be in a condition of armed conflict, with another state or states. The final stage in the creation of a formal basis for the admission of new members to SCO was the adoption of standard Memorandum in Astana in June 2011, which showed that the organization is legally and procedurally stabilized and

officially ready to expand.

Despite the adoption of the Memorandum and the availability of a general transparent mechanism for admission of new members into the SCO, many acute problems of the organization, in our opinion, are still far from being solved.

General attractive aspect for all SCO observer-countries is the desire to develop and strengthen cooperation in the energy field. Applicant countries for membership in SCO express, in particular, interest in the work of the SCO energy club, creation of which must become an important element of security system, formed within SCO and related to the energy sector.

2. Material and Methods

Energy cooperation is one of objectives, motivating Iran to expand the membership of «Shanghai Five» due to his participation, as evidenced by a visit of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to SCO summit in Bishkek, in August 2007. However, Iran's interest in the SCO is also explained by desire of Tehran to advance its interests in Central Asia. Also, a desire of this the state to join the SCO is dictated, primarily, by desire to emerge from international isolation and gain powerful allies in its confrontation with the United States, because of its nuclear program. Iran membership in this organization has a goal of reducing the volume of regional threats and participation in regional cooperation in the economic and defensive areas for national interest and national growth of Iranian power. And also Iran can use economic, trade and transport capabilities of this organization

In favor of the adoption of Iran into Shanghai Cooperation Organization says, that this state owns one of the key roles in the global energy sector. Iran is the second largest the oil-producing state after Saudi Arabia, and has significant reserves of gas. For member countries Iran is important as a basic link in the North-South transport corridor, agreement on the creation of which was signed between India, Iran and Russia in St. Petersburg in June 2002

On the other hand, key players in the organization are unlikely to deteriorate relations with the U.S., which is inevitable in the case of Shanghai Cooperation Organization rapprochement with Iran. Russia and China are not ready for an ongoing confrontation with the U.S., which could lead to even greater political instability in Central Asia and will not contribute to a constructive solution of problems of security and cooperation in the economic sphere.

Iran's official entry into the organization can lead to blockage of the negotiation processes between SCO, EU and U.S., in the light of the negative position of the West, concerning development of Iran's nuclear

program. All this make prospects of Iran adoption in SCO rather lackluster

It should be mentioned that, in accordance with the Regulation on the admission of new members to the SCO, approved by the Council of Heads of SCO Member States in June 11, 2010 [4], Iran accession to the SCO has been blocked due to the fact that Tehran is under UN Security Council sanctions. Newspaper «Times of India» added that «despite the close economic and energy ties with the Islamic Republic, China, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council with veto power, supported a new round of UN sanctions against Iran» [5]. In addition, under the Charter of Shanghai Cooperation Organization, one of the conditions of entry into Shanghai Cooperation Organization is the presence of joint land border with one of the member countries, which prevents the entry of Iran into the organization. Consequently, we believe that the waste of time and assets for adoption of Iran, probably in the near future will remain inconclusive.

India and Pakistan have expressed interest in the SCO. In terms of economic cooperation South Asia has access to the Indian Ocean and China, Russia and Central Asian countries are interested in exporting their products across the Indian Ocean. India and Russia have already discussed at the highest level to create a corridor «North-South», linking Russia to the Indian Ocean and the countries of Central Asia, India and Pakistan to consider as a way of being landlocked. Therefore, in the field of economic cooperation, India and Pakistan may be of great interest for the future development of the SCO.

Pakistan is interested in changing his status to permanent membership within the SCO. As is known, candidature of Pakistan is supported by China and among Central Asian countries - Uzbekistan, with whom Pakistan has sufficiently developed relations. In particular, Uzbekistan and Pakistan since 2001 have an extradition agreement, due to which Tashkent can count on assistance of Islamabad in extradition of hiding militants of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. In addition, Pakistan has supported the authorities in the Andijan events.

China, in its turn, is the largest partner of Pakistan in the field of military-technical cooperation, as well as major economic partner. Also, in 2001 the foreign minister of Pakistan Hina Rabbani Haq supported China's policy in matters, concerning Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang. In this regard, can be mentioned that, according to the newspaper «Daily Times», for Pakistan membership in SCO would be very useful - both for the economy and the fight against terrorism. Because many Taliban - Central Asians. [6].

Pakistan expects to increase the participation of member countries in the energy project - construction of the Trans-Afghan gas pipeline, system,

leading from Turkmenistan (not a member of SCO, but expresses its wish to join) through Afghanistan to Pakistan and India.

Except participation in energy projects, full membership will allow Pakistan to diversify its foreign policy in conditions of relative cooling of relations with the U.S. and strengthen its negotiating positions in relations with the West. Also accession to SCO may raise the authority and influence of Pakistan among muslim countries of Central Asia. At the same time, if Pakistan comes to organization earlier than India, it could change the balance of power in the US-India-Pakistan relations.

Activization of Pakistan regarding SCO is also dictated by a political imperative. Pakistan seeks to increase its presence in Central Asia since its states became independent in 1991. Islamabad is interested in establishing economic contacts, in strengthening its political influence in the Central Asian region and in deterring here its traditional rival - India [7].

Negative bearing on possible participation of Pakistan in the SCO is effected by the lack of common borders between Pakistan and central asian states. Countries of Central Asia are separated from Pakistan by Afghanistan territory, which makes difficulties in Pakistan use of oil and gas exports route from Central Asian countries to foreign markets.

An important argument against the appearances of Pakistan in the SCO is Russia's position, which traditionally does not perceive Pakistan as a friendly state. Formation of such a perception of Pakistan dates back to the Soviet-Afghan conflict, when Islamabad supported Mujahideen. However, today relations between Russia and Pakistan are formally normalized [8].

Relations between Pakistan and China have primarily strategic character for both sides, which may be the reason for inclusion of Pakistan in SCO, but this is impracticable, because of the complex geopolitical contradictions in the triangle of China-Pakistan-India.

India was interested in cooperation with the SCO since the formation of the organization, mainly due to the prospects of joint regional energy projects. And also, motivating impulse for India is an interest of regional cooperation in combating transnational terrorism, religious extremism and drug trafficking. There are also economic interests, that encourages India to join the SCO. This growing asian country is the sixth among the world's major energy consumers. At the same time, India is in a more difficult position than China: two-thirds of its oil needs are met by imports, while in China, only a third. In an effort to diversify sources of energy supply, India considers Central Asia, where India is in a much more favorable position than Afghanistan or Pakistan. Back in the Soviet period India laid a solid foundation of relations

with Central Asian republics, as well as Russia. Russia supports India's candidacy, among other things, because of unspoken desire to create a certain counterbalance to China within the organization.

If Pakistan is considered an ally of China, then India is traditionally perceived as Russia's closest ally. This largely subjective perception is one of the main reasons of impossibility of India and Pakistan to join the SCO separately – in order to save the balance of power within the organization is need either to maintain the status quo, in which neither Russia nor China have a decisive weight in the SCO, or take Pakistan and India in SCO. According to experts, is possible only simultaneous acceptance of India and Pakistan as a permanent member of SCO, which will not disturb the balance of forces in the region. But joint participation of two regional competitors in SCO not yet discussed.

At the same time, despite the significant progress made in Sino-Indian relations in recent years, two states still have unresolved conflicts, particularly about state borders. So, Ariel Schneider notes, that in relations with India in other regional organizations China wins influence over much of Southeast Asia, but loses the sphere of political influence in Vietnam, Indonesia and the African coast [9]. At the same time, according to Zhao Huasheng, India, historically not tending to any alliances is less interested in SCO than Pakistan [10]. This may indicate, that China considers India as serious geopolitical rival in the NEA, that affects to his position on the issue of participation in the SCO.

However, with the potential accession of informal powers India and Pakistan in the SCO inevitably arises a problem of strict NPT compliance, advocated by SCO member states. And also, Regulation on the admission of new members to SCO, approved by the Council of Heads of SCO Member States in June 11, 2010 opposes the entry India and Pakistan in the SCO, because according to Regulation pretender country should not be in a state of armed conflict with another state or states.

And, India and Pakistan – are two nuclear South Asian countries, which occasionally act with aggressive statements against each other. And often there are situations when the «cold war» in relations between Delhi and Islamabad had almost turned into «hot». Therefore, next question arises: «What if the inclusion of these two countries in SCO will ensure their «finding out relations» with each other, using the platform of SCO? ».

Therefore, some analysts expressed the view, that the process of accepting new members to the SCO should be frozen, and to develop the organization by expanding the functions of observers. At the same, to veto the adoption of India and Pakistan in view of fact

that conflicts in their relations will be projected on the internal situation in SCO, therefore moratorium on the expansion should be retained.

We believe that, in the case of India and Pakistan accession in the SCO could arise the following problems:

- If India will enter in SCO, it will adversely affect the stability in South Asia. If Pakistan will enter, it will complicate the internal connections between the SCO member states. If they come simultaneously, without a significant improvements in their bilateral relations, SCO itself become a victim of Indo-Pakistani conflict and mutual attacks.

- Both South and Central Asia are part of a vast region with sharp contradictions and challenges. Accession of India and Pakistan in the SCO may lead to the fact that the center of SCO geopolitical influence will shift, activities will expand excessively, organizational and material resources of the organization will not be used properly.

- India and Pakistan are large states, their relations with the SCO member states are quite complicated, therefore, their entry may damage the structure of the organization's functioning.

- Since both of these countries have nuclear weapons, their adoption in the SCO might lead to a deadlock of undertaken measures to control nuclear weapons within the SCO.

Considering these factors, we believe that the change of status of India and Pakistan within the SCO framework medium term is unlikely.

The most likely candidate for full membership in the SCO seems Mongolia, primarily due to its geographical position between Russia and China. Since 2004, Mongolia as a country observer actively participates in meetings of the Council of Heads of State and Heads of Government of the SCO. Mongolia's main interests are enclosed in effective multilateral cooperation with the SCO member states in matters of transport, rail transport and energy.

In relation to the SCO Mongolia has a unique geopolitical value. In the north and south borders with Russia and China, on the westbound is close to the Central Asian countries. If Mongolia will join the SCO, it will contribute to establishing connections with the region and create conditions for successful cooperation among the SCO member states in Northeast Asia.

We believe that China is very interested in accession of Mongolia. As Chinese researcher Zhang Chuan Chun noted, directivity of bilateral relations between China and Mongolia is based, primarily on the principle of good neighborliness [11]. China appreciates the fact that the policy of this state focused on international processes in the region, and its geopolitical location is unique enough.

China is one of the main trading partners of Mongolia, which characterizes the high volume of trade between these countries. Agreements concluded in order to increase bilateral trade and cooperation in the development of railway communication, indicate China's interest in accelerating trade between the two countries and increase role of China in the foreign policy of Mongolia.

In general, it can be argued, that China considers Mongolia as state, most likely corresponding to the policy of the SCO, and does not see any problems in the official status of this state organization. On the other hand, for China is important a fact, that there is virtually no problems and threats of terrorist extremism in Mongolia, therefore, this country will not have a significant impact on the SCO's anti-terrorist activities.

And, Mongolia adheres to the strategy of non-alignment, pursuing a policy of balancing between the three powers - Russia, China and the West. Mongolia is a post-communist democracy in Asia and prefers the orientation of foreign trade policy at United States. In addition, the observer status in the SCO satisfies Mongolia, because does not impose the obligations, that must be met by permanent members of the organization.

According to Mongolian researcher T. Tserendorzh, Mongolia was never going to join as a full member of the SCO. He writes: «Yes Ulan Bator became the first member of SCO observers' club, however, Mongolia is interested only in observer status. Yes, Mongolia wants to develop partnerships with Russia, but she does not want to be totally dependent on China, believing that SCO primarily serve the interests of China. Ulan Bator is trying to develop close relations with the U.S., Japan and EU. Mongolia's entry in SCO is able to prevent friendly partnerships with these countries» [12].

Considering the above factors, we believe that in the medium and even long-term perspective, accession of Mongolia to SCO seems unlikely.

Considering the problems of SCO enlargement of the at the present stage, we concluded, that the increase SCO membership by entry of Iran, Mongolia, India and Pakistan is unlikely to be expected in the near future.

Corresponding Author:

Serik Stambulov, Kazakh University of the international relations and world languages named after Abylay khan, International Relations Department, apt.200, 2 floor, Muratbaev Street, building 2, Almaty, Kazakhstan

serstam@mail.ru

References

1. Shanghai Cooperation Organization Charter. Available from http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006-06/12/content_614628.htm
2. The Regulations on Observer Status at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Available from <http://www.hrichina.org/sites/default/files/PDFs/Reports/SCO/2011-HRIC-SCO-Whitepaper-AppendixA-SCO-Docs.pdf>
3. Sonila Swaminathan. (2009). [Update on SCO \(Shanghai Cooperation Organisation\)](#) (Wednesday, 29 July) Available from <http://focusweb.org/india/peace-and-democracy/statements-and-declaration/1148-update-on-sco-shanghai-cooperation-organisation>
4. Informational message to the tenth meeting of the Council of Heads of SCO Member States (Tashkent, 10-11 June 2010) Available from <http://www.infoshos.ru>
5. [Shanghai group set to deny membership to Iran.](#) *Times of India*, Fri, 06/11/2010. Available from <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/World-China/Shanghai-group-set-to-deny-membership-to-Iran/articleshows/6037035.cms>
6. SCO opens up new avenues. *Daily Times, Saturday, February 01, 2014.* Available from <http://archives.dailytimes.com.pk/editorial/14-Jun-2010/editorial-sco-opens-up-new-avenues>
7. Major Jefferson Turner. 2005. What is driving India,s and Pakistan,s interest in joining the Shanghai cooperation organization? *Strategic insight*, Vol:4, Issue 8.
8. Rizwan Zeb. 2006. Pakistan bid for membership: prospects and pitfalls. *Central Asia Caucasus analyst*. Available from <http://old.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4085>
9. Ariel Pablo Sznajder. 2006. China,s Shanghai Cooperation Organization Strategy. *Spring*.Vol. 5. P.14. Available from <http://irps.ucsd.edu/assets/004/5367.pdf>
10. Zhao Huasheng. 2006. SCO and ratios of the great powers on the background of the new situation in the Central Asian region. Available from <http://www.kisi.kz/img/docs/310.pdf>
11. Zhang Chuan Chun. 2006. *Study of three large relations in Northeast Asia: economics, trade, politics, and security.* - Beijing 2006. - 160 p.
12. Tserendorzh T. 2006. Mongolia and regional security systems. *Concepts and approach to regional security: experiences, challenges and prospects for cooperation in Central Asia. Materials of IV Annual Almaty Conference* (June 7, 2006). - Almaty: KISR under the President of Kazakhstan, 2006. P.212-228.

8/6/2025