

SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION - ANALYSIS OF THE MODEL FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Sanela Veljković¹ Milica Ćurčić² Marina Dabetić³

Abstract: The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is one of the most important regional multilateral mechanisms in Eurasia. From an organization for the resolution of border disputes, it has developed into a complex system that includes eight full members, several observers and partners for dialogue. Today, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization represents a platform for strengthening regional stability, economic integration and the promotion of multilateralism. At the same time, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization faces enormous challenges, which are primarily reflected in defining its role in global politics. The aim of the work is to analyze models of possible further development of this organization. Also, the potential consequences of the expansion of its work are analyzed, especially in the context of new global initiatives and great power rivalry.

Key words: Shanghai Cooperation Organization, regional cooperation, international relations, development models, Russia, China

1. INTRODUCTION

After the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union, certain regions of the world were faced with a huge challenge. For the Central Asian region, that challenge was reflected in the United States' interest in this part of the world. At the same time, the possibility of conflict spillover from certain countries, such as Afghanistan, to neighboring countries should not be ignored. After the disappearance of the bipolar structure of the world and the emergence of numerous independent states, questions related to territorial demarcation were frequent. The states of Central Asia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, in these new conditions of the international environment, are turning to Russia and China. The multilateral cooperation of these five countries resulted in the creation of a new regional organization in 2001 - the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. From its beginnings and focusing on the withdrawal of the army from the borders and on building trust between the mentioned countries, today this organization covers many areas of cooperation. Also, from the initial reservation towards new members, over time, new countries have been accepted under the umbrella of the organization. Today, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is one of the most important regional organizations in this part of the world. Above all, the paper will present the origin of the organization and the intertwined interests of individual member states, which may be important for future forecasts of the development of this regional initiative. Then, using the development model matrix of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization offered by professors Miroslav Mladenović and Zoran Kilibarda, the work is oriented towards determining the most likely development model out of the four offered.

2. FROM MULTILATERAL COOPERATION TO REGIONAL ORGANIZATION

The end of the Cold War brought with it certain challenges for the successor countries of the Soviet Union. States like Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, in the changed situation of international relations, had to find an adequate alternative to the United States of America, which in that period expressed interest in the Central Asian region. In such an atmosphere, multilateral cooperation between the three Central Asian republics and Russia and China began to develop in 1996. This type of cooperation was primarily aimed at territorial demarcations, the withdrawal of armies from the borders and the building of trust between the mentioned countries. Thus, Russia and the states of Central Asia significantly reduced their expenditures for military purposes, while China could direct its troops towards Taiwan [1]. In the following years, cooperation began to take on new forms and dimensions, to the extent that a regional organization was established in 2001. The so-called

¹Junior Research Assistant, Vinca Institute of Nuclear Sciences – National Institute of the Republic of Serbia, Mike Petrovića Alasa 12-14, Belgrade, Serbia, sanela.veljkovic@vin.bg.ac.rs.

²Research associate, Vinca Institute of Nuclear Sciences – National Institute of the Republic of Serbia, Mike Petrovića Alasa 12-14, Belgrade, Serbia, milica.curcic@vin.bg.ac.rs.

³Research Assistant, Vinca Institute of Nuclear Sciences – National Institute of the Republic of Serbia, Mike Petrovića Alasa 12-14, Belgrade, Serbia, fmarina@vin.bg.ac.rs.

"Shanghai Five" is renamed the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. At the summit in Shanghai, the Founding Declaration was adopted. Also, the Shanghai Convention was adopted, the invaluable importance of which is reflected in the fact that it is the first instrument in international relations that defines "separatism and extremism as violent methods that represent a criminal offense" [2]. Terrorism is added to this, and all three phenomena together are defined as three evils for which the countries of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization strive to suppress. In the same year 2001, Uzbekistan was admitted to membership. The following year, a Charter was adopted that defined "goals and principles, areas of cooperation, working bodies and the way of functioning" [2]. The scale of this regional initiative is also indicated by the fact that the states that are members of the organization cover 60% of the territory of Eurasia, and their population makes up a quarter of the world's population [2].

In the years following the end of the Cold War, Russia and China individually did not have the same status as the United States in international relations. While the Central Asian region became an object of interest for the United States of America, China and Russia considered this area very important for their national security [3]. The cooperation of the two countries and the gathering of Central Asian countries were enough to limit the influence of the United States of America in this region. Also, this regional connection significantly contributed to the loss of the super power status of the United States of America in the post-Cold War period [3]. Within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the interests and views of the two most important countries, China and Russia, were not always in agreement. For example, while China advocated the creation of a free trade zone, Russia and Central Asian countries did not look favorably on this initiative fearing its possible dominant position within the organization [4]. However, despite certain disagreements that may arise between countries, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization manages to find an adequate solution and has a unique approach in relation to third parties.

Following the development of the organization, it can be concluded that it does not belong to the category of "open" organizations. From the original "Shanghai Five" through the creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the admission of Uzbekistan to membership, until today the number of members has increased by only three. In 2017, India and Pakistan were admitted, while Iran will be a full member from 2021. These countries had different statuses for many years, until they were admitted to membership. Accordingly, countries can have the status of observer, partner, guest or country that supports the work of the organization [5]. Today, observer status is given to Belarus, Mongolia and Afghanistan. The negotiator status is enjoyed by Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia, Nepal, Turkey, and Sri Lanka, and from 2021 Qatar, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia also received this status. Although no sudden decisions are made during admission to membership, it is a long-term process, the interest of many countries to become members is obvious. It can be concluded that the breadth of the organization is no longer limited to the Central Asian region.

3. ANALYSIS OF FURTHER DEVELOPMENT MODELS

Analyzing the importance and complexity of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, professors Miroslav Mladenović and Zoran Kilibarda describe four possible models for its further development. The first, which the authors themselves believe is not so likely, predicts the openness of the organization to such an extent that even Western countries will join it [2]. Based on the organization's development so far, the careful admission of new Asian countries to membership, as well as the many years of "keeping" them in various statuses before membership, this model is certainly the least likely. At the same time, if such a possible development of the situation were ever to occur, the desire of Western countries to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization would be questionable. Western countries already have their long-standing, developed forms of cooperation, primarily through the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

The second model foresees the continuation of the current policy, whereby this organization would continue to develop as an anti-Western one [2]. Although the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was established primarily to prevent the influence of the United States of America in the Central Asian region, its strictly anti-Western character should be questioned. It is certain that the perception of the United States of America as a country that has certain specific interests in this region persists. However, before Iran became a member, care had to be taken not only about the very image

of the organization, but also about the relations of member states with Western states [4]. Also, the anti-Western character of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is questionable when considering its relations with the European Union. It is obvious that both sides are considering the possible potentials of their cooperation. Accordingly, these issues may lead to deepening cooperation in some future period, given that Europe's interest in this relationship stems from its energy dependence, fear of terrorism, migration and extremism [2].

The third model foresees the development of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization into a regional power, during which Russia or China would take over the hegemonic role within the organization [2]. Although there were fears about the intentions of the other side, as well as the fear of the Central Asian republics that this situation could happen, so far neither Russia nor China has assumed the role of hegemon. During the very creation of the organization, the inclusion of two regional powers in itself was a guarantee that none of them would take the leading role [4]. Even in addition to the different perceptions of the two states, the organization itself provided a framework for the possibility of their harmonization. Obviously, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization contributed to the strengthening of relations between China and Russia. They are involved in numerous other regional initiatives and projects, however, there is no overlapping of spheres of interest because they obviously always find an adequate way to avoid such a situation. China's New Silk Road Economic Belt project, although bypassing Russia, does not lead to the creation of rivalry between the two countries. In this spirit, the 2014 Agreement between Russia and China on the supply of gas that meets the needs of both parties was concluded [6]. Given the enormous cooperation that exists, this model of development would perhaps only be plausible in a situation where one of them either began to significantly lose its regional power or became disinterested in the issues the organization deals with.

The fourth model of development envisages the strengthening of the organization's regional strength, admission to membership of observer states, but with the preservation of the equality of member states [2]. From the very beginning of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the emphasis was placed on equality and equal treatment of all the countries that made up it, and especially on the equality of Russia and China. Strengthening the regional strength is likely in the further development of the organization, especially if the areas that were the subject of cooperation, which have included new dimensions over the years, are followed. From issues of security and building trust between member states, through the fight against the three evils, today this organization also deals with issues in the fields of economy, economy, culture, and environmental protection. Also, during the Covid-19 virus pandemic, member states supported each other and showed great mutual understanding [7]. Admission to membership is obviously a lengthy process. However, perhaps it is this longevity that leads to quality membership. An organization that covers such a huge territory and a huge number of inhabitants, obviously before the accession of new members tries to reconcile the differences that exist between the already existing members. Nurturing collectivity and a sense of shared identity, there has been talk of the "Shanghai spirit" lately [5]. Perhaps precisely because of its caution and small membership, this "Shanghai Spirit" seems to have a greater perspective in international relations than the "European Spirit", whose effects are being questioned especially after 2004 and the great enlargement of the European Union.

4. CONCLUSION

With the end of the bipolar structure of the world and the strengthening of the role of the United States of America in international relations, there is a wave of connecting states on a regional basis. Certain countries from the post-Soviet space are turning to European integration, while others are starting cooperation with China and Russia. The multilateral cooperation that began in 1996 between the three Central Asian republics and the regional powers, China and Russia, resulted in the creation of a new regional organizational structure in 2001. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization represented a favorable framework for deepening cooperation among the countries that make it up. Although the organization is considerate of new members, states that wish to join have the opportunity to find themselves in certain categories before membership itself - observer, partner, guest. Those categories enable certain forms of cooperation with countries that are already part of the organization, but undoubtedly there are some limitations. This regional initiative also led to the strengthening of relations

between China and Russia. Even when the two most important regional states have conflicting interests, the organization represents an adequate framework that avoids the conflict of interests and leads to the satisfaction of both parties. Considering the importance of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, professors Miroslav Mladenović and Zoran Kilibarda offered four possible lines of its future development. Analyzing all four models, it can be concluded that the most likely of them is the one that assumes further strengthening of the organization's regional strength, admission of new members, as well as maintaining equality among them. The cautious approach towards the new member states is an element that contributes to the stability of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. If this approach were to be maintained in the future, it could be expected to enhance the organization's regional influence and solidify its position in contemporary international relations.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation of Republic of Serbia, as part of the funding of the scientific research work of the University of Belgrade, „Vinča“ Institute of Nuclear Sciences (grant number 451-03-66/2024-03/200017).

6. REFERENCES

- [1] Đukanović D., Gajić D.: *Evroazijske bezbednosne integracije i bezbednost Balkana i Srbije*, *Međunarodni problemi* 64(1): 55-63, 2012, <https://doiserbia.nb.rs/Article.aspx?id=0025-85551201053D>.
- [2] Mladenović M., Kilibarda Z.: *Šangajska organizacija za saradnju*, *Vjno delo* 63(1): 24-40, 2011.
- [3] Proroković, D.: *Uloga Šangajske organizacije za saradnju u promeni ravnoteže snaga u Centralnoj Aziji*, *Politika nacionalne bezbednosti* 15(9): 79-95, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.22182/pnb.1522018.5>.
- [4] Kilibarda Z., Mladenović M., Ajzenhamer V.: *Geopolitičke perspektive savremenog sveta*, Fakultet bezbednosti, Beograd, 2014.
- [5] Petrović, D., Tomić-Petrović, N.: *Stanje i dalje perspektive Šangajske organizacije za saradnju*, *Kultura polisa*, 17(43): 209-221, 2020.
- [6] Simić, J.: *Ekonomski pojas Novog puta svile: kineski prodor na Zapad ili odgovor na azijske izazove*, *Međunarodni problemi* 63(2-3): 196-216, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.2298/MEDJP1503196S>.
- [7] Lađevac, I.: *Odgovor Kine na novi bezbednosni izazov*, u: *Čovek, prostor, tehnologija, ideje: međunarodna bezbednost u trećoj dekadi 21. veka*. Beograd, Srbija, 2020, str. 126-151.