



The causes of Central Asia -Afghanistan non-integration (2001-2021)*

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ARTICLE INFO

Article type:
Research Article

Article History:
Received 16 July 24
Revised 03 August 2024
Accepted 28 September 2024
Published Online 04 October 2024

Keywords:
Afghanistan,
Central Asia,
Constructivism,
Culture of regionalism,
Regional society,
Regionness,
Regionalism.

ABSTRACT

After the collapse of the Islamic Emirate of the Taliban in 2001 and the establishment of a national government in Afghanistan, the international community members agreed that the establishment of stability in Afghanistan depends on its development. Therefore, various efforts have been made to integrate Afghanistan within the framework of regional cooperation plans. It seemed that due to the desire of the great powers and the formation of some cooperation frameworks between Afghanistan and Central Asia, the integration of Afghanistan with this region would be possible. However, this cooperation did not lead to comprehensive integration in all political, social, economic, and security dimensions, as B. Hettne and F. Söderbaum refer to the third level of regional society. This article, using qualitative analysis method and descriptive-analytical approach and according to library and internet resources, will try to answer the question: "Why Afghanistan and Central Asia cooperation between 2001-2021 did not rise to the level of integration in the form of a "regional society"?" In response to this question, using the conceptual framework of regionness, this hypothesis will be investigated: "Despite the existing levels of governmental and non-governmental cooperation and interactions, as well as common cultural and ideological elements between Afghanistan and Central Asian countries and societies, the weakness of civil societies, the superficiality of relations between them, the inequality of government relations, and the lack of awareness of shared identities have prevented the formation of a regional society between Afghanistan and Central Asia."

Cite this article: Vaezi, T. (2024). The causes of Central Asia -Afghanistan non-integration (2001-2021). *Journal of Iran and Central Eurasia Studies*, 7 (1), 189-201. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22059/ijces.2024.98868>



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DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22059/ijces.2024.98868>

Publisher: University of Tehran Press.

* The article is from the research project titled "Obstacles and Opportunities of Afghanistan's Integration with Central Asia" at the Center for Central Eurasian Studies, Faculty of Law and Political Science, University of Tehran.

Introduction

From the beginning of the national government in Afghanistan in 2001, there was a consensus that the reconstruction of Afghanistan should be based on increasing security, better governance, and more economic and social development. So, regional cooperation was proposed as a tool to reintegrate Afghanistan into the international society. During the following years, international efforts were made to push Afghanistan to regional cooperation projects (Gleason et al., 2009: 275). In this process, the Central Asia region - compared to the South Asia region - was considered the target region for the integration of Afghanistan. Based on this, The United States expressed its Central Asia policy from the perspective of its plans and policies in Afghanistan (Hoagland, 2020) and the EU, which had separated its Central Asia policy from Afghanistan for a while and operated separately in two regions, revised its approach on the eve of the initial timeline for withdrawing American military forces from Afghanistan. Referring to the potential threats to Central Asia from Afghanistan after 2014, the EU, in its 2012 strategy for Central Asia, emphasized the need to strengthen regional dynamics, deepen bilateral political dialogue and turn into Afghanistan as an “opportunity for the development of economic cooperation in the wider region” (European Commission External Relations, 2012).

In addition, the countries of Central Asia signed and organized various documents and agreements regarding the relationship with Afghanistan, as well as different cooperation frameworks with this country, including the Declaration on Good Neighbourly Relations (2002), the Berlin Agreements of 2003, the Dubai declaration of 2003, the statement of the Bishkek conference of 2004, the statement of the Kabul conference of December 2005, and the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA) (Gleason et al., 2009:276).

Despite these relations, the cooperation was limited to economic and commercial cooperation and did not lead to the comprehensive integration of Afghanistan within the countries of the region. This article investigates the hypothesis: “The weakness of civil societies, the superficiality of relations between them, the inequality of government relations, and the lack of awareness of shared identities have prevented the formation of a regional society between Afghanistan and Central Asia.” In the following, after reviewing the research literature and the levels of regionness, the hypothesis will be examined.

1. Literature Review

Due to the importance of stability and development in Afghanistan, the issue of expanding the relations between Afghanistan and Central Asia has attracted the attention of researchers. Several research has focused on the relationship between Afghanistan and Central Asia.

For example, the report "Strengthening Trade and Economic Relations between Afghanistan and Neighboring Countries in Central Asia" by the United Nations Special Program for the Economics of Central Asia (2016) is about the obstacles to economic cooperation between Central Asia and Afghanistan. But the report is only focused on economic issues and does not address the frameworks of the cooperation and the obstacles to its transformation into a regional society. Nargis Kassenova's report (2014) on "Relations between Afghanistan and Central Asia after 2014: Incentives, Constraints and Prospects" is a prospective study of Central Asia-Afghanistan relations after the withdrawal of NATO forces in 2014. This work considers some aspects of Afghanistan's cooperation with the region and has not studied promoting integration. Laruelle, et. al (2013) in their article titled “Afghanistan's relationship in Central Asia: What role is there for the European Union?” have focused on several EU integration plans for Central Asia and Afghanistan and do not deal with the grounds and obstacles of establishing a regional society. Similarly, in his article Hoagland (2020) presents the American national security strategy for Afghanistan and further elaborates on the American integration plans for

Afghanistan concluding that the issue of the formation of a regional society for Afghanistan has not been fully discussed within it.

Hikmatullah Azami's article (2017) titled "Afghanistan: An Asset or a Liability for the Neighbors of Central Asia?" examines the opportunities and challenges of Afghanistan for Central Asia since 2001. Yet the study fails to specifically in full the issue of promoting integration and creating a regional society for that period.

In general, the review of the existing literature on Afghanistan post 2001 shows that the issue of regional integration in non-economic areas has not been considered. Therefore, this study will examine the key obstacles to the formation of a regional society in Afghanistan and Central Asian countries within the "regionness" conceptual framework.

2. Theoretical and conceptual framework

Although the theoretical literature of regionalism has been in academic use prior to the 1980s, dating to the early days of the Cold War, these theories were characterized by a commitment to rationalism and the distribution of purely material capabilities (Wendt, 1992:91). However, since the 1980s, regionalism theories have gained a new expression with the constructivist perspective and attention to immaterial variables alongside material factors. Constructivism emphasizes three ontological principles: 1) the importance of intellectual and normative structures parallel to material structures, 2) the role of identities and norms in the formation of interests and behaviours, and 3) the mutual relationship between structure and agent.

Constructivism also emphasized the need to use interpretive methodology and by identifying ideas, norms and intersubjective relationships - as its epistemological principle - it redefined the concepts of identity, interests, and anarchy. From the constructivist point of view, identities are fluid phenomena and express a certain understanding of oneself in front of others, and they cannot be defined apart from their possible context. Whether the "self" considers itself a friend, rival or enemy of "others", many differences are created in the interaction and, as a result, their interests. (Moshirzadeh, 2006: 332) On the other hand, interests and anarchy do not have a predetermined logic, but governments' understanding of its nature can determine its meaning in the international system.

This theory believes that the identity and interests of governments are created through norms, interactions and cultures. Therefore, to achieve integration, a connection must be established between material interdependence and the feeling of belonging to a specific regional society. In other words, constructivism is primarily focused on regional awareness and identity and on the sense of belonging to a specific regional society or the so-called "cognitive regionalism" (Hurrell, 1995:352).

Accordingly, for the formation of the region, there must be a group of elements in a specific region, and at the same time, they are shown differently from the rest of the neighbouring space. Based on this, the area does not have a natural and organic existence and requires the presence of an element of awareness to formulate this distinction (with adjacent spaces) (Gica, 2013: 738).

Because, as long as no one is politically aware of the existence of this distinction and specific elements, regionalism will remain hidden. The act of presenting a region as distinct from the rest of the world is a mental process called "regionalization". From this viewpoint, regional identity is one of the characteristics of a region that distinguishes it from the neighbouring space. Therefore, regional identity is the normative-representational element of regionalism. Therefore, regional identity creates regionness. This repeating process may reinforce a sense of difference from the rest of the world, which in turn reinforces a sense of regional identity (Gica, 2013:740).

According to what has been said, Hettne and Soderbaum argue that although the stages of development of regionness are not the same and definite, in general, five stages of "regionness" (Hettne, 2013:61-62; Hettne and Soderbaum, 2002:14-25) can be discussed:

1. The region as a geographical unit with relatively natural physical boundaries that have natural characteristics and is the place where people live. In this sense, the region is called "pre-regional zone". In this region, people live in scattered societies with minimal communication.
2. The region as a social system that exists among the human groups living in it, there are extra-local relations of different natures - either positive or negative interactions. These social groups depend on each other in terms of security and political stability. This region, like the international system, is anarchic and there is a low level of organization - such as the balance of power or concert - so at this stage, we can speak of a "Primitive zone" or a "Security complex".
3. The third level of regionness is the level where the vital process of regionalization is developed and intensified. The emergence of various communication and interactive processes between a multitude of governmental and non-governmental actors, including markets, trade and private companies, transnational corporations (TNC), the existence of transnational business networks, non-governmental organizations, social movements and other types of social networks that formed based on professional, ideological, ethnic or religious ties, which help to form the transnational regional economy and regional civil society, as well as various economic, political and cultural cooperation and relations, are important features of this level of the regionness.

This increase in the intensity, scope, and extent of regionalization may occur through formal regional cooperation or more spontaneously. In the case of more formal cooperation, the region is defined by the members of the regional organization. This level of regionness can be called the "formal region". To assess the relevance and future potential of a particular regional organization, one must be able to relate the formal region to the "real region". This level of regionness can be called the regional form of the "international community", as used in the English school, but with this important difference: it is not limited to state relations. Although the dynamics of this region are often dominated by state-centred logic, the increasing interdependence in this level of regionalism, creates a complex interaction between many types of actors. This level of regionalism is also called "regional society".

4. The region as a civil society, which is promoted by the formation of its organizational framework, social relations and the convergence of values. In this region, there are common cultural traditions and multidimensional regional cooperation. This level of regionality is called "regional community" and in the field of security, "security community" in which, the resolution of conflicts violently is unthinkable and, in the economic field of the region, it is not simply reduced to a "market". Rather, there are regional mechanisms that can counteract the effects of polarization inherent in the market and ensure social security, regional balance, and prosperity with functions similar to those of old, albeit primitive, states. At this level, regional collective identity has emerged and regional collective identity and relationships are characterized by mutual trust guided by social learning. However, governments are still standing and have independent sovereignty.
5. The region as an active actor with a separate identity, having legitimacy, the power to play a role and a decision-making structure. In fact, at this level of regionalism, we are faced with a "regional government" in which, despite the existence of cultural pluralism, political units have been merged. In terms of political order, the region-state is the

voluntary—rather than coercive—evolution of a group of formerly independent national societies into a new form of political entity, in which governance is best integrated and more intensely democratic than other forms of "international" governance. Moreover, authority, power and decision-making are not centralized, but layered and decentralized at local, micro-regional, national and macro-regional/transnational levels.

Although, as Hettne and Soderbaum emphasize, no single and uniform process for the evolution of regionalization can be considered as a criterion and indicator of regionness. However, if the above steps are considered as an indicator for the degree of integration, it seems that Afghanistan and Central Asia, despite their relations and cooperation between 2001-2021, have slightly exceeded the level of the second stage of regionness, but at the same time, it hasn't reached the third level, which is the regional society. Based on this, this study will continue to examine the most important factors affecting the establishment of regional society between Afghanistan and Central Asia.

3. Obstacles to the formation of a regional community between Afghanistan and Central Asian countries

This article will further examine the obstacles to the formation of a regional society between Afghanistan and Central Asia based on the indicators of the definition of a regional society based on the perspective of Hettne and Söderbaum. These indicators are 1- The existence of a variety of communication and interaction processes 2- The existence of a relationship between a variety of governmental and non-governmental actors (from different economic, political and social fields) 3- The existence of ethnic, religious, and ideological ties. Then, the combination of these factors contributes to the formation of a transnational economy or civil society (with the guidance of governments or non-governmental actors). Therefore, we will examine the state of Afghanistan-Central Asian relations based on these three indicators.

1. The scope and diversity of Central Asian-Afghanistan interactions:

Northern Afghanistan, known as Transoxiana or Turkestan, was disintegrated in the 18th century and subsequently annexed and divided between the Tsarist Russia and British colonial empires in the 19th century. The Bukhara Emirate was the last direct historical link between Central Asia and Afghanistan. With the profound political, social, economic and cultural developments in Central Asia by the Soviet Union between 1917 and 1991, the region's similarity to Afghanistan ended. But relations between the two regions continued. In the 1920s and 1930s, tens of thousands of Central Asians fled the Soviet Union to Afghanistan. (Laruelle et al., 2013:5)

During the prime ministership of Mohammad Dawood Khan (1953-1963) until two decades later, Moscow was Kabul's main trading partner and political ally, providing significant military, political, and social assistance to Afghanistan. After the 1973 coup, Dawood Khan's efforts to reduce the influence of the Soviet Union and the Afghan Communists on the government led to the 1978 coup. With the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, Central Asian soldiers and advisers (mostly Tajiks and Uzbeks) gained a large role and influence in the pro-Soviet government of Mohammad Najibullah. (Laruelle et al., 2013:5)

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, economic relations between the newly founded Central Asian republics and Afghanistan were limited. The Afghan civil war in the mid-1990s cut off official trade between these countries and Afghanistan. However, Central Asian countries and Russia were helping Ahmad Shah Massoud's Northern Alliance. After the Taliban came to power in 1996, other countries in the region cut diplomatic relations with Afghanistan, except for Turkmenistan, which continued its trade relations with the Taliban based on its principle of permanent neutrality. (Laruelle et al., 2013: 6)

After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Central Asian countries have also been among the providers of humanitarian aid and economic and technical assistance to Afghanistan. Construction of schools and hospitals in Samangan and Bamyan provinces, as well as repairs of roads between Kunduz and Taluks by Kazakhstan, construction of 11 bridges between Mazar-e-Sharif and Kabul, construction of electricity transmission lines and a 75-kilometer railway connecting Termez in Uzbekistan to Hairan and Mazar-e-Sharif in Afghanistan, and providing fuel, building materials, metals, fertilizers and food by Uzbekistan are examples of these collaborations (Marmontova et al., 2016: 22-23) .

Also, official bilateral trade resumed after the establishment of the Hamid Karzai regime in late 2001 and boomed with the reopening of previous routes between Afghanistan and these countries and the activation of border customs from 2007–2008 onwards. A comparison of data from different years shows that in 2010, Afghanistan's imports from its northern neighbours increased significantly from near zero in 2000 to 13 percentages (Mogilevskii, 2012: 46)

Such partnerships especially expanded from 2010 onwards. Examples include the launch of the World Bank-led CASA-1000 energy project, the expansion of cooperation under the TAPI gas pipeline project, and investment in communications and railways with Afghanistan (\$500 million commitment to build railway lines) and negotiations on the establishment of a free trade zone between the two countries to promote trade and development as part of Uzbekistan's economic relations with Afghanistan (Sanchez, 2018).

The export of wheat, flour and construction materials from Kazakhstan, the export of agricultural products and light goods from Kyrgyzstan, and the focus of Turkmenistan's trade relations with Afghanistan on energy exports such as natural gas and electricity to Afghanistan indicate the existence of economic relations with Afghanistan (see Figure 1). However, inequality of trade balance between countries, security concerns and a lack of adequate communications infrastructure have been the most important obstacles to expanding relations within the region.

In the field of social relations, signing numerous agreements with Afghanistan to promote exchanges and quality of education by Uzbekistan, providing scholarships to Afghan students by Kazakhstani Universities and the Agha Khan Development Network, and implementing a \$50 million training program for vocational training to about 1,000 Afghan citizens by 2021 by the Kazakhstan government (Sanchez, 2018). providing scholarships and cooperating in teacher training and curriculum development programs by Tajikistan, establishing the Kyrgyz-Afghan Technical University in Bishkek in 2013 and hosting joint educational conferences by Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan's limited educational assistance with a focus on technical-vocational training are other notable social ties between the countries of the region and Afghanistan.

Meanwhile in the field of political and security relations: the signing of the border security agreement between Tajikistan and Afghanistan in 2009, the signing of a political memorandum of understanding between Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan in 2011, the hosting of the peace conference in 2014 by Kazakhstan, the conclusion of a border security cooperation agreement with Turkmenistan in 2007, the expressed readiness to mediate between the Afghan government and the Taliban by Uzbekistan and its hosting of the 2018 "Peace Process, Security Cooperation and Regional Cooperation" Conference and the "Central and South Asia: Regional Links, Opportunities and Challenges" Conference-held in 2021 - are noteworthy (EUCAM, 2021).

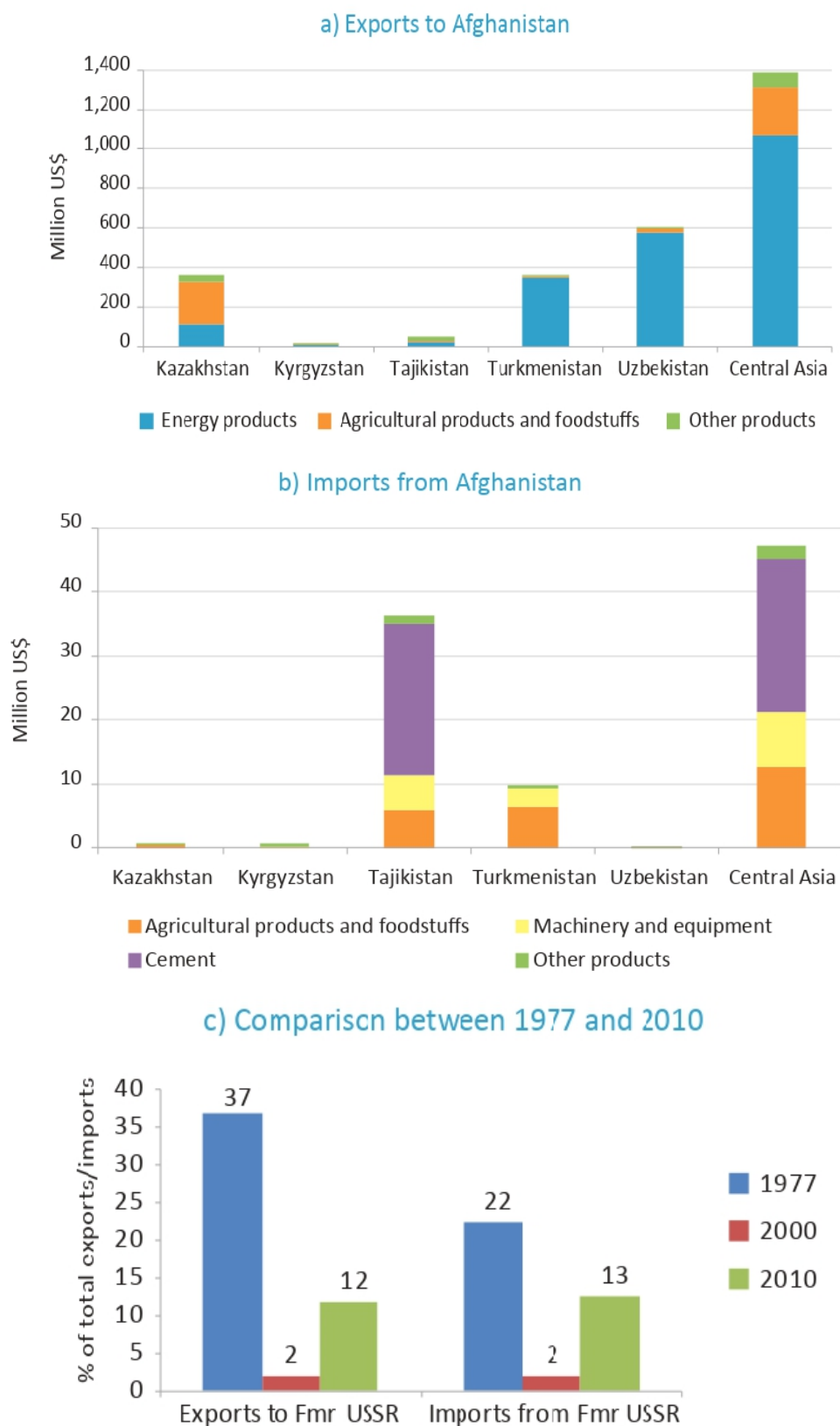


Figure 1. Trade between Central Asian countries and Afghanistan, 2010
(Source: Mogilevskii, 2012: 46-47)

However, due to security concerns, political-security relations between the countries of the region and Afghanistan have always been cautious and under scrutiny. While Kazakhstan, due to its lack of a common border and ethnic commonalities, feels the least concern about the spillover of Afghan insecurity to its borders, Tajikistan feels the most vulnerable due to its longest common border among Central Asian countries with Afghanistan and extensive ethnic ties. Meanwhile, even Turkmenistan, which had refused to recognize any threat from Afghanistan in the 1990s because of its neutrality, felt threatened by the spillover of instability from Afghanistan over time (Kassenova, 2014: 4–5)

4. The role of governmental and non-governmental actors in the relations between Afghanistan and Central Asia

Before evaluating the position of non-governmental actors and members of civil society in the relations between Afghanistan and Central Asia, it is necessary to examine the position of these actors within the countries in question.

It should be noted that non-governmental actors here mean a wide range of political parties, traditional institutions, religious authorities, non-governmental organizations, non-governmental business networks and research institutions. From this point of view, it can be said that there were political parties in Afghanistan during the period in question, which were mainly rooted in the factions or alliances of Mujahideen leaders and members during the war (1979-1991) against the Soviet Union. In addition to traditional parties and institutions such as councils and jirgas, which often include religious leaders, since 2001, numerous civil institutions were formed in various fields of education, media, women, etc., and were organized within networks such as the Afghan Civil Society Association and Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) (Bell, 2015:12). These institutions, whose number reached more than 3000 non-governmental organizations, had extensive cooperation with international organizations. (Novak, 2013: 884). Based on this, it can be argued that the Afghan civil society has grown significantly in the studied period.

Meanwhile in Central Asian countries, especially Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, civil society activities are considered as a potential threat to the security and integrity of the regime. Accordingly, since 2005, the governments of the region have banned the activities of non-governmental organizations and have taken extensive measures to eliminate the influence of civil society, such as creating new obstacles to the registration, operation and financing of non-governmental organizations and

Limiting travel and networking activities of NGO leaders. Besides, the emergence of new tracking and monitoring technologies in the digital field has also made it easier for the security services of these countries to monitor the activities of non-governmental organizations. At the same time, governments increased their funding and support for state-sponsored youth organizations and also launched several government-sponsored non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) to support the government's goals under the guise of civil society, but with a non-critical approach. (Cooley, 2020:3)

Therefore, it can be said that the first limitation in the non-governmental relations between Afghanistan and Central Asia is the remarkable weakness of civil society in Central Asian countries. However, there have been limited relations at this level, which will be explained further. The relations between Afghanistan and Central Asia at the level of non-state actors from one point of view include the relations between ethnic minorities (especially Tajiks, Turks, and Uzbeks), which, due to the division of these groups into smaller groups with contradictory strategies. On the one hand, and the limitation of relations with these minorities and their relatives on the other side of the border during the period of the Soviet Union, the relations of

these groups are facing complications and limitations. However, these relationships form a limited part of people-to-people communication.

Another part of public relations is formed by businessmen. Due to the type of economic and political structures that exist, especially in Central Asian countries, in most cases, businessmen must be in direct contact with the ruling networks, security services and private militias to ensure the security of transactions. In other words, this part of relations has also been limited and has been affected by government networks and mafias affiliated with governments.

Another part of civil society relations was the result of humanitarian projects led by the international community, which were implemented in both regions (Central Asia and Afghanistan). In other words, the projects of international organizations such as the United Nations and its related institutions or the EU, with the use of local workforce, have become the basis for the partnership and relationship between the civil society of Afghanistan and the countries of Central Asia. In this regard, the project of the Red Cross between the Gorno-Badakhshan region of Tajikistan and the Badakhshan province of Afghanistan in 2012 (in the field of disaster management and risk reduction), in which hundreds of engineers, nurses and doctors from Central Asia on both sides of the borders worked. the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) projects and the Program of Non-State Actors and Local Authorities in Development, (NSA-LA) of the European Union, interregional exchange between women's non-governmental organizations of Central Asia and Afghanistan, the European Union Instrument for Stability (IFS) projects (to involve civil society in the border regions of Tajikistan and Afghanistan to prevent conflict and deal with the consequences of possible crises), are some other noticeable cases.

In this way, it can be seen that, despite the existence of some relations at the level of the civil societies of Afghanistan and Central Asia, due to the existence of obstacles (mainly the type of political systems and the influence of governments), these relations have been limited and superficial. At the level of government relations, official visits between Central Asian officials and their Afghan counterparts increased steadily throughout the 2000s. These relations were strengthened by the establishment of bilateral trade commissions. The leaders met regularly at NATO or UN, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and other international meetings. Also, the embassies of the target countries have also been the main places for bilateral information gathering and networking, especially for business relations. And finally, the security services and law enforcement organizations are directly responsible for the border security and customs committees have also monitored most of the relations (Laruelle et al., 2013: 15)

5. The existence of ethnic, religious and ideological ties

Investigating the position of this index in the relations between Afghanistan and Central Asia requires a look at the background of their historical-civilizational relationships. The lands of Central Asia and today's Afghanistan were connected regionally during the rule of Greco-Western dynasties, the Kushan, Ghaznavid, Timurid and Babri kingdoms. A large part of today's Afghanistan was part of the Khanate of Bukhara and the city of Balkh for centuries. In addition, the graves of great thinkers such as Ali-Shir Nava'i, Maulana Lotfi, Kamaluddin Behzad, Abdul Rahman Jami, Zahiruddin Mohammad Babar, Abu Rihan Biruni, Bobo Rahim Mashrab, who have greatly contributed to the civilization and cultural relations of the people of the entire region, are located in the territory of new Afghanistan.

In addition, Afghanistan is a diverse, multi-ethnic and multilingual nation. The Tajik, Turkmen and Uzbek population of Afghanistan have the same language, culture and history as their compatriots in the neighbouring countries of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. These ethnic groups first migrated to Afghanistan in the 19th century during the advance of the

Christian Russian Tsarist forces and then with the establishment of the anti-religious government of the Soviet Union in the 20th century. So nowadays, the ethnic Tajiks of Afghanistan are the second-largest ethnic group after the Pashtuns, who make up more than a quarter of the population. They mainly live in the north and northeast of the country. (Kassenova, 2014:4) Tajiks of Afghanistan and Tajikistan have close linguistic, cultural and historical relations and have common religions, cultural values, traditions and customs. Although there are many families whose members live on both sides of the border and have different citizenships, they maintain blood and kinship ties. (Ubaidulloev, 2014: 121)

The population of Uzbeks is about 8% of the total population of Afghanistan. Uzbeks live in the northern plains of Afghanistan. They speak their language, and are members of the Altai language family. (Blood, 2004:20) Although there are few ethnic tendencies between Uzbeks in Uzbekistan and Uzbeks in Afghanistan, there are good relations at the elite level. For example, in the 1990s, the Uzbek government helped General Abdul Rashid Dostum, the leader of the Afghan Uzbek community and the anti-Taliban United Front (the Northern Alliance), and supported him after the Taliban (Ubaidulloev, 2014:122). However, since the Afghan Uzbeks were completely separated from their other tribes on the other side of the Amu Darya River and there was no mutual communication between them for many years, music, culture, art and literature have grown differently between them. At the beginning of the independence of the Soviet republics, Uzbek literature was not understandable for Afghan Uzbeks. (Sattarov, 2018)

Turkmen are another Turkic group of the Sunni religion and are one of the largest ethnic groups in Afghanistan, whose names are mentioned in the constitution of Afghanistan. The population of Turkmenistan constitutes 3% of the total Afghanistan population. They are mainly concentrated along the Afghanistan northern border with Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. In addition to the above ethnic groups, more than a thousand Kazakhs and Kyrgyz from Central Asia currently live in Afghanistan. (Blood, 2001: 21)

It should be explained that despite the above racial and ethnic commonalities, at the beginning of the 20th century, the people of northern Afghanistan had a common cultural worldview and strong trade relations with their neighbours in Central Asia, but this situation changed in the late 1920s. The policies of the Soviet Union aimed at strengthening the borders and fundamental social changes and economic reorganization put these previously similar groups on very different historical paths. During the 1930s, Joseph Stalin tightened the border and made Afghanistan's northern borders impenetrable. Thus, with the passing of generations, the personal and cultural ties between the cross-border population were lost. The people of Central Asia were pushed towards Moscow and eventually came to believe that they had little in common with their neighbours to the south. They also accepted the common belief in the Soviet Union that all these neighbours were culturally inferior, economically backward, and dangerous. This attitude intensified during the Afghan-Soviet war in the 1980s. Even the collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of the Central Asian countries in 1991 did not change these views, but they were even strengthened by the Afghan civil war. (American Institute of Afghanistan Studies, 2009:10). In other words, After the collapse of the Soviet Union, although the communities on both sides of the border shared a common language and race, they were not the same people as before and lived in completely different mental worlds from their fellow citizens on the other side of the border.

In this period, the efforts of the republics that gained independence from the Soviet Union to shape their distinct national and ethnic identities led to the redefinition of ethnic identities in these countries. Therefore, today, Tajiks, Turkmen and Uzbeks have a specific definition of their identity and do not want to connect with their fellow countrymen in Afghanistan. In

contrast, the Uzbek, Tajik and Turkmen people of Afghanistan sometimes do not even consider their descendants in neighbouring countries to be Muslims (Atai, 2022: 123-124) .

Conclusion

From the beginning of the establishment of the national government of Afghanistan in 2001, due to the importance of stability and security of this country to other parts of the world, there was a consensus at the international level that establishing security in Afghanistan requires economic development through regional and global cooperation. Therefore, several plans were followed to expand all-round cooperation between Afghanistan and international actors, especially at the regional level. Regardless of bilateral cooperation, multilateral cooperation to broaden coordination and economic development of Afghanistan was supported by the international community, especially the Western powers. However, these initiatives did not lead to the formation of comprehensive integration or regional society, according to Hettne and Soderbaum's interpretation. The study of the indicators of a regional society showed that the relations between Afghanistan and Central Asia - quantitatively and qualitatively - are flawed and deficient in having the preconditions for creating a regional society (that is, diversity of actors, depth of interactions, and common identical-cultural elements). To be more precise, although their formal governmental relations have been expanding from 2001 to 2021) The level of relationships was not equal or even close to each other. Afghanistan has always been economically weak, an importer of goods and services, and a recipient of economic and social aid and support. This issue has prevented complementarity and interdependence between these countries. In addition, obstacles such as the Lack of proper communication infrastructure and the spread of insecurity in the north of Afghanistan in the last years of the national government, which was the result of the Taliban regaining power and the presence of ISIS, caused many challenges to these relations.

On the other hand, despite the growing civil society in Afghanistan, the remarkable weakness of civil society in Central Asian countries and the inevitable dependence of the private sector on the governments in the form of power mafias. So, the limited cases of civil society relations under the cover of aid projects of international organizations never led to complex interactions between societies that were needed for a regional society and, at best, relations have grown only at the government level. Also, regardless of the Pashtun people in Afghanistan and the issue of the absence of national identity inside Afghanistan, even among the common ethnic groups of Afghanistan and Central Asia, the awareness of common identity is weak. Therefore, the formation of a sense of belonging to a specific regional society or the so-called "cognitive regionalism" is unlikely.

Declaration

"The author declares that they have fully observed all ethical issues including plagiarism, double publication and/or submission, redundancy, data fabrication and/or falsification, informed consent, misconduct, etc."

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