

Categories, Models and Forecast of the Global Configuration

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The article discusses some theoretical aspects of the forming configuration of the global world and describes the notions of 'pole', 'center of power', 'hierarchy' and 'framework' with respect to the global world, as well as reveals its three-level structure. The forecast is given with respect to the possible models of the global world and cycles of development of global political system. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is examined in terms of its possible claim to the status of the center of power of the global world.

Keywords: *pole, center of power, multipolar, polycentric, the hierarchical level, models of the global world, cycles of development of the global world system, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.*

Accelerating and deepening processes of globalization result in qualitative changes of the world structure. This finds its expression in the emergence of new categories to characterize that structure. However, those categories have not yet obtained an institutionalized status.

Thus, 'a pole' and 'a center of power' are essential categories of Political Globalistics which are still to be institutionalized and clearly defined.

In the encyclopedia *Global Studies* (Mazour, Chumakov, and Gay 2006), a rather short entry contains the following definition: 'Multipolar world is an imaginary geopolitical structure of the world governed in a balanced manner by several poles of power and might'.

Encyclopedias and dictionaries often describe the notion of 'a pole' with a certain characteristic of unidimensionality (a geographic pole, the Northern (Southern) pole, a magnetic pole, an equilibrium pole, *etc.*) with a single typologically dominant feature. Therefore, we suggest that the following types of poles should be distinguished: a military pole, an economic pole, a political pole, and a civilization pole. Each of those poles has its own characteristics, which, in their turn, may be used as criteria to attribute a country to a particular category.

An economic pole. Its status is determined by an array of the following factors: high GDP; economic efficiency; development of market relations; high investment activity within a country and general investment attractiveness of a region; a developed social and economic infrastructure; achieving of the best possible standards and quality of life under the circumstances; policies oriented towards innovations and high technologies; a balanced social, ecological and economic system within the country; assurance of sustainable and balanced reproduction of social, economic, resource and ecological potentials of a region; high competitiveness of a region in the world system.

Currently, the 'G-7' countries, as well as rapidly developing countries of the Asian-Pacific Region and BRICS can be considered as economic poles.

A political pole. Membership of the UN Security Council is considered as a crucial requirement for a country to qualify for the status of a political pole. Besides, one can distinguish the following characteristics of a political pole: ability to control a vast geopolitical space, abundant opportunities to retain influence over such a territory, evident indicators of political self-sufficiency.

The basic requirement for the maintenance of a political pole is a stable political situation within the country combined with its sustainable development, provided by the optimal quantity of controlled territory, including certain key (geostrategic) areas. The political pole is characterized by such essential features as political orientations and vectors of nation-building within the country, and also by the country's territory size and population. The vast territory rich in natural resources and large population numbers should be considered as prerequisites for a country to become a political pole, to which other countries will gravitate, and around which other nations and countries will group in order to gain economic benefits or adapt the political environment and follow that country.

A military pole. The nuclear-weapon states are usually considered as military poles. The possession of nuclear weapons provides opportunities of intensive impact on other countries and on international relations system due to the mere existence of nuclear weapons and threat of its use, to the demonstration of political will and the authorities' determination to conduct armed conflicts if necessary. However, even the fact of possession of such powerful weapons does not reflect to a full scale the notion of 'a military pole'. It is a number of statutes (the military doctrine, the national security doctrine, the country's foreign policy concept, the official statements and actions of the country political leadership, the public opinion towards possible military force, *etc.*), institutions and environments that define the military force as the state's major political tool that qualifies a country as a military pole.

Such nuclear weapons countries as India, China, Pakistan, North Korea, *etc.* can be also considered as military poles.

A civilization pole is a country or a group of countries that has a distinctly evident civilization identity and a powerful potential for social and cultural influence on other countries. A civilization pole can be represented by a group of countries that have common cultural and genetic codes within a single civilization matrix. Western Europe, China, India, Japan, Iran, Turkey and other countries with a distinctly prominent national identity and national project can certainly be called civilization poles of the world system.

Taken together, all the above mentioned factors may prove to have a many-sided and significant influence on the position, rating, authority and power of a state in the multipolar world. When most features of economic, political, military and may be civilization poles can be found in a single state or in a macro-regional formation then we can define the respective entity as a center of power. In the contemporary world system, there are a few macro-regional associations that have been rapidly increasing their material, economic and political resources and will qualify for the status of a center of power in the nearest future.

Contenders for the status of a center of power are countries that have consolidated their resources and are on the way to establishing an economic, political and military strategic union.

To the contenders claiming to become a center of power, one can attribute regional integration-focused associations, such as MERCOSUR (Common Market of the Southern Cone), ASEAN, CCASG (Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf), South African Development Community, *etc.* They all qualify for the status of a center of power, but due to a complex character of integration processes and a number of issues arising in this connection, none of them has managed to reach the level of a full-scale economic and political alliance.

Unions and blocks claiming the status of a center of power (ASEAN, UNASUR, BRICS, and the CIS) are still at the stage of mainly economic integration, while the political integration encounters considerable objective and subjective obstacles.

In this context, the notion of the 'unipolar world' seems to be insufficiently precise. In the contemporary global world system one can find numerous heterogeneous poles: military, economic, and civilization ones. That is why nowadays we can already claim the existence of the multipolar world. However, there is only one power that has managed to combine the characteristics of the most poles – the USA. It is the USA that is a center of power in the modern world system and a global leader. That is why, it would be more precise to denote the modern world system as a monocentric one. However, with the account of the well-established traditions and widely used speech patterns, we shall rather use the terms 'pole' and 'unipolar world'.

There is no doubt that the European Union exhibits the properties of economic, military and civilization poles. However, its status as a center of power in the world system depends on the degree of independence of domestic politics and foreign policy decision-making from the USA. The recognition of the European Union as a center of power allows speaking about the existence of a bicentric (but at the same time a multipolar) model of the world system.

With the advancing globalization processes, with the emergence of new poles and contenders to centers of power, it is possible to forecast that the future configuration is bound to become the one of the polycentric world.

Thus, the world system has its hierarchy of actors including: centers of power, contenders to the status of a center of power, economic, political, military and civilization poles.

The *rivalry* among the structural elements of the globalizing world for the place in the hierarchy will determine the evolvement of political processes and future scenario of the world system development.

Even today it is evident that the future configuration of the world system will be:

- multipolar, with a considerable number of poles (economic, military, civilization, and, to a lesser degree, political ones, since the political independence and self-sustainability can be hardly achieved within the global polycentric world);

- polycentric. It will have several centers of power represented by the USA and other global structures (the EU, UNASUR, probably ASEAN, BRICS or the Eurasian Union).

Thus, the future structure of the multipolar world can be described as a configuration of the following structural elements:

- *the first hierarchy level*: the centers of power within the multipolar world: the USA, the EU, China;

– *the second hierarchy level*: macroregions with a high economic integration and a rather prominent political component which claim to become the centers of power of the multipolar world in the future. Here one can mention macroregions, led by the organizations, such as ASEAN, UNASUR, CCASG (Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf), South African Development Community, *etc.*;

– *the third hierarchy level*: Japan, Russia, India, Brazil, South Korea, Singapore, Australia, Turkey, Malaysia, Chili and other countries. Even today these countries can be considered the economic, political or military poles of the multipolar world.

Thus, we can distinguish **three models of the world system**: the unipolar, bipolar and multipolar world.

There is a certain discrepancy between the notions of ‘multipolar’ and ‘polycentric’ world. The term ‘multipolar’ is more widespread today and is extrapolated to the future configuration of the world system.

However, today the world is already multipolar, as there exist economic (rapidly developing countries with high economic indicators), military (countries at least having nuclear weapons at their disposal) and civilization poles (countries with a distinct civilization identity).

The term ‘polycentric’ world seems to be a more logical definition of the future structure of the world system – the world containing several centers of power, each combining several types of poles.

The relationships between structural elements of the world system can be associated with the market competition phenomenon. Thus, the market competition mechanism can be extrapolated (with certain reservations and the account of corresponding correlatives) to the environment on the global political market. For instance, such a significant correlative is represented by the subjective factor of global political processes that has a more prominent character on the political market in comparison with the economic market.

First, the rivalries between global actors of the same ‘league’ seem to be inevitable.

The competition between global actors seems to be an effective trigger for deepening of integrative processes both at the regional level, as well as at the level of the inter-state associations, such as ASEAN.

The aspirations to retain the achieved status in the global hierarchy, to secure the country's own political and economic niche, to outstrip a competitor, to keep pace with the general rates of globalization processes – all these are vigorous drivers for further intensification of integration and alliance-focused relations by means of signed treaties and the creation of supra-national governance bodies. It also mobilizes the potential of political elite and business communities within the countries and promotes understanding of the necessity and even inevitability to partially sacrifice the country's authority, tactical economic interests and even partially its sovereignty in order to achieve strategic, and in all respects, ‘global’ objectives.

Second, the variety of the leading actors and their positions in the world system leads to the emergence and automatic maintenance of competitive environment.

Due to its nature, the multipolar and polycentric global system gives rise to competition, which makes it possible to consider the global competition principle as inherent to this system and its natural and inevitable attribute.

Thus, a regional power / regional leader can encounter competition on the part of other countries which are 'axial' within the given region. Several regional powers/leaders can face plenty of competition with each other, with countries-poles of the world system or with contenders to the status of a center of power.

Such competitive practices manifest in the competition for sales markets and for the spheres of political influence and can result in the involvement of new members in one's orbit or 'drawing' countries from one alliance (block) to another.

The evolvement of global processes, their essence and development vector are largely determined by competition among the players in the global arena, their attempts to maintain and affirm their status in the global hierarchy, the claims to a higher ranking also through the actions (*i.e.* a system of economic, political, military and ideological measures) aimed at involving new allies and members to its own block.

Using the notions, it is possible to endeavor at forecasting the future configuration of the world system. However, one should bear in mind that a forecast is rather a suggestion about a possibility, than the future itself. A forecast does not predetermine any event, but rather informs of it.

One can expect that the competitive rivalries between structural elements of the world system will lead to the cyclic alterations of the world system models.

Those models are represented by the unipolar world, bipolar world and multipolar world (the widespread and conventional terms). However, as has been stated above, it seems to be more accurate to apply the notions of the monocentric, bicentric and polycentric world.

Yakunin, Bagdasaryan, Kulikov and Sulakshin in their book 'Variation and Cyclic Regularity of the Humankind Global Development' (Yakunin *et al.* 2009: 289–307) proposed and substantiated the concept of cyclic development through the description of the pendulum cyclic regularity in the context of discreet and conservative modernization models. The concept of the cyclic pendulum is of fundamental nature, which enables to extrapolate it to the world system.

The competition mechanism will make the world system models alternate.

The bicentric world can be considered as an equilibrium point. The international system balance was disturbed with the end of the 'Cold War' period, the collapse of the USSR and its disintegration. The bicentric world was substituted by the monocentric world with the USA as a global hegemon. Today this model demonstrates clear signs of crisis, which is much spoken about.

The phase of the monocentric world will change to the bicentric world – evidently with the USA and China as its centers. (The European Union will also be a center of power, but within the system of international relations it generally aligns with the USA).

Within a certain period of time (which is different for individual international actors) the contenders to the center-of-power status within the world system will be able to strengthen their positions and build up their own alliances and blocks. That is why the phase of the bicentric world will change to the polycentric world.

This will be the first cycle of the global world system's development. Among the major actors of the cycle one can, probably, mention: ASEAN, Arab World (Islamic Caliphate),

‘Great Turan’ (Turkey’s geopolitical project based on the pan-Turkism ideology); UNASUR and others.

The competitive rivalries will gradually reveal leaders and outsiders among those centers of power. The stage of the multipolar world will come to its end. The ‘pendulum’ will start its reverse motion and the global system will again strive to recover the balance within the framework of a bicentric world model. The pendulum movement in the direction of the bicentric world will indicate the beginning of the second cycle of the global system’s development.

What countries or centers of power will be the future leading tandem within the bicentric world in the second cycle? There is no doubt that the USA will remain one of the two actors and one of the winners in competitive rivalries within the multipolar world will oppose the USA.

That situation can be presented as follows. The USA versus X1, or X2, or X3, or X4, *etc.*, where X1 is China, X2 is Russia, X3 is ASEAN, X4 is UNASUR, X5 is the project ‘Arab World’ (Islamic Caliphate), X6 is the project ‘Great Turan’.

However, the history repeats itself, and according to the famous statement, ‘Bolivar cannot carry double’, the pendulum will once again start moving to the monocentric world. One of the two global players will consolidate the status of a hegemon and the global world leader.

In order to extricate the global world from a static state, in addition to the internal factors (competition) there should be an external trigger or ‘exogenous penetrations’. A global scale catastrophe – an international conflict, an ecological or space catastrophe, a global financial and economic crisis, *etc.* – can become such an external trigger.

The stagnation of the self-contained system inevitably leads to a crisis of the monocentric world which becomes a watershed for changing the global system movement vector. The global leader’s monopoly triggers the mechanism of self-destruction of the unipolar world and drives the forces which initiate the reverse movement of the global pendulum. The cycle pattern ‘bicentric world – monocentric world – bicentric world – polycentric world’ will repeat again and again.

Within that cycle the model of ‘the bicentric world’ should be regarded as a situation of the system’s maximum possible stability. The models of ‘monocentric world’ and ‘polycentric world’ should be regarded as the maximum amplitudes of the global pendulum movements. Upon reaching the maximum amplitude, the global pendulum starts to reverse, changing the vector of the global system development to the opposite one.

Such an approach enables to identify the development cycles of the world system, to forecast the vector of its transformation, to develop the strategy for a country’s adaptation to the world system, and identify the most effective geopolitical priorities.

In general, the cycles of pendulum oscillations of the global system should be considered as a historically and subjectively determined phenomenon.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has a great potential to become such a center of power in the future.

There is a certain historical background for the creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The SCO’s predecessor was the so-called ‘Shanghai Five’ (Russia,

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China, and Tajikistan), which was formed as a result of signing 'Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions' in 1996. The organization came to be called the 'Shanghai Five' named after the city where the agreement had been signed.

Then, a number of summits in Almaty (1998), Bishkek (1999), and Dushanbe (2000) took place, which showed the need for joint discussions on the wide range of issues concerning foreign policy, economy, environmental protection, culture, use of water resources, *etc.* In course of time, the system of the summits and consultations led to the formation of a new regional association – the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

The development of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a regional organization has gone through several stages. At the first stage, on June 14–15, 2001 in Shanghai the meeting took place with the participation of then existing six member countries – Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, where the establishment of the SCO was announced. At the summit the Declaration specifying the organization's major objectives was issued. The following objectives were announced: to maintain and secure peace, safety and stability in the Middle Asia, as well as to develop cooperation in political, trade and economic, scientific and technological, cultural, educational, energetic, transportation, ecological and other spheres. The Convention on terrorism, separatism and extremism was adopted at the summit.

At the second stage, in June 2002 in St. Petersburg the heads of the SCO member states met and signed the Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Agreement between the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure and the Declaration of the SCO member countries. Those documents expounded purposes and principles, organizational structure, form of operation, cooperation, orientation and external relations, marking the actual establishment of this new organization in the sense of international law.

At the third stage, in May 2003, in Moscow the third top-level meeting took place. At that meeting the documents were worked out that define the procedure of the SCO main bodies and the budgeting mechanism.

Today, the SCO is a regional international organization, including six states – Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The member states cover an area of over 30 million square kilometers, which accounts for 61 per cent of the land mass of Eurasia. Its total demographic potential accounts for 1 billion 455 million people, that is a quarter of the world's total. The economic potential of the SCO includes not only large-scale economies of China, Russia and Kazakhstan, but also the intensively developing economies of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

The working languages of the organization are Russian and Chinese. The headquarters of the organization are located in Beijing.

Sri Lanka and Belorussia have been granted the status of 'dialogue partners'. Egypt, Nepal, Serbia, Qatar, Azerbaijan, Turkey and other countries show clear interest in the establishing contacts with SCO.

The SCO's main objectives are the following: to secure stability and safety in the region; to fight terrorism, separatism, extremism, drug trafficking; to intensify cooperation with the Central Asian countries, including the development of economic cooperation, energy-sector partnerships, scientific and cultural interaction; to maintain the secular regimes

in power as an alternative to radical Islamism; to accelerate the economic development of the Central Asian countries, which is considered as the basis for political stability.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization has developed intensively and made great progress. Since it was set up, the SCO has turned into an active and respected organization with many countries showing their interest in it.

The promotion role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is among Russia's major strategic interests. The achievement of that objective is connected with the necessity to optimize the activities of this international organization.

The international heft of the organization is determined not only by joint demographic and territorial potential of the member countries, but also by the strategic partnership of the two nuclear powers and the permanent UN Security Council members – Russia and China. This determines the role of the SCO in establishing collective security both in the Middle East, as well as the Asia-Pacific Region.

On the one hand, the SCO has been in line with its members' geopolitics interests, such as ebbing of the American influence within the region, establishment of the modern organization of a new type, building a multipolar world.

On the other hand, the geopolitical interests of Russia and China with respect to a number of issues have come into conflict. Thus, China seeks for new sales markets for its products and new energy resources. Russia uses the SCO as a counterweight to the US and EU's influence on the Middle East countries. The rest of the members under China's or Kazakhstan's guidance are eager to strengthen the economic cooperation with the West.

Those contradictions, as well as difficulties associated with the growth of a young international organization, have resulted in a number of issues and difficulties in the SCO activities.

1. The issues of performing similar functions by the simultaneously existing structures. In the post-Soviet space, there exists the CIS Anti-Terrorism Center (the ATC-CIS), acting as a coordinating body for the special services of the CIS member countries. Since 2004, within the framework of the SCO an analogous operational body – the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) – coordinates counter-terrorism cooperation among the SCO member states. The two structures performing similar functions have brought up a necessity to differentiate their objectives and coordinate the undertaken efforts.

In the post-Soviet territory, in addition to the SCO, there are other multilateral associations successfully dealing with economic cooperation issues: the EurAsEC, the CIS, and the Customs Union. Against this background, it would probably be more appropriate to find the ways for all those structures to interact with each other in harmony without unnecessary competition or functions duplication, for the sake of promotion social and economic development of every country in the region.

2. The SCO member countries have different interpretations of terrorism and identification of the priorities in that area.

In China, the terrorist threat is not generally associated with the Islamic factor. Here that issue is rather associated with the problems of separatism (including the Uyghur separatism, the Tibet issue). Meanwhile, the root cause of terrorism is considered to be poverty of the population in underdeveloped countries, wherefrom the terrorist threat originates. That is the reason, why for China the anti-separatism measures are much more

important than the anti-terrorism ones. While for Russia the priority objective is exactly the struggle against the international terrorism.

3. The SCO member countries also have quite different interests and priorities in their foreign policy activities. China perceives the economic component as the priority, in particular, the economic sphere, economic cooperation and establishment of a free trade area within the SCO. China considers poverty and economic underdevelopment as the social catalysts of extremism and terrorism, so the measures should be taken to eliminate their social and economic 'roots'. According to the Chinese part, the most effective means and methods to prevent terrorism and extremism are free capital and goods flows which help to eliminate their social and economic causes. Economy is the least covered area within the SCO activity. There are few multilateral economic projects. It is mainly the bilateral cooperation programs that are implemented, but which can be generally implemented without the SCO involved. Today, one of the SCO's main objectives is to intensify economic interaction. The involvement of such large economies as those of India and Pakistan could promote economic cooperation and trigger the development of multilateral projects.

4. There are certain discrepancies in views on the military component of cooperation. Some of the SCO members would be interested in establishing a sort of Eastern military block on the basis of the organization as a counterbalance to the NATO. However, China thinks that the SCO should not be transformed into a military block, emphasizing a non-block focus of its foreign policies.

5. Some countries of the SCO region cannot be regarded as economically successful and intensively developing ones. Here one can observe some signs of domestic political instability, the impact of the global financial crisis is hardly mitigated yet, there are economic and social problems, and in some countries ethnic conflicts have persisted.

6. Also, the SCO structure itself should be improved. The Secretariat of the SCO, located in Beijing, is an insufficiently independent and self-sufficient body. It is rather a conglomerate of the member countries representatives, who mainly report not to the SCO General Secretary, but rather to national ministries. That is why every minor issue needs to be aligned with the countries' Ministries of Foreign Affairs, and this decreases the organization's efficiency.

7. The consensus-focused method of decision-making, in theory, gives every member country an opportunity to virtually block cooperation in economic, political or cultural areas. That leverage, for instance, is applied by Uzbekistan, which refuses to participate in educational programs and to mutually recognize higher education diplomas. The decision-making procedure should not prevent development of cooperation between organization members if any single organization member is uninterested in joint projects.

8. The financial facilities of multilateral projects implemented by the organization should be generally improved. The SCO budget is quite limited, which requires the establishment of the organization's consolidated financial and investment resources and implementation of a number of large-scale projects, which would evoke a positive international response.

9. The possible further expansion of the SCO will have controversial consequences.

There is an increasing interest in the SCO, primarily, on the part of the observer states. Thus, in 2006, Pakistan submitted a request to join the organization as a full-time member, Iran qualified for a full membership in 2006 and 2007, and India – in 2010.

The organization's Charter underlines that the SCO membership is open. However, until recently the SCO member countries and experts have been convinced that the growth of the number of member countries and admitting any new members should be suspended. They justified this position with the need to primarily strengthen the organization in its current composition, arrange the operating mechanisms, gain experience; besides, there were no rules for admitting new members.

In May 2006, at the meeting of the SCO Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs there was established a tacit consensus on the moratorium on admitting any members. That moratorium was confirmed at the meetings of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO in June 2006 in Shanghai, as well as in August 2007 in Bishkek and in June 2010 in Tashkent.

However, that moratorium contradicted the organization's Charter, proclaiming it to be an open organization. In order to mitigate that contradiction, in 2009 in Yekaterinburg there was introduced a new status – ‘a dialogue partner’, which was granted to Sri Lanka and Belarus. In June 2010, the Regulations on the Admission of New Members to the SCO were approved at the meeting of the Heads of States of the SCO Member States in Tashkent, and also they worked out criteria for a contender to qualify for a full-member status. According to the Regulations, a state qualifying for a SCO full member should be located in Eurasia, have diplomatic relations with all the SCO countries, maintain active trade and economic relations with them; have a status of an observer country or a dialogue partner, not be under any sanctions of the UN Security Council (this requirement excludes an active contender – Iran); not be engaged in an armed conflict with other state or states. Not all the SCO member countries agree with those criteria. For instance, Tajikistan was against the criterion of absence of any sanctions of the UN Security Council, as in line with its cultural and historic traditions it has supported Iran's bid. However, the acceptance of Iran as a member of the SCO could become a cause for confrontations with the West, so Tajikistan had to make a concession. Today Russia is the major proponent of the organization expansion.

The accession of India – an effectively and dynamically developing country – to the SCO could disturb the geopolitical equilibrium within the organization, downgrade the role of Russia with its lower economic development rates, and relegate it to the background. In addition, the existing territorial and political conflicts between China and India would bring the conflict issues into the SCO, which might hamper its further development. Meanwhile, in the area of the SCO geopolitical development, the territorial ‘gaps’ have remained, which could be ‘covered’ by Mongolia and Turkmenistan. However, these countries have not been active in submitting the application for membership in the SCO.

10. Lack of information about the organization also prevents the improvement of its efficiency. There is still too little information about the SCO, both abroad and within the SCO member countries. The publications covering the SCO in the Western mass media can be characterized as biased and generally would use such definitions as ‘anti-American alliance with a military component’, ‘the Eastern NATO’, ‘club of despots’ or ‘Potemkin union’, *etc.*

In general, the international community perceives the SCO as a club of countries whose activities generally confine to meetings and joint statements. Foreign experts and analytics often consider the SCO as a forum for China and Russia to coordinate their interests in Central Asia.

Unfortunately, one should acknowledge that the SCO has not become a significant international mechanism yet, comparable in terms of influence with ASEAN or APEC.

At present, the following operational recommendations can be provided to tackle the identified problems:

- to correct the SCO's activities in order to enable the organization to achieve the level of maturity;
- to change from an extensive to intensive and harmonious growth;
- to identify the essence of the notion 'the SCO space'. (This can be defined as a adjustable area including the territory of the observer countries and dialogue partners, or as the territory of the six founding countries, covering the core of the Eurasian continent – 'heartland');
- to evaluate the expediency of transforming the SCO from a regional organization (with a clearly defined responsibility area) into a global one through the incorporation of new countries. It should be taken into account that the expansion of the organization core will result in the new space configuration;
- to clarify legal, financial and organizational conditions concerning the accession of new members;
- to define the 'critical mass' of the core, which the organization is able to survive without a danger of self-destruction and remaining in line with the core of Eurasia;
- to harmonize activities in the major areas of cooperation;
- to strengthen solidarity in political sphere on the basis of combination of nation-state interests with general interests of the organization;
- to expand the foundations not only concerning cooperation, but also co-development in the economic sector;
- to promote the feeling of commonality in cultural and humanitarian dimension;
- to improve the mechanism for coordinating the interests. To enable a wider employment of the identified in the SCO Charter non-mandatory character of the full consensus with respect to certain events and projects with a practical focus;
- to perform operations 'at different speeds', which assumes the outrunning efforts on the part of member groups as regards some particular issues and projects;
- to develop and implement the SCO's multilateral projects (economic and humanitarian cooperation), which could be developed on the basis of bilateral projects through gradual involvement of other members ('two plus' approach);
- to abstain from the accelerated integration in favor of the project activities. That gives priority to the projects in the field of the information-transport infrastructure and ecological energetics.
- to set up a two-level structure of the SCO (on the model of ASEAN), which would make the long-time and more developed member countries to be integrated faster than the newly joined ones;
- to promote relations with the international community, primarily, with the UN, as well as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation;

– to maintain cooperation on issues of mutual national interests.

There is no doubt that the SCO has gained a significant potential of political influence not only within its own region, but also in the world system in general.

First, the organization is an aggregate of political, economic, military, as well as strategic and cultural potential of China, Russia and the states that were created from the break of the Soviet Union.

Second, the SCO has a number of advantages, enabling its member countries to significantly increase the rates of economic cooperation. China's financial and investment opportunities, Russia's technological potential, the abundance of natural resources in the Central Asian countries – all these provide an opportunity to implement large-scale projects in such areas as transportation, energy production, infrastructure construction, telecommunications, food security and meet the interests of most member countries.

Third, the SCO has a number of peculiar features which should be emphasized within international political communication.

One should point out the following four 'NOTs' which emphasize the uniqueness of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization:

1. When creating the SCO, the six founding countries believed that it would *not* be a mere functional structure, but something more. The organization's major objective, as identified in the SCO Charter, is to strengthen mutual trust, friendship and good neighborly relations between the member countries. In fact, today most member countries have managed to build up strategic partnerships.

2. The SCO is *not* a political-military alliance so the cooperation between defense ministries is carried out exclusively in the field of anti-terrorism objectives.

3. The SCO activities are *not* aimed against any third parties; it is alien to ideological and confrontational approaches to tackling urgent issues of international and regional development.

4. The SCO is *not* a block association. It is a new trend in international politics. The SCO is just the example of how non-block associations can provide international security.

For the sake of further optimization of the SCO activities, one should highlight the features and positive prospects of the organization that can be introduced into international politics. Among those features one can mention the following:

1. In course of time, it becomes more evident that the block politics does not have any viable prospects. As an opposite to a military block with its limited formats and non-transparency, the SCO offers a multilateral network diplomacy involving qualitatively new forms of interactions between countries.

2. The main trend of the SCO's development is emergence of a new, network-based regional architecture, as well as the establishment of far-reaching partnership network within multilateral associations.

3. The SCO in its practical activities embodies a qualitatively new philosophy of state-to-state partnership, which is already known as 'the Shanghai spirit'. Its major features are the following: equality of large and small countries, mutual trust, and respect for diverse civilizations, cultures, religions, forms of state structure, development concepts, and aspirations to mutual prosperity. On the basis of this philosophy a unique model of effective and harmonious international relations within the multipolar world has been forming.

In order to build up an appealing image of the SCO as a possible contender to become a center of power within the global system, there is a need to aspire to implementation in its activities of the following features:

- the organization should be strong, consolidated, multi-profile, effectively functioning, achieve its objectives and solve tasks, and recruit new members;
- the organization should effect a full control over regional security;
- the organization should seek for development of multilateral economic cooperation and endeavor to promote region-wide common prosperity;
- the organization should provide opportunities for friendly human communications and wide humanitarian cooperation among the citizens of the SCO member countries;
- the organization should be open to interactions with all other peaceful countries, and play an important role in the world.

Thus, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is the most striking example of the emerging elements of the global multipolar governance at regional levels.

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