

Economic Cooperation and Sustainable Development: Kazakhstan and China's Confidence-Building Measures

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Abstract

This study aimed to analyse institutional and diplomatic approaches to confidence-building measures in Kazakhstan and China, with a particular emphasis on assessing their impact on regional security and the sustainability of bilateral relations. The research employed methods such as comparative analysis of foreign policy strategies, content analysis of official documents, and an examination of integration processes within the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA). The role of China as a leading economic and geopolitical player in Central Asia was analysed, focusing on its strategy of infrastructure project diplomacy and the use of economic influence mechanisms within the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Key challenges identified in the study include border demarcation, water management, Kazakhstan's growing economic dependence on Chinese investment, and the necessity to balance economic benefits with the preservation of strategic autonomy. The study underscores the importance of sustainable development in fostering long-term regional stability and cooperation.

Keywords: diplomacy, geopolitics, security, conflicts, partnerships, sustainable management

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1. Introduction

Despite the existing mechanisms of trust between Kazakhstan and China, their effectiveness remains ambiguous. Kazakhstan seeks to balance the interests of various international factors, while China uses a centralised approach in which economic power plays a leading role. This poses challenges for regional security and requires a detailed analysis of trust mechanisms, considering their strengths and weaknesses. The study aimed to analyse the institutional and diplomatic mechanisms of confidence-building measures in Kazakhstan and China, assess their impact on regional security, and identify prospects for their development, with a particular focus on sustainable development.

Previous studies, by D.M. Turtugulova et al. (2024), emphasised that Kazakhstan has a unique geopolitical position in Central Asia, which determines its important role in regional and international processes. B. Zhang et al. (2024) emphasize that China's economic strategy within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative aims to achieve political aspirations through economic dominance, thereby creating a virtuous cycle for all parties involved. The study by R. Hasanov et al. (2025) underscores the lack of empirical research examining the relationship between renewable energy adoption and manufacturing value added in Kazakhstan. The findings suggest that while progress has been made in renewable energy adoption, substantial challenges persist in achieving effective integration.

G. Birimkulova et al. (2024) emphasized the dual nature of Chinese initiatives in the region, noting that, on the one hand, active economic cooperation with China contributes to the deepening of interstate relations, the expansion of trade and economic cooperation, and the development of transport and logistics infrastructure. On the other hand, researchers highlight the risks of unequal partnership due to the imbalance of economic potential between China and partner countries. S. Kozhirova et al. (2024) emphasized that Kazakhstan, having a strategic geopolitical position in Central Asia, relies on multilateral mechanisms of diplomatic cooperation, such as the SCO, EAEU, and CICA. M. Sarybaev and C. Lai (2024) emphasize that China's foreign policy strategy, focused on large-scale investments and infrastructure projects, has a significant impact on China's economic interaction with developing countries. However, despite the economic benefits, such as increased trade, job creation, and infrastructure

development, the Chinese model raises certain concerns among partner countries, such as excessive dependence on Chinese investment.

G. Duysen and D. Aitzhanova (2024) emphasized that Central Asia is characterized by a multi-layered structure of interactions, where economic, political, and military factors interact, creating a unique context for analysing regional security and stability. At the same time, Baisalbek et al. (2024) demonstrated that trust in the region is often built through institutionalized mechanisms such as the SCO and CICA, which create platforms for negotiation and conflict reduction.

The study aimed to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the trust mechanisms in Kazakhstan and China, incorporating political, economic, and institutional aspects, with a particular focus on sustainable development. The study has identified the following key objectives: to analyse the institutional mechanisms of trust in Kazakhstan and China, to identify their features and impact on regional security; to consider the economic aspect of trust, including investment cooperation and infrastructure projects; to conduct a comparative analysis of the strategies of Kazakhstan and China, using SWOT analysis to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in a structured manner; and to identify key challenges and propose areas for improving trust mechanisms, with an emphasis on sustainability.

2. Materials and methods

The research utilised a thorough multidisciplinary method to analyse institutional and diplomatic confidence-building initiatives in Asia. The study was conducted in three stages between March 2024 and December 2024. Kazakhstan and China were selected for the study of interaction and confidence-building measures in Asia due to their key role in regional security, economic cooperation and integration processes. Kazakhstan, with its strategic geopolitical position in Central Asia, is an important participant in multilateral initiatives, making it a significant factor in the formation of regional confidence-building mechanisms. China, in turn, is the leading economic and political power in the region, whose foreign policy is characterised by large-scale investment projects and the development of strategic partnerships with neighbouring states. An analysis of these two countries reveals both successful diplomatic and institutional practices and structural problems related to asymmetrical economic opportunities, cross-border resource management and the preservation of strategic autonomy. The time frame for the analysis (2010-2024) was determined based on the availability of statistical data on trade relations between Kazakhstan and

China, the long-term dynamics of China's economic growth and its impact on the region from 2010 to 2024. This highlighted the evolution of economic and diplomatic interactions between the countries.

The study analysed official documents, bilateral agreements and joint initiatives aimed at developing cooperation between the two countries. Strategic programmes, such as Kazakhstan's concept of multi-vector foreign policy and China's BRI, were examined to identify their impact on regional stability (Conference on Interaction..., 2021; Trains-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), 2023; Bureau of National Statistics..., 2025).

The study included an analysis of the diplomatic instruments used by China to strengthen bilateral relations. The economic aspects of cooperation, including China's investment policy, the nature of cooperation in infrastructure and energy projects, as well as the mechanisms for controlling and regulating these initiatives by Kazakhstan, were emphasised. The issues of Kazakhstan's strategic autonomy in the context of growing economic interdependence, mechanisms for minimising the risks of unequal partnership, and institutional instruments used to protect national interests in bilateral cooperation were considered (Centre for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), 2018; Ernst & Young Global Limited, 2021; National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2023).

The geopolitical aspects of cooperation were assessed, including the balance of interests between China, Russia and Central Asian countries. The role of international organisations and multilateral forums as instruments of trust to minimise China's asymmetric influence in the region was analysed. The potential risks of Kazakhstan's growing dependence on Chinese investments and technologies, as well as possible scenarios for diversifying Kazakhstan's foreign policy course, were considered (ChinaPower, 2020; Official Information Source, 2023; OECtoday, 2025).

3. Results

3.1. Institutional and diplomatic approaches to confidence-building measures in Kazakhstan

Sustainable development plays a crucial role in strengthening trust among Asian countries as it fosters long-term and mutually beneficial relationships. By integrating sustainable development principles into economic and political strategies, countries can address current issues while laying the foundation for future cooperation. For instance, joint projects in renewable energy and water resource management enhance trust as they require close

collaboration and mutual understanding among participants. In this context, Kazakhstan, through its active role in promoting sustainable development initiatives, can serve as a model for other countries in the region, demonstrating how environmental and social aspects can be integrated into trust-building strategies.

Economic interdependence theory suggests that countries with strong economic ties are less likely to engage in conflicts due to the high cost of disruptions (Abykeeva-Sultanalieva et al., 2022). When these economic ties are built on sustainable practices, they contribute to long-term stability and trust. Kazakhstan and China can leverage their economic interdependence to promote sustainable development. For instance, joint ventures in green technology and sustainable infrastructure projects can create a robust framework for trust. The BRI can incorporate sustainability criteria to ensure that economic cooperation also addresses environmental and social concerns.

Since gaining independence in 1991, Kazakhstan has been actively promoting initiatives aimed at strengthening regional security and cooperation. One of the key strategies in this direction is the development and implementation of institutional and diplomatic approaches to confidence-building measures, both in multilateral and bilateral formats. Given that Central Asia has traditionally been a zone of geopolitical rivalry between various powers, including Russia, China, the US and the EU, Kazakhstan seeks to act as a moderator of dialogue, which strengthens its international credibility (Karabalaeva et al., 2025; Zhetpisbayev et al., 2017).

Another rationale for the vigorous advocacy of initiatives to foster trust is Kazakhstan's aspiration to enhance its position as a pivotal actor in international diplomacy. One of the first and most significant steps in this direction was the proposal to convene the CICA in 1992 (Speech by the President..., 1992). The CICA has developed a Catalogue of Confidence Building Measures, which includes several key areas of cooperation (Conference on Interaction..., 2021). Military-political confidence-building measures include the exchange of information on military activities, notifications of major military exercises, and measures to ensure transparency in the defence policies of the participating states. Environmental security includes joint projects on environmental monitoring, water management, and combating the effects of climate change (Khan et al., 2025; Krechko and Mikhaylov, 2025.). Given the importance of transboundary water resources for Central Asia, Kazakhstan plays a substantial role in the formation of mechanisms for the collective management of water flows of the Irtysh, Ili and Syr Darya rivers.

Kazakhstan's military and political confidence-building initiatives have effectively averted potential escalations in the area. For example, in 2017,

Kazakhstan signed a Memorandum of Understanding with China in the field of defence (Belt and Road Portal, 2017a), which increased the transparency of military cooperation and reduced tensions on the border. In addition, Kazakhstan is also actively involved in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping initiatives. In 2018, a Kazakh peacekeeping contingent was deployed to Lebanon as part of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL, 2018), which increased international confidence in the country and demonstrated its commitment to global security.

Kazakhstan's economic initiatives within the framework of confidence-building measures have demonstrated their effectiveness. One of the key difficulties is that the measures taken under the CICA are recommendatory, which reduces their binding effect on the participating states. In addition, political competition between major powers such as China, Russia and India make it difficult to reach a common consensus on many regional security issues. A further problem is the necessity to continuously oversee and adjust confidence-building tactics in response to emerging challenges. The threat of cybersecurity has increased, requiring the development of additional coordination mechanisms in this area. Kazakhstan is already taking steps in this direction by initiating discussions on digital security within regional organisations.

The asymmetry between Kazakhstan and China is most critical in economic, political, and military dimensions. Economically, China's dominance through investments and loans, particularly under the BRI, creates a dependency that limits Kazakhstan's economic sovereignty. Politically, Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy contrasts with China's centralized approach, which sometimes pressures Kazakhstan to align more closely with Chinese interests. Militarily, Kazakhstan's smaller military capacity relies on multilateral security frameworks like the SCO and CICA, while China's growing influence in the region, particularly in Central Asia, raises concerns for Kazakhstan's strategic autonomy. This asymmetry challenges Kazakhstan's ability to balance its diplomatic priorities and safeguard its independence in the face of China's expanding power.

Kazakhstan's bilateral relations with China are developing in the context of the national overall foreign policy strategy aimed at multi-vectorism and balancing between the world's leading and regional actors (Table 1). Kazakhstan has traditionally maintained partnerships with Russia, the EU, Turkey, Central Asian states and the United States. However, it is China that is Kazakhstan's largest trading partner and is crucial in ensuring the country's infrastructure and investment development. In 2023, trade between the two countries reached 43 billion USD (Kazinform International..., 2025).

Table 1 - Key economic indicators of trade relations between Kazakhstan and China

Year	Chinese exports to Kazakhstan, billion USD	Kazakh exports to China, billion USD	Chinese imports to Kazakhstan, billion USD	Kazakh imports to China, billion USD
2020	8	9.5	10.4	1.9
2021	9.8	10.2	11.3	2.4
2022	12.4	13.4	14.8	3.5
2023	18.7	15.2	16.4	16.7
2024	14.9	15.9	15.1	15.8

Source: Compiled by the authors based on OECtoday (2025), Trading Economics (2025a, b), Eurasia (2025).

Analysis of Kazakhstan-China relations is relevant for the assessment of the impact of economic interdependence on regional trust mechanisms. Kazakhstan occupies a strategic position in Eurasia, which makes it a key element of China's BRI. As part of its cooperation with China, Kazakhstan is implementing major investment programmes aimed at modernising infrastructure and developing logistics. For example, China ranks second among Kazakhstan's foreign partners in terms of the number of joint projects, with 62 projects worth 8.7 billion USD (Omarova, 2025). Energy cooperation also remains an important element of bilateral relations: China is actively involved in the development of Kazakhstan's oil and gas fields, which contributes to the diversification of Kazakhstan's export flows. In 2024, 16 bilateral documents were signed, including agreements on the development of twinning relations between the regions of Kazakhstan and the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China (Official Information Source, 2023).

Despite the economic benefits, there are structural challenges to the relationship between Kazakhstan and China. One of them is the risk of economic dependence, as Kazakhstan attracts significant amounts of Chinese investment and loans, which potentially limits its economic sovereignty. In addition, the issue of water allocation of the transboundary Ili and Irtysh rivers remains unresolved and could harm Kazakhstan's agriculture and ecosystem. The social factor is also significant in shaping the perception of Chinese influence in Kazakhstan. Despite official efforts to strengthen bilateral trust, a part of Kazakh society fears the expansion of Chinese capital. This is expressed in protests against the leasing of agricultural land to Chinese companies (Carnegie Endowment..., 2024).

Kazakhstan's involvement in integration initiatives, such as the EAEU and SCO, significantly influences the establishment and enhancement of security measures in the region. The EEU, established in 2015, unites the

member states of Russia, Belarus, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan to deepen economic integration (Musarova and Adamkulova, 2023). The impact of the EAEU on confidence-building measures is to create transparent conditions for interaction between states, which strengthens economic ties and reduces the likelihood of conflict. For example, mutual economic interests, including energy and infrastructure projects, contribute to building mutual understanding and reducing political tensions (Abikenov et al., 2019; Nurekenova et al., 2022). Russia remains Kazakhstan's most important partner within the EAEU, accounting for 91.1% of total trade with the EAEU countries. The share of Kyrgyzstan is 5.5%, Belarus 3.2%, and Armenia 0.2% (Bureau of National Statistics, 2025).

Kazakhstan is one of the founding members of the SCO, established in 2001 together with China, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The organisation emphasises multilateral cooperation in areas such as security, the fight against terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking, as well as strengthening economic and cultural ties (UN, 2017). Kazakhstan has been actively promoting confidence-building initiatives within the SCO, including the exchange of information on military activities, joint anti-terrorism exercises and coordination of political and diplomatic efforts (Kushenova et al., 2025). These confidence-building measures contribute to strengthening regional security and creating mutual guarantees on security and development issues.

In addition to the EAEU and SCO, Kazakhstan is actively involved in other international organisations that promote confidence-building in Asia. For instance, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) finances transport and energy infrastructure projects, which strengthens economic cooperation between countries in the region. Kazakhstan, as an active member of the AIIB, has access to long-term financing, which allows it to develop transport corridors and energy networks, strengthening interstate trust. Kazakhstan demonstrates a high level of institutional adaptation, actively using the mechanisms of international organisations to strengthen trust in the region. The focus on multilateral diplomatic initiatives, such as the CICA, the SCO, and the EAEU, confirms the national desire to build sustainable mechanisms of interaction at various levels, from the military and political to the economic and humanitarian.

Kazakhstan's strategy of confidence-building measures is based on a combination of economic integration, diplomatic dialogue and institution building (Khamzin et al., 2016). The economic interdependence formed within the EAEU and BRI creates conditions for reducing conflict risks, while participation in international anti-crisis initiatives, such as the SCO, helps to minimise security threats, including extremism, terrorism and cross-

border crime (Centre for European Reform, 2017). Nonetheless, despite considerable accomplishments, the efficacy of Kazakhstan's building trust strategy is not unequivocal. The limited binding nature of decisions taken within the CICA and SCO reduces their institutional effectiveness, making it difficult to implement long-term initiatives. In addition, the competition of geopolitical interests in Central Asia, including the influence of Russia, China, the US and the EU, creates additional challenges for Kazakhstan to promote domestic diplomatic priorities.

Kazakhstan's approach to confidence-building measures can be viewed within the framework of strategic neutrality. S. Gunasekara (2024) and M. Szalai (2025) note that small and medium-sized states, being in the zone of geopolitical rivalry, seek to balance between major actors, minimising the risks of involvement in conflicts. Following a multi-vector course, they use dialogue platforms such as the CICA and the SCO to strengthen their diplomatic positions.

Institutionalised mechanisms within regional organisations, as noted by J. Park and A. Adibayeva (2023), provide the region with regular consultations and joint activities aimed at combating cross-border threats. This was confirmed by the present study, demonstrating that data exchange mechanisms within the SCO and CICA reduce the probability of conflict escalation in the region. However, R. Kulnazarov (2024) indicates that the competition between China, Russia and the United States for influence in Central Asia creates difficulties for the formation of common standards of trust. These geopolitical forces are interacting in the region, giving rise to conflicting interests and increasing political instability. N. Nyshanbayev et al. (2024) confirmed that Kazakhstan's vulnerability to external pressure requires a flexible and multi-level system of diplomacy that could balance the interests of all parties. However, the absence of a clear and transparent confidence-building strategy, especially in the context of regional security, weakens the opportunities for constructive engagement and confidence-building both domestically and internationally.

As noted by M. Koçak and G. Yeşilçimen (2024), public perceptions of Chinese influence in Kazakhstan remain ambiguous, as evidenced by protest moods emerging both at the level of individual citizens and organised social groups. This perception is largely shaped by a variety of factors, including economic dependence on China, cultural differences, and Kazakhstan's geopolitical position in the context of Chinese initiatives.

3.2. Strategy of trust in regional policy in China

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is central in the political and

economic architecture of Asia, playing a key role in shaping global and regional economic and political processes. Chinese economic power, rapidly developing industry, and strong foreign trade relations make it one of the leading players in the global economy. However, in addition to economic aspects, China is actively working to strengthen political trust and stability in its region, which is an integral part of its foreign policy. China has significantly strengthened its presence in key international organisations such as the UN and the SCO and is actively promoting initiatives aimed at improving regional and global stability, including the BRI project (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023).

One of the key challenges facing China is the need to balance its growing economic power with regional security. The complex political situation in the South China Sea, territorial disputes with neighbouring states and competition with global powers such as the United States and India require subtle diplomacy and increased confidence-building in the region. Confidence-building measures play an important role in China's strategy.

China recognizes the importance of sustainable development as a key component of its strategy to build trust and ensure long-term stability in the region. By integrating sustainable practices into its economic and infrastructure projects, China aims to foster trust and cooperation with its partners. For instance, the BRI not only focuses on economic interconnectivity but also emphasizes the importance of sustainable and green development. Projects under the BRI increasingly incorporate environmental considerations, such as reducing carbon emissions and promoting renewable energy sources, which helps in building trust through shared environmental goals. Moreover, China's commitment to sustainable development is evident in its efforts to address climate change and environmental degradation through international cooperation. By participating in global environmental agreements and promoting green technologies, China demonstrates its dedication to sustainable practices, thereby enhancing its credibility and trustworthiness on the global stage.

In the field of security, China prioritises diplomatic channels and international legal agreements, striving to build a stable and predictable environment for its economic and political development. Examples include strategic relations with Russia, Germany, African and Latin American countries, where China uses a model of asymmetric dependence, offering infrastructure projects, loans and investments in exchange for access to natural resources, technology markets and political influence. Cultural and educational cooperation is also significant in building trust. China is actively developing academic exchange programmes, opening university centres in foreign countries and attracting foreign students to its leading universities.

Social sustainability emphasizes the importance of cultural exchange, education, and social equity in building trust. Cultural diplomacy and educational exchanges can foster mutual understanding and respect, which are vital for sustainable international relations. Kazakhstan and China can enhance their confidence-building measures by promoting cultural and educational exchanges focused on sustainable development. China seeks to create sustainable mechanisms of trust based on economic power, diplomatic initiatives and cultural exchanges.

One of China's key instruments in building confidence is the BRI, launched in 2013. This programme is a comprehensive strategy for international cooperation aimed at creating a network of trade, transport, energy and digital corridors connecting Asia, Europe and Africa. The main goal of the BRI is to promote global economic interconnectivity through large-scale infrastructure investment, which in turn contributes to the formation of a new geo-economic architecture in which China is a central factor (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023). One of the key aspects of the BRI is the creation of new transport corridors, such as the Silk Road Economic Belt (Belt and Road Portal, 2023a) and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (Belt and Road Portal, 2023b), which ensure accelerated logistics development and reduce transaction costs for international trade.

Kazakhstan is central to the implementation of the Silk Road Economic Belt, being a key transit hub between China and Europe (Adamkulova et al., 2025). Due to its strategic geographical location, Kazakhstan has become an integral part of the BRI land routes, which have assisted in the modernisation of transport infrastructure and establishing the region as a regional logistics hub. One of the most significant projects under the BRI was the construction of the Khorgos International Centre for Border Cooperation (Belt and Road Portal, 2017b), which serves as the largest trade and logistics hub on the border between China and Kazakhstan.

China is actively developing military contacts and concluding security agreements with neighbouring states, which is an important element of its strategy to strengthen its position as a regional hegemon. Military cooperation is carried out through the mechanisms of bilateral and multilateral agreements, participation in joint exercises and the provision of military assistance. In addition, China has bilateral military cooperation agreements with several countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. An example is the agreement with Pakistan, under which China supplies modern weapons, participates in the joint production of military equipment and provides Pakistan with loans for the purchase of defence technologies (Lalwani, 2023). China is also actively developing its naval presence in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea, which is a cause for concern for

neighbouring states such as India, Vietnam and the Philippines. The construction of the naval base in Djibouti was the first example of the deployment of a Chinese contingent outside the national territory, which is indicative of Beijing’s global security ambitions (East Asia Forum, 2020).

In addition to the military sphere, China uses economic instruments of influence, concluding long-term investment agreements, infrastructure contracts and providing loans to partner countries (Işık et al., 2025). An example of economic dependence is Sri Lanka, which, having received a Chinese loan for the construction of the Hambantota port, was unable to service the debt, which led to the transfer of the port to Chinese control for 99 years (CSIS, 2018). This case has become a symbol of China’s “debt diplomacy”, in which countries unable to repay loans are forced to provide Beijing with strategically important facilities (Peter, 2024). China, as a regional hegemon, uses multi-vector mechanisms of influence, including military cooperation, investment agreements, infrastructure contracts and financial support, to expand its sphere of control (Table 2).

Table 2 - Chinese economic growth and its impact on the region

Metric	2010	2015	2020	2024
China’s gross domestic product (GDP) (trillion USD)	6.09	11.06	14.6	18.2
China’s share in global GDP (%)	12.5%	15.5%	18.3%	19%
China’s direct investment in Asia (billion USD)	10.3	49.4	13.7	No data available

Source: Compiled by the authors based on National Bureau of Statistics of China (2023), Statista (2025a, b), World Bank Group (2025).

Despite its successes, the Chinese credibility policy faces a range of challenges. The growth of Chinese economic and military capabilities is causing concern among international competitors, leading to increased geopolitical tensions. The formation of asymmetric dependencies in the framework of investment initiatives may also generate counteractions from partner countries seeking to diversify their foreign economic relations. In the military sphere, China’s increased presence in key strategic areas has provoked mixed reactions, requiring China to further develop diplomatic channels and contribute to the transparency of its initiatives. The sustainability of China’s confidence-building strategy will depend on its ability to adapt to changing international conditions, maintain a fair balance of interests with partners, and minimise the risks associated with states’ overdependence on Chinese influence.

Analysing China’s and Kazakhstan’s confidence-building measures, it is possible to note both commonalities and differences in approaches to

strengthening bilateral relations and regional security. Both states actively use diplomatic and economic instruments to ensure mutual understanding and stability in the region, but the methods and focus differ depending on their national interests and foreign economic policies.

China and Kazakhstan's common approaches in trust are based on a mutual desire to deepen economic cooperation, which is reflected in numerous projects under the BRI. Nevertheless, there are differences in approaches related to the internal and external challenges of each country. Kazakhstan prioritises stability of strategic autonomy and independence in decision-making, which is often expressed in its desire for multilateral cooperation, through participation in international structures such as the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Asia (OSCE) and the SCO. In contrast, China, to strengthen its geopolitical position, emphasises centralised leadership and decision-making, which sometimes raises concerns among its neighbours about Beijing's excessive influence on the internal affairs of other countries. A SWOT analysis (Table 3) of the strategies of Kazakhstan and China was conducted to identify their strengths and weaknesses, as well as to assess opportunities and threats that could affect the further development of bilateral relations.

Table 3 - SWOT analysis of the strategies of Kazakhstan and China

Factor	Kazakhstan	China
Advantages	Multilateral diplomatic approach, participation in international organisations (CICA, EAEU, SCO)	Economic power, investment programmes, BRI
Disadvantages	Limited economic resources, dependence on external partners	Growing criticism of unequal economic relations and the "debt diplomacy"
Possibilities	Expansion of cooperation with alternative partners (EU, USA, Turkey)	Strengthening of position in Central Asia, further developing infrastructure
Risks	Pressure from major powers, dependence on Chinese investment	Increased geopolitical competition and protectionism on the part of partners

Source: Compiled by the authors.

Kazakhstan's key strengths include its multi-vector foreign policy and ability to balance the interests of major geopolitical players. In turn, China's advantages include strong economic potential, large-scale investment programmes and a high degree of institutional stability, which allows Beijing

to effectively use economic instruments as a diplomatic lever. However, some weaknesses may limit the effectiveness of confidence-building measures. For Kazakhstan, this is the risk of economic dependence on external partners, including China. China, in turn, faces challenges related to distrust on the part of neighbouring states that fear its growing influence, as well as the potential overload of investment programmes, which may affect the sustainability of individual projects.

4. Discussion

The findings of Z. Han and M. Papa (2020) and B.T.F. Lee et al. (2024) confirm that Chinese diplomacy is based on a combination of economic influence and political pragmatism, which is particularly evident in its bilateral relations with key partners. Y. Sun et al. (2022) demonstrate that this approach is part of China's broader strategy to create an "economic belt of trust" that reduces the probability of political conflict and strengthens interdependence.

In turn, studies by S.L. Kastner and M.M. Pearson (2021) and M. Zreik (2022) confirm that the BRI not only strengthens China's economic ties with other countries but also serves as a tool of geopolitical influence. However, this also creates risks of "debt dependence", as demonstrated in the studies of M. Himmer and Z. Rod (2022) and F. Al-Fadhat and H. Prasetyo (2024), which analysed the impact of Chinese loans on the economic stability of developing countries. X. Hu et al. (2025) emphasize the lack of empirical research examining the relationship between renewable energy adoption and manufacturing value added in Kazakhstan. The study by D.J. Lim and G.J. Ikenberry (2023) analysed the theoretical foundations and features of the Chinese model of international order, which is being formed in the context of growing geopolitical competition. The Chinese approach is focused on integrating economic mechanisms and diplomatic instruments into the process of shaping a new order. The study emphasises that this order is aimed at protecting China's domestic political and economic model, which is manifested in its practice of international interaction.

5. Conclusions

A study of institutional and diplomatic approaches to confidence-building measures in Kazakhstan and China has revealed both significant achievements and important challenges faced by both countries in their

foreign economic and political practices. Kazakhstan is actively involved in multilateral and bilateral formats of cooperation aimed at strengthening regional security and stability. The country uses international platforms, such as the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia, to deepen trusting relations with neighbouring states. However, despite its successes, Kazakhstan faces several challenges, including dependence on external partners, border demarcation, and water management.

China is executing a strategy of economically driven confidence-building measures, utilising the Belt and Road Initiative as a principal tool for its foreign policy development. This initiative not only contributes to the modernization of transport, logistics, and energy infrastructure in Central Asia but also creates asymmetric economic interdependence, in which partner states become integrated into Chinese value chains. Financial support provided by China in the form of loans and investments is often accompanied by limited transparency of the terms of cooperation, which can lead to the phenomenon of debt dependence and strengthening of Beijing's political and economic influence. China uses geo-economic soft power tools, including infrastructure diplomacy and an investment strategy aimed at creating a sustainable dependence of regional partners on Chinese financial institutions.

Comparative analysis has shown that Kazakhstan pursues a multi-vector foreign policy, while China operates within the framework of a centralized strategy focused on economic dominance. The main challenges remain managing economic risks, balancing foreign policy priorities, and protecting Kazakhstan's strategic autonomy. The analysis showed that Kazakhstan's participation in confidence-building measures helps to reduce political tensions in the region, but the degree of their effectiveness varies. As of 2023, 62 investment projects worth USD 8.7 billion had been signed, highlighting the depth of its dependence on China. Kazakhstan should diversify its national economic partners and deepen cooperation not only with China but also with other countries, including the EU and Central Asian states, which can reduce economic dependence on certain factors and increase resilience to external shocks.

The study faced several challenges, including the limited data available on specific confidence-building measures implemented under multilateral and bilateral agreements. Moving forward, bilateral and multilateral confidence-building mechanisms should be further developed, with particular attention devoted to harmonizing security, economic, and sustainable development interests. Emphasizing sustainable development is crucial for ensuring that the economic and political cooperation between Kazakhstan and China is not only beneficial in the short term but also viable and equitable in the long term. By integrating sustainable practices into their

joint initiatives, both countries can foster a relationship that supports environmental stewardship, social equity, and economic stability, thereby laying a foundation for enduring trust and cooperation.

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