

# *Sustainable Security in Central Asia: Kazakhstan and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (1996-2011)*

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## *Abstract*

This paper investigates Kazakhstan's position in the Shanghai Five and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), focussing on multilateral security mechanisms and sustainable regional development. This study uses qualitative analysis of SCO documents, legal texts, and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime data to examine Kazakhstan's role in regional security and sustainable development. It was noted that the main objectives of the “five” in the 1990s were to establish trusting relationships to prevent military and border conflicts in Central Asia. It is analysed that separatist rallies took place in the northern regions of Kazakhstan in the mid and late 1990s, but the provisions of the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism helped to minimise separatist phenomena in Kazakhstan. The provisions of the Agreement of the SCO in 2004 became important for such changes, where a role was given to the development of a health protection system. Counteraction to the transportation of narcotic substances in Kazakhstan was extremely weak since 730 kg of heroin were seized in 2009 and 323 kg – in 2010, considering 70-75 t of heroin that arrived in transit to Kazakhstan in 2010. The findings reveal that Kazakhstan's SCO engagement shows a regional cooperation model that links security governance to sustainability, resilience, and equitable development. The data also shows that institutional corruption and law enforcement's ineffective narcotics control continue to impair sustainable outcomes.

**Keywords:** Regional Security, Institutional Resilience, Transit of Drug Trafficking, Sustainable Development, Transnational Threats, The Afghan Factor.

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## Introduction

Regional and global security is a key aspect in the work of many international organisations, including the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), and the Organisation of American States (OAS). Security in each individual region, be it Europe, Africa, or the Middle East, is critical to ensuring security on a global scale, all over the world. Historically, Central Asia (CA) is a region located at the crossroads of routes between East and West and borders areas of frequent conflict and insecurity, such as Afghanistan and Iran. During the Cold War, this region was practically not marked by substantial security events, but in the 21st century, CA has simultaneously become an energy hub for a number of states, in particular China, and a transit zone for the development of criminal, especially religious extremist activities. The increased attention to this region after the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York in the context of security is used as an arena for playing power politics by external players (Makarenko, 2010).

The process of disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the formation of new, independent and sovereign actors of international relations on the world stage, including in CA, certainly led to a series of problems in regional security. Weak governance and lack of experience greatly complicated the creation of high-quality political institutions, which is a distinctive feature of most states of the former USSR (Galymzhan et al., 2020; Mukhamadiyeva, et al., 2017; Spyska, 2023). In addition, many ethnic tensions arose, which even led to the civil war in Tajikistan (Pannier, 2017a), where, according to various estimates, 20,000 to 150,000 people died (Pannier, 2017b; RFE/RL, 2021). In addition, substantial consequences for the CA states at the end of the 20th century were economic instability and cross-border threats such as drug trafficking, weapons. These challenges not only undermined regional peace but also impeded pathways toward sustainable development by destabilising institutions, health systems, and economic cooperation. Such a tense situation in the region contributed to the search for the most optimal solution to new security problems. The formation of the Shanghai Five, and after that, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), became revolutionary for the states in CA after gaining independence since multilateral meetings provided an opportunity for the leaders of the CA countries to conduct a direct dialogue on various issues. Over time, the SCO began to address a broader agenda, including public health, environmental risks, and development cooperation, aligning with the principles of sustainable regional governance

(Apakhayev, et al., 2018; Kalaganov et al., 2018; Smagulova, et al., 2018). The fundamental changes in international relations in the 1990s, in particular, the changing balance of power, the tense geopolitical situation in Eurasia, along with the active processes of globalism and regionalism, had a strong impact on the formation of a modern security structure in the region (The role of the SCO..., 2021).

The former Permanent Representative of the Republic of Tajikistan to the SCO noted that the SCO is not a classic example of a traditional alliance (Alimov, 2018). The institutional feature of the organisation, which consists in consensus decision-making, emphasises the equality of all member states, regardless of their potential and capabilities. Due to this, the example of the SCO's activities shows not only how different in size, influence, paradigms of public administration and national and cultural characteristics of the state can coexist but also how favourable conditions are created for the development of dialogue between civilisations to achieve a mutually beneficial result (Khamzina et al., 2020; Ketners, 2025). Islamova (2020) and Auanasova (2023) analysed the history, goals, and objectives of the SCO, the practical importance of the organisation for the government of Kazakhstan, and bilateral projects and programmes. The partnership relations between Kazakhstan and the SCO member states in the field of education, in particular, student exchange programmes, exchange of experience among pedagogical specialists, are analysed. Studies by Kozhirova (2022), and Sarsenbayeva and Kuldibaev (2023) considered this problem. The international legal aspects of the fight against bioterrorism and the role of the efforts of the Government of Kazakhstan within the framework of the SCO anti-terrorist structure were examined. The importance of the government of Kazakhstan being an active participant in building a security architecture in the region to strengthen its geopolitical orientation is investigated. This architecture, increasingly responsive to transnational threats, also became essential for promoting the long-term sustainability of socio-economic systems in the region (Kushenova et al., 2025). The above questions were the domain of analysis by researchers such as Doshmanov (2021), and Joldybaeva, and Abikenova (2020).

Based on the above, the purpose of the study was to analyse the security problems in CA, in particular, in Kazakhstan, the role of structures involved in ensuring security in the region and the contribution of the Government of Kazakhstan to their development. The objectives of the study were the identification and assessment of risks and threats in the field of security and how these challenges affect the prospects for sustainable development, the analysis of the regulatory framework, and the examination of data from international organisations in the field of security in CA.

## Materials and Methods

During the study, materials published by the SCO press service (Information message on the..., 2010; Anti-terrorist exercise..., 2011) were reviewed. This helped to identify the key stages in the development of cooperation and the role of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan in approving the fundamental principles of security in the CA region. The key regulatory documents of the initial period of the Shanghai Five's existence were analysed, namely the Agreements between the heads of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Russia, the Republic of Tajikistan, and the People's Republic of China in 1996 and 1997 (Law of the Republic..., 1996; 1997). By analysing the publications of the online publication Orda and the regional division of the Radio Free Europe "Radio Azattyk" media corporation (Alieva, 2023; Tokayeva, 2011), important security issues for the Government of Kazakhstan in the 1990s and 2000s, including separatism and terrorism, were identified. Based on this, the Shanghai Convention on Combatting Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism (2003) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Convention Against Terrorism (2009) were analysed.

The basis for understanding the effectiveness of the SCO's activities in the areas of illicit drug trafficking was data from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in CA in 2010-2011, which allowed identifying critical security issues for the government and society of Kazakhstan (Trafficking in opiates..., 2012). It was also important to analyse the statistics of the number of drug-addicted citizens of Kazakhstan before and after the adoption of the SCO Agreement on Cooperation in Combating Illicit Drug Trafficking, psychotropic substances, and their precursors (The program on counteracting..., 2001; Drug treatment to..., 2015; Agreement between member..., 2004).

Since drug trafficking was also a concomitant problem of drug addiction among the population of CA states, reports in the mass media of Kazakhstan in 2011 on the suppression of attempts by organised criminal groups to transport narcotic substances were analysed (Kosenov, 2011).

## Results

Since the newly formed CA states have been extremely unstable in political, social, economic, and security terms since the early 90s, within the framework of the first meeting of the Shanghai Five in 1996, the ratification of the Agreement between the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic,

Russia and the Republic of Tajikistan and the People's Republic of China on confidence-building in the military field in the border area (1996) were signed.

The second landmark international legal document signed within the framework of the second meeting of the Shanghai Five in 1997 was the ratification of the Agreement between the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Russia, the Republic of Tajikistan, and the People's Republic of China on mutual reduction of armed forces in the border area (1997).

Ensuring security on the territory of Kazakhstan is directly related to security in neighbouring countries. In 1996, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) was founded in Uzbekistan (Gozii, 2014), whose main task was to overthrow the secular regime in Uzbekistan and create an Islamic state in its place. In this context, the subsequent meeting of the heads of the "five" in 1998 was important, where the parties focused on security issues, noting the substantial contribution of the international legal documents signed earlier and agreeing to continue to adhere to the new concept of security, which was actively developing after the end of the Cold War (Dossier on the SCO..., 2006).

The problem of separatism in Kazakhstan was a political reality that the state faced immediately after the declaration of independence. For example, in 1994 in Ust-Kamenogorsk, about a thousand people rallied under the slogans of creating Russian autonomy, approving the status of the Russian language as the state language, and demanding the introduction of dual citizenship (Alieva, 2023).

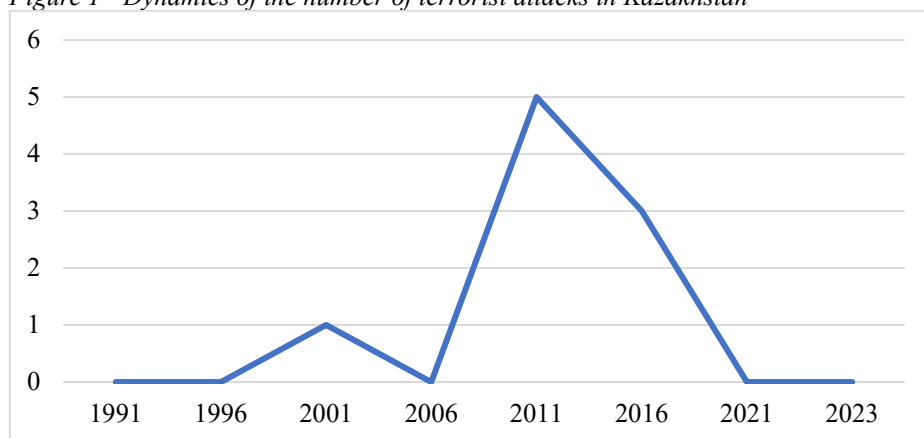
Later, in 1996, Kazakhstan faced a significant separatist attempt in the city of Ust-Kamenogorsk, where a group of Cossack military organisations, including the Union of Cossack Forces of Kazakhstan, rallied for autonomy. The group demanded the recognition of the Russian language as the state language and the establishment of dual citizenship, aiming to create a new type of 'Abkhazia' on the territory of Kazakhstan. In response, the government of Kazakhstan took swift and decisive action, deploying security forces to prevent the escalation of the unrest. The authorities conducted targeted arrests and implemented a series of legal measures to disband the separatist organisations. These efforts successfully minimised the development of separatist sentiments, ensuring no further such incidents occurred in the country. This early intervention was crucial in preserving national unity and stability. However, as mentioned above, ensuring national security is directly related to the broader situation in the region. Based on this provision, the Shanghai Convention on Combatting Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism (2003), laid the foundation for further preventing

the development of separatist movements both in the region and in Kazakhstan, in particular. Political stability, social cohesiveness, and regional integrity were all supported by the institutionalisation of anti-separatist cooperation through legal norms.

In 2001, the Shanghai Five formally transitioned into the SCO, marking a significant evolution in the group's role and objectives (Declaration on the Establishment..., 2001). This change was crucial because the SCO began to address issues of economic, cultural, and wider regional security in addition to border security and military cooperation. Furthermore, Uzbekistan's admission as a full member expanded the organisation's reach and impact. The signing of the Charter of the SCO (2002), which created a more formal and long-lasting framework for member state cooperation, cemented the SCO's official formation.

The problem of the spread of terrorism in the CA region was one of the priorities of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) of the SCO, established in 2002 (Agreement between the..., 2002). It was a valuable experience for the government of Kazakhstan to conduct counter-terrorism exercises "Interaction-2003" on the territory of its state (The SCO counter-terrorism..., 2003). These exercises were conducted in accordance with the above-mentioned Agreement (Shanghai Convention on..., 2003), and their purpose was to coordinate joint actions in the interests of the SCO member states. Among the proven mechanisms of interaction were the organisation of combat operations, landing, coordination of staff officers, blocking terrorist groups. Therewith, terrorism was not an acute problem for the CA states, especially Kazakhstan (Figure 1).

*Figure 1 - Dynamics of the number of terrorist attacks in Kazakhstan*



Source: Created by the authors based on Global Terrorism Index by the Institute for Economics and Peace (2024).

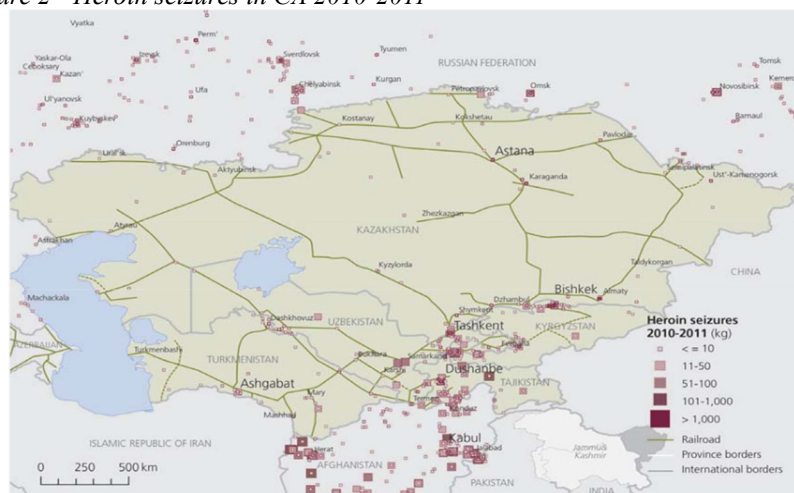
The greatest activity of terrorist activity in Kazakhstan since the approval of the “five” and after the SCO until 2011 was recorded in 2011. The Jund al-Caliphate group claimed responsibility for a series of terrorist attacks (Glushkova, 2011), and later it was confirmed by the Prosecutor’s Office of Kazakhstan (Tokayeva, 2011). Shortly before these terrorist attacks, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Convention Against Terrorism (2009) was adopted in 2009. In it, the SCO member states, being deeply concerned about the escalation of international terrorism and recognising that crimes cannot be justified under any circumstances, pledged to increase the effectiveness of cooperation against terrorism. However, the Parliament of the RK ratified the SCO convention against terrorism (2010) only at the end of the year.

According to the UN (A knowledge-based approach..., 2023), Afghanistan has been and continues to be one of the world’s largest producers of heroin and methamphetamine. By the end of 2000, the number of injected drug users registered with rehabilitation services in Kazakhstan amounted to 250,000 people and an increase in cases of injected drug addiction was recorded annually, from 90 in 1996 to 250 cases per 100,000 population in 2000 (The program on counteracting..., 2001). However, by 2013 (the earliest available information), the number of people who inject drugs had decreased to 25,480 people (Drug treatment to the..., 2015).

The territory of Kazakhstan, which is the last transit zone before narcotic substances enter the final consumption market in Russia, as of the end of the 2000s, there was a tendency to extremely low volumes of drug seizures, – follows from the report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (Trafficking in opiates in..., 2012). On average, with the exception of a jump in 2008, in 2010-2011, drug seizures in Kazakhstan accounted for less than 1% of the total estimated flow entering the country (Figure 2).

The low level of seizures on the territory of Kazakhstan was partly explained by the rather long 3,600 km border and the difficulty of patrolling it. The risk of being caught was extremely low since the possibility of detection in the border areas, bypassing official checkpoints, was small. The same report stated that during a visit by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime to the northern Kazakh border, border guards noted that it was not uncommon for the scanner of Kazakh border guards to detect nothing, while large quantities of drugs were subsequently seized on the other side of the border (Trafficking in opiates in..., 2012).

Figure 2 - Heroin seizures in CA 2010-2011



Source: Created by the authors based on Trafficking in opiates in northern Afghanistan and CA: A risk assessment (2012).

One of the ways to transport drugs was to hide them in products, often in vegetables or fruits. Therewith, for the Government of Kazakhstan, the export of these products was not of economic interest, which meant that the largest part of fruits and vegetables came from other CA states (Trafficking in opiates in..., 2012). It was precisely these methods that illegal criminal formations used to hide hundreds of kilogrammes of narcotic substances in trucks transporting fruits. Smugglers actively used international legal aspects within the framework of the Customs Convention on the International Carriage of Goods (About the TIR Convention, 2015). According to the convention, goods must be transported in reliable vehicles or containers, which should completely exclude the possibility of access to the cargo without damaging seals.

By the end of 2004, the SCO Agreement on Cooperation in Combating Illicit Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances, and Their Precursors was signed between the parties (Agreement between member..., 2004.). The provisions of the Agreement indicated concern about this problem; therefore, further activities were aimed at coordinating relevant national bodies and ministries, public and other organisations, and other subjects of regional cooperation to combat drug trafficking. The report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime noted (Trafficking in opiates in..., 2012) that substantial efforts and initiatives in the field of countering illicit drug trafficking have been undertaken by many regional and



international organisations, including the SCO. However, such cooperation often remained at the rhetorical level when specific actions were required.

The efforts of the Government of Kazakhstan, along with active work within the SCO, have not led to a solution to the problem of transportation of narcotic substances in CA. In 2009, law enforcement agencies seized only 730 kg of heroin, and in 2010 – 323 kg. As of November 2011, only 93 kg of heroin had been seized (Kosenov, 2011), although by the end of 2012, these figures had increased to 137 kg of heroin (Information bulletin on..., 2013). In total, in 2011, almost 34 t of drugs were seized by all services responsible for combating illicit drug trafficking. However, these figures were still scanty, given the figures of 70-75 t of heroin that arrived in transit from Kyrgyzstan in 2010 and subsequent years (Trafficking in opiates in..., 2012).

In October 2010, a meeting of the general prosecutors of the SCO member states was held in the Chinese city of Xiangmen, and the delegation of Kazakhstan was headed by Prosecutor General Kairat Mami (Prosecutors General of the..., 2010). The meeting resulted in the signing of a protocol confirming the readiness of the SCO member states to continue strengthening cooperation between prosecutor's offices in the field of combating terrorism, extremism, and separatism, a different range of transnational threats, including drug trafficking, for which it was proposed to create a mechanism for regular meetings of prosecutors of the SCO member states. The aforementioned Prosecutor General of Kazakhstan, Kairat Mami, noted shortly before the meeting that the generalisation of judicial practice and the exchange of experience qualitatively helps to establish the integration process between the SCO member states and best contributes to solving security problems in the region (Yumashev, 2008). He also stated that the decision to hold annual meetings of representatives of the judicial system within the SCO was overdue by itself since an effective solution to the problems arising in the region is possible only with the participation of all SCO members with international coordination of national legislations and the adoption of uniform documents binding on each of the parties.

Already in June 2011, the right to receive the Attorneys General of the SCO member states passed to the then-presiding Kazakhstan (Consolidation is needed in..., 2011). At that time, the newly appointed Prosecutor of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Askhat Daulbayev, noted that only joint efforts and cooperation of law enforcement agencies are the key to success in countering organised crime. In total, exactly one year after the meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO Uzbekistan (Information message on the..., 2010), which was marked by the transfer of the right of chairmanship in the

organisation to representatives of Kazakhstan, in June 2011, Astana hosted a meeting of the PRC (Astana hosted a meeting of..., 2011). During the meeting, the heads of the SCO member states noted with high appreciation the period of the presidency of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the SCO in 2010-2011.

Nursultan Nazarbayev, the former President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, in June 2011 noted the contribution (N. Nazarbayev voiced at the..., 2011), which, over the 10 years of its existence, has brought the SCO to the region of CA, Kazakhstan, and the general world order. In particular, under the motto of the Kazakh presidency, “Ten years on the path of security and cooperation”, more than 110 joint events, anti-terrorist exercises, and the signing of documents strategically important for the security of the region were held and the efforts of the SCO member states had a substantial impact on the process of resolving problems with Afghanistan. In addition, Nursultan Nazarbayev proposed the introduction of concepts that were revolutionary for international relations in the region at that time, such as the electronic border, electronic sovereignty, and put forward the idea of creating a new special SCO body like a Cyberpol. In addition, the Kazakh leader brought to everyone’s attention specific supranational goals that meet key trends in the development of the world for the next decade, namely, the creation of a Meeting on the settlement of territorial and regional conflicts within the SCO, a single transport and energy space, a Water and Food Committee and a Development Fund to finance joint projects and innovations, and an Emergency Council and a single SCO Forecasting Center with the ability to develop forecasts for the development of the region until 2030 and 2050.

An important achievement in the fight against illicit drug trafficking during the period of Kazakhstan’s chairmanship in the SCO was the continued strengthening of cooperation between the SCO member states. This includes the adopted in 2011 in Astana, the Decision of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation “On Approval of the Anti-Drug Strategy of the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation for 2011-2016” (2011), confirming its commitment to preventing the negative impact of this threat in the CA region and, in general, to ensure sustainable development in the SCO space. The substantial role of the Government of Kazakhstan in ensuring security in the region was repeatedly confirmed in 1990 and 2000.

A substantial event of the summit in July 2024 (Kazakhstan completes chairmanship of..., 2024), at which the right of chairmanship in the SCO was transferred from Kazakhstan to the PRC, was the adoption of the document “On World Unity for Just Peace and Harmony, which will help in

promoting and consolidating international efforts to resolve conflicts in various regions of the world. This document was proposed by the President of Kazakhstan at the Delhi Summit (Seilekhanov, 2023).

In total, since the approval of the Shanghai Five, the Government of Kazakhstan has actively participated in building a security system in the region and has made a great contribution to preventing the development of the “three evils” – terrorism, separatism, and extremism. The peak period was 2010-2011 when the right to chair the organisation passed from Uzbekistan to Kazakhstan. During this period, many events were held under the chairmanship of the Kazakh side, ranging from anti-terrorist exercises to scientific and practical conferences. What is also important is that the Kazakh authorities were also awarded the right to chair the OSCE, which added to the acquisition of additional experience, which was subsequently used to ensure security within the SCO. The right of Kazakhstan’s representatives to chair the SCO in 2023 has once again shown the intentions and active actions of the Government of Kazakhstan within the framework of the SCO to ensure both regional and international security. Kazakhstan’s strategy increasingly included developmental aspects in addition to traditional security accomplishments, placing a strong emphasis on regional cooperation, institutional strengthening, inclusive policymaking, and strategic foresight. This approach reaffirms that peace and stability are not only ends in and of themselves but also necessary prerequisites for equitable and sustained regional advancement, bringing security efforts into line with the larger objectives of sustainable development.

## Discussion

During the analysis, it was established that in the period from 1996 to 2001, there was an association called the Shanghai Five. The initial tasks of the association were to strengthen confidence in the military field and the reduction of armed forces in the border area, fixed by the relevant agreements in 1996 and 1997 (Law of the Republic..., 1996; 1997). T. Pradt (2020) also analysed the activities of the Shanghai Five as the predecessor of the SCO in the field of confidence-building and security in the CA region, noting the goals of the “five” similar to the results of the study. The organisation’s activities were focused on rapid response to certain events in the regional security system. Founded in 1996, the IMU posed the greatest threat to the secular regime in Uzbekistan (Pannier, 2017b), but unrest and tension in any of the CA states could negatively affect public sentiment in Kazakhstan.

The problem of separatism in Kazakhstan took place in the 1990s in a number of cities and regions of the state, but the measures taken at the state level helped to prevent this threat from spreading more than at the local level. In this regard, it is important that, as in the case of the IMU, the stability of the region depended on the general regional order (Auanasova et al., 2024; Bekishev et al., 2019). For the government and for the society of independent Kazakhstan as a whole, the Shanghai Convention on Combatting Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism (2003) was one of the fundamental documents containing specific mechanisms to prevent threats and overcome the consequences of separatist sentiments both in the region and in the state.

During the existence of the Shanghai Five and the SCO, representatives of Kazakhstan took part in many events aimed at training armed personnel and other law enforcement agencies to counter terrorist attacks. Among them, the experience gained during counter-terrorism measures on the territory of Kazakhstan itself is notable, namely the exercises “Interaction-2003” and “Peace mission 2010” (The SCO counter-terrorism..., 2003; Trafficking in opiates in..., 2012). Such security measures were a consequence of the above-mentioned Convention, and their purpose was to work out cohesive and coordinated actions of the structural units of the five SCO member states (Shanghai Convention on..., 2003). The analysis of counter-terrorism mechanisms was the basis for the study conducted by S. Rauf (2020). Researchers noted that since terrorism was increasingly becoming a problem for each SCO member state, it was decided that this problem should be solved collectively, which subsequently helped prevent hundreds of terrorist attacks. Although terrorism was not the main threat to the states of the CA region, as evidenced by the study data (Figure 1), timely response and proper regional management contributed to the formation of an immediate response in the event of a terrorist threat. Despite this, in the autumn of 2011, a number of terrorist attacks occurred in Kazakhstan (Tokayeva, 2011), which, however, some research organisations called internal political and clan struggle.

An urgent problem for the then Government of Kazakhstan was the widespread and massive use of injected drugs by the population (The program on counteracting..., 2001). A large proportion of them came from Afghanistan, which has been one of the largest suppliers of opiates and heroin worldwide. The territory of Kazakhstan and the rest of the SCO member states was used as a transit zone for transporting illegal goods to the final consumer on the territory of Russia. In Kazakhstan in the early 2000s, estimates of the number of drug addicts varied, but on average, their number reached 250,000 people (The program on counteracting..., 2001), which was a catastrophically large number for the health system. Akhtar and Javaid

(2024) also note the important role of the SCO member States in countering the illicit distribution of narcotic drugs and supporting efforts to stabilise Afghanistan in the early 2000s. In total, the results of the authors' studies confirm the thesis put forward about the importance of the government of Kazakhstan developing high-quality relationships within the organisation, which contributed to strengthening both the regional security system and helped solve the state's internal problems. This integrated approach offers a model for tying security governance to sustainable development pathways by tying public health reform and institutional development to transnational security threats.

Despite a series of decisions taken within the framework of the SCO, in Kazakhstan at the end of the 2000s, the scale of drug seizures was extremely small compared to other states in the CA region. This, according to a report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (Trafficking in opiates in..., 2012), was the result of a number of reasons, ranging from the length of the northern border of 3,600 km and the inability to control every section of it, the lack of a sufficient number of high-quality scanners at checkpoints, ending with the corruption of border services. S. Biswas (2021) addresses a different important aspect of the presence of illicit drug trafficking in the CA region. The researcher noted that drug trafficking has almost completely destroyed the governance architecture in the region and, thus, made states vulnerable to all non-state actors involved in the drug trade, with the exception of the architecture of public administration in Kazakhstan. Due to the focus of the subject, the rest of the states of the CA region were not examined, nevertheless, even for the government of Kazakhstan in the late 1990s and 2000, the problem of injected drug use by the population and their transportation by organised criminal groups across the territory of the state remained relevant and countering these threats was extremely weak. This demonstrates that even though Kazakhstan made great institutional strides, more systemic changes were required to bring security results into line with the more general ideas of accountability, transparency, and development-oriented planning.

The development of multilateral cooperation within the SCO has also actively contributed to the strengthening of bilateral relations between the member States. For example, in 2003, a summit meeting of the heads of state of Kazakhstan and China (Joint Declaration of..., 2003) was held, in which a number of agreements were reached in the field of further maintaining security in the region and, in particular, an agreement not to conclude agreements with third countries that could damage the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the parties.

The period of Kazakhstan's chairmanship in the SCO in 2023-2024 was marked by a number of important decisions in the field of security, such as updating already implemented strategies and the development of new documents in the field of security. However, in addition, close attention was also paid to issues of trade and economic cooperation and aspects of "green" policy, which is also extremely important for the sustainable and safe development of the region. Ferrari and Ambrosetti (2023) stated that one of the main reasons and justification for the participation of the government of Kazakhstan in the SCO is territorial security since the country borders Russia and the People's Republic of China, as well as the opportunity to use its position as a crossroads between East and West. This is confirmed in the conducted study since the President of Kazakhstan noted the importance of maintaining beneficial relations and preventing a rift between East and West (Nurullin, 2023).

The analysis of the papers of a number of authors helped to compare them qualitatively with the results of this study. Thus, an understanding was reached of additional aspects of Kazakhstan's participation in the SCO and the importance of ensuring regional security through the adoption of high-quality consensus decisions and fundamental international legal documents.

## **Conclusion**

In the course of the study, the initial goals of the Shanghai Five in 1990 and the SCO in 2000 were identified. They consisted of a mutual reduction in the number of troops in the border territories, a limitation in the number of personnel and weapons, and an obligation not to attack the other sides of the "five". It was stated that the problem of separatism was urgent for the government of Kazakhstan in the 1990s. In this regard, not only did the measures taken at the national level play a qualitative role in reducing separatist sentiments in the state, but also the obligations of the "five" states to take measures against destructive activities on the territories of their states and to help prevent such in neighbouring states. In addition, already within the framework of the SCO, the Shanghai Convention on Combatting Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism has become the basis for preventing the further development of separatist sentiments. These steps helped create a stable security environment, which is necessary for sustainable development and collaboration.

It was determined that the problem of terrorism during 1990-2011 was not so substantial for the government of Kazakhstan. However, the peak period of terrorist activity was precisely in 2011, when the society of Kazakhstan faced a series of terrorist attacks. Nevertheless, timely response

and readiness to all kinds of threats was the basis for the functioning of the SCO, as a result of which the Convention of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation against Terrorism was additionally adopted, and anti-terrorist exercises “Interaction-2003” and “Peace Mission-2010” were held on the territory of Kazakhstan. It is noted that in the early 2000s, one of the most serious problems for the Kazakhstani society was the mass consumption of injectable narcotic drugs and the use of the territory of Kazakhstan by organised criminal groups, mainly from Afghanistan, to transport drugs to the end user in Russia. In this regard, it was valuable for the government of Kazakhstan to adopt within the framework of the SCO an appropriate international legal document on cooperation in combating illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, and their precursors. Subsequently, the number of injected drug users decreased from 250,000 in 2000 to just over 25,000 in 2013. However, the number of seizures of narcotic substances was extremely small. While 730 kg of heroin were seized in 2009, 323 and 137 kg were seized in 2010 and 2012, respectively.

It is analysed that during the presidency of Kazakhstan in the SCO, former President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev put forward supranational goals for the organisation, such as the formation of structural institutions like a Cyberpol, the creation of a single transport and energy space. In addition, the Kazakh side contributed to the further formation of anti-drug strategies and by 2011, the Anti-Drug Strategy of the SCO member states for 2011-2016 was adopted in Astana. Notably, the 2023 proposal to establish a UN Regional Centre for Sustainable Development Goals in Almaty further underscored Kazakhstan’s recognition that sustainable peace is inseparable from environmental, economic, and institutional development.

The limitations of the study include incomplete statistics, and sometimes even their absence in some aspects of ensuring health protection in Kazakhstan in the 2000s, and the difficulty in objectively assessing the fight against illegal transportation of narcotic substances due to the difference in data from international organisations and official law enforcement agencies of Kazakhstan, which did not allow to fully determine the effectiveness the measures taken in the field of security. Future research on the subject may include a comparative analysis of the effectiveness of regional cooperation within the SCO with cooperation within other regional and international organisations of which Kazakhstan is a member state.

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