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## **ASTANA CENTER OF REGIONAL DIPLOMACY: AN OVERVIEW OF THE PRIORITIES OF KAZAKHSTAN'S CHAIRMANSHIP IN THE SCO**

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**Abstract.** Since its establishment in 2001, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has always adhered to the “Shanghai spirit” of mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, mutual consultation, respect for cultural diversity and the pursuit of joint development, and continues to strengthen political mutual trust, expand good-neighborly and friendly relations, jointly protect regional security and develop practical cooperation, which It contributes to the constant growth of its influence, cohesion and attractiveness.

Kazakhstan paid great attention to the development of intraregional and transcontinental transport connectivity, which gives a powerful impetus to the expansion of trade and economic ties in Eurasia. Astana attracts a lot of attention to the integration of the Chinese initiative Belt and Road and the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, as well as the implementation of regional infrastructure projects in the SCO. Also, Kazakhstan proposed to create a Partner network of large strategic ports and logistics centers.

Kazakhstan's initiative to adopt the document “On World Unity for Just Peace and Harmony”, which laid down the principles of strengthening confidence-building measures, maintaining stability and security at the global level. In addition, the SCO's traditional task of combating the “three forces of evil” and transnational crime remains in the focus of the chairmanship. Additionally, Kazakhstan's proposals include updated Cooperation Programs on countering terrorism, separatism and extremism for 2025-2027 and the adoption of the SCO Anti-Drug Strategy for 2024-2029 and an Action Program for its implementation.

Today, the SCO is a trans-regional international organization with the largest coverage area and the largest population in the world. This article analyzes the main decisions taken at the meeting of the Council of Heads of SCO Member States under the chairmanship of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Council of Heads of Government of the SCO Member States under the Chairmanship of the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2023-2024.

**Key words:** Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Astana summit, Shanghai spirit, Kazakhstan, international organization, regional security, international cooperation, diplomacy

## **Introduction**

In 2024, Kazakhstan chaired six international organizations: the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-building Measures in Asia (CICA), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Islamic Organization for Food Security (IOF), the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS). Currently, these organizations have a great influence on shaping the international agenda [1]. At the same time, in the history of each of them, Kazakhstan stood at the origins of the formation, and in some served as the initiator of the creation [2].

Kazakhstan is one of the founders of the SCO and one of its locomotives. The SCO was established in 2001 (it was preceded by the Shanghai Five in 1996). The organization has grown from the original 6 founding states to the current 10 member States (Kazakhstan, India, Iran, China, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Belarus), it also includes 2 observer States (Afghanistan and Mongolia), 14 dialogue partner countries (Turkey, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Armenia, Cambodia, Kuwait, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal and Sri Lanka), covering 26 countries on three continents, with a total area of more than 36 million square kilometers, that makes up more than 65% of the Eurasian continent [3]. The population of its member States exceeds 3.3 billion people, which is about 42% of the total world population [4]. And in 2023, five countries joined the SCO family as dialogue partners, including Bahrain, Kuwait, Maldives, Myanmar and the United Arab Emirates [5]. Kazakhstan assumed the chairmanship of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in July 2023 and headed it until June 2024 [2].

Over the years, the organization has gradually become multidisciplinary and multifunctional, where, thanks to the joint efforts of the member States, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization comprehensively promotes cooperation in six areas - in the political, security, economic, humanitarian spheres, in foreign policy cooperation and in institution-building [6]. It has achieved impressive results, paving the way for effective peaceful development, and has become an important barrier to security, a bridge of cooperation, bonds of friendship, and a force of constructiveness that helps the countries of the region achieve universal security and stability, as well as common development and prosperity, and has laid a model for building a new type of international relations [7].

## **Materials and Methods**

This article uses a comprehensive methodological approach, including qualitative and quantitative analysis. The main sources of data were the official documents of the Astana Summit in 2024. The main sources of information are the official documents of the summit, such as final declarations, minutes of meetings, signed agreements, as well as press releases and statements by participants.

Additionally, materials from government departments of the participating countries and international organizations covering the results of the summit were used.

The analysis used content analysis of official speeches and media materials, as well as expert assessments provided by leading political scientists and economists in the region. Additionally, a comparative analysis was carried out with previous summits, which made it possible to identify the dynamics of cooperation and changes in the priorities of the participating countries. The limitations of the analysis are based primarily on open sources and official documents, which limited the completeness of information about the internal dynamics of negotiations.

**Results**

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is an international organization whose activities are aimed at strengthening peace, cooperation and good neighborliness. In the period from 2023 to 2024, the Republic of Kazakhstan chaired the SCO. This is the fourth time that Kazakhstan has led this organization. Our country previously chaired the Organization in 2004, 2010 and 2016.

Table 1. Comparison table of SCO summits in Kazakhstan (2004, 2010, 2016, 2024)

Parameter / Year	SCO Summit 2004 (Astana)	SCO Summit 2010 (Astana)	SCO Summit 2016 (Astana)	SCO Summit 2024 (Astana)
The main participants	Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan	The same + India and Pakistan in observer status	Russia, China, Kazakhstan, India, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan	The same, with an emphasis on deepening integration and coordination + Belarus
Key topics	Formation of the foundations of the organization, regional security, economic cooperation	Strengthening security, combating terrorism, economic integration	Strengthening economic cooperation, combating extremism, and developing infrastructure	Regional conflict resolution, Afghanistan, ecology, digitalization
Main achievements	Approval of the SCO Charter, creation of basic cooperation mechanisms	Adoption of security programs, development of joint anti-terrorist operations	Signing of strategic agreements, expansion of cooperation in energy and transport	Conclusion of important agreements on safety, ecology and digital technologies

Importance for the region	Creating a platform for dialogue and cooperation, enhancing the role of Kazakhstan	Strengthening trust and cooperation, expanding the powers of the SCO	Strengthening the SCO's role in regional policy, launching a new economic integration	Strengthening Kazakhstan's position, solving urgent problems of the region
Problems and challenges	Lack of institutionalization, limited resources	Uneven development of cooperation, geopolitical tensions	Economic challenges, the need to adapt to new threats	Geopolitical instability, difficulties in the implementation of agreements

*Source: the table was prepared by the author based on the analysis of open data obtained from Internet resources.*

The 2004 SCO Summit in Astana was a historic event that marked the beginning of the organization's formation as a regional platform for cooperation in the fields of security, economics and politics. During this period, Kazakhstan acted as chairman for the first time, demonstrating its desire to strengthen interstate relations and create the institutional foundations of the SCO. The main tasks were the establishment of the charter and the formation of key mechanisms of interaction [2].

By 2010, the Astana summit was held in a more mature format with an expanded agenda, including an active fight against terrorism and deepening economic cooperation. At this stage, Kazakhstan maintained its leading role, contributing to the strengthening of trust between the participating countries and the development of joint programs [1].

The 2016 Summit showed significant progress in expanding economic ties and transport routes, as well as in coordinating efforts to counter extremism. Kazakhstan continued to strengthen its diplomatic position, contributing to the development of infrastructure projects and integration [5].

In 2024, Kazakhstan will once again chair the SCO, focusing on resolving acute regional conflicts, including the situation in Afghanistan, as well as environmental initiatives and digitalization. The summit demonstrates the growing maturity of the organization and efforts to adapt to new challenges, strengthening Kazakhstan's role as a key mediator and leader in the region [6]. The SCO summit in Astana has become an important stage in the development of this organization. It is characteristic that Kazakhstan effectively put an end to its chairmanship in the SCO, which has now passed to China. But it is also significant that Kazakhstani Nurlan Yermekbayev has become the new Secretary General. So this is, to some extent, continuity in the SCO projects and programs.

Within the framework of its SCO presidency for 2023-2024, Kazakhstan has identified six main priorities of its chairmanship in the organization:

1. Ensuring security and stability in the SCO space;
2. Expansion of trade and economic ties;
3. Strengthening energy cooperation;
4. Expanding cooperation in the digital sphere;
5. Strengthening cooperation in the field of ecology;
6. Development of cultural and humanitarian ties [7].

## **Discussion**

The fundamental thematic focus of the Astana SCO Summit was “Strengthening multilateral dialogue - striving for sustainable peace and development”. The modern development processes of the SCO are characterized by the interaction of the member countries in the field of maintaining peace and security, trade, transport, energy, digital technologies, etc. Speaking at the SCO summit in New Delhi, India, on July 4, 2023, Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev stressed that “through joint efforts, the organization will be able to ensure the availability of digital technologies for all citizens of the participating states and give a new impetus to the innovative technological development of the economy” [2]. During Kazakhstan’s presidency, emphasis was placed on reducing the “digital divide” between countries and social groups. To achieve these goals, Kazakhstan proposed the creation of a Digital Hub in the SCO space [6].

The heads of the SCO member states paid great attention to the consideration and resolution of a wide range of topical issues of interaction. It is worth noting that the participating countries differ in different levels of economic development, therefore, it is important within the SCO to coordinate economic interests for equal partnership and mutually beneficial cooperation, and joint development and implementation of large-scale multilateral socio-economic projects is essential. It should be noted that the regular holding of forums with the participation of the Heads of the SCO member states helps to enhance the international image of the Organization [7].

The Astana Summit summed up the results of the Kazakh presidency and became a new stage in the expansion of the organization. The Republic of Belarus is a significant partner of many countries in the region within the framework of the EAEU and the CIS, and its accession to the SCO has not only increased the number of members and improved the gross economic indicators of the organization, but also included a country with significant intellectual potential and production base in the contour of trade and economic cooperation of this institution. Consequently, four out of five (Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus) states of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) have become SCO members. If we take into account the “expanded outline” of the SCO, including dialogue partners (including Armenia), then all the EAEU countries are working on this platform [1].

The Summit played an important role in strengthening the international position of the Central Asian region. The final declaration stated: “The Member States confirm that... Central Asia is the core of the SCO” [4]. The countries of the region, in turn, are strengthening their international subjectivity by participating in a dynamically developing organization, the agenda of which is gradually expanding [4].

Among the favorable factors for the further development of cooperation in the SCO are the following:

- geography that reduces the potential negative impact of third parties;
- the complementary structure and capabilities of the member countries’ economies;
- the understanding of the importance of further development of cooperation and the corresponding political will of the leadership of the SCO member states [8].

Kazakhstan’s chairmanship in the SCO contributes to the qualitative growth of the Organization in the system of integration development, strengthening multilateral dialogue and expanding interstate cooperation as factors of ensuring security and stability in the region [2].

Kazakhstan has held about 180 events during its presidency. Meetings and meetings between the ministries and departments of the SCO countries were held in different formats: online and offline. They touched upon the development of cooperation in the fields of healthcare, defense, security, law, agriculture and other areas. Such activity has noticeably revitalized the organization and brought it together in many areas. In particular, Kazakhstan, which is one of the founders of the SCO, has focused on promoting the green agenda. As a result, 2024 has been declared the SCO Year of Ecology [6].

At the initiative of the Head of State of Kazakhstan, 2024 was declared the Year of Ecology in the SCO. In the 21st century, environmental issues are one of the most important in international relations. Irreversible catastrophic environmental changes actualize global environmental security. Environmental protection, the salvation and protection of nature, the preservation of the animal and plant world are a necessary condition for the safe existence, development and further progress of mankind. Ensuring environmental safety involves a diverse interaction of States, an integrated approach to solving global security, economic and social development problems. Effective waste management and safe drinking water and sanitation are also important. The implementation of large-scale projects determines the development of infrastructure, environmental protection, and rational use of water resources [9, 10].

In 2024, the SCO member States paid special attention to environmental security issues related to impending global threats such as climate change, scarcity and uneven distribution of water resources, extreme natural disasters, floods and floods, soil degradation and desertification, as well as the topic of ensuring the



safety of drinking water and sanitation [12, 13]. To implement the Action Plan for the SCO Year of Ecology, various events were organized, including round tables, seminars, environmental and educational campaigns.

The concept of cooperation in the field of environmental protection of the SCO member States and the Action Plan have laid a solid legal foundation for the development of environmental cooperation [11].

Among the wide range of issues related to the environmental agenda, it is worth noting a number of documents that have opened a new page in environmental cooperation, namely:

1. Decision of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on the approval of the Program for the Development of Cooperation between States in the field of protected areas and Ecological tourism;
2. Statement of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on ensuring the safety of drinking water and sanitation;
3. Statement by the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on effective waste management;
4. Agreement between the Governments of the member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in the Field of Environmental Protection [11].

Water conservation is one of the most important and priority areas of SCO environmental and conservation cooperation. The SCO member states face problems of water scarcity, uneven distribution and pollution to varying degrees. Water conservation is a priority of the SCO, coinciding with the global water paradigm, as well as modern environmental and climate policies in the SCO countries. The Member States attached great importance to this issue and considered a decision at the highest level. For example, the Republic of Kazakhstan is actively working on the development of the Water Code, which is a clear example of the transition from declared initiatives to the practical implementation of the stated proposals [14].

As SCO Secretary General Zhang Ming noted in his speech, the SCO Secretariat contributes to the implementation of initiatives of the SCO member states in the development of cooperation on environmental protection. Among the events held over the past year, the SCO Model Youth Conference, the round table on Environmental Safety in the SCO member States, and the SCO Year of Ecology 2024 forum in Qingdao (China, July 2024) should be noted, which includes two areas – the main environmental challenges and the practical experience of the SCO countries in overcoming them and the efforts of the SCO countries to manage global biodiversity. This creates another new platform for discussing environmental cooperation between Member States [9, 11].

It is important that the summit participants expressed united support for Kazakhstan's initiatives to establish the United Nations Regional Center for Sustainable Development Goals for Central Asia and Afghanistan, based in

Almaty, and the International Biosafety Agency, which reports to the UN Security Council [15].

Rational use of natural resources, issues of water policy and sustainable development are not a situational response to complex modern challenges, but a systematic progressive movement towards sustainable development, which is declared as the thematic status of the next 2025 SCO. This course has been adopted by all participating states, and it will be a key aspect during China's presidency of the SCO in 2025.

The thematic status of 2025 is the Year of Sustainable Development. In addition, the joint efforts of the SCO member states will be aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the International Year of Glacier Conservation in 2025, announced by the UN General Assembly [16].

Kazakhstan is a very influential country that has its own position on topical issues on the international agenda. It is no coincidence that Kazakhstan is one of the middle powers that influence world politics. It is characteristic that at the end of May 2024, Euronews published an article by President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev on the role of the middle Powers in the modern world [17]. The middle Powers usually include Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Kenya, Mexico, Brazil, and South Africa. This is a very impressive and honorable list, but it's worth noting that it needs to be matched. So Kazakhstan is quite active, putting forward many initiatives, some of which were included in the materials of the SCO summit in Astana. For example, the declaration included Kazakhstan's proposal to establish an SCO Investment Fund. In addition, it is worth noting the idea of establishing the UN Regional Center for Sustainable Development Goals for Central Asia and Afghanistan in Almaty.

This is important given that the SCO, in fact, began with security issues in Central Asia and emerged against the background of threats to this security in 1996 from Afghanistan, when the situation was extremely uncertain. Today, there are other tasks, but the region continues to play a major role, not only in geopolitics, but also in geo-economics. More and more transport corridors pass through Central Asia.

In particular, various development projects and new transport routes should play an important role in stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan. In recent years, Kazakhstan has been helping to stabilize the situation in this country by supplying it with food, as well as supporting development projects. The SCO countries support an "independent, neutral and peaceful state free from terrorism, war and drugs" [11].

These are the minimum sufficient conditions to start interacting with the new Afghan authorities. But at the same time, this document states that "an inclusive government with broad participation of representatives of all ethnic and political groups of Afghan society is the only way to achieve lasting peace and stability in this country" [11]. This can be called a conditional maximum program.



## **Conclusion**

It was a very important event for Kazakhstan, it highlighted his role in the new international realities. When the situation is not too stable, the importance of international institutions and those countries that put forward a positive agenda increases.

The SCO member states have large labor, energy and mineral resources, and have great potential and opportunities for conducting profitable agro-industrial production. They also represent a huge growing market for consumer and investment goods.

During Kazakhstan's chairmanship in the SCO, much attention was paid to the environmental agenda. At the Astana Summit, it was noted that in the context of the development of the modern international space, it is important to strengthen joint work on attracting investments, the active participation of businesses, business structures and business circles in the implementation of economic, energy, and transport projects.

At the initiative of Kazakhstan, the SCO member states actively cooperated in the fields of scientific and technical cooperation, education, information exchange, green finance, environmental safety, biodiversity, climate change, waste management, energy conservation and emission reduction.

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## **АСТАНА ӨҢІРЛІК ДИПЛОМАТИЯ ОРТАЛЫҒЫ: ҚАЗАҚСТАННЫҢ ШЫҰ - ҒА ТӨРАҒАЛЫҚ ЕТУІНІҢ БАСЫМДЫЛЫҚТАРЫНА ШОЛУ**

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**Аңдатпа.** 2001 жылы Құрылғаннан бері Шанхай Ынтымақтастық Ұйымы әрқашан өзара сенімнің, өзара тиімділіктің, теңдіктің, өзара консультациялардың, мәдени әртүрлілікті құрметтеудің және бірлескен дамуға ұмтылудың «Шанхай рухын» ұстанады және саяси өзара сенімді нығайтуды, тату көршілік пен достық қарым-қатынасты

кеңейтуді, аймақтық қауіпсіздікті бірлесіп қорғауды және практикалық ынтымақтастықты дамытуды жалғастыруда. Бұл оның ықпалының, бірлігі мен тартымдылығының тұрақты өсуіне ықпал етеді.

Саммит барысында Қазақстан Еуразиядағы сауда-экономикалық байланыстардың кеңеюіне қуатты серпін беретін ішкі өңірлік және трансконтиненталдық көліктік өзара байланысты дамытуға көп көңіл бөлді. «Белдеу және жол» Қытай бастамасының арқасында Астана Қытай бастамасы мен Транскаспий халықаралық көлік бағытын ұштастыруға, сондай-ақ ШЫҰ кеңістігінде өңірлік инфрақұрылымдық жобаларды іске асыруға көп көңіл бөлді. Практикалық шара ретінде Қазақстан ірі стратегиялық порттар мен логистикалық орталықтардың серіктестік желісін құруды ұсынды.

Сондай-ақ, басымдық шеңберінде Қазақстан «әділ бейбітшілік пен келісім үшін әлемдік бірлік туралы» құжатты қабылдау бойынша бастама көтерді, онда сенім шараларын нығайту, жаһандық деңгейде тұрақтылық пен қауіпсіздікті қолдау қағидаттары негізделді. Сонымен қатар, ШЫҰ – ның дәстүрлі міндеті – «үш зұлымдық күшімен» және трансұлттық қылмыспен күресу төрағалықтың назарында қалып отыр. Осы тұрғыда Қазақстанның ұсыныстары терроризмге, сепаратизмге және экстремизмге қарсы іс-қимыл жөніндегі 2025-2027 жылдарға арналған ынтымақтастықтың жаңартылған бағдарламаларын және ШЫҰ-ның 2024-2029 жылдарға арналған есірткіге қарсы стратегиясын қабылдауды және оны іске асыру жөніндегі іс-қимыл бағдарламаларын қамтиды.

Бүгінгі Таңда Шанхай Ынтымақтастық Ұйымы-ең үлкен қамту аймағы және әлемдегі ең көп халқы бар трансаймақтық халықаралық ұйым. Бұл мақалада Қазақстан Республикасының төрағалығымен ШЫҰ-ға Мүше Мемлекеттердің Басшылары Кеңесінің және 2023-2024 жылдары Қазақстан Республикасының Төрағалығымен ШЫҰ-ға Мүше Мемлекеттердің Үкімет Басшылары Кеңесінің отырысында қабылданған негізгі шешімдер талданады.

**Тірек сөздер:** Шанхай Ынтымақтастық Ұйымы, Астана саммиті, Шанхай рухы, Қазақстан, халықаралық ұйым, региональная безопасность, международное сотрудничество, дипломатия

## **АСТАНА ЦЕНТР РЕГИОНАЛЬНОЙ ДИПЛОМАТИИ: ОБЗОР ПРИОРИТЕТОВ ПРЕДСЕДАТЕЛЬСТВА КАЗАХСТАНА В ШОС**

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**Аннотация.** С момента своего создания в 2001 году Шанхайская организация сотрудничества всегда придерживалась «шанхайского духа»

взаимного доверия, взаимной выгоды, равенства, взаимных консультаций, уважения культурного разнообразия и стремления к совместному развитию и продолжает укреплять политическое взаимодоверие, расширять добрососедские и дружественные отношения, совместно защищать права человека. региональную безопасность и развивать практическое сотрудничество, что способствует постоянному росту его влияния, сплоченности и привлекательности.

Во время саммита большое внимание Казахстаном было уделено развитию транспортной взаимосвязанности, как внутрирегиональной, так и трансконтинентальной, которая придает мощный импульс расширению торгово-экономических связей в Евразии. Благодаря китайской инициативе «Пояс и путь» Астана привлекает большое внимания сопряжению китайской инициативы и Транскаспийского международного транспортного маршрута, а также реализации региональных инфраструктурных проектов на просторах ШОС. В качестве практической меры Казахстан предложил создать Партнерскую сеть крупных стратегических портов и логистических центров.

Так же, в рамках приоритета Казахстаном была выдвинута инициатива по принятию документа «О мировом единстве за справедливый мир и согласие», в котором были заложены принципы укрепления мер доверия, поддержания стабильности и безопасности на глобальном уровне. Кроме того, в фокусе председательства остается традиционная задача ШОС – борьба с «тремя силами зла» и транснациональной преступностью. В этом контексте предложения Казахстана включают обновленные программы сотрудничества по противодействию терроризму, сепаратизму и экстремизму на 2025-2027 годы и принятию антинаркотической стратегии ШОС на 2024-2029 годы и программы действий по ее реализации.

Сегодня Шанхайская организация сотрудничества – это трансрегиональная международная организация с самой большой территорией охвата и самой многочисленной численностью населения в мире. В данной статье анализируются основные решения, принятые на заседаниях Совета глав государств-членов ШОС под председательством Республики Казахстан и Совета глав правительств государств-членов ШОС под председательством Республики Казахстан в 2023-2024 годах.

**Ключевые слова:** Шанхайская организация сотрудничества, саммит в Астане, Шанхайский дух, Казахстан, международная организация, аймақтық қауіпсіздік, халықаралық ынтымақтастық, дипломатия

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