

The Main Directions of Development of Kazakh-Russian Cooperation in the Border Area: Transport and Logistics Vector

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Abstract. The article deals with the issues of bilateral relations between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation in the border area in the sphere of transport and logistics. The analysis is based on the idea that the study of the situation in the sphere of transport and logistics can be associated with the consideration of the barrier and communicative function of the border.

The authors drew attention to how transparency issues affect the economic aspects of interaction. Based on the dynamics of trade turnover, the peculiarities of cargo traffic, conclusions are drawn about the dynamics of the development of relations for nearest future. As a result, key indicators and the main directions of Kazakh-Russian cross-border cooperation in the sphere of railways were identified. Based on the study of the specifics of transport flows, the dynamics of economic interaction between the border regions of the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan is shown.

The main problems that economic entities of the border regions of the two countries regularly face due to logistical problems were formulated. Conclusions are also drawn about how the consistent solution of these problems will contribute to the expansion and deepening of relationships not only in the border area, but also at the country-wide level.

Keywords: economy, transport, logistic, border, integration, barrier

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Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the defragmentation of the space of Greater Eurasia. The administrative-territorial border that defines the territories of the Russian Federation and the Kazakh SSR became the border of the new independent states and acquired an international character. By 2019, it was possible to fully complete the process of delimitation of the state border, which determined the status of territories over more than 7,500 km. As a result, a huge border area with its characteristic systemic communication processes has been formed. The level of cross-border cooperation between Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation is also influenced by such factors as Eurasian integration, the general situation within the framework of «Greater Eurasia», trends in geopolitical processes, etc. A high degree of depth of interaction can be confirmed by a number of figures and facts. 76 out of 85 subjects of the Russian Federation have direct links with various regions of Kazakhstan. The array of the contractual and legal framework of bilateral cooperation includes 400 contracts and agreements of various levels. Issues of cross-border and interregional cooperation are regulated in detail by special and comprehensive programs of the Governments of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation.

The current dialogue platform, where initiatives to develop bilateral cooperation are being tested, are the Cross-Border Cooperation Forums of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Kazakhstan, which have been held on a regular basis since 2003, currently the event is held under the name «Forum of Interregional Cooperation». Since 2003, 17 forums have been held, where about 200 agreements have been signed. The cities of Russia or Kazakhstan in turn serve as the venues.

The problem in the development of relations is the recurring attacks of representatives of the Russian establishment with enviable constancy in relation to various aspects of the political and social situation in Kazakhstan. The official position of the Russian side, according to Yermek Kosherbaev, Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Russian Federation, is that “such statements do not correspond to the official position of the Russian Federation and run counter to the good neighborly and allied relations of the two states”¹. However, public opinion is very negative about the constant attacks.

Based on all the above mentioned, it is possible to formulate the purpose of the study: to analyze the features of bilateral relations between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation in the border zone based on an assessment of their transport and logistics vector.

The authors proceeded from the hypothesis that the issues of transport and logistics in determining the situation in the border zone can be explained in the context of studying the barrier and communicative functions of the border.

1 Malyshev A. Russia and Kazakhstan: cooperation priorities. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 2021, January 10h

Materials and methods

This is a complex of general scientific and special methods of comparative political research. In particular, chronological, comparative-historical methods were useful in order to get a general idea of the situation in the border zone. The issues of assessing the transport and logistics potential were analyzed by comparing and evaluating the data obtained on the basis of the analysis of open data posted on the official portals and in the media.

In general, issues related to the assessment of the cross-border potential of our countries are actively considered in public discourse. At the same time, it is necessary to understand that the constant change of the situation necessitates its constant reassessment. In this regard, there is a need to constantly monitor the situation in order to provide timely expert assessments for making decisions based on verified data. Of the works used within the framework of this topic, we should pay attention to the collective monograph «Cross-border cooperation along the state border of Russia» edited by A.P. Klemeshev, Ya.A. Vorozheina, I.S. Gumenyuk, G.M. Fedorov (6), which analyzed in detail the problems and assessed the situation in the border regions in the Far East, Siberia, the Urals and the Volga region. Analytical interest presents the opinion of M.K. Zhundubaev, who makes an overview of cross-border interactions with an emphasis on the situation in the trade and economic sphere (4); V.N. Ivanov, M.K. Zhundubaev (5). The situation on the Kazakh-Russian border in relation to individual regions is considered by such authors as O.V. Volokh, V.Yu. Pitrikov (3); M.K. Zhundubaev (4). At the same time, we should mention that it is impossible to fully study the problem without studying the data of the media and Internet portals, such as the website of the Valdai Club and the EEC.

Results

The Kazakh-Russian border appears to be a political and geographical phenomenon of an impressive scale, the significance of which goes beyond Eurasia. The border has practically no expression on the ground either in a natural or ethnic way, it is of its post-administrative version. Only 4% of the border line are natural boundaries.

The administrative units of the two states interact over a considerable distance, it is well known that the border between Kazakhstan and Russia is one of the longest land borders in the world. The table below shows which regions of Kazakhstan have contact with the regions of the Russian Federation along the state border.

Thus, 7 regions of the Republic of Kazakhstan border on 12 regions of Russia. In the case of our countries, the importance of cooperation near the state border increases due to the fact that such economically developed cities as Omsk, Orenburg, Novosibirsk, Volgograd, Aktobe, Atyrau, Petropavlovsk, Ust-Kamenogorsk and a number of others are located near the border, where even in the Soviet period, large industrial complexes were formed for the extraction and processing of raw materials and other mineral resources (4:87).

Table 1. Border between Kazakhstan and Russia²

Regions of Kazakhstan	Regions of the Russian Federation
Atyrau region	Astrakhan region
West Kazakhstan region	Orenburg, Samara, Saratov, Volgograd and Astrakhan regions
Aktobe region	Orenburg region
Kostanay region	Orenburg, Chelyabinsk and Kurgan regions
North Kazakhstan region	Omsk, Kurgan and Tyumen regions
Pavlodar region	Omsk, Novosibirsk regions, the Altai Territory
East Kazakhstan region	The Altai Territory and the Republic of Altai

The deterministic nature of cross-border contacts is also relevant to the issues of interaction at the infrastructure level (6:188).

The border regions represent a zone of economic cooperation, it is in these regions that the interests of the Russian Federation in Kazakhstan are promoted. The formation of the structure of economic complexes of the borderlands is influenced by the vector of counter interests of the potential of innovative cooperation (1:65). Border regions still remain a place where market laws do not fully apply, as a result, investments in these territories come in insufficient volume for the full development of communicative potential (2:3.).

Interaction in the border zone seems to be one of the main components of relations between Kazakhstan and Russia, both in the format of bilateral cooperation and within the framework of multilateral integration formats developing in the space of Greater Eurasia. In this regard, the content of cooperation is determined, on the one hand, by the interests of regional actors, on the other hand, by the volume of qualitative changes that have occurred in the region since the beginning of the EAEU activities.

In this regard, we can recall the unrealized project of regional cooperation associated with an attempt to create the first Eurasian region, which was supposed to include the Atyrau and Astrakhan regions. The failure of the initiative is partly due to the different legal statuses of the regions. Atyrau region is part of a unitary state, and Astrakhan region is a subject of the Russian Federation, which is a state with a federal structure (5:39).

Despite the documented high level of bilateral relations, they cannot be considered ideal. Attention is drawn to a number of systemic contradictions that complicate the situation of cross-border interactions.

The issues related to the weak development of the relevant infrastructure complicate the process of Kazakh-Russian cooperation.

² Compiled from publicly available geographic data.

Table 2. Problems of cross-border cooperation between Kazakhstan and Russia³

Problem	Content	Solution Perspective
Problems of a local technical nature	Due to non-compliance with the norms and regulations of the EAEU, their inaccurate interpretation, different speed of implementation of the EAEU norms in the regions	High, only time is needed
Asymmetry in the development of economic cooperation processes	It is expressed in disproportions and excessive use of non-tariff restrictions related to the admission of goods from the EAEU countries to the single market, a set of foreign policy factors that complicate economic relations with third countries	Average, in the long-term time interval
Systemic problems	Due to the fact that in some sensitive areas the limit of integration has been reached, overcoming which will lead to infringement of national interests	In the case of Eurasian integration, such a moment will come, but not soon, there is nothing to fear yet

There are currently 50 checkpoints on the Kazakh-Russian border. Most of these are road and rail, but there is also 1 river checkpoint. At the same time, the question of their condition is quite acute, some of them need modernization. For example, in the case of that part of the border that passes through the territory of the Omsk region from the Russian side, and North Kazakhstan and Pavlodar region from the side of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 1020 km of the border have 8 checkpoints, and each of them requires modernization. Within the framework of the current «Program of joint actions between the Ministry of Transport of the Russian Federation and the Ministry of Industry and Infrastructure Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the operation of checkpoints on the Russian-Kazakh state border» from 2020 to 2025, it is planned to update six checkpoints each. Access roads and all infrastructure will be reconstructed⁴.

Discussion

Analyzing the territorial distribution of the economic potential of the borderland, it should be stated that approximately 2/3 of its potential falls on Russia, and the remaining third on Kazakhstan. The regions of Kazakhstan bordering with Russia form 36% of the republic's GRP. The regions of the Russian Federation located near the border form 12% of the country's gross regional product. The economic and resource potential of the border regions is a real driver for the development of cooperation.

³ Dodonov V. Progress and problems of Eurasian integration). 2022. Available from: ru.valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/progress-i-problemy-evraziyskoy-integratsii/

⁴ Checkpoints on the border with Kazakhstan are being modernized in the Omsk region (2019. Available from: omskaif.ru/auto/v_omskoy_oblasti_moderniziruyut_punkty_propuska_na_granice_s_kazahstanom.

According to statistics for 2021, Kazakhstan's trade with the EAEU countries amounted to \$26.1 billion, an increase of 28% per year. At the same time, the main volumes of trade of Kazakhstan within the framework of the Eurasian five fall precisely on Russia. The share of the Russian Federation in the trade turnover with the EAEU countries amounted to 92.9%, and with Kazakhstan – 23.9%. Russia accounted for 90.4% of Kazakhstan's exports to the EAEU countries. Over the past (2021) year, 31.6 thousand cars and other motor vehicles, 684 thousand tons of iron and stainless steel bars, 590.2 thousand tons of crude oil and oil products, etc. were delivered from Russia to Kazakhstan⁵.

These data give grounds to conclude that it is the connections of the border regions, the so-called «small integration», determine the development of integration on its large contour.

Among the obvious problems in the development of cross-border cooperation is the issue of balance between the contact and barrier functions of the border. Kazakhstan and Russia within the framework of the EAEU are kind of leaders in terms of the number of barriers that negatively affect economic cooperation both in bilateral and multilateral formats. Russia is the leader within the EAEU, the number of barriers is 55. The second position is taken by Kazakhstan, which has 51 barriers⁶. For example, there are a sufficient number of barriers for Kazakh products in the process of their promotion in the Russian Federation. During the period of Kazakhstan's chairmanship in the EAEU, there were qualitative changes in terms of improving the contact function of the border, since even the number of barriers stated above is a historical minimum. In 2019, the number of barriers was 71.

Estimating the carrying capacity of the border is perhaps the most important point in the study of relationships. Indicative here will be the assessment of the intensity of the traffic flow passing through the checkpoints. The full potential of the contact function of the border will be realized in the presence of a modern infrastructure of checkpoints. And in the case of the Kazakh-Russian border, the infrastructure of the checkpoints is worn out and needs to be modernized. According to the Minister of Industry and Infrastructure Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Beibut Atamkulov, by 2025, the traffic flow can grow by 2 times (up to 20 thousand cars per day), passenger traffic – by 4 times (up to 112 thousand people). In this regard, the issue of modernizing checkpoints is of great importance. Currently, the issue of reconstruction of 6 checkpoints is being studied: Syrym, Taskala, Kosak Urlyutobe, Zhana Zhol and Alimbet. The issue of phased reconstruction of another 24 checkpoints will be addressed. This is a serious problem; It's not secret that traffic jams on the Kazakh-Russian border have become an almost regular occurrence. The most cursory analysis of the media gives information about the presence of congestion on the Kazakh-Russian border at the Mashtakovo / Syrym border checkpoints, for example,

⁵ Trade turnover of Kazakhstan with the EAEU countries grew by 28% over the year (2022). Available from: kapital.kz/economic/103557/tovarooborot-kazakhstana-so-stranami-yeaes-vyros-na-28-za-god.html.

⁶ The EAEU Heads of State approved the Strategic Directions for the Development of Eurasian Economic Integration until 2025 (2020). Available from: www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/nae/news/Pages/11-12-2020-02.aspx.

in March 2022^{7, 8}. Moreover, the situation has a tendency to constant repetition. To develop the transport and logistics potential and timely resolve urgent problems in 2023-2024, the work is planned to modernize checkpoints in the Orenburg, Omsk and Astrakhan regions. Financing of checkpoints in the Saratov, Orenburg, Astrakhan and Chelyabinsk regions will be increased, it is planned to purchase the necessary equipment for control and inspection at checkpoints located in these regions, as well as carry out repair work⁹.

Table 3. Problems of transport and logistics and the ways to solve them¹⁰

Problem	Content	Territory	Ways of solution
Noncurrent infrastructure of checkpoints	Out of the 30 automobile border checkpoints 5 have specialized inspection equipment, which is unstable and periodically breaks down	Crossing points on the border with the Saratov region, the Orenburg region, the Chelyabinsk region, the Kurgan region, the Tyumen region and others	Additional equipment of checkpoints with modern inspection complexes will speed up commercial transit and ensure its safety
The complexity of meeting the requirements of the border service of the Russian Federation (to ensure a technological passage in the cargo compartments of vehicles)	To bring it into line in the inspection zone, the vehicle is unloaded; as a result of the delay, cargo damage has become frequent	Trucks are not fully loaded	The rise of transport costs, the increase of the price of goods

A necessary step for the development of cross-border cooperation is the availability of a modern infrastructure of checkpoints. The understanding of the existence of the problem is present at the state level, as evidenced by the negotiations held in September 2021 between the Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan R. Sklyar and the Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation M. Khusnullin, where the subject of discussion was the need to synchronize the construction of highways in order to be able to predict their carrying capacity, the volume of cargo transportation and the social and economic effect¹¹.

Kazakhstan is also taking certain actions aimed at improving the transit potential in the border area. In particular, in December 2021, K.K. Tokayev spoke about Kazakhstan's

7 Traffic jams on the Kazakh-Russian border will clear up as the weather improves (2022). Available from: www.ritmeurasia.org/news--2022-03-22--probki-na-kazahstansko-rossijskoj-granice-rassosutsja-po-mere-uluchsheniya-pogody-59121.

8 Deputy asks to sort out kilometer-long traffic jams on Kazakh-Russian border (2022). Available from: www.zakon.kz/5066962-s-kilometrovymi-zatorami-na.html.

9 Three checkpoints to be upgraded in 2023-2024 on the border between Russia and Kazakhstan (2022). Available from: tass.ru/ekonomika/12549665.

10 Russia-Kazakhstan interregional cooperation forum (2022). Available from: kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66809.

11 Roman Sklyar and Marat Khusnullin discussed issues of cooperation between Kazakhstan and Russia (2022), Available from: forbes.kz/news/2021/10/01/newsid_259989.

intention to build two cross-border cooperation centers on the border with Russia. In fairness, it should be noted that Kazakhstan plans to build two similar centers on the border with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. All this will make it possible to level transaction costs and promote the growth of transport logistics in order to increase Kazakhstan's export.

In case of the completion of the construction of the M12 highway (Moscow – Kazan – Yekaterinburg), which can go to Xian (PRC), a highway with a length of 8,500 km will be formed bypassing Kazakhstan¹².

Insufficient development of railway communication can be considered one of the problems complicating the development of cross-border cooperation between Kazakhstan and Russia. The main concentration of railway lines falls on the northern section of the border. The western section has three times less railways. The shortest distance by rail between the industrial centers of Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation is through the northwestern part of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Volga region. In the case of the border between Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation, which affects the east of Kazakhstan, approximately 70% of this region has no connection with Russia by rail. The abolition of the section "Kulunda – Malinovo Ozero – Lokot" due to low load in the early 2000s had a negative effect on the transport and logistics potential¹³. Attempts were repeatedly made (unfortunately, unsuccessful) to restore the railway line «Russkaya Polyana (Irtyskoye) – Granichnaya – Kzyl-Tu».

Assessing the transport and logistics potential at the border of the Omsk and North Kazakhstan regions, it should be noted that the total cargo flow is approximately 10 million tons per year, and transit, in turn, exceeds the specified volume. Large mining and manufacturing enterprises are located here, we are talking about OAO (OJSC) Gazpromneft-ONPZ (Omsk oil refinery), as well as large centers for the extraction of coal and crushed stone in Pavlodar, Petropavlovsk. These enterprises are cargo generating centers. Therefore, the formation of a regional transport and logistics hub «Omsk – Pavlodar» would be a completely rational form of cross-border cooperation.

In the case of the construction of new railway lines between the Pavlodar region and the Russian Federation, as well as towards China, it will be possible to seriously expand the foreign economic contacts of the region both in the north-south and east-west directions (3, p. 155).

Also, assessing the transport and logistics potential of cross-border cooperation, we should point out that its development can be a promising direction to improve bilateral relations. The plans of our countries include the intention to increase the volume of river cargo transportation between Omsk and Pavlodar to 1 million tons per year by 2025.

The issues of railway communication have recently constituted a very sensitive sphere of relations between our countries. In this regard, the presence of pronounced disagreements in the period of 2020–2021 between OAO (OJSC) "RZD" (Russian Railways)

12 Zhukov E. Road of Change: Why Russia is going to build an 8500-kilometer highway to China, bypassing Kazakhstan (2022). Available from: life.ru/p/1470555.

13 Russia-Kazakhstan: railway infrastructure lags behind integration needs (2022). Available from: www.ritmeurasia.org/news—2022-01-28—rossija-kazahstan-zh-d-infrastruktura-otstaet-ot-potrebnostej-integracii-58369.

and Kazakhstan Temir Zholy (KTZ – Kazakhstan railways) is indicative. During the period of strict quarantine restrictions, the transport giants were unable to find a common language on the supply of railcars, which affected the production process of a number of Russian border iron and steel enterprises. The issue had to be resolved at the EEC level¹⁴.

The restriction for the growth of cargo traffic is the poor technical condition of the Bukhtarma, Ust-Kamenogorsk and Shulba shipping locks. It is also necessary to carry out dredging works on the Irtysh. In the event of repair work, it will be possible to organize navigation along the entire length of the Irtysh, and if we take into account the long-term perspective, it will be possible to open a multimodal communication with China¹⁵.

Conclusion

The prospects and state of relations between Kazakhstan and Russia are also determined by how cross-border interactions are developing.

The indicators of cooperation include: trade turnover – both in the border area and in general, mutual investments, passenger and freight traffic, border infrastructure. All this must be taken into account in conjunction with the contact and barrier functions of the Kazakh-Russian border.

Based on the study, we can conclude that there is a direct connection between the policy pursued in the border area and the issues of bilateral cooperation between Kazakhstan and Russia. The problems of cross-border cooperation can be formulated as follows:

differences in implementation, untimely execution of agreements, both bilateral and multilateral, that are in force within the framework of the EAEU;

- underperformance of the local authorities of the border regions;
- barriers, exemptions and restrictions in the organization of trade, which, however, are gradually reduced;
- negative balance of Kazakhstan in trade with Russia;
- technically and morally, the border infrastructure is outdated, the number of checkpoints does not meet the needs;
- the network of cross-border transport arteries does not meet the level of needs of the main stakeholders.

Problems are gradually being solved, but the pace and scale of work are low. At the same time, it should be noted that cross-border cooperation is gradually beginning to take on a systemic character in all vectors (trade, investment, etc.).

¹⁴ Zainullin, E. Skorlygina N. Conventions are followed by Kazakhstan. Russian business complains about stopping the entry of empty cars. 2022. Available from: www.kommersant.ru/doc/4683588.

¹⁵ Mishustin said that the trade turnover between Russia and Kazakhstan has returned to the growth trajectory (2022). Available from: tass.ru/ekonomika/13248457.

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