

## BOOK REVIEW NOTES

### NEW IMPULSES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION: AN ACADEMIC VIEW<sup>1</sup>

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#### Introduction

In recent decades, the international order has been transforming into a multipolar format. Current changes in world politics require the application of new approaches and the adoption of contemporary measures by states in order to make it possible

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<sup>1</sup> Reviewed book: Sergey Marochkin & Yuri Bezborodov (eds.), *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Exploring New Horizons* (2022).

to deal with the new global challenges. International organizations are the principal players in this process. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is one of the most rapidly developing centers of the multipolar world. Therefore, the future of this organization justly attracts the attention of researchers and politicians.

The book under review is called *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Exploring New Horizons*, and it is devoted to this organization in its entirety, examining and analyzing the SCO's significance as a political, economic and security institution in Eurasia. It is presented by two renowned editors, Sergey Marochkin (Professor, JSD (Doctor of Juridical Sciences in legal theory and in public international law); Head, Centre for International and Comparative Legal Studies, University of Tyumen; Honored Jurist of the Russian Federation; and Member, European Society of International Law, Russia) and Yury Bezborodov (Professor, JSD (Doctor of Juridical Sciences), Ural State Law University and Ural Federal University, Ekaterinburg, Russia). This book constitutes a thoughtful analysis of the SCO's current state as well as its future prospects.

### **1. Methodology and Relevance of the Book**

The authors set an ambitious goal for themselves, which was to not consider this organization statically, as a given or a "monument." The team of researchers took an evolutionary approach to analyzing the current state of international legal regulation of the organization, its institutions and mechanisms of interaction. In other words, the main methodological arrangement of the study involved examining the SCO from the perspective of its development. Thus, the authors discussed the features of the emergence of this organization, assessed its current functioning and outlined potential development prospects.

After reading the book, I would say with confidence that the ambitious goal set by the authors has been achieved. The research team was successful in demonstrating that the SCO has the potential for development in the future. The authors acknowledge that there are some design flaws that have the potential to become obstacles to the development of the organization; nonetheless, they believe these challenges are surmountable. The SCO was created to strengthen stability and security on the territory of its member states, as well as combat terrorism, separatism, extremism and drug trafficking. The authors emphasize the inevitable and rather natural transition of this organization from the above-mentioned issues to the handling of problems in the social and economic spheres. In particular, areas such as transport, energy, labor migration, healthcare and education are of special interest. According to the team of researchers involved in the study, the future of the SCO depends on whether the organization will be capable of self-renewal, self-criticism and self-improvement. However, on the basis of their study of the organization's prior experiences, the results of the work done by other international organizations and

the discoveries of the professional expert community, they are convinced that the SCO can continue to develop and improve its efficiency in all areas of its activity.

A few words ought to be also mentioned concerning the evolution of the topic. The SCO attracts the attention of researchers in various fields of knowledge. The main role in the process of studying this organization is played by representatives of political science. However, the book under review differs from purely political research by the fact that representatives of various branches of knowledge and scientific directions took part in its preparation.

Additionally, in some studies, the problems of the SCO were examined through the prism of its member states' individual relationships. This book successfully overcomes this research limitation since the majority of the chapters of the study were written by representatives of different member states of the SCO. Such an approach allows the reader's attention not to be focused solely on the bilateral relations of individual states but covers the entire range of interstate communications in a particular area within the organization.

Furthermore, a sufficient number of works are devoted to the external influence and interaction of the SCO with other international organizations such as NATO, BRICS, CSTO and the European Union. The book under consideration, however, was created using a different approach. The authors set an objective not to compare the SCO with other similar organizations but instead to analyze the evolution of its development and trace a special path in the formation of its institutions and mechanisms.

At present, there is much discussion about the prospects for the SCO's evolution. Researchers draw attention to the fact that this organization was created primarily for law-enforcement purposes. However, during the course of its existence, the social and economic potential of this organization became more apparent. Some scientists believe that the SCO should remain a political and law-enforcement alliance, while other researchers defend the view that the organization is capable of achieving greater results. This monograph lies right in line with this discussion and provides the author's noteworthy view of the problem voiced. Thus, the present study differs from previously published works on this issue and makes a significant contribution to the development of ideas concerning the SCO.

## **2. Structure and Content of the Book**

The structure of the book is well elaborated and shows a clear methodology. The book is organized into three parts: in the first part, the authors outline the basis for the formation of the SCO; in the second part, they consider the existing areas of cooperation within the organization and in the third part, they model the prospects for its development. The book uses well-defined terminology. Footnotes and bibliographic references are designed accurately and professionally.

Almost every chapter of the book is structured according to a general scheme. Each chapter has an introduction and conclusion, in which the authors state the specific goal of the chapter and evaluate its achievement accordingly. When a chapter is devoted to a certain area of cooperation, it is necessary to single out the following fragments in it: the legal basis for the functioning of a particular area of cooperation, the national legislation of the member states of the organization in this sphere, institutional mechanisms within the organization and possible scenarios for the future development of these areas.

In Part I of the book, contributing authors *Olga Porshneva, Mirzokhid Rakhimov and Sergey Razinkov* discuss the historical and legal foundations for the formation and institutional development of the organization. *Marat Sarsembayev and Yuri Bezborodov*, the editors of the book, analyze the international legal background and aspects of intercommunication among the SCO member states. They arrive at the conclusion that the interaction among the SCO states is based on respect, diversity of cultures, civilizations and religions, as well as the desire for joint development and equal relations. Furthermore, while discussing the issue of the SCO's security cooperation, *Ekaterina Mikhaylenko, Aigerim Ospanova and Maria Lagutina* emphasize that the organization follows the non-interference policy and establishes a global terrorism governance regime. They are convinced that the SCO format is attractive to potential members because the organization is not a true military institution but constitutes a platform for discussions as well. *Aslan Abashidze and Ksenia Lyabakh* note the SCO's achievements in countering extremism, but they also point out that the existing formats of relations within its framework cannot yet fully guarantee an adequate counteraction to the growing challenges and threats posed by extremist groups.

In Part II, *Oleg Vinnichenko, Elena Gladun and Zhumabek Busurmanov* analyze the convergence of Western and Asian legal values from the SCO's perspective. They come to the conclusion that the Western concept of human rights shall be supplemented within the SCO in accordance with different historic and legal values, traditions and ideas about human rights. *Olga Bogatyreva and Aida Orozobekova* discuss the current situation as well as the development features of the humanitarian cooperation within the organization. They suppose that the key objective of such cooperation is intercultural dialogue and the building of trust between people belonging to different civilizational paradigms. *Larisa Zaitseva and Kubanychbek Ramankulov* suggest opportunities for convergence of member states' labor legislation. They argue that the most realistic approach in this sphere is the implementation of the most important International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions and the coordination of countries' positions on priority areas for ratifying certain agreements. *Tatyana Luzina and Amangeldy Khamzin* stress the urgent need for the development, harmonization and unification of the SCO regulatory framework on labor migration and *Zhanat Kulzhabayeva and Assem Oinarova* address international legal forms of interaction between the SCO and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

In Part III, the authors explore the prospects for the development of the organization in specific areas and indicate the legal grounds, obstacles, opportunities and legal means suitable for this purpose. Consequently, in the chapters that follow, *Olga Arkhipova and Andrey Chukreyev* pay special attention to economic interaction, *Meng Qihong and Gong Nan* analyze cooperation in the field of energy; *Zhanna Iskakova and Amanulla Mukhamedjanov* discuss the SCO's cooperation in the transport sphere and logistic assistance to the states of the Central Asia region; *Qin Tianbao and Alexander Solntsev* discover challenges of environmental protection within the SCO territory and finally, *Kartikeya Dwivedi and Amika Bawa* examine the basis for a strategic partnership of the SCO with India.

It is interesting to note that the introduction and conclusion of this book have also been replaced by two chapters. The first of these is devoted to the development of the Eurasian space through regional cooperation. In this chapter, the authors outline the methodology and present an overview of the contents of all the chapters. The sixteenth chapter, devoted to considerations about the effectiveness of the SCO effectively summarizes the study. Thus, the book is well structured, sustained in a single style and on the basis of a single methodology. The mentioned approach to the composition of the text makes this book a valuable resource for researchers as the results obtained do not resemble a descriptive narrative but represent a modern and rather successful scientific research.

### 3. Book Advantages

Speaking about the advantages of the book, first of all, I would like to emphasize the team of authors themselves. Studies in international law and international relations tend to have a "national" character. Often, a particular author's viewpoint on the world community and the relationships that exist within it may be inspired not by objectively viewing a developing situation but by other factors. These factors include the scientific traditions existing in the author's state of residence, as well as the author's historical, cultural and social background. In such circumstances, one's view of the problem may turn out to be one-sided or even tendentious. The research team that worked on this book was successfully able to overcome this problem. Scientists from Russia, Kazakhstan, China, India and Kyrgyzstan participated in the composition of the book. The majority of the book's chapters were written jointly in collaboration with authors from various countries, which makes the conclusions presented in the book objective. Moreover, many authors represent the member states of the SCO, so their conclusions are not third-party observations but constitute an inside look at the organization.

In carrying out research with a large team of scientists, there is always the risk of getting a fragmented result, when it feels like particular parts of the book were written by different people. The research group for this book was successfully able

to cope with this issue. The book uses unified approaches to the layout of chapters, the presentation of the material and the argumentation of the theses stated by the authors. This approach makes the text a single whole.

In addition, I would like to positively note the complex nature of this book. Sometimes, such an assessment of a book as having a 'complex character' is perceived negatively in the scientific community since behind this definition there may be emptiness, unresolved individual problems and failure to achieve the objectives set by the team of authors. However, this is not the case for the research in question. The complex nature of the book is determined, firstly, by the fact that the SCO has been studied from the moment of its inception to the present, with the authors elucidating possible prospects for the development of this organization. Secondly, the complex nature ensures that the authors consider individual areas of cooperation between states under the auspices of the organization. The combination of these two ideas yields a unique result – the reader gets a comprehensive picture of how the organization functions, the historical reasons for its formation and the prospects for the further development of this cooperation.

Another positive feature of this study is that it is not limited to one area of knowledge. Researchers from the various fields of study, including law, history, political science and international relations, were involved in the work on the book. This approach made it possible to analyze the SCO in an interdisciplinary manner.

## **Conclusion**

The publication under review can serve as a "handbook" for legal scientists and other professionals associated with the SCO. It will be helpful for researchers in various fields of knowledge and can be utilized, on the one hand, as a starting point for scientific developments and, on the other hand, as a tool for demonstrating new interdisciplinary approaches to assessing the activities of different international organizations.

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