



Detailed Text of Interview of

His Excellency Vladimir Norov,
Secretary-General of Shanghai Cooperation Organization



Conducted by
Center for Global & Strategic Studies, (CGSS), Islamabad
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Overview

On 20th July 2020, Center for Global & Strategic Studies (CGSS), Islamabad conducted an Exclusive Live Interview of His Excellency Vladimir Norov, Secretary-General SCO. The interview was conducted by Lt Col Khalid Taimur Akram (Retd), Executive Director, CGSS. The detailed interview is as below:

QUESTION 1

1. Vladimir Imamovich, you assumed the post of Secretary-General of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on January 1, 2019. What has been done since then, and how do you assess the role of SCO member states today?

ANSWER

The main task of the SCO Secretary-General is to coordinate and implement the decisions taken by the main SCO bodies - the Council of Heads of State, the Council of Heads of Government, the Council of Foreign Ministers, and other mechanisms of the Organization.

Since assuming office in January 2019, I, along with my colleagues, have been taking steps for the implementation of the SCO's basic documents and the important agreements concluded by the Heads of State of the member countries.

Also, in 2019, in close coordination with the Kyrgyz side, the SCO Summit was held, which put forward new challenges and offered clear algorithms of action to all working mechanisms and permanent SCO bodies.

The SCO has facilitated the expansion of anti-terrorist exercises involving law enforcement and the armed forces of Member States.

I note the active participation of the Pakistani side in the SCO exercises and activities aimed at maintaining stability in the Organization's area of responsibility.

Our cooperation in the fight against drug trafficking has also grown significantly.

It has become global and diversified, as well as became possible to establish close ties with the relevant UN structures and with other international organizations, for example, ASEAN and the OSCE and the Paris Pact Initiative.

Moreover, we look forward to continue to deepen our cooperation with our Pakistani counterparts.

Regarding trade and economic cooperation, I would like to say that in October 2019 a meeting of the Council of Heads of Government of the SCO Member States was held in Tashkent, under the chair of the Uzbek side, **to further expand** economic cooperation and improve the investment climate based on mutual benefit and equality and to ensure stable sustainable development in the SCO region.

The meeting resulted in the approval of an updated Program of Multilateral Trade and Economic Cooperation.

Under this program, the SCO Member States will develop and start implementing short-term promising programs and projects using modern innovative and green technologies until 2025.

For medium-term, it was planned to transform national economies by developing rules on trade and investment within the SCO, promoting the service and e-commerce industry including simplifying trade procedures.

Whereas, for the long term, the goal is to increase competitiveness and ensure the digital transformation of the national economies of the SCO countries by introducing digital technologies and creating favorable conditions for the gradual implementation of the free movement of goods, capital, services, and technologies until 2035.

Also, the Heads of Government of the SCO countries, during the meeting in Tashkent considering global and regional processes, supported the Initiative of the Secretariat to establish a Consortium of Think tanks on economic issues, which would have to serve as a platform for studying and comprehensive analysis of factors influencing economic interaction within the SCO.

The SCO Cities Environmental Welfare Program was also approved and a memorandum was signed between the customs services of SCO Member States on the mutual integration of national transit systems.

In general, in the last year and a half of this year, the work has been directed effectively on the development of practical areas of cooperation, especially in trade, economic, transport & logistics, infrastructure, scientific & technological, innovation and information & communication spheres, including the development of small and medium-sized businesses.

Today, all SCO countries are facing the pandemic that has become a major challenge for the entire world community.

But at the same time, the efficient, rapid transfer to the online mode of a large part of state and business life, educational services have showed how powerful technological, human resources of the IT sector has increased during the epidemic.

Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of Internet platforms, which has not only accelerated the full digitalization of the service sector but also created many jobs with new business formats, has become a new incentive to stabilize growing employment.

The pandemic has made it clear that digitalization and ICT are essential to the continued functioning of the economy and society.

At the SCO summit in Bishkek in June 2019, the SCO leaders approved the SCO Member States' Concept for Digitalization and Information and Communication Technologies to jointly develop the region's digital economies through the exchange of experience, human capital development, and joint economic and research projects.

Many of the challenges faced by the SCO countries in the digital economy and e-commerce are also in the ASEAN region.

At the same time, consideration should be given to the creation of common digital trading platforms in the SCO and ASEAN space.

The countries of the SCO and ASEAN regions are in many ways in similar stages of digitization of their economies, which opens opportunities for cooperation, growth, and prosperity.

In this regard, the SCO Secretariat has prepared the CONCEPT of holding the SCO-ASEAN Conference to jointly discuss the challenges and prospects for scientific and technological cooperation in the digital economy and e-commerce between the two largest regional organizations.

Most SCO Member States supported the initiative.

The most common problems that some SCO countries and the Central Asian States in particular, face in the development of e-commerce are: the lack of logistics infrastructure, trained human capital, as well as shortcomings in the field of legal regulation, cross-border financial transactions and customs clearance.

In this regard, we are working with specialized large companies in e-commerce.

For instance, we are actively working with Alibaba Group, holding joint events with the participation of young entrepreneurs and talented persons from SCO countries, in which representatives from Pakistan are also very active.

I believe that we have also managed to give new content to cooperation in the cultural and humanitarian sphere, which is designed through a cultural and civilizational prism to acquaint the peoples of our countries with history, cultural heritage, and educational trends.

The Secretariat initiated a comprehensive project called "Eight Wonders of the SCO" aimed at unlocking the cultural and tourism potential of the SCO countries.

On a high emotional note, there was a celebration of Nowruz, "Day of Yoga and Tai chi", Exhibitions of paintings, and international marathons of the SCO.

The Secretariat also places importance on media cooperation, gender issues, and youth policy.

In 2019, the Media Forum, the SCO Women's Forum, was held, in which representatives of Pakistan also took an active part.

A few words about our international connections.

During this period, I have held more than 100 meetings with presidents, prime ministers, foreign ministers, and heads of international organizations, including the UN, OSCE, ASEAN,

CIS, CSTO, heads of diplomatic missions of the ASEAN, the European Union and the League of Arab States in Beijing and others.

It also reflects the SCO's growing authority in the international arena and the world's attention to the Organization's regional and global activities.

Speaking about the role of the SCO Member States, I would like to emphasize that our common denominator is the principle of consensus, which makes all our countries equal in making important decisions, and this demonstrates, in turn, the openness, the democratic essence of the Organization and the importance of multilateral diplomacy.

QUESTION

2. The SCO has the capacity and ability to address emerging security challenges by engaging its members in dialogue in the region and beyond. How do you think the SCO can unite member states on a single platform to discuss current common security challenges, in particular, unconventional security threats?

ANSWER

You have very accurately noted the broad potential of the SCO.

It is particularly important to note, however, that the Organization is not a military and political bloc against third states.

On the contrary, the emergence of such a union as the SCO in 2001 marked a transition to a qualitatively new type of international and interstate relations based on non-confrontational, more democratic, and fairer "**rules of the game**".

The most comprehensive and distinct principles of SCO activity are expressed in the concept of the "Shanghai spirit", the main content of which is mutual trust and benefit, equality, mutual consultation, respect for the diversity of cultures and civilizations, the desire for joint development - that is, all those elements that should underlie the emerging polycentric world order.

The decision to create the SCO came at a time when the world was facing security challenges.

That is why, under the SCO Charter, the main objectives of the Organization included joint counter-terrorism, separatism and extremism, combating drug and arms trafficking, and other transnational criminal activities.

The improvement of multilateral cooperation in these areas has been accompanied by the systematic development of the relevant regulatory framework.

To date, the SCO has adopted almost 700 documents covering regional security issues.

Undoubtedly, our countries continue to work together to consider the emergence of new risks, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thus, during the upcoming SCO summit in St.Petersburg, which is scheduled for next fall, it is planned to approve a package of documents aimed at developing agreed approaches and practical measures to counter modern challenges and threats.

One of the sources of the terrorist threat to the SCO space remains the territory of neighboring Afghanistan.

I would like to emphasize the non-alternative resolution of the conflict in Afghanistan through political and diplomatic means through the implementation of the peace process by the Afghans and under the leadership of the Afghans themselves.

We consider it important to involve Afghanistan in the process of cooperation between the SCO and CIS member States in the field of transport.

At the same time, the **Hairaton — Mazar-I-Sharif** railway and the planned **Mazar- I-Sharif — Herat and Mazar-I-Sharif-Peshawar** routes will form a new North-South transit corridor with access to the Iranian, Pakistani and Indian Railways to the ports of Chabahar and Gwadar.

This can become another factor in stabilizing the political situation and economic development of this country in full accordance with the provisions of the Road map of the SCO - Afghanistan Contact group adopted at the SCO Summit in Bishkek in 2019.

We intend to continue to work with our Afghan partners through the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group.

We plan to hold its next meeting this year at the first opportunity.

At the same time, the focus of the mechanism will be on the implementation of a joint roadmap aimed at strengthening coordination with official in Kabul in the field of counter-terrorism activities and combating drug trafficking.

In this regard, it is impossible not to note the effective work of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of the SCO, with the coordinating role of which over the last year, uncovered **288 terrorist crimes**, suppressed the activities of **78 clandestine terrorist cells**, blocked **24 channels** of terrorist financing, restricted access to more than **23,000 internet resources** containing terrorist and extremist material.

It is also worth highlighting the sustainable cooperation of the SCO Member States on the Anti-Drug track.

As a result of the two-fold joint Anti-Drug operation "**Web**" in just one week, more than **10 tons of narcotic** drugs and psychotropic substances were seized.

In this regard, we must closely monitor and address new challenges, particularly in terms of the use of new information and communication technologies, including the internet, to detect the drug businesses.

I am referring to the dangers of using it to promote and distribute drugs.

In the context of coronavirus, we must also take proactive and preventive measures to prevent the transit of drugs through new routes and distribution channels.

In general, I believe that the SCO has demonstrated to the world an effective mechanism of cooperation, in which there is no place for closed "exclusive" clubs and dividing lines, and multilateralism and cooperation are seen as the only way to protect themselves from global threats and ensure stable development and well-being for all.

It is no coincidence that we use the term "SCO family", which applies not only to member states but also to our observers and dialogue partners.

Thanks to its openness and attractive agenda, the Organization has united most of the territory and population of Eurasia, consistently forming a united consolidated front to combat cross-border challenges and threats.

And this important merit of the SCO has been repeatedly noted at the highest international level, including by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

QUESTION 3

3. The SCO faces the serious task of expanding its composition in the context of the current two divergent trends, globalization, and regionalization. What strategy do you think the SCO should adopt to strike a balance between the trends of globalization and regionalization in today's world for expansion?

ANSWER

The Declaration on the creation of the SCO, adopted on July 15, 2001, in Shanghai, **states** that the SCO is ready by consensus to accept as new members of the state, who share the goals and objectives of cooperation within the organization.

With the accession of India and Pakistan, the SCO became transcontinental, and in terms of total potential - the total population, territory, reserves of natural resources, the GDP produced, became the largest organization not only in the region but also in the world.

According to preliminary estimates, the total GDP of the SCO member countries over the past year amounted to 22.5 % of the global figure (18.4 trillion us dollars).

This figure is expected to reach 35-40% of the world's runway by 2030.

The SCO has real opportunities to become one of the world's economic centers in the near future.

Changes in the international sphere are constantly and non-stop.

But the next decades are likely to be a special period - the foundations of a new world order must be determined by their end.

How will global governance work?

A fierce battle has already begun over these issues.

It is clear that the epicenter of the ongoing struggle is and will be the Eurasian continent.

The SCO member States form the core of the Eurasian continent, and their relations and interaction will determine the further vector of development of this vast territory for years to come.

By and large, the SCO experience can be considered the first experience in the history of building a truly equal partnership of diverse, multi-scale States with different economic and political potential, cultural and civilizational features.

Our task is to balance the development of the Organization as much as possible, to effectively realize the cumulative potential.

The current stage of the SCO's development is characterized by the expansion of the SCO agenda.

Heads of State regularly discuss not only the regional but also the global level of problems, and the SCO documents increasingly reflect the themes of countering global challenges and threats that require the development of collective and effective approaches of the world community.

The SCO acts as a reliable platform for fruitful cooperation in the interests of forming a polycentric world order that ensures the rule of international law, especially the UN Charter, equal, joint, indivisible, comprehensive and sustainable security, the implementation of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, respect for the peoples' independent choice of their political and socio-economic development, and ensuring the interests of each and every state.

At the summit in Bishkek by our leaders it was confirmed once more that the SCO, as an influential and responsible participant in the modern system of international relations, will increase its participation in efforts to ensure peace and security, consistently advocating the settlement of international and regional conflicts exclusively by peaceful political and diplomatic means, based on the principles of equality and respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal Affairs of States, rejecting the use of force or threat of its application.

In the same context, the initiative to start consultations of the EU, EAEU, SCO and ASEAN countries on the formation of new approaches to network cooperation of regional organizations that would take into account the interests of all States in the region, based on the principles of equality and **would avoid counterproductive competition between different integration initiatives in the Eurasian space is also relevant.**

At the same time, the member States confirmed their firm support for the efforts of the UN as a universal multilateral organization in maintaining international peace and security, promoting global development, and promoting and protecting human rights.

They are in favor of strengthening the key role of the UN Security Council, which, in accordance with the UN Charter, has the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security.

Despite the various discussions in the world, I believe that globalization is the main trend of peace, and global cooperation is the universal aspiration of humankind, including the peoples of the SCO countries.

QUESTION 4

4. In the twenty-first century, regional organizations are expanding their scope and becoming more multifunctional. What new potential areas do you think should be included in the SCO's scope for future work?

ANSWER

The SCO strives to go in the same **rhythm** with new trends in the world.

Determining the strategy, prospects, and priorities for the development of multidisciplinary cooperation is the prerogative of the Council of Heads of SCO union.

At each the SCO summit, decisions are made to determine new forward-looking directions for the Organization.

The SCO space is a huge opportunity for trade and economic cooperation and the implementation of joint projects.

Work is currently underway to agree on a draft action plan for the implementation of the SCO Development Strategy until 2025, which already reflects more than **150 practical measures** in the areas of regional security, deepening trade and economic dialogue, cultural and humanitarian ties and the development of international contacts of the SCO.

To expand the mutual volume of mutual trade it is necessary to intensify cooperation in the field of transport.

At the same time, joint efforts should be focused on developing the infrastructure of multi-modal logistics centers, speeding up the process of harmonization of transport standards and phytosanitary regulations.

As I said in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, the possibilities of digitalization and information and communication technologies demonstrate their high efficiency and demand.

Information and communication technologies have great potential not only in the economy and trade but also in providing the population with accessible and high-quality health services.

Telemedicine overcomes geographical barriers and significantly increases the access of the population to health services.

The SCO's cooperation in this area will open access to relevant information and exchange of experience for SCO medical professionals in the field of medicine.

Distance learning should also be one of the promising areas of cooperation within the SCO.

The coronavirus pandemic has shown effectiveness of the traditional medicine in treating patients.

In this regard, it is very important to establish multilateral cooperation in the field of traditional medicine within the SCO **because each of the member countries has rich historical experience in this field of medicine.**

The online learning format provides a wide range of opportunities and perspectives for changing and improving educational systems for which a critical situation creates a forced environment.

Currently in the conditions of widespread use of the Internet by most countries of the world in the social and economic life, a cyberattacks on the Internet resources of individuals and legal entities has increased significantly.

According to the forecasts of the Davos World economic forum in 2021, the damage from cyberattacks will amount to **6 trillion US dollars.**

In this regard, we need to encourage more active cooperation in the fight against cybercrime by strengthening the legal framework and mechanisms for coordinating the common efforts of the Organization's member countries.

QUESTION 5

5: Looking at the economic prospects of the SCO member states and China's One Belt, One Road initiative, we see that the Organization is an important platform for the more effective implementation of this initiative. The SCO is a regional organization with a large population and great market potential. How do you imagine a new era when the SCO is actively involved in the "One Belt, One Road" initiative for win-win cooperation in the region and beyond?"

ANSWER

The SCO countries cannot stay away from the large-scale economic initiative unfolding in the region.

Accordingly, many member states have taken steps to align their national development strategies with the belt and road concept and are in favour of harnessing the potential of the region's countries and for the formation of a broad, open, mutually beneficial, and equitable partnership in the SCO space.

The main routes of the **Silk Road Economic Belt** lead from China through Central Asia, Russia to Europe, as well as from China through Central and West Asia to the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea.

Besides, cooperation to pair the **GOP** initiative with national economic development strategies offers a broad perspective for Central Asian countries to meet the strategic objective of direct access to seaports and to transform the region into the largest crossroads of transcontinental highways from East to West and From North to South.

That is why the SCO Development Strategy until 2025 prioritizes the implementation of projects that enhance transport and communication capabilities, develop, and modernize infrastructure, establish international multi-modal logistics centers and form a network of industrial clusters along transport arteries.

Ensuring the long-term sustainable development of countries and regions along the Belt and Road objectively necessitates increased transport and communication interconnectivity and interconnected infrastructures, which is particularly important in overcoming the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

QUESTION 6

6. The COVID-19 pandemic has hit the world and has become a major global challenge. How can international cooperation help contain the epidemic and what can the SCO play in this context?

ANSWER

The outbreak of new coronavirus pneumonia has shown how interconnected the world is.

This virus is by no means the last global test the world will face.

All countries must recognize this and make efforts to cooperate on the principles of mutual trust, joint development, and the strengthening of the common good.

In the current situation, along with the objective difficulties of combating the pandemic in each country, the most important task is to overcome the global and regional political confrontation, as well as to abandon nationalist and populist ideas and protectionism.

Multilateralism and cooperation are the only way to protect ourselves from global threats and to ensure safe and sustainable development for all.

It is important to enhance the status and competence of international mechanisms under the auspices of the UN so that humanity can unite in the face of future challenges.

We attach great importance to the cooperation of SCO Member States in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic, which has not yet been fully defeated in either the national or global framework.

The pandemic was a serious test of the viability and strength of the SCO.

The Member States shared not only epidemiological and organizational experiences but also provided financial, economic, food, and humanitarian assistance to each other.

Our countries understand that no State can provide for their security if the spread of the disease continues in neighbouring countries.

In the current difficult situation, coordination of actions, exchange of information and mutual assistance, considering international experience is urgently needed.

On May 13, the Foreign Ministers of the SCO Member States by Russian initiative held videoconference and had detailed conversation.

The hold a common view that the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic requires a strong, concerted, and inclusive multilateral effort, with the central role of the UN system.

The SCO advocates effective engagement with WHO, other international organizations and associations in the fight against coronavirus infection.

Meetings of Health Ministers and Heads of Services responsible for the health and epidemiological well-being of countries will be held in the near future.

The SCO intends to fully implement the existing mechanisms, actively continue consultations on the topic on the fight against coronavirus, and jointly take decisive measures to maintain security and stability, as well as restore economic activity.

QUESTION 7

7. The SCO has become one of the strongest regional organizations, but there are still some problems, and if they are corrected, it will further strengthen the POSITION of the SCO. What are these problems and how are they addressed by SCO member states?

ANSWER

Of course, the SCO is on its own, in which it must solve a variety of problems related to multidisciplinary cooperation.

I often say to myself: there is cooperation - there are problems, no cooperation - no problems.

I have already mentioned some of them during our interview.

The main thing in multilateral diplomacy is to harmonize the interests of all participants in the process and find a compromise.

The main security challenge for the Organization is the continued fight against international terrorism and extremism, and the illicit trafficking of drugs and weapons, ensuring regional peace, and promoting the work of the UN and other sought-after international organizations.

The existing but current economic problems of the Organization are the development of road transport and logistics infrastructure, the reduction of trade, customs and other obstacles to the free movement of goods and capital, the creation of banking structures for the implementation of project activities, the development of the digital economy, food security, and all this is to improve the well-being of our peoples.

In the humanitarian sphere, it is the expansion of the common information space, strengthening of inter-civilizational dialogue, mutual enrichment of cultures, and the improvement of health and education.

In summary, I would like to emphasize that the SCO's international credibility has improved significantly in recent years, cementing its status as a leading multilateral structure in the region and the world.