

# What kind of opportunities does the SCO present to Central Asia?

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Originally published by CGTN, 12<sup>th</sup> October 2018

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Chinese Premier Li Keqiang arrived on Thursday in the Tajik capital city of Dushanbe for an official visit and to attend the 17th meeting of the Council of Heads of Government of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

The SCO is one of the major international organizations. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that, in aggregate, the number of people this organization represents is almost half of the world's population, about three billion people living in its member countries.

In the modern world, in conditions where the local is closely intertwined with the global, an important role is assigned to international organizations. Most importantly is how capable large international organizations are in meeting challenges and solving urgent problems on the agenda. It is necessary to meet the expectations of the world community; special attention is drawn to the SCO. Will the members of the organization be able to build an economic model that would help other countries not to compete, but to cooperate in various issues?

During this year's SCO summit in Qingdao, more focus is being put into economic cooperation between its members.

Analysis of the long-term cooperation of the SCO member countries shows that the economic block of the Organization's activities remains the most debatable in terms of assessing the level of effectiveness of participation in the SCO integration initiatives.

On the one hand, of course, there is the positive aspect of consolidating the efforts of the SCO member countries in the fight against terrorism, poverty, in the development of social, cultural exchange, educational mobility, etc. On the other hand, the economic opportunities caused by varying degrees of involvement in the international division of labor in the global world order, as well as mental, cultural, and religious characteristics of representatives of the participating countries, are equally heterogeneous and unequal.

This shows the weakness of the SCO resource to reducing external economic risks, the low efficiency of collective response mechanisms to potential challenges and threats in the economic sphere. According to current assessments in expert circles, the Organization has no real mechanisms for overcoming crises, and its capabilities in this area are far from perfect.

And most likely, the task of the SCO is to create the conditions and legal bases for effective economic cooperation.

What kind of opportunities does the SCO present to Central Asian countries? And how has the SCO facilitated these countries' economic development over the years?

The creation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) will be helpful in improving cross-border transport infrastructure, reducing trade barriers and increasing trade, increasing the speed and quality of economic operations, as well as attracting investment.

The countries of Central Asia, which are landlocked, have received favorable conditions for road transport. This, in turn, allowed these countries to organize the supply of their goods to the world market, to find new trading partners and growth points, and to adopt new technologies. That is, in general, the entrepreneurs of the SCO member countries were able to scale their business, to reach the level of global players.

The opening of the transport route will strengthen the basis of economic cooperation between the SCO member countries, allowing the launching of free economic zones (FEZ), and implementing large-scale infrastructure projects.

We note, according to estimates, that the BRI is able to create an impetus for the development of sectors such as energy, transport, agriculture, telecommunications, and other industries.

After every year's SCO summit, different meetings, including meetings of the Council of the Heads of government, of Trade Ministers and of Tourism Ministers, will be held to honor the decisions reached over the Summit. In reality, are those meetings effective, and what does it say about the SCO mechanism?

At the same time, many experts note (I share this point of view) that it is obvious that the process of economic cooperation and efficiency depends on the readiness of political elites in the SCO member countries to create supranational formats of the SCO's mechanisms. The SCO opens up broad opportunities for the practical application of new methods and forms of economic cooperation.

The key economic priorities of member countries are related to trade, energy cooperation, the creation of a favorable investment climate, and the regional division of labor.

However, given the huge imbalance in the economic development of the SCO countries, it can be presumed that participating countries will get a different effect from the integration.