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Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Gateway to Economic and Regional Connectivity

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Globalization has emerged in recent decades as the main trend in international relations and continues to deepen the interlinking of relations between countries and regions of the world. Regionalization, the steady process of building qualitatively new forms of interaction between the states comprising the world's macro-regions, has emerged as another fundamental trend in the development of global order. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is one of the most outstanding examples of this new hybrid model of interstate economic and regional partnership.

The dynamics of geopolitical world order is shifting in a way that for the first time in centuries the theatre of international politics is no longer west centered but instead the power dynamics have shifted towards the Asian continent, and in this regard the presence of SCO acts as a catalyst for representational and coordinated activities. This has transformed the uni-polar world into multi-polar, indicating the shift in world politics from military might towards economic prosperity. In this context, Eurasia holds significance due to its strategic position, natural resources and economic potential.

Connectivity has always remained the basis of economic stability. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has given impetus to a diverse range of activities, including inter-regional trade by enhancing better relations between the regional and extra-regional players. SCO serves as a good specimen of regional hub and joint economic development. SCO's primary objectives are based on encouraging cooperation between the member states to ensure stability in the region, aiming at strengthening military and economic assistance, and promoting mutual trust and collaboration in diplomacy, trade and social sectors.

SCO facilitates economic and security developments to bridge the regional gaps and promote integration among the regional states. The multilateral feature of SCO is very constructive in creating international and regional standards regarding issues which cannot be dealt with the bilateral mechanism alone. Russia and China, being two big economic powers, makes

this organization more prominent. In pursuing the common objectives of the organization, all the member states are putting in productive efforts. Russia is contributing towards the energy centered developments and collective security complex while China is focusing on the connectivity and trade linkages to enhance economic developments in the region. Furthermore, SCO ensured progressive participation of states, aiming at building a stable regional model and creating a regional architecture of security and cooperation that would meet the interests of all states.

The SCO member states comprise the core of the Eurasian continent, thus their mutual relations and interactions will define the nature of the further development of this vast territory for years to come. Given the format of communication established within the SCO, its joint experience, and existing agreements, the Organisation is the largest (in both territory and population) and therefore a key Eurasian platform for international cooperation. Furthermore, SCO seeks to strengthen political trust and mutual support among the member states. It is directed to formulate a community getting equal treatment at diplomatic, economic and social level. It has put forward the 'Convention on Combating Extremism' in order to tackle the regional security challenges. This implies the consolidation of regional counter terrorism establishments and a joint effort to eradicate evils of terrorism, separatism and extremism.

SCO former Secretary General Rashid Alimov has stated that the role of SCO is to help create a political environment which will work to resolve disputes

between member states in a friendly and constructive manner. Regional prosperity being the foremost concern of SCO, recognizes that peace in Afghanistan is imperative to the stability of the region as it is one of the main transit country between Central and South Asia. In this regard, China and other member states are supporting the Belt and Road construction to actively advancing regional cooperation initiatives.

Thus, the Greater Eurasian Partnership calls primarily for building a macro-regional system of stable political and economic cooperation, and for cultural and civilisational interaction based on the deepening of ties between different parts of the Eurasian continent. At the same time, it apparently does not insist on the signing of some sort of single collective agreement. Rather the partnership should be based on building a system of cooperation between states and partner regional organisations and associations, a search for areas of shared interests, and the development of substantive areas of mutually beneficial joint undertakings. Moreover, the inclusion of India and Pakistan as members of SCO has been largely beneficial for the organization in forging regional integration and prosperity.

SCO has also signed various prominent MOUs with both regional and international organizations in order to achieve its desired interests which include MOU with United Nations to prevent regional crimes such as human trafficking, organized drug smuggling and other organized transnational crimes, with ASEAN over more prominently regional issues such as money laundering terrorism and arms trafficking in the region, with Collective

Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) over regional stability and security, and most prominently an MOU was signed with ECO to increase trade, infrastructural development and to provide economic assistance to one another. SCO also aims at strengthening culture ties by introducing new visa opportunities and road transport licensing. This will enhance inter border trade and promote tourism.

Convincingly, in today's world where different states are striving for development through mutual interest, we see regionalism popping up as a major phenomenon. It is significant as it directs an organized regional cooperation that ensures the solutions for regional economic and security issues. The formation, extension and sustenance of SCO is one of the best examples of a coordinated regional infrastructure that determines the alignment of interests of its member states. If SCO keeps on working effectively, it can significantly influence the expansion of bilateral and multilateral relations in the region and even beyond.