

## Russia and Kazakhstan: Transformation of Borders and Perspectives of Cross-Border Interactions

DOI: 10.31551/2410-2725-2018-4-4-486-498

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**Abstract.** The paper is devoted to the issues of the transformation of borders and cross-border cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan. Methodologically, the article is based on the "New economic geography" approaches and the theory of borders by O Martinez with the accents made on the institutional factors of the cross-border cooperation. The problems raised in the paper are considered in the context of basic trends in the evolution of borders of the states belonging to the former Soviet zone of influence that occurred in Europe and Eurasia after collapse of the USSR. The vectors of evolution of borders of the Central and Eastern Europe countries and Commonwealth of Independent States are analyzed. Particular attention is delivered to the state of interregional cooperation of Russia and Kazakhstan. According to the authors' view, the current state of interregional cooperation is not satisfactory to stimulate the process of regional development and integration and cannot substitute the advantages of cross-border cooperation of the «euroregions» type. So far, the authors conclude that no cross-border regions exist in Russia – Kazakhstan border area meaning that there are no genuine integrated regions. They agree that comparative advantages of the cross-border localization and available resources in a poor institutional environment can turn into barriers for regional development and, therefore, transform into «institutional traps».

**Keywords:** Russia; Kazakhstan; CIS; EU; regional development; borders; cross-border cooperation; institutions.

## Ресей және Қазақстан: шекаралардың трансформациясы және трансшекаралық өзараөрекеттіктің болашағы

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**Аңдатпа.** Мақала Ресей және Қазақстан трансшекаралық ынтымақтастығы және шекараларды трансформациялау мәселелеріне арналған. Мақала әдіснамалық қатынаста П.Кругманның «Жаңа экономикалық география» және О. Мартинестің шекаралар теориясының концептеріне негізделеді. Трансшекаралық ынтымақтастықтың институционалды факторларын талдауға ерекше назар аударылған. Жұмыста қарастырылған мәселелер бұрын кеңестік әсер ету зонасына енген, КСРО ыдырағаннан кейін Еуропа және Еуразиядағы мемлекеттер шекараларының эволюциясының негізгі тенденциялары контекстінде талданады. Ресей және Қазақстанның шекаралық ынтымақтастығы мәселелеріне басты назар аударылады. Авторлардың пікірінше, трансшекаралық ынтымақтастықтың қазіргі кезеңдегі жағдайы аймақтық даму және интеграция үрдістерін ынталандырмайды және «еуроаймақтар» типі бойынша трансшекаралық ынтымақтастықтың механизмдерінің эквиваленті ретінде қызмет ете алмайды. Қазіргі уақытта Ресейде және Қазақстанда шоғырланған трансшекаралық аймақтар жоқ.

Авторлар трансшекаралық локализацияның салыстырмалы артықшылықтары және нашар институционалды ортада қол жетімді ресурстар аймақтық даму үшін кедергіге айналады, осылайша «институционалды торға» трансформацияланады деген пікірмен келіседі.

**Түйінді сөздер:** Ресей; Қазақстан; ТМД; ЕО, аймақтық даму; шекаралар; трансшекаралық ыңтымақтастық; институттар.

## **Россия и Казахстан:**

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**Абстракт.** Статья посвящена проблемам трансформации границ и трансграничного сотрудничества России и Казахстана. В методологическом отношении статья базируется на концептах «Новой экономической географии» П. Кругмана и теории границ О. Мартинеса. Акценты расставлены на анализе институциональных факторов трансграничного сотрудничества. Поднятые в работе проблемы анализируются в контексте основных тенденций эволюции границ государств, ранее входивших в советскую зону влияния, в Европе и Евразии после распада СССР. Особое влияние уделено вопросам приграничного сотрудничества России и Казахстана. По мнению авторов, современное состояние трансграничного сотрудничества не стимулирует процессы регионального развития и интеграции и не может служить эквивалентом механизмов трансграничного сотрудничества по типу «еврорегионов». К настоящему времени, в России и Казахстане практически не существует интегрированных трансграничных регионов. Авторы соглашаются с мнением о том, что сравнительные преимущества трансграничной локализации и доступных ресурсов в плохой институциональной среде превращаются в барьеры для регионального развития, тем самым трансформируясь в «институциональные ловушки».

**Ключевые слова:** Россия; Казахстан; СНГ; ЕС; региональное развитие; границы; трансграничное сотрудничество; институты.

**UDC/УДК** 9:327 (470+571)(575.2)(04)

## **Russia and Kazakhstan: Transformation of Borders and Perspectives of Cross-Border Interactions**

*N.N. Ablazhey, E.G. Vodichev*

**1. Problem Statement.** The question of interactions of border areas of neighboring countries is of a great importance for the prospects of their economic and socio-cultural development. This is especially significant for such states as Russia and Kazakhstan. The Russian-Kazakhstan border area is unique. One of the main features that determine its special character is geography. The Russian-Kazakhstan border is the longest in the world – more than 7 thousand km. 12 Russian regions and 7 of the 14 regions of Kazakhstan are adjacent to it. Another factor, also very important for understanding the processes of cross-border interactions, is historical one. Over the centuries, the territories of modern Russia and Kazakhstan have developed within the framework of one state – first the Russian Empire, and then the

Soviet Union. This determined not only the proximity of cultural archetypes, but also the complementarity of the economic profiles of the border areas. Finally, the ethno-demographic factor should also be taken into consideration. 30 million people live in the border areas of both countries. These territories are characterized by a mixed ethnic composition of the population and the wide use of the Russian language as a means of interethnic communication. Given these arguments, the Russian-Kazakhstan border is potentially a key regulator of the Eurasian flows (Vardomsky&Golunov, 2002).

Obviously, the two countries have a lot in common, and in many respects they depend on each other. It is also obvious that such dependence manifests itself in the specifics of development of the adjacent regions. However, based on the length of the borders and features of the border areas, the logical question is whether the determined vector of the evolution of borders of Russia and Kazakhstan is optimal from the point of view of development prospects of the border areas of neighboring countries, and how effectively is the potential of cross-border nature of the border areas used? In the main part of this paper, the authors will attempt to present their point of view on the issue posed, taking into account the assessment of experience gained so far in the cross-border interactions.

**2. Research methodology and theoretical analysis.** The issue of the border functionality and cross-border interactions is interdisciplinary in nature. Accordingly, when analyzing it, interdisciplinary methods and approaches have the greatest heuristic capabilities. As a theoretical basis for analyzing the processes occurring in transboundary territories and spaces, the authors consider it appropriate to highlight three methodological tools. First, these are the concepts of the «new economic geography» by P. Krugman. With extreme simplification, his theory of spatial development of the economy operates with a combination of factors of the «first nature» (that is, the natural parameters and advantages of localization of certain territories and actors of economic activity) and the «second nature» (that is, the institutional factors). As the author rightly notes, if there is no balance between them, then comparative advantages of localization («first nature» factors) in a poor institutional environment («second nature» factors) can turn into barriers for regional development and, therefore, transform into «institutional traps» (See Krugman, 1991).

Secondly, when analyzing the processes occurring in the adjacent territories of the two (or more) countries, which are considered in the framework of the transboundary paradigm, very interesting results can be achieved by using the concepts of the «new institutional economy» developed by another Nobel Laureate E. Ostrom. In the opinion of this researcher, institutions are rarely just private or public, «market» or «state». Many successful common resource institutions are variegated mixtures of «private-like» and «state-like» institutions, denying the classification of sterile dichotomy. No market can long exist without basic public institutions to maintain it. In practice, public and private institutions do not exist in the isolated worlds, but are often mixed and depend on each other (Ostrom, 1990). Understanding the need to ensure a balance between various institutional mechanisms and approaches to managing «common» entities (resources, potential, risks, etc.) allows assessing the limitations of certain formats of border and cross-border interactions that in Russian practice are usually associated with an exaggerated role of the state.

Finally, the classification scheme of borders and cross-border areas, now widely used in geography, political science, etc. and going back to the development of O. Martinez (Martinez, 1990: 1-5), in our opinion, is seen as an adequate theoretical basis for determining the vector of evolution of borders and transboundary

interactions. It includes such areas as alienated border regions (there are no border links); coexisting border regions (with just some economic and cultural relations), interdependent border regions (they carry out extensive interaction in the economic, social and cultural spheres); integrated border regions (a high degree of integration, and free movement of people, goods, financial flows and ideas are ensured).

In accordance with this approach, the alienated border areas are the subject to strict centralized control, which is often associated with complicated interstate relations of neighboring countries. Obviously, the barrier functions of the state border dominate, with which any cross-border contacts are extremely difficult.

Within the framework of the coexisting border areas, some revival of cross-border contacts takes place. However, they are sporadic and exclude the possibility of developing mutually agreed strategies for interaction between territories adjacent to the state border. The barrier function of the border still dominates, which is expressed in strict border controls, visa and customs regimes, and other difficulties and restrictions for any cross-border operations.

Interdependent territories are characterized by a high intensity of cross-border contacts, which relies on appropriate institutional mechanisms and practices. It is obvious that there is a mutual desire to develop various forms of transboundary interactions, the scale of which reaches a level that transforms the border area into a potential transboundary region. According to O. Martinez, the desire to create ample opportunities for stable social and cultural cross-border processes along the state border is to be seen as the expression of the interdependence of such territories (Martinez, 1990: 5). The border itself is opened and institutional prerequisites are being created for its transformation into a zone of stable cross-border contacts.

Finally, integrated border areas, as a rule, rely on the agreed development strategies, which transform them into a single cross-border region (Martinez, 1990: 1-5). Barrier functions of the border are finally giving way to contact ones, and the border becomes, rather, a bridge than a dividing line between individual states. Institutional mechanisms and practices make cross-border interactions as easy as possible. Visa and customs restrictions are practically absent.

It is important to note that regular cross-border contacts, which are part of everyday life, contribute to the development of a special cross-border identity among people in cross-border areas. According to the established opinion, «a general pattern is the direct dependence of border contact on: 1) the level of development of partner countries, 2) their cultural affinity, 3) the similarity of national economic and legal systems, 4) mutual proximity and neighborhood. ...A high degree of border contact contributes to the formation of large market spaces, and national areas that are similar in economic parameters contribute to the growth of state border contact and reduce their barriers» (Vardomsky, 2006).

To what extent this model «works» in the modern conditions of the border areas of Russia and Kazakhstan, and to what extent the established practices correlate with current trends in the development of institutional mechanisms of cross-border interactions that have developed in the contemporary world, is shown in the main part of the paper.

**3. Modern integration processes and development of cross-border interactions in Europe and on the borders of Russia and Kazakhstan.** The end of the 20th century was characterized by a significant strengthening of the integration and disintegration processes on the west and east of the Eurasian continent. However, these processes had a multidirectional vector. The collapse of the USSR and the Soviet zone of influence in Europe led to a systemic and qualitatively new round of integration trends in the countries of Central and Eastern

Europe (CEE), which were previously «under the umbrella» of the Soviet Union. The main development trends of the CEE countries in the 1990s – the first decade of the 2000s were determined by the prospects of integration, and then their actual integration with the European Union (EU) and the extension of political institutions and the legal system of the EU to these countries. Even before the formal accession to the EU, in the CEE countries there was a rapid erosion of borders both among themselves and with the states of the European Union. As integration processes deepened, the borders lost their barrier function, having de facto transformed into administrative boundaries.

This process took place at an accelerated pace also because the trends towards the formation of a strong regional policy intensified in the EU itself at that time. The concept of «Europe of the Regions» gained wide popularity, the prerequisite for the spread of which was a single internal market and an integrated economic space within the Union. The CEE countries entered not only into the economic space of the EU, but also divided the new doctrine of interregional cooperation, which implies the implementation of joint programs and projects by local authorities and socio-economic and socio-cultural actors, regardless of their nationality. The model of three regions, which changed the previous model of center-peripheral relations (Niebuhr, 2004) became the theoretical conceptualization of this concept. According to this model, «a common cross-border region emerges on the border of the EU countries, along with two national regions on both sides of the border, which is characterized by common cross-border demand and, accordingly, a common market. As a result, the peripheral regions of the countries cease to be backward, as they become attractive for skilled labor and other factors of production, as well as for investment» (Stepanov, 2008: 67).

There was a sharp increase in the importance of cross-border institutions (primarily the EU INTERREG and CBC programs), and, accordingly, the possibilities for cross-border interactions among the CEE countries both before and after their entry into the EU increased. After joining the EU, the barrier functions of the borders between the EU member states have practically disappeared. This was naturally accompanied by a wide development of cross-border cooperation, which transformed border areas into an integrated transboundary space with a significant number of cross-border regions developing on the basis of agreed strategies and programs.

While in Western Europe borders virtually disappeared and trans-regional integration processes accelerated under the influence of the European integration policy, the border barrier functions intensified on the Russian borders. The Schengen visa regime was extended to Russia and other post-Soviet countries, and customs regimes and administrative regulations changed. If the quantity of integrated cross-border areas quickly increased in the west, on the east of Europe integration developed at a much slower pace and more contradictory. Under the terms of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between the EU and Russia (signed in 1994, but enforced only on December 1, 1997), certain efforts were made to develop trans-regional interactions between Russia and the CEE countries both before and after their accession to the European Union. However, they faced doctrinal restrictions and a different legal regime. In addition to political factors, weak institutions as well as the poor state of the border infrastructure affected the integration efforts. This is clearly seen, for example, when comparing the depth of cross-border interactions on the western and eastern borders of Poland on the eve of the country accession to the European Union (Strykiewicz, 1998: 206).

Unlike the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, full-fledged state borders began to form in the spaces of the former USSR between its former republics – now independent states. As a result, the barrier functions of the borders increased. At this stage, this process was quite natural and was defined by self-determination in the new independent states, the formation of their own identity. In general, the processes that took place on the new interstate borders of the post-Soviet space were in many respects opposite to those that were characteristic of the CEE countries. The desire to suspend disintegration processes and compensate them with new intergovernmental institutions in the 1990s – early 2000s led to the formation of such entities as the CIS, the Union State of Russia and Belarus, the Customs Union, and then the Eurasian Economic Community (EAEU).

No less important was the fact that after the collapse of the USSR, the Central Asian countries of the CIS, including Kazakhstan, became objects of the keen interest from China, seeking to implement its own integration initiatives. The PRC began considering the states of Central Asia as its «strategic rear», a «resource belt» and a sales market for the Chinese economy. At the same time, in the last 15–20 years, as the economy of China was growing, this approach was supplemented with new accents that arose due to the relative exhaustion of opportunities for extensive development within the country and the associated excess of production capacities and higher labor costs. The stake on investment activity outside the country, first of all in the regions of Central Asia, was embodied in the strategy «One belt – one way», which directly impacted Kazakhstan. In the autumn of 2013 in Astana, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced the initiative of the Silk Road Economic Belt, which specified the economic and infrastructural aspects of the PRC integration strategies in Central Asia (Vorobiev, 2017). At the same time, it is important to point out that this strategy as referred to Kazakhstan is largely implemented through the Xinjiang-Uygur Autonomous Region, which is close in ethnic and socio-cultural aspects, becoming the «gateway» of China to the west.

Without going into details, we would note that according to the available economic data, the systemic activity of Kazakhstan's eastern neighbor in building such integration strategies has already led to significant practical results that will undoubtedly have and have already had geopolitical consequences. Kazakhstan, like other post-Soviet states of Central Asia, is increasingly being drawn into the orbit of China's foreign economic strategies based on providing multibillion-dollar investments in the economies of the partner countries. Accordingly, on the Kazakhstani direction (and on the Central Asian direction as a whole), the Russian Federation is increasingly confronted with a growing «integration challenge» from China, whose vector is competitive for Russia, and does not always find good arguments to withstand such a competition.

Due to the enormous length of the borders, the relations of Russia and Kazakhstan naturally acquired a fundamentally important character not only for the two states, but also for the whole Eurasian space. The Russian-Kazakhstan border, even becoming a state one, retained its contact functions. However, transformation of the borders after the independence was reached gained additional communication problems for the economy and the population of the border areas. They were complemented by an abundance of logistic and infrastructural difficulties that had a disincentive effect for the development of border trade and the entire set of economic and socio-cultural relations. In fact, after the restoration of the barrier functions of the border, the governments of the two countries had to take active steps to strengthen its contact functions.

Particularly, in the development of relations of Russia and Kazakhstan a lot of expectations were connected with the development of cross-border cooperation (Ivanov, 2015). The border regions with maximum gravity remaining from the Soviet epoch became the initiators of cross-border integration (in Russia, these were Omsk oblast, Altai Krai, Kurgan, Saratov, Samara, and Chelyabinsk oblasts; in Kazakhstan – Pavlodar, Aktobe, East Kazakhstan, West Kazakhstan, North Kazakhstan and Kostanai regions. In early 1993, the Russian government supported the idea of the Omsk Governor L.K. Polezhayev on the Russian-Kazakhstan meeting on the issues of border relations. The first basic document governing the interaction of neighboring regions, the Agreement on cooperation of border regions of Russia and Kazakhstan, was concluded on January 26, 1995 in Omsk (Garant, 1995). The main purpose of the Agreement declared the promotion of cooperation between border regions, including such tasks as:

- elimination of obstacles to the movement of goods and services produced within the border areas;
- improvement of legislation;
- encouragement of mutual investments and creation of joint ventures;
- simplification of border and other control procedures with respect to residents of border regions;
- ensuring favorable conditions for the functioning of a cross-border transport;
- environmental protection, prevention and liquidation of emergency situations;
- cooperation in the humanitarian field;
- regulation of migration processes;
- coordination of law enforcement interaction.

Later, such agreements were signed on a regular basis.

New impetus to the development of cross-border cooperation was given by the forums of the border areas of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Kazakhstan with participation of the heads of the state, designed to promote deeper integration. The first such forum was held on April 15, 2003 in Omsk. Noting the important role of cross-border relations as a component of bilateral cooperation, including in the context of creating a single economic space, the presidents of the two countries instructed governments to take additional measures to stimulate cross-border interaction, the level of which «did not fully meet» the interests of the economic development of Russia and Kazakhstan. In the future, with a certain periodicity, such forums were held in Russia and Kazakhstan in Chelyabinsk, Uralsk, Novosibirsk, Aktobe, Orenburg, Ust-Kamenogorsk, Astana and other cities.

It should be noted that already at the 4th Forum, which took place on October 3–5, 2007 in Novosibirsk, the Russian-Kazakhstan border cooperation was unexpectedly criticized. The Kazakhstan side assessed the progress achieved as «very modest». The President of the Republic of Kazakhstan N.A. Nazarbayev stressed that so far cross-border cooperation was not a priority for economic cooperation of the two countries, and it is granted more interests in Kazakhstan than in Russia. He noted that after the signing of the border treaty, emphasis was placed on the protection of the borders, which objectively strengthened the barrier function of the borders, impacting the economic cooperation of border regions, and the tightening of the border regime blocks economic cooperation of the border regions: modernization of road infrastructure, development of special areas of cross-border trade, and cross-border electric power industry. It was noted that the existing road infrastructure (highways and checkpoints) on the Russian-Kazakhstan border is not enough to meet the needs for cross-border transportation from the border regions,

and to transport transit cargo, which is extremely negative for all border cooperation (Reshetnikova, 2007: 18).

As for special zones of border trade, such zones exist on both the Russian-Chinese and Kazakhstan-Chinese borders. Creating them meets the conditions of the World Trade Organization (WTO) on cross-border trade. However, on the Russian-Kazakhstan border, such zones have not effectively developed. The created five special zones actually do not operate due to the absence of a joint control agreement, and Kazakhstan continued to form them unilaterally. According to the Kazakhstan party, the construction of a network of special zones should be considered a serious basis for the development of cross-border cooperation.

In the future, the cross-border cooperation forums became more and more substantive and aimed at solving actual problems of international and interregional cooperation. So, in particular, the 13th forum of 2016 in Astana was largely devoted to the possibilities of transport and logistics potential in the Eurasian space. A proposal was made to create cross-border agglomerations within the EAEU. Kazakhstan presented the first such project – the concept of the Kurgan-Petropavlovsk agglomeration. The Russian partners voiced a proposal to create a global Omsk-Kazakhstan agglomeration that is seen as extremely ambitious and hardly feasible. According to the leaders of this region, Omsk could claim the status of the third capital of the Russian Federation if it becomes a real window to Asia by creating a border agglomeration aimed at expanding cooperation with the northern regions of Kazakhstan, including Astana (Economy gov., 2018).

The development of human capital became the subject of the 14th Forum in Chelyabinsk in 2017. During the Forum, a meeting of rectors of universities of the two countries was held with more of 80 universities involved. As a result of the event, a decision was made to approve the program of interregional and cross-border cooperation between the governments of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2018–2023. The document provides for the solution of general issues of interregional and cross-border cooperation, as well as the definition and implementation of joint activities and projects in its various directions (Association of Siberian and Far Eastern Cities, 2016).

Thus, today there is a significant contractual and regulatory framework for the interstate and interregional cross-border interaction. On the part of Russia, the Chelyabinsk, Orenburg, Tyumen, Novosibirsk and Omsk oblasts, as well as the Altai Krai, are most actively developing trade and economic relations with the border regions of Kazakhstan. Cross-border cooperation has become positioned as an important factor of economic integration and a tool for the formation of a common economic space. The leadership of both countries has repeatedly stressed that it is in the border regions, the socio-economic, political and socio-cultural issues that exist in the relations between the two states crystallize, and the border cooperation itself becomes a way of working out their solutions.

However, in recent years, the volume of cross-border cooperation has been constantly decreasing. Cross-border cooperation remains resource-based in type, and this approach is only intensifying. Hydrocarbons occupy half of the total export of the cooperation – the Tyumen oblast and Aterau provide such export-import operations. There is a feeling that something did not go the way it was originally envisaged. The depth of integration on adjacent territories is low. If we return to the O. Martinez's classification, they clearly did not reach the stage of integrated territories. It can be concluded that, in contrast to the transboundary spaces, cross-border regions in eastern Russia are practically absent (Vodichev et al., 2016).

Undoubtedly, international and interregional treaties and agreements, cross-border cooperation forums, the formation of the Customs, and then the Eurasian Economic Union strengthen and expand the regulatory framework of integration processes between Russia and Kazakhstan, including in the border areas. The EAEU has declared a high level of integration, within which there must be a common internal market that ensures the freedom of movement of goods, services, capital and labor resources. However, it should be recognized that in many respects this cooperation remains «verbal». There is an opinion that the EAEU has become a political reaction to the evolution of the European Union and the issues that have arisen in the EU in recent years, and under the conditions of sanctions it risks becoming a stronghold of mutual distrust and protectionism (Koktysh, 2016). The experts of Bloomberg believe that the economic benefit of its creation is highly questionable for all participants (Bloomberg, 2014). No less important is another aspect of the problem. It is worth mentioning that now one of the goals of the EAEU for Russia is to form a unified position of its member states on the strategy of economic cooperation with China. At the same time, «Beijing is currently shaking this «united front» quite successfully, relying on bilateral cooperation with the states of Central Asia» (Vorobiev, 2017).

These cannot but affect the development of relations in the post-Soviet transboundary spaces. It is obvious that the current policy of Russia in the field of cross-border interactions is very controversial. It fancifully combines Russia's desire to expand its economic and political influence when trying to limit dependence on neighboring territories. As follows from official declarations, its main vector is the formation of a common economic space with uniform norms of economic activity. This is hardly possible without coordination of the basic institutions, the development of which should occur as a result of close cooperation, not only intergovernmental, but above all, interregional and local. According to many experts, the main place in it is to be occupied by harmonized or unified business institutions (Vardomsky, 2006).

The underdevelopment of institutions for cross-border interaction is now the most important, and possibly the major obstacle that limits cross-border cooperation and the formation of cross-border regions along the border between Russia and Kazakhstan. In this regard, it is extremely important to thoroughly comprehend the institutional practices and lessons of the EU, for example, the activities of the «euroregions» to assess the possibility of their use in the regions of Eurasia (Vodichev, 2011).

No less important are the tasks of the infrastructure development of the Russian-Kazakhstan trans-border area, which still remains a «bottleneck» of both interregional interactions and the socio-economic development of these territories. According to the authoritative opinion, which is difficult to disagree, «increasing attention to projects aimed at intensifying transport communication in border areas and developing local road and other infrastructure will have a stimulating effect on the socio-economic development of border areas of Russia and Kazakhstan» (Tamozhennyi Soyuz, 2012: 11).

At the same time, when assessing the prospects for the development of cross-border interactions in the Russian-Kazakhstan border area, certain limitations of a doctrinal character should be taken into account, the significance of which is enhanced in the current political vector. Now in Russia, accents are placed on the factors of the integrity of the state (albeit it is a federation from a formal point of view) as the key principle of ensuring national security, identity, political power and economic well-being. At the same time, «in all countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the development of new forms of cross-border relations and new identity in

cross-border territories has become a significant factor weakening the centralist tendencies that are the legacy of the former communist regimes» (Strykiewicz, 1998: 211). It seems that strengthening the emphasis on the flexibility of the regions and their right to a decisive vote in determining the strategy of regional development hardly fits the current logic of political processes in Russia. The dichotomy of the «center-periphery» in the country is now clearly being decided in favor of the Center.

The economic asymmetry that exists, with some exceptions, in the border areas of the Asian part of Russia and its nearest neighbors is also a significant obstacle for the development of a cross-border areas. As for the sociocultural aspects, and, in particular, the identity factor, there are no significant signs of cross-border identity in the border regions on the east of Russia, and its formation is clearly not encouraged. The Eurasian narrative, which nowadays is much talked about in Russia and Kazakhstan, can hardly be considered as a sociocultural imperative that unites transboundary territories and significantly influences economic and political processes. Finally, one should not overlook the question of mentality. Administrations of Russian regions and municipalities in the border areas, which are still operating in a very foggy legislative and regulatory space, when the rules of the game are not always clear and transparent, and, moreover, are constantly changing, usually do not promote or support breakthrough initiatives in the field of cross-border interactions if they are associated with economic risks. This fully applies both to Russia and Kazakhstan.

**4. Conclusion.** Returning to the methodological setting of the problem, we would note that there are several risk factors that are manifested in the current practices of cross-border interaction between Russia and Kazakhstan. Among them, such issues should be mentioned as selfishness in relation to the «governing the commons». This leads to the administration of part of the resource potential on the basis of traditional schemes, which creates risks for the emergence of economic and environmental contradictions and conflicts. The use of water resources is indicative in this respect (Vinokurov, 2014). No less significant are the overestimation of the state regulation and the underestimation of other instruments, characteristic to both Russia and Kazakhstan. And finally, the «barrier thinking» should also be noted, i.e. the lack of understanding of the transboundary factor as a link between the countries, as well as its potential for regional development. On the whole, based on the scheme of O. Martinez, it can be concluded that the border areas of the Asiatic Russia and neighboring countries, including Kazakhstan, at best reached the stage of interdependent territories, mostly staying at the stage of coexisting territories, but not integrated cross-border regions.

It can be assumed that cooperation programs of border regions will develop, and the number of joint projects in the border areas of Russia and Kazakhstan will gradually increase. It is quite possible that they will be designed in the form of programs for the development of cross-border regions. But due to the nature of their formation and functioning, in contrast to «euroregions», such programs can at best lead to the formation of a kind of «eurasia-regions», for which the factors of political initiative and control «from above» will be of fundamental importance. In any case, up to the present, cross-border cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan has always developed according to the scenarios proposed by the states. And in any case, the issue of the effectiveness of institutions of cross-border interaction will remain as the key one.

When assessing the prospects of such programs, it is important to understand the fact that, as international experience shows, most of the programs initiated by the authorities, if they are not supported by economic actors and civil society

structures, have no chance of practical implementation and remain on paper (Strykiewicz 1998: 209). In the development of the Russian-Kazakhstan borderland much will depend on whether the evolution of the border areas into truly cross-border regions will occur, and interregional cooperation will evolve into networked and extensive cross-border integration. Only under this condition the factor of transboundary cooperation can become an essential driver of regional development for both countries. And for future concrete projects, the key task is to determine their basic vector: do they contribute to the development of cross-border areas according to the optimal scenario, or, on the contrary, preserve the historically established asymmetry and can lead to an increase of tension at the contact points in the future, as it has already happened in the Eurasian space?

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