

**Editor's note:** RASHID ALIMOV, secretary-general of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), gave a keynote speech at the Belt and Road Forum organized by the China Academy of Culture on Nov 3 in

Hong Kong. Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor, chief executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, and top representatives and envoys from SCO countries also spoke at the event.

# SCO builds on pillars of cooperation

Dialogue of cultures and civilizations developed within this framework is facilitating better understanding between nations

By RASHID ALIMOV

The contemporary world is currently undergoing a fundamental change. Against this backdrop, the complexity of processes in global politics is becoming increasingly clear. The existing concepts and perspectives regarding international cooperation are becoming history, and are being replaced by new ones aimed at ensuring overarching cooperation as a way to achieve development and prosperity.

As for the Eurasian space, today there is no doubt that it has already become a space for large-scale processes that design new systems of interstate cooperation. What speaks in favor of this?

First, almost all countries in the vast region are actively involved in projects ranging from the classic forms of integration to the formatting of joint multilateral mechanisms to address specific tasks.

Second, the trend of centripetal motion in Eurasia is becoming increasingly obvious and, as a result, it creates a need for structuring, combining capacities and efforts to ensure synergy and long-term sustainable inclusive development. This, in fact, is the common interest of all states in the region.

There is an ongoing intensive search for the optimal mechanisms for the formation of a Greater Eurasian Partnership.

Emerging as the core elements of this process are: Negotiations between the Eurasian Economic Union and China, and between the Eurasian Economic Union and countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN); progress in implementing the Belt and Road Initiative (the China-led drive to revive the ancient Silk Road trade routes); as well as the development of multifaceted cooperation within the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's (SCO) eight full members.

The Eurasian space could constitute a partnership of regional states united by the common ideas of joint development. However, its fundamental underpinnings can only be built by multilateral efforts in the sphere of politics and security, as well as trade, economic and cultural interaction between countries and people in the region.

Such spheres are exactly the pillars of cooperation within the SCO.

In the contemporary world, sustainable development is impossible without providing security. Active



**Rashid Alimov**, secretary-general of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, which focuses on strengthening security and promoting cooperation across the Eurasian region. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY ASIA WEEKLY

measures are constantly required to contend with traditional challenges as well as combat new threats posed by international terrorism, extremism, international organized crime and illicit drug trafficking.

In this regard, on June 9, during the SCO summit in Astana, capital of the Republic of Kazakhstan, leaders of the SCO member states formulated consolidated assessments of international security in the context of developments in the region and the world and defined important areas to further strengthen the versatile cooperation within the SCO.

Joint efforts against all kinds of terrorism and extremism, an uncompromising struggle against illicit drugs and weapons trafficking and other types of transnational crime, as well as illegal migration, have always been and remain the SCO's key priorities.

An important item on the summit's agenda was accepting India and Pakistan as full SCO members. After the accession of these two respected and authoritative states, the SCO has unified nearly 44 percent of the world population and expanded the organization's zone

of responsibility — from the Arctic in the north to the Indian Ocean in the south and from Lianyungang, in China's Jiangsu province, in the east to Kaliningrad in Russia in the west.

All the member states of the SCO are as one in striving to promote cooperation based on clear and open principles of partner relations.

Since its early days, the SCO has followed a policy that rules out bloc-based, ideological and confrontational approaches to solving current international and regional problems.

The SCO strictly abides by the principles enshrined in its charter, including the principle of not being directed against other states and international associations.

The SCO prioritizes active development of contacts and cooperation with international and regional organizations, primarily with the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

Trade and economic cooperation is becoming an increasingly important part of the collaborative effort within the SCO. One reason for this is the ongoing new large-scale economic processes in the region,

in which the SCO countries are actively involved.

These include regional economic integration within the Eurasian Economic Union, the implementation of the Belt and Road strategy, and prospects for creating a Greater Eurasian Partnership together with the ASEAN economies.

What is the most important thing in this regard? The vision of Eurasia as a single and integrated system of mutual ties, stretching from the Pacific to the Atlantic, underpins new powerful economic initiatives that are currently being implemented in the region.

More countries are joining these projects, discovering new growth opportunities by coordinating and aligning national economic development strategies.

Finding new models for coordinating and aligning these initiatives with national economic development programs is an objective of unprecedented scale and complexity, while also being attractive and offering opportunities to all of Eurasia and Asia Pacific.

Delivering on this objective would also create unparalleled opportunities for businesses, in terms of trade and investment promotion, as well as for carrying out major transcontinental projects.

In terms of geography, the SCO is at the very center of these large-scale economic initiatives, and the system of regular meetings of the heads of the SCO member states' governments and economic ministries and agencies allows the organization to work on a wide range of issues on the regional economic agenda.

Today, the SCO countries are focused on infrastructure, transportation and communications projects and are searching for new forms and methods of regional economic cooperation. This promotes the gradual increase in the SCO member states' mutual accumulation of investments, which exceeded \$40 billion in 2016.

One of the most important transcontinental projects of the SCO is the creation of a common system of roads through Eurasia based on the SCO Member States Agreement on Facilitation of International Road Transport. This document became effective on Jan 20, 2017.

The agreement has provided the legal framework of parity conditions for road carriers and a uniform basis for international road transportation between Eastern Europe and the eastern shores of Russia and China.

A major feature is the agreement's openness to nonmembers, which has immediately attracted the attention of SCO neighbors in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Asia Pacific.

Further work will also require the simplification of formalities and procedures in such issues as the issuance of visas, border and customs arrangements, transport, phytosanitary and veterinary control.

As the agreement is open for joining of nonmember states, there are good prospects for the development of practical cooperation with ASEAN countries.

Humanitarian cooperation is the foundation for strengthening mutual trust, friendship and neighborly relations between nations.

A sustainable dialogue of cultures and civilizations, which has developed within the SCO framework, is facilitating mutual cognition, enrichment and, ultimately, better understanding between nations. This is the foremost civilizational mission of the SCO.

To achieve these ends in the Eurasian space, the SCO gradually develops cultural and humanitarian ties, launches educational projects and seminars, and develops tourist programs.

At the SCO headquarters in Beijing, cultural events and scientific symposiums are held on a regular basis.

Over the past 16 years, the SCO has become one of the world's largest systems of regional interaction that is focused on guaranteeing political stability, strengthening security and promoting trade and economic cooperation in the interests of mutual development and prosperity of the SCO nations and the whole vast Eurasian region.

The upcoming meeting of the heads of governments of SCO member states will take place in Sochi, Russia, at the beginning of December.

Prime ministers will discuss key issues of trade, economic and humanitarian cooperation within the association. Taking into consideration the participation of eight member states' prime ministers, the meeting will be an important step for the development of economic cooperation on the entire Eurasian space, and will define the new contours of regional economic architecture.

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