

THE STATE OF THE ROAD SECTOR AND ITS PROBLEMS IN THE COUNTRIES OF THE CENTRAL ASIAN REGION DURING THE FIRST YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE

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Abstract: *This article analyzes the reforms in the road sector observed in the early years of independence in the Central Asian republics and their results, investment projects, and infrastructure issues.*

Keywords: *Central Asia, lack of investment, deterioration of infrastructure, geographical problems.*

In the first years of independence, the road and transport sectors in the countries of Central Asia faced serious problems. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the newly independent states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan inherited the transport infrastructure, primarily intended for the needs of the Soviet economy. This infrastructure was often insufficient for new economic realities and geopolitical contexts. Information will be provided on the main problems faced by the countries of the region [1]. They consist of the following.

Firstly - the deterioration of infrastructure, which was in poor condition due to the fact that many roads and transport facilities were not repaired. The focus on heavy industry transport during the Soviet era meant that road networks were often insufficient for the needs of the local population and developing markets.

Secondly, due to the lack of investment, with the transition to independence, economic instability arose in these countries, and state budgets were reduced, which led to a decrease in the volume of investments in the maintenance and development of roads. International support was limited, and funding often gave preference to other sectors [2].

Thirdly, due to geographical problems, the diverse geography of Central Asia, characterized by mountains, deserts, and remote areas, has made it difficult to develop a unified transport network. This led to significant logistical problems and hindered economic integration.

Fourthly, the emergence of national borders due to political fragmentation disrupted the established transport routes that previously facilitated movement within the territory of the Soviet Union. New customs regulations and border control have complicated trade and transportation.

Sixthly, as a result of the economic transition, the demand for efficient transport networks has increased as a result of these countries' transition from a planned economy to market-oriented systems. However, the change led to a discrepancy between the requirements of the existing infrastructure and the developing economy [3].

As a solution to the above cases, a number of problems are noted. These are:

The issue of regional cooperation, in response to which the countries of Central Asia began to study regional cooperation initiatives aimed at improving transport connectivity. Organizations such as the Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation Organization (CAREC) sought to meet common infrastructure needs.

As a result of international assistance and investments, various international organizations, including the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, began investing in infrastructure projects, with the main focus on road restoration and the development of transport corridors.

Modernization efforts Some countries have initiated modernization programs aimed at updating their road networks. For example, Kazakhstan has begun implementing ambitious projects to improve its roads, connect major cities, and expand trade routes [4].

Attention to Connectivity Recognizing the strategic importance of transport networks, Central Asian countries have begun to focus on strengthening ties with neighboring regions, particularly China and Russia, to promote trade and economic development.

In general, in the first years of independence, the state of the road and transport network in Central Asia was characterized by serious problems due to the degradation of infrastructure, political changes, and economic transitions. At the same time, the period laid the groundwork for further reforms and improvements based on both regional cooperation and international support, aimed at creating a more integrated and efficient transport network in the region.

The state of the road sector in Central Asia from 1991 to 2022 underwent significant changes shaped by historical, political, and economic factors. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 was a turning point that led to the emergence of independent states such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. This transition created both opportunities and challenges for the region's road infrastructure [5].

During the Soviet period, Central Asia mainly used a relatively well-developed road network designed to meet the needs of industry and agriculture. However, with the achievement of independence and the emergence of new national priorities, attention changed. Many countries have struggled with outdated infrastructure legacy, lack of investment, and political instability. The fragmentation of centralized planning has led to fragmented approaches to the management and development of road networks.

From 1991 to the early 2000s, the region faced many problems. Economic instability and limited financial resources hindered the maintenance and expansion of road infrastructure. The lack of effective transport networks has become a serious obstacle to trade, economic development, and regional integration. In addition, geographical factors such as the mountainous landscape in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan complicated road construction and repair work.

International assistance began to play a decisive role in solving these problems. Organizations such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and various bilateral assistance agencies provided financial and technical assistance to improve road infrastructure. The reconstruction of existing roads and the implementation of major projects that will facilitate new highways, in particular, trade routes, such as the CAREC corridors, have begun.

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