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THE CONCEPT OF INTEGRATION AND ITS THEORETICAL APPROACHES

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Abstract. This article analyzes the essence, formation, and developmental stages of the concept of integration, along with its theoretical interpretations in modern scientific thought. The study examines the interconnected economic, political, social, cultural, and institutional aspects of the integration process. The article reveals the role of integration processes in deepening cooperation between states and international institutions, coordinating common interests, and forming a common space. The findings of the study demonstrate the multifaceted and complex nature of the concept of integration, allowing it to be assessed not just as an economic or political process, but as an essential form of multi-level cooperation between states and societies.

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqolada integratsiya tushunchasining mazmun-mohiyati, shakllanishi va rivojlanish bosqichlari hamda uning zamonaviy ilmiy tafakkurdagi nazariy talqinlari tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotda integratsiya jarayonining iqtisodiy, siyosiy, ijtimoiy, madaniy va institutsional jihatlari o'zaro bog'liqlikda ko'rib chiqilgan. Maqolada integratsiya jarayonlarining davlatlar va xalqaro institutlar o'rtasidagi hamkorlikni chuqurlashtirish, umumiy manfaatlarni muvofiqlashtirish hamda yagona makon shakllanishidagi o'rni ochib beriladi. Tadqiqot natijalari integratsiya tushunchasining ko'p qirrali va kompleks xarakterga ega ekanligini ko'rsatib, uni faqat iqtisodiy yoki siyosiy jarayon sifatida emas, balki davlatlar va jamiyatlar o'rtasidagi ko'p darajali hamkorlikning muhim shakli sifatida baholash imkonini beradi.

Kalit so'zlar: integratsiya, integratsiya nazariyasi, xalqaro integratsiya, funksionalizm, neofunksionalizm, federalizm, intergovernmentalizm, institutsionalizm, konstruktivizm, xalqaro hamkorlik, mintaqaviy integratsiya.

Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются содержание и сущность понятия интеграции, этапы его формирования и развития, а также основные теоретические интерпретации интеграционных процессов в современной научной мысли. В исследовании экономические, политические, социальные,



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культурные и институциональные аспекты интеграции анализируются во взаимосвязи. Раскрывается роль интеграционных процессов в углублении сотрудничества между государствами и международными институтами, согласовании общих интересов и формировании единого экономического, политического и социально-культурного пространства. Результаты исследования показывают, что интеграция представляет собой многомерный и комплексный процесс, который целесообразно рассматривать не только как экономическое или политическое сближение, но и как многоуровневую форму взаимодействия государств и обществ.

Ключевые слова: интеграция, теория интеграции, международная интеграция, функционализм, неофункционализм, федерализм, межправительственный подход, институционализм, конструктивизм, международное сотрудничество, региональная интеграция.

The concept of "integration" is a key category in modern theories of International Relations and Regional Integration. In academic literature, it is interpreted as the process of deepening mutual cooperation between states and regions in the political, socio-economic, and cultural spheres, as well as their unification into a single system. The term was first used in the 1930s as "economic integration" in the works of German and Swedish economists. The phenomenon of integration is multifaceted and is not limited solely to economic cooperation. Translated from Latin, the word "integratio" means "unification" or "completion," while "integrare" means "to make whole," signifying the process of "combining (uniting) parts into a certain whole"[1].

Regional integration involves the joint activity of several countries at the regional level, leading to the unification of their economies into some form of a single regional economic complex. The single economic space, formed as a result of the complete liberalization of the movement of goods and factors of production between the integrating countries, allows for an increase in the number of competitive firms. Regional associations differ in the depth and nature of their member countries' economic convergence, their chosen integration strategy and institutional structure, the scope and scale of their activities, and their socio-cultural aspects. In this context, integration is characterized by the following features:

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- the elimination of restrictions on the movement of goods, services, capital, and human resources among the countries party to the agreement;
- the mutual adaptation of national production and the formation of technological integrity in production processes within the region;
- the harmonization of national legislation, norms, and standards;
- the purposeful regulation of the integration process and the development of bodies to manage mutual cooperation (for example, the interstate introduction of common governance among the countries of the region, as in the European Union) [2].

In today's era of globalization, regional integration is emerging as a vital component of international politics and economics. Countries are increasingly choosing to actively participate in regional integration structures to secure their economic interests, address security needs, and ensure political stability. This trend is also evident in the Central Asian region. The theoretical foundations of regional integration have been thoroughly studied by researchers, with each theory explaining its economic, political, and institutional aspects in various ways.

The theoretical foundations of the concept of regional integration began to take shape in the 1950s. Researcher Karl Deutsch[3], through his communication approach, referred to regional cooperation as the integration of political societies. In his view, for regional integration to be successful, there must be trust between states, harmony among political institutions, and social exchange. K. Deutsch's "Security Community" concept is particularly relevant for Central Asia[4]. This conclusion is drawn from the fact that the region is experiencing interdependence in the security sphere and a shared need to respond collectively to external threats.

The economic approach also holds a significant place in the theory of regional integration. In his classic study, "The Theory of Economic Integration"[5], researcher Bela Balassa divided regional economic integration into the following five stages:

- free trade area;
- customs union;
- common market;
- economic union;
- complete economic and political integration[6].

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Although the countries of Central Asia are currently in the initial stage of integration, they are pursuing economic convergence specifically through free trade zones and customs cooperation.

Ernst Haas[7], one of the founders of neofunctionalism, also explained regional integration based on the "spillover effect" concept. In his view, once integration begins in one sector, it spontaneously expands to others. For instance, history shows that trade agreements have influenced the transport, energy, and subsequently, security sectors. In the Central Asian region, initiatives related to the development of trade routes, such as the "Central Asia–South Asia" transport corridors and the "Belt and Road" initiative, demonstrate a similar spiral-like expansion process.

Another theoretical approach to regional integration is intergovernmentalism, a theory advanced by the researcher Stanley Hoffmann[8]. He argued that the integration process should be carried out through agreements between heads of state and governments, in a manner that remains faithful to national sovereignty. It is noteworthy that this particular model is dominant in Central Asia, where the governments of the region's countries cooperate through mutual agreements without relinquishing their state sovereignty.

From an economic and geopolitical standpoint, the Central Asian region holds particular interest for the world's developed countries regarding regional integration. This is because the region is situated at the crossroads of major transport routes between Europe and Asia. International organizations, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, have repeatedly highlighted the potential for developing the Central Asian region as a "transcontinental trade hub." In this context, Central Asia's energy resources—gas, oil, uranium, and water—serve to bring the countries of the region even closer together.

At the current stage of Central Asian integration, the analyses of numerous academic researchers hold significant importance. In particular, scholar Roy Allison[9], in his research, analyzed the security dynamics in the region within the context of the influence of major world powers: Russia, China, and the United States. According to the researcher, the competition among external powers in Central Asia presents both an opportunity for regional cooperation on the one hand, and a threat on the other. Additionally, scholar S. Frederick Starr[10] analyzed Central Asia through the "Greater Central Asia" concept. The scholar emphasized that infrastructure, economic reforms,



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and cultural connectivity are crucial for regional integration. As highlighted in the study, transport networks in Central Asia (which, in the study, include railways, highways, and gas pipelines) lay the groundwork for the formation of a single economic space.

Richard Pomfret, one of the leading researchers of regional integration, has offered his in-depth economic analyses of regional trade and economic cooperation. In the researcher's view, the modernization of customs structures and the reduction of trade barriers are the primary factors driving the development of regional trade in Central Asia.

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