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THE IMPACT OF THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR ON CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES

Gülperi GÜNGÖR

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Due to the sanctions imposed on Russia as a result of the war in Ukraine, not only Russia itself but also the Central Asian countries whose economies are closely tied to Russia have been deeply affected. Trade restrictions, the situation of migrant workers, and the disruption of energy and trade routes are among the most significant impacts of the war on the region.

For the Central Asian countries, Russia is a major trading partner. In terms of imports, Russia ranks first for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan; second after China for Uzbekistan; and second after Türkiye for Turkmenistan. Looking at exports, Russia ranks third among the main export destinations for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, while it ranks eighth for Tajikistan.[1]

The suspension of trade in grains and basic foodstuffs such as wheat and sugar between Russia and Central Asia due to the war has led to a series of negative consequences. Russia and Ukraine are among the worlds leading wheat-exporting countries.[2] Following Russias announcement in March this year that it would temporarily halt grain exports, it was estimated that the disruption in wheat trade could affect 25% of the global grain market.[3] Kazakhstan, which imports wheat from Russia, processes it, and exports flour, also suspended its wheat and flour exports, significantly affecting other Central Asian countries. Tajikistan imports 94% of its wheat from Kazakhstan, while Kyrgyzstan imports 40%.[4] Uzbekistan also meets 35% of its wheat consumption needs through imports from Kazakhstan.[5]

It is widely noted that poor households in Central Asia □□□□ spend a large share of their income on food □□□□□ be the most affected by the food price inflation caused by disruptions in trade.[6] The severity of the situation is reflected in Tajikistans President Emomali Rahmon instructing citizens to stockpile food for two years.[7] It has also been reported that the Tajik government, facing a risk of default, will send a delegation to the United States to negotiate an IMF loan.[8]

Another challenge faced by the Central Asian countries concerns a potential decline in remittances from Russia. The flow of remittances sent home by migrant workers employed in Russia plays a significant role in the economies of Central Asian states. In addition to the impact of the depreciation of the ruble on remittances, it is also expected

that the volume of remittances will decrease as Russian companies downsize or shut down, leading to job losses among migrant workers. Remittances account for more than one-quarter of Tajikistans Gross National Income (GNI)[9] and for 33.2% of Kyrgyzstans GNI.[10] Hence, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are likely to be the countries most affected by a decline in remittances from Russia.

Another challenge for the Central Asian countries is that their trade routes to the West pass through Russia. For Kazakhstan, whose largest export item is oil, nearly two-thirds of its oil supply is transported via Russian ports.[11] So far, no sanctions have been imposed on Kazakh oil transported through the Caspian Pipeline Consortium, which connects oil extracted in western Kazakhstan to Russia and onwards to the port of Novorossiysk. However, considering that Russia also holds shares in the consortium, there is a possibility that the situation may change in the future.[12] Kazakhstan has been engaged in negotiations with the United States to avoid being affected by sanctions against Russia.[13] In its search for alternative trade routes, Kazakhstan announced that an agreement had been reached to ship cargo via Latvia.[14] Increasing the effectiveness of the Middle Corridor, which runs from the Caspian Sea through the Caucasus and then through Türkiye to Europe, is also on the agenda.

Another issue concerns the outflow of migrants from Russia □□□□□□□□□□ those working in the information technology sector. Various sources report that more than 70,000 IT workers have left Russia.[15] Armenia, which allows Russian citizens to enter without a visa, has become one of the primary destinations for these migrants.[16] Georgia and Türkiye are also among the most preferred countries. The founders of Russian companies relocating abroad have stated that if they remained in Russia, their firms would be compelled to operate solely within the domestic market.[17] Central Asian countries have also emerged as destinations. Uzbek officials have reported that since the beginning of the year, around 3,000 foreign IT specialists have moved to Uzbekistan.[18] The Central Asian governments seek to turn this situation into an opportunity by attracting Russias skilled labor and brain drain. Uzbekistan has announced that it will simplify procedures for foreign investors in the IT sector,[19] and similar measures are being prepared in Kyrgyzstan as well.[20]

While the relocation of Russian companies and the inflow of skilled labor offer opportunities for the Central Asian countries, this development has also raised certain security concerns □□□□□□□□□□□□ for Kazakhstan. Reports indicate a significant increase in the number of Russian citizens applying for residence permits in Kazakhstan.[21] Some analysts have even posed the question of whether Kazakhstan □□□□□ its long shared border with Russia and the concentration of ethnic Russians in its northern regions □□□□□ become Russias Next Ukraine.[22] Although Kazakhstan received Russian support through the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) during the January events, it has recently signaled a desire to distance itself from Moscow. The announcement that there would be no military parade in Nur-Sultan on 7 and 9 May this year for Victory Day □□□□□□□□□ one of the most important holidays in the Soviet period □□□□ been interpreted as an indicator of this shift.

High food prices, declining remittances, and disruptions in trade could lead to an increase

and deepening of poverty in the region in 2022. In an increasingly interconnected global economy, it is possible to argue that sanctions imposed on Russia may affect global stability to a greater extent than initially anticipated.

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About the Author :

Gülperi Güngör graduated from International Relations, Faculty of Political Sciences, Ankara University in 2015, and holds MSc. in International Relations from Middle East Technical University. (2020) She joined AVİM in January 2020. Güngör is Ph.D. candidate in Ankara University International Relations Department. As of March 2025, Güngör has started working at AVİM as a Non-resident Fellow while continuing her doctoral research at the University of Sheffield.

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Süleyman Nazif Sok. No: 12/B Daire 3-4 06550 Çankaya-ANKARA / TÜRKİYE
Tel: +90 (312) 438 50 23-24 • **Fax**: +90 (312) 438 50 26
@avimorgtr
https://www.facebook.com/avrasyaincelemelerimerkezi
E-Mail: info@avim.org.tr
http://avim.org.tr

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