

Section 6 | Russia and Belarus, Central Asia and the Caucasus

1 Overview

The international community responded immediately to the outrageous act of Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

Protests were held around the world immediately after the aggression, and a draft resolution demanding the immediate, complete, and unconditional withdrawal of Russian troops was adopted by a majority of 141 countries at an emergency special session of the UN General Assembly on March 2. Severe sanctions against Russia were levied in quick succession, mainly by the G7 and EU countries, and support for Ukraine gradually strengthened. Furthermore, Europe, which imports many Russian energy resources, has been rapidly shrinking its economic ties with Russia, for example, by reducing its dependence on Russia. Foreign companies that had expanded into Russia also announced that they would suspend or withdraw their businesses. Direct flights between Russia, mainly from the G7 and EU countries, have been suspended, reducing the number of people traveling to and from Russia. Thus, in the wake of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, relations between the G7 and EU countries and Russia have reached a major turning point.

In response to this situation, Russia has taken a confrontational stance toward the G7 and EU countries and others that have imposed sanctions against it, while at the same time shifting its focus to maintaining and strengthening relations with China, India, Turkey, Central Asian and Caucasus countries (excluding Georgia, which has expressed support for Ukraine), and others that have friendly relations with Russia and have not imposed sanctions.

Regarding Belarus, the international community, led by the G7 and EU countries, strongly condemned it for supporting Russia's aggression against Ukraine through the use of its own territory, and adopted sanctions against Belarus, including sanctions against President Alexander Lukashenko and other individuals and entities, and export control measures. In addition, the General Assembly of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) adopted a resolution condemning the actions of the Belarusian government regarding the forced landing of a commercial aircraft flying over Belarus.

Regarding Central Asian and Caucasus countries, while they have close geopolitical and economic ties with Russia, they have maintained a neutral stance toward Russia's aggression against Ukraine (with the exception of Georgia). They are also struggling to cope with the impact on transportation routes for energy and other trade items and remittances from migrant workers in Russia.

This situation has drawn the attention of the international community to the Central Asian and Caucasus countries. Central Asia was on the agenda at the G7 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Münster in November, and Japan, the United States, the EU, the Republic of Korea, and other countries held summit- and ministerial-level meetings with the five Central Asian countries. In addition, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Central Asia as the destination of his first overseas trip in about two years. Russia is conducting active diplomacy to maintain its centripetal power, including holding the first Central Asia-Russia summit meeting in October.

2 Russia and Belarus

(1) Situation in Russia

A Internal Situation in Russia

When Russia announced the start of its “special military operation” against Ukraine in February, there were various forms of anti-war movements in Russia. Small-scale protests were held in various parts of Russia, and some journalists, business people, academics, lawmakers, and others sent out anti-war messages and collected signatures. However, the administration severely suppressed the anti-war movement by further tightening restrictions on the freedom of speech and press, and some domestic independent news organizations, foreign NGOs, think tanks, and other organizations active in Russia were forced to suspend their activities and leave for foreign countries.

In September, after the Ukrainian military had recaptured some of the occupied territories, Russian President Vladimir Putin issued a partial mobilization order, mobilizing some 300,000 people, according to the authorities. This triggered renewed anti-war activities in various parts of Russia, and at the same time, hundreds of thousands of people fled the country to escape the mobilization. There was also a growing outcry in support of the start of peace negotiations. Subsequently, these domestic movements died down.

In late September, the purported “referenda” on “incorporation” into Russia were held in Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson in Ukraine, and Russia illegally “annexed” these regions under the pretext of its results.

Given these circumstances, there are indications that Russia may transit to a wartime economy. In addition to implementing special economic measures to execute “military operations,” including a ban on the refusal of contracts for military supplies, the Government Coordination Council, chaired by Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin and responsible for responding quickly to the war situation and the needs of society, was established.

Since Russia's aggression against Ukraine, President Putin's approval rating has ranged between around 70 to 80%, up from the previous 60% range. Although

there was a slight drop in support after the partial mobilization order was issued, this remains high.

B Russian Foreign Policy

In response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, while the G7, the EU, and others have announced a series of various supports, including military aid to Ukraine, and sanctions against Russia, Russia is strengthening its confrontational stance with the West.

Since the reported buildup of Russian forces in areas along the Ukrainian border in the fall of 2021, the U.S. has continued dialogue with Russia to reduce tensions, but since the aggression against Ukraine, high-level talks between the U.S. and Russia have been extremely limited. Moreover, in February 2023, President Putin announced in his Address to the Federal Assembly the suspension of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) between the U.S. and Russia.

Political and economic relations with the EU are in the process of cooling, with European companies suspending or withdrawing their operations in Russia, reduced dependence on Russian energy, and mutually expelling staff of embassies and consulate generals. Although there are minimal contacts between Russia and Germany and between Russia and France, including at the summit level, these kinds of dialogues have failed to reach an agreement, and cooperation between Europe and Russia in practical fields has been greatly reduced.

Meanwhile, Russia is developing its own narrative on its aggression against Ukraine and is working to maintain and deepen relations with China, India, Turkey, the Central Asian and Caucasus countries (excluding Georgia), and other countries that have not imposed sanctions against Russia, but each country's position on the aggression against Ukraine is not the same.

Regarding China, the joint statement issued at the China-Russia summit in February stated that “Friendship between the two States has no limits, there are no forbidden areas of cooperation.” Since the start of the Russia's aggression against Ukraine, China has never condemned Russia and has opposed “unilateral” sanctions, as stated in a 12-point document

entitled “China’s Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis,” released by the Chinese Foreign Ministry on February 24, 2023, one year after the aggression. Close contact between China and Russia has been strengthened at the leader’s and foreign minister’s levels, and coordination in the military field, such as joint navigation and joint flights in the vicinity of Japan, has been strengthened even after the start of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. In addition, the volume of trade between the two countries is increasing, including greater imports of crude oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Russia.

India, which has traditionally maintained friendly relations with Russia, has not directly condemned Russia. However, at the Russia-India summit meeting in September, Prime Minister Narendra Modi told President Putin that “today’s era is not of war,” and publicly asserted the need for an early cessation of hostilities, dialogue, and diplomacy. However, India has been increasing its imports of crude oil and fertilizers from Russia, indicating the importance it attaches to maintaining economic relations with Russia.

Turkey, which maintains friendly relations with both Russia and Ukraine, supports the UN General Assembly resolutions related to Russia’s aggression against Ukraine and condemns Russia’s actions. At the same time, Turkey continues to engage in high-level talks with Russia and remains involved in the situation surrounding Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, including brokering the negotiations between Russia and Ukraine and working with the UN as a mediator on the Black Sea Grain Initiative.

Russia attaches importance to Belarus and the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus, and continues to engage with these countries. The Central Asia-Russia Summit was held in Kazakhstan in 2022 for the first time. The Central Asian and Caucasus countries, with a few exceptions, have been absent from or abstained from UN General Assembly resolutions related to Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, and many countries have avoided making their positions clear publicly.

President Putin shifted the Russian Army’s deterrence forces to high combat alert immediately after the start of Russia’s aggression, and nuclear threats have been made through various forms of transmissions

from Russia. Thus, the possibility of Russia using nuclear weapons continues to be a concern.

In the Indo-Pacific region, the Russian military’s strategic command and staff exercise “Vostok 2022” in September marked the first time the Chinese military had three branches of the military (Army, Navy, and Air Force) participate in a Russian military exercise at once. Russia’s Armed Forces have been strengthening their military coordination with China by conducting joint flights of their bombers and joint navigation by their naval vessels in the vicinity of Japan. The fact that the militaries of China and Russia continue to engage in joint activities with increasing frequency in the vicinity of Japan should be closely monitored with serious concern from the perspective of Japan’s security.

C Russian Economy

GDP growth in Russia from January to March was +3.5%, but fell -4.1% from April to June and dropped another -3.7% from July to September due to the impact of sanctions against Russia and other factors. In addition, the 2022 budget fell from an expected budget surplus to a deficit, due in part to increased national defense spending, etc.. Significant increases in national defense and other spending are expected in the 2023 budget and beyond.

Following Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, the Russian central bank took a wide range of monetary measures, including a significant increase in the policy interest rate, to mitigate the effects of sanctions against Russia. The ruble depreciated significantly immediately after the aggression, but over time the currency’s value superficially recovered, and inflation peaked at the beginning of May and has trended downward since then.

On the other hand, the suspension and withdrawal of operations by foreign companies imposed restrictions on production as well as consumption behavior. Furthermore, the sanctions against Russia have reduced imports in the semiconductor and other high-tech sectors, disrupting supply chains and affecting production activities in the automotive and airline industries, among others. In response, Russia is attempting to address this by trying to produce substitutes domestically.

Russia has taken various “countermeasures” in the energy sector, such as forcing the transfer of underground resource development licenses from foreign companies to Russian corporations, and also restricting gas supplies to some countries.

(2) Japan-Russia Relations

A Overview of Japan-Russia Relations

At the Japan-Russia Summit telephone call held on February 17, just prior to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, Prime Minister Kishida told President Putin that Japan is monitoring the situation around Ukraine with grave concern, and that a solution acceptable to the countries concerned should be pursued through diplomatic negotiations, rather than an unilateral change of the status quo by force.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which began on February 24, has had a serious impact on Japan-Russia relations. In response to this aggression, Japan has been implementing severe sanctions against Russia (For details, see the Special Feature “Russia's Aggression Against Ukraine and Japan's Response” on page 16). In May, in connection with Japan's sanctions against Russian individuals, the Russian government announced an indefinite ban on a total of 63 Japanese individuals, including Prime Minister Kishida and Foreign Minister Hayashi, from entering Russia. In July, it similarly announced an indefinite ban on 384 members of the House of Representatives from entering Russia.

Furthermore, In April, Japan demanded the expulsion of eight diplomats and officials from the Embassy of the Russian Federation and the Trade Representation of the Russian Federation in Japan, as a result of Japan's comprehensive assessment, given the situation over Ukraine. In response, Russia demanded the expulsion of eight diplomats of the Embassy of Japan in Russia later that month. Japan protested to Russia, saying that it was absolutely unacceptable for Russia to take these measures, despite the fact that it was the Russian side that resorted to military means and caused the current situation, and that Russian side was fully responsible for bringing Japan-Russia relations to this state.

In the area of cultural and people-to-people

exchanges, the opening ceremony of the “Japan-Russia Year of Regional Exchanges” was held in Sapporo in January. Subsequently, due to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, cultural and people-to-people exchanges between Japan and Russia at the governmental level have basically been put on hold for the time being.

In April, the sightseeing boat KAZU I was involved in a maritime accident off the Shiretoko Peninsula in Hokkaido. Regarding the three bodies found on Kunashiri Island and Sakhalin Island, Japan coordinated arrangements with Russia for the early handover of the bodies after confirming with the Russian side that the DNA information matched that of the missing persons in the accident. As a result, the bodies were handed over in September.

In September, a consular officer of the Consulate-General of Japan in Vladivostok was detained by the Russian authorities on the account of conducting illegal information collection activities and was declared as *persona non grata* (an undesirable person) and the officer's expulsion was demanded. There is no fact that the consular officer conducted an illegal activity, and the detention and intimidating interrogation conducted by Russia are clear and serious violations of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations and the Japan-Soviet Consular Convention, and are absolutely unacceptable. The Government of Japan therefore lodged a strong protest and demanded a formal apology and prevention of recurrence from Russia. Furthermore, in October, as an appropriate measure in response to the measures taken by Russia, Japan declared a consul at the Consulate-General of the Russian Federation in Sapporo as *persona non grata*, and demanded the expulsion of the consul from Japan.

In the fisheries sector, the Government of Russia unilaterally announced in June it would suspend the Framework Agreement concerning operations of Japanese fishing vessels in waters around the Four Northern Islands¹ on the grounds of the Cooperative Project with the Sakhalin Oblast government, but operations began in September as a result of subsequent adjustments. However, Russia has rejected negotiations for operations for 2023 based on this agreement. Since the start of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the

1 Agreement on the Operation of Japanese Fishing Vessels in the Waters Surrounding the Northern Territories.

Government of Japan has been holding discussions to maintain and secure Japan's fishing rights and interests, including those under other Japan-Russia fisheries agreements.

B The Northern Territories and Negotiations on a Peace Treaty

The greatest concern between Japan and Russia is the Northern Territories issue. The Northern Territories are islands over which Japan has sovereignty. The islands are an inherent territory of Japan but currently illegally occupied by Russia. The issue is yet to be resolved even after 77 years have passed since the end of World War II, and the Government of Japan firmly worked on the negotiations under the policy of concluding a peace treaty through the resolution of the territorial issue².

However, in March, the Government of Russia, considering the measures taken by Japan in relation to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, announced measures such as discontinuing negotiations on a peace treaty, suspending free visits and the Four-island exchange program, and withdrawing from the dialogue on the joint economic activities on the Four Northern Islands. In September, the Government of Russia also announced a government decree suspending the validity of the agreement on free visits and the four-island exchange program.

The current situation is entirely the result of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and Russia's attempt to shift the responsibility to the Japanese side is extremely unjust and absolutely unacceptable. The Government of Japan has lodged a strong protest against the Russian side and has strongly urged Russia to stop the aggression and withdraw its forces immediately.

Although Japan-Russia relations are in a difficult situation due to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and now is not a moment in which Japan can talk about the prospects for the peace treaty negotiations, the Government of Japan will firmly maintain its policy of concluding a peace treaty through the resolution of the territorial issue. In addition, under the current circumstances, the situation does not allow the

four-island exchange program and other programs³ to be conducted, and following on from 2020 and 2021, when Japan was unable to conduct these programs due to the circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, it was also unable to conduct them in 2022. The resumption of the programs, including visits to graves in the Four Northern Islands, is one of the highest priorities for Japan-Russia relations in the future. The Government of Japan strongly hopes that the situation will become such that the programs can be resumed as soon as possible, and will continue to take appropriate measures.

Furthermore, Japan lodged protests against Russia over Russia's moves to build up its military forces in the Four Northern Islands, including military exercises, on the grounds that such moves are contradictory to Japan's position regarding the territorial issue.

C Japan-Russia Economic Relations

From January to December 2022, trade between Japan and Russia increased by 6.2% year-on-year (total trade for the same period was approximately 2,563.7 billion Japanese yen (Source: Trade Statistics of Japan, Ministry of Finance)). This is believed to be due to the fact that while exports from Japan to Russia decreased due to Japan's sanctions against Russia, imports from Russia to Japan increased due to the effects of soaring global resource prices and the depreciation of the yen.

On February 15, prior to the Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the Co-chairs' meeting of the Japan-Russia Intergovernmental Committee on Trade and Economic Issues was held online, where Foreign Minister Hayashi informed Minister of Economic Development Maksim Gennadyevich Reshetnikov that Japan is closely monitoring the situation in Ukraine with serious concern. After conveying Japan's position that it seeks to reduce tensions and encourages the pursuit of a diplomatic solution under the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity, the co-chairs discussed the current status of Japan-Russia cooperation in economic relations and exchanges.

2 Refer to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website for the position of the Government of Japan on the Northern Territories issue: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/russia/territory/index.html>

3 Refers to Visits to Graves in the Northern Territories, free visits, and exchange visits/receptions to the Four Northern Islands (including receiving patients and expert exchanges).



However, later that month, Russia started its aggression against Ukraine, making it difficult to continue bilateral relations as before, including in the economic sphere. For this reason, government projects related to economic cooperation with Russia, including the Eight-point Cooperation Plan for Innovative Reform in the Fields of Industry and Economy and a Favorable Living Environment of Russia proposed in 2016, are basically on hold for the time being.

In addition, in order to demonstrate that outrageous acts that shake the very foundation of the international order come with a high price, Japan, in cooperation with the G7 and the rest of the international community, is swiftly implementing severe sanctions against Russia, including sanctions against Russian individuals and organizations, sanctions in the financial sector such as freezing the assets of banks, and measures banning imports and exports. In the energy sector, in accordance with the G7 Leaders' Statement, Japan will phase out its dependence on Russian energy, including oil and coal, while maintaining its interests in the "Sakhalin 1" and "Sakhalin 2" oil and natural gas development projects in Russia, considering their importance for Japan's energy security.

(3) Situation in Belarus

Amidst increasing tensions in the region surrounding the Ukrainian border since the end of 2021 due to the buildup of Russian forces and other factors, Belarus started its engagement in a joint military exercise with Russia on February 10. In Russia's aggression against Ukraine that began on February 24, Belarus supported Russia by allowing the use of its own territory. In light of Belarus' obvious involvement in the aggression by Russia, Japan strongly condemned Belarus and imposed sanctions against the country, including sanctions against President Lukashenko and other individuals and entities, and export control measures. Since

then, Belarus has allowed Russian troops to remain in its territory, and the two countries have conducted joint military exercises and other activities.

A referendum on constitutional amendments was held in February, and the majority voted in favor of the amendments, which included the deletion of the provision that Belarus should be a denuclearized region and a neutral state, the reinstatement of the provision prohibiting the president from being elected three times, and the tightening of qualifications for presidential candidates.

In July 2022, the Council of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) adopted a decision that Belarus had violated the Convention on International Civil Aviation (Chicago Convention) regarding the forced landing of a civilian aircraft flying over Belarus that occurred in May 2021. In October, the ICAO General Assembly approved the decision and adopted a resolution condemning the actions of the Government of Belarus.

The Nobel Peace Prize for 2022 was awarded to Ales Bialiatski, founder of the Belarusian human rights organization Viasna (Spring), along with human rights organizations from Russia and Ukraine, for representing his country's civil society and promoting over the years things such as the right to criticize power and protect the fundamental rights of citizens, and other reasons.

Sviatlana Heorhiyeuna Tsikhanouskaya and other Belarusian political activists continued to appeal to the international community for support, from their bases in the countries surrounding Belarus. In August, they gathered in Lithuania for a meeting where they announced the creation of a "United Transition Cabinet" with the goals of restoring constitutionality and order, ensuring the transition from a dictatorship to a democratic government, and creating conditions for holding fair and free elections.

3 Countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus

(1) Overview

Countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus are situated in a location of geopolitical importance that connects East Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Russia, and have abundant natural resources such as oil, natural gas, uranium, and rare metals. Stability of the region as a whole, including the countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus, has significant importance in addressing key challenges that the international community faces such as fighting against terrorism and countering illicit drugs. Japan continues to work to strengthen bilateral ties with these countries through high level talks and will be continuing initiatives to promote regional cooperation using the framework of the “Central Asia plus Japan” Dialogue.

2022 marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Central Asia and Caucasus countries. Prime Minister Kishida and Foreign Minister Hayashi exchanged congratulatory messages with the leaders and foreign ministers of the respective countries, and actively implemented initiatives to strengthen relations, including high-level bilateral exchanges (see the Column on page 160). In light of the growing importance of the “Caspian Sea Route,” a transportation route that bypasses Russia and links Central Asia and Europe via the Caucasus region, following Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), together with relevant ministries, agencies, and Japanese companies, formed a study team to survey the route in Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan.



The Ninth Foreign Ministers’ Meeting of the “Central Asia plus Japan” (December 24, Tokyo)

The Central Asia and Caucasus countries, with a few exceptions, have been absent from or abstained from UN General Assembly resolutions related to Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, and many of them have avoided making their positions clear publicly. Uzbekistan has consistently explained that the country’s position is “objective and neutral.” In June, President Jomart Tokaev of Kazakhstan refused to recognize the “Donetsk People’s Republic” and “Luhansk People’s Republic” in front of Russian President Putin at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum. While Tajikistan has not made any external comments on Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, it drew public attention when President Emomali Rahmon of Tajikistan made remarks to Russian President Putin at the Central Asia-Russia Summit in October, that policies like those of the former Soviet Union were still in place in Central Asia and that he hoped they would be respected.

(2) Central Asian Countries

The countries of Central Asia are partners of Japan in maintaining and strengthening a free and open international order, and Japan is promoting diplomacy aimed at contributing to peace and stability in Central Asia.

In April, the Eighth Foreign Ministers’ Meeting of the “Central Asia plus Japan” Dialogue was held online, where foreign ministers exchanged opinions on regional affairs including Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. Foreign Minister Hayashi also visited Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. In December, the foreign ministers of the five Central Asian countries visited Japan for the first time together, where the Ninth Foreign Ministers’ Meeting of the “Central Asia plus Japan” Dialogue was held in Tokyo for the first time in 10 years. The foreign ministers decided to establish and promote a new development model focusing on “investment in people” and “quality of growth” to achieve sustainable development in Central Asia, and exchanged views on the “Caspian Sea Route.” They also candidly exchanged views on how to respond to Russia’s aggression against Ukraine and the situation in Afghanistan.

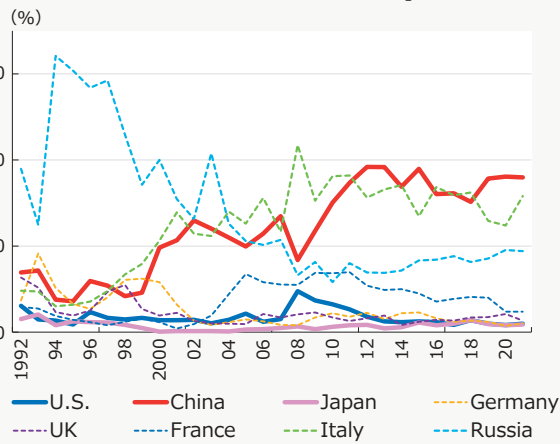
While there was continued progress in intra-regional cooperation among the Central Asian countries, with

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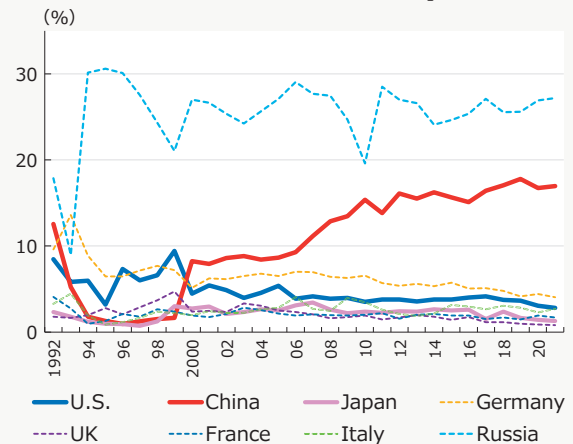
Relations between Central Asia and the Caucasus Region and Japan, the U.S., China, etc., Seen Through Economic Data¹

- Trade: China is the largest export destination, but exports to Italy (exports of natural resources from Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan) and Russia are also large. In terms of import, Russia is still exceeding China as it has large trade volumes with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan. In 2021, Japan ranked 25th in terms of its share in the region's export and 16th in terms of import.²
- Investment: The U.S. has the second largest presence in Kazakhstan, which accounts for about 70% of the region's FDI stock (the largest investor in Kazakhstan is the Netherlands). This is followed by France, the UK and China. In addition, Russia maintains a certain presence in the former Soviet Union bloc countries, as it is a major investor in Kyrgyz Republic, Armenia, and Tajikistan. Japan's FDI in the region is not particularly noticeable except in Kazakhstan and is below the U.S., the UK, China and Russia in scale.
- Finance: The region has the largest bilateral external debt to China, but this has been declining in recent years. Japan is a creditor mainly in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, and ranks second as of 2021.

Share of Japan, the U.S., China, etc. in Central Asia and the Caucasus' exports



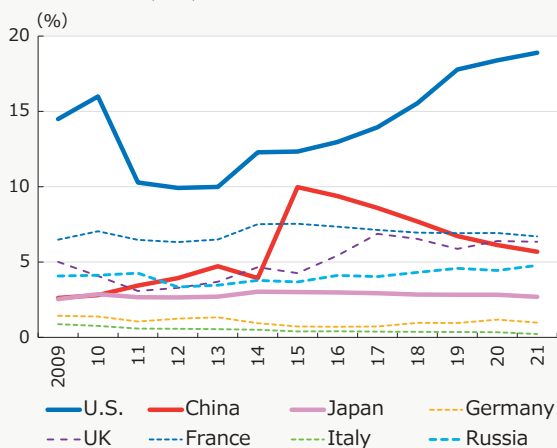
Share of Japan, the U.S., China, etc. in Central Asia and the Caucasus' imports



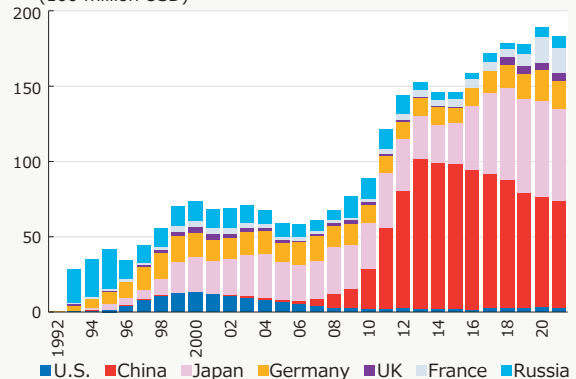
Note 1: Prepared by MOFA based on IMF (DOT) data.

Note 2: Figures for China are the sum of Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Macau. Graphs for past figures may be skewed due to missing data, etc.

Share of Japan, the U.S., China, etc. in the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) stock in Central Asia and the Caucasus



Bilateral External Debt in Central Asia and the Caucasus (100 million USD)



Note 1: Prepared by MOFA based on data from the World Bank (IDS).

Note 2: The graph illustrates the sum of bilateral external debt in the public sector and in the private sector (private sector external debt guaranteed by the public sector).

1 See page193 for notes regarding this data.

2 While only limited number of countries such as Japan, the U.S., and China are illustrated in the chart the rankings in the text are for all countries/regions for which data are available (including countries, etc. in the relevant region).

the Fourth Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of the Central Asian countries held in July, and an agreement on border demarcation was reached between Uzbekistan and the Kyrgyz Republic in November, military clashes broke out in September near the border between the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan. A cease-fire agreement was reached within the same month, but on the Kyrgyz side, approximately 140,000 people were temporarily internally displaced. In response to the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the Kyrgyz Republic, the Japanese government decided to provide emergency grant aid of 1 million US dollars through the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

In Uzbekistan, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev continues to pursue a reform path. Japan has actively engaged in high-level political dialogue with Uzbekistan, including a visit to Japan by Deputy Prime-Minister and Minister of Investments and Foreign Trade Sardor Umurzakov in April, a visit to Uzbekistan by Foreign Minister Hayashi, a telephone call between Prime Minister Kishida and President Mirziyoyev in June, and a foreign ministers' meeting in December. Foreign Minister Hayashi met with Foreign Minister Vladimir Norov, who visited Japan in December for the Ninth Foreign Ministers' Meeting of the "Central Asia plus Japan" Dialogue, where the ministers exchanged views on cooperation in the areas of labor, environment, climate change and human resource development as well as on the regional situation.

In Kazakhstan, unrest broke out across the country in January, mainly in Almaty, but the situation was calmed by the deployment of Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) peacekeeping forces at the request of Kazakhstan. The Government of Kazakhstan has attributed the unrest to an attempted coup d'état by former Chair of the National Security Committee Karim Massimov and others. The upheaval led to the retirement of first President Nursultan Nazarbayev from the position of Chairman of the Security Council and strengthened President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's efforts at large-scale domestic reforms. In June, a referendum was held to amend the constitution, and in September, the name of the capital city was restored from Nur-Sultan to Astana. In November, President Tokayev was inaugurated after the reelection

in an early presidential election. In relations with Japan, Foreign Minister Hayashi visited Kazakhstan in April and held talks with President Tokayev and Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mukhtar Tileuberdi. In September and December, Foreign Minister Hayashi also met with the Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan and exchanged views on cooperation in the energy and decarbonization sectors, regional affairs, and other issues.

In relations with the Kyrgyz Republic, Foreign Minister Hayashi met with Minister of Foreign Affairs Zheenbek Kulubaev in September and December. During the December meeting, the two ministers signed a Cooperation Program between the ministries for 2023 to 2025, and shared the view to further promote bilateral relations and stimulate dialogue. In addition, Minister of Foreign Affairs Kulubaev expressed his gratitude for the support provided by Japan to date, including the emergency grant aid in October.

In relations with Tajikistan, First Deputy Prime Minister Davlatoli Said and Foreign Minister Sirojiddin Muhriddin each visited Japan in December. During his meeting with Foreign Minister Muhriddin, Foreign Minister Hayashi signed a cooperation program between the two countries' foreign ministries for 2023 to 2025, and confirmed that the two ministries would work closely together on bilateral cooperation, including human resource development and infrastructure development, as well as on the regional situation.

In Turkmenistan, Serdar Berdimuhamedov, the eldest son of President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, was elected as the new president in March. In relations with Japan, Prime Minister Kishida held a telephone call with President Berdimuhamedov in April, followed by a meeting between Prime Minister Kishida and Chairman of the Halk Maslakhaty, Milli Gengesh of Turkmenistan Berdimuhamedov (former President) in September. In December, Foreign Minister Hayashi met with Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers and Minister of Foreign Affairs Rashid Meredov to strengthen economic ties, including in the area of decarbonization, and to strengthen cooperation in the areas of education and culture.

In recent years, efforts toward advancing regional cooperation have become active among Central

Asian and neighboring countries. In 2022, leaders of Central Asian countries attended a variety of meetings that included the meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in December, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Summit held in October, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit in September, and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) Summit and the Summit of the Organization of Turkic States held in November.

In addition, there are active summits and foreign ministers' meetings in the format of the five Central Asian countries and another country. In 2022, Japan, the U.S., the EU, China, Russia, and the ROK each held a foreign ministers' meeting with the five Central Asian countries in this format, while the EU, China, India, and Russia held a summit meeting with them.

(3) Caucasus Countries

The Caucasus region has a potential to be a gateway connecting Asia, Europe and the Middle East, and geopolitical importance that directly affects the peace and stability of the international community. However, there are still outstanding issues such as in Georgia over South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh. Japan announced the Caucasus Initiative in 2018, which is comprised of two pillars: (1) assistance for human resources development for state building (human resources development) and (2) assistance for paving the way to "Appealing Caucasus" (infrastructure development and business environment improvement), and develops its diplomacy in line with this initiative.

Regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, Japan has taken the position that it hopes the remaining issues related to the conflict between the two countries will be resolved peacefully based on the principles of international law through dialogue, including with the OSCE Minsk Group. In 2022, there were efforts toward dialogue mediated by the U.S., the EU, Russia, and other countries on the basis of the cease-fire agreement reached through a joint statement by the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia in November 2020. Meanwhile, the largest armed clashes since the



Japan-Georgia Foreign Ministers' Meeting (December 15, Tokyo)

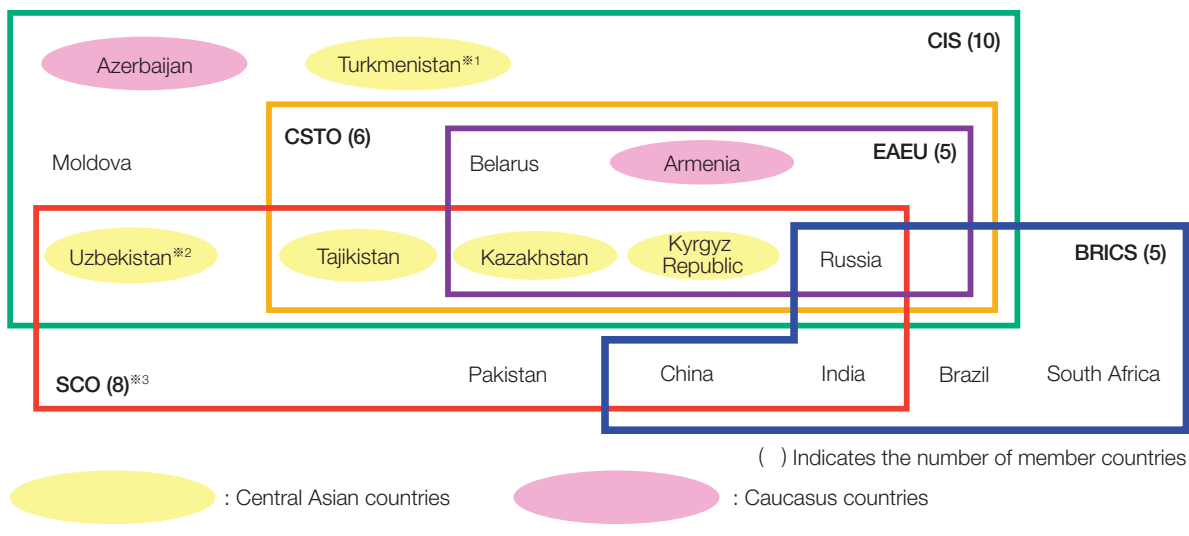
agreement occurred in the border region in September, and in December, a group claiming to be an environmental group on the Azerbaijan side staged a protest along the Lachin corridor, the only transportation route connecting the Nagorno-Karabakh region and Armenia. In response, the Armenian side complained that the corridor had been blocked, creating a humanitarian crisis.

In relations with Azerbaijan, Japan and Azerbaijan signed a new tax convention in December that wholly amends the previous tax convention, which was succeeded after dissolution of the Soviet Union. It is expected that this convention will further promote investment and economic exchange between the two countries.

Regarding relations with Armenia, Foreign Minister Hayashi met with Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan in New York in September, where they exchanged views on the regional situation and other issues. In Armenia, President Armen Sarkissian resigned before the end of his term in January 2022, and Vahagn Khachatryan was elected president by the National Assembly in March.

In relations with Georgia, Foreign Minister Hayashi met with Foreign Minister Ilia Darchiashvili, who visited Japan in December. The two Ministers agreed to further strengthen bilateral relations, including strengthening regional connectivity with the "Caspian Sea Route" in mind and cooperation in the field of decarbonization based on the Memorandum of Cooperation on the Joint Crediting Mechanism (JCM) signed in September.

Major Frameworks involving Russia, Central Asia, and Caucasus countries



<Note>

Turkmenistan has been an associate member of the CIS since 2005.

Uzbekistan ceased its membership in the CSTO in 2012.

Iran signed a memorandum of understanding for full SCO membership in 2022.

<Abbreviations>

CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States): 10

CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization): 6

EAEU (Eurasian Economic Union): 5

SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization): 8

Column

30th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic relations between Japan and the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus



The countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus are located almost in the central part of the vast Eurasian continent and had prospered as hubs of the Silk Road connecting Europe and Asia in ancient times. They were annexed by Russia in the 19th century but became independent after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. By September 1992, Japan had recognized these eight countries as states and established diplomatic relations. Japan and the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus have developed exchanges in various fields over the 30 years since their independence.

Date of Establishment of Diplomatic relations between Japan and the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus

	Country	Date
Central Asia	Uzbekistan	January 26, 1992
	Kazakhstan	January 26, 1992
	Kyrgyz Republic	January 26, 1992
	Tajikistan	February 2, 1992
	Turkmenistan	April 22, 1992
the Caucasus	Azerbaijan	September 7, 1992
	Armenia	September 7, 1992
	Georgia	August 3, 1992



Japan launched the “Central Asia plus Japan” Dialogue in 2004 to promote regional cooperation for solving common regional issues. Such cooperation is indispensable for the stability and development of Central Asia. At present, other major countries are establishing frameworks for dialogue similar to Japan’s, but the “Central Asia plus Japan” Dialogue is the pioneer of these. In 2015, Prime Minister Abe became the first Japanese Prime Minister to visit five Central Asian countries, and in 2018, Foreign Minister KONO Taro visited three Caucasus countries, furthering exchanges in various fields. Furthermore, in 2015, Japan opened the Embassy of Japan in Armenia, and today all eight countries have Japanese Embassies.

In 2022, the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, active exchanges were held, including visits by high-level dignitaries, such as the visit to Japan by Foreign Minister Ilia Darchiashvili of Georgia in December, and the visit to Japan by the foreign ministers from five Central Asian countries all together for the first time to participate in the 9th Foreign Ministers’ Meeting of the “Central Asia plus Japan” Dialogue. In addition, Prime Minister Kishida and the leaders of the countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus, along with Foreign Minister Hayashi and the foreign ministers of each country, celebrated the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, and exchanged letters with each country affirming they would strive to further develop bilateral relations.

An official logo for the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and the five Central Asian countries was created using the characters of the “Central Asia plus Japan” Dialogue by renown *manga* artist MORI Kaoru, whose famous pieces include the *manga* “*Otoyomegatari*” (The Bride’s Stories), the story of which was set in Central Asia. There were also many commemorative events held by local governments and private companies in various fields, such as politics, economy, tourism, and culture. Japan also actively disseminated Japanese culture through performances by “Japanese Drum (*Wadaiko*) Group Sai” in five Central Asian countries, *bonsai* workshops and “Japanese food and food sample exhibitions” in Uzbekistan, and “Japanese Culture Day” in Kazakhstan, among others.

Between Japan and the Caucasus countries, logos were created to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations with Azerbaijan and Georgia, respectively, and various commemorative events were held, including a piano concert by NAKAMURA Tempei. The 15th Japanese Film Festival was held in four cities in Armenia.



The official logo for the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and five Central Asian countries



Concert by “Japanese Drum (*Wadaiko*) Group Sai” (November 20, Ashgabat, Turkmenistan)



Piano recital by NAKAMURA Tempei (July 18, Baku, Azerbaijan)



Logo for Japan-Azerbaijan Friendship Year 2022



Logo for the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Georgia