

## **The Future of Asia We Want: Ideas for the CICA Region**

Thinking about future is both exciting and scaring at the same time. Whether it is our future at a personal level or broader (national, global). However, the global future is made up of the future of each person and the most things depend on our decisions made today. Therefore, taking into account different aspects of life while making long-term decisions is a must.

The Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) has developed tremendously since its establishment. Lately the Conference is on the path of transforming into international organization (Laumulin, Kozhirova 2021; Kuppaeva 2023; Astana Statement 2022). Military aspects of relations between member states, including the respect of boundaries, non-interference, arms control, were the main motives of CICA (Declaration 1999). Upcoming transformation will most likely come with the new opportunities and challenges as a result of the widening of the scope of equally prioritized responsibilities.

This essay will pay attention to the environmental, educational, economic and cultural aspects of cooperation, as these spheres might require more efforts in becoming full-fledged organization. Some ideas will be shared throughout the essay for each field in strengthening the cooperation and building our common future.

To begin with, the urgent challenge of not only the region, but our planet, is the environmental degradation. CICA recognized from the beginning the importance of environmental cooperation as one of the cornerstones of the security of the member countries (Declaration 1999). As the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev reported 57 million people suffered from climate change related disasters just in 2021 in Asia (Kuppaeva

2023: 17). Recently, the Secretary General of the CICA, Ambassador Kairat Sarybay discussed with the Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources of Kazakhstan, Yerlan Nyssanbayev the preparation for the Conference of Ministers of CICA Member States on Environmental Issues to be held in 2024 (CICA website 2023). Thus, environmental dimension of the organization's work is gaining increasing importance.

While efforts are being taken at the state, inter-state levels, citizen engagement should not be put aside. Transnational corporations and other large-scale companies are making the most part of the damage to the environment, but small daily steps by the citizens of every country may have huge impact. Therefore, raising environmental awareness should be in the environmental agenda. In this regard, the ideas are as following:

1. Organizing a **collaboration of eco-activists** for sharing experiences and applying the best practices in home countries;
2. Starting a campaign to **encourage citizens to make small easy steps** to leave less harmful footprints on environment (may include marathons, free webinars, organized in collaboration with eco-activists);
3. **Engaging students both at school and higher education level** in eco-activities as volunteers.

Hopefully, these activities will result in informed and engaged citizens, which in its turn will strengthen the environmental protection.

Next, high-quality education and research are the basics of development of any nation. Hence, in the framework of CICA the cooperation for this purpose should be systematic and regular. The Conference has already taken great steps by gathering think tanks and forming the partnership net of universities (Kuppaeva 2023: 16-17). Nevertheless, the following activities may also have good impact on sharing experience in education and research:

1. Creating a **fund for talented students** to study, do internships (research/industry) at universities/organizations of member countries;
2. Promoting **collaboration between Think Tank Forum participants and master and doctor students** with same research interests.

Thus, not only professors and established researchers may benefit from the research and academic cooperation, but also students will be engaged in this process.

Thirdly, economic cooperation is a vital part of security and prosperity. Economic development of every country is a unique path. Business Forums within the framework of CICA for small and medium businesses were already organized several times (Kuppaeva 2023: 11). Moreover, there is a permanent body of CICA such as Business Council (CICA website 2023a). In this dimension here is an idea on encouraging business start-ups:

1. Organizing an **international platform for investors and start-ups** in areas of concern for CICA, such as information security, environmental security, etc.

This activity may serve several purposes at the same time, such as supporting small businesses and finding solutions to urgent issues.

Cultural cooperation is the last in this essay, but not least of importance. The culture is the soul of a nation. People express themselves and learn and understand each other through their culture. This sphere has not been fallen out of the sight of CICA. Cultural festivals, youth forums, publishing the collection of national tales and legends of member countries are some of the activities in furthering cultural cooperation (Kuppaeva 2023: 11). The following recommendations for cultural cooperation rotate around the literature and arts:

1. Organizing **literature festivals** with introducing contemporary writers of member countries;
2. Supporting writers in **translation and contribution of their works** in member countries;
3. Creating a **platform for arts**, where art creators may collaborate, share their own works or arrange masterclasses.

These ideas try to highlight the parts of the culture which often stay aside. Establishing cooperation in these activities can help in making bounds in our intercultural community.

Most of the Asian countries, as well as the CICA members, is developing states, yet each has its own strengths. Therefore, learning from each other will

definitely further the development of the region. By applying the best practices, sustainable development should be the benchmark in all the activities planned for future.

To conclude, this essay tried to discuss four cooperation dimensions of the CICA region: environmental, educational, economic and cultural. It also proposed some ideas in stimulating cooperation in these fields. The most of the recommendations attempts to involve citizens, as the author believes that the best results can be achieved while working together as a community in shaping our common future.

## References

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