Analyses OSW

CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES 13.06.2012 www.osw.waw.pl

The summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

Krzysztof Strachota

The twelfth summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) took place on 6-7 June in Beijing. The summit was attended by the presidents of the organisation's member states: China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and also by the presidents of Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan.
A further development of co-operation in the area of security (for example, the development of SCO's anti-terrorist structures) and economic co-operation (including work on the establishment of the SCO Development Bank; China offered a capital contribution at US$ 10 billion) was discussed during the meeting. On the occasion of this summit, China signed bilateral loan agreements with Kazakhstan (1 billion USD) and Tajikistan (1 billion USD). Other issues which were raised during the summit included the situation in Afghanistan and the role of the SCO in the region after the ISAF mission ends (2014). The escalating tension imputed to the US over Iran and Syria was criticised. Afghanistan was accepted into the SCO with observer status, and Turkey was recognised as a "partner in dialogue".

The SCO, which has existed since 2001, sees its task as helping to promote stability in its member states (especially in Central Asia), and it aspires to play the role of the leading organisation in Asia and to create a counterbalance for the global domination of the USA (especially the US military presence in Central Asia). Unofficially, the SCO is the main platform for striking deals and neutralising tension between Russia and China with regard to Central Asia.

Commentary

- The atmosphere of the summit and the declarations which accompanied it have confirmed the ambitions of the SCO (and especially of Russia) to continuously improve its global standing. This was manifested both in the promises that the SCO would become more active over the issue of Afghanistan and the harsh criticism of the situation in the Middle East, especially US policy here.

- Despite the aforementioned ambitions and the growing international position of the SCO, the organisation's effectiveness as regards the main area of its interest, Central Asia, is still an open question, mainly due to the scarcely concealed clash of stances taken by Beijing and Moscow. Beijing wants the SCO to have stronger instruments in the area of security and economic co-operation, while Russia prefers to use organisations where it is dominant for this purpose (the Collective Security Treaty Organisation and the Customs Union) and treats the SCO mainly as an element constricting China's position in the

region and an anti-American political platform. These controversies have limited the real effectiveness of the SCO.

- The most recent SCO summit was another attempt from China to take the initiative. More emphasis was put on security issues, and the summit was an opportunity to underline China's economic attractiveness to Central Asia (loans); this met with no response from Russia. However, the real test for both the SCO and the Russian and Chinese influences within this organisation will be its ability to respond to the continuing and deteriorating instability in Central Asia, the development of the situation in Afghanistan in the context of the winding up of the ISAF mission and the prospects for a continued US military presence in this region after 2014.