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Article

Beyond Treaty-Based Regionalism: The Formal-Realization Gap and Selective Institutional Design in Central

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Abstract: This article examines how regional commitments translate into administrative practice in Central Asia, with particular attention to Uzbekistan. Comparative institutional analysis is combined with a documentary pilot covering seven policy fields as of 1 August 2026. The proposed Selective Institutional Transfer Matrix evaluates foreign mechanisms through functional relevance, institutional compatibility, delivery feasibility, and distributional resilience. The pilot records mean formal commitment of 0.61, mean implementation performance of 0.46, and an equal-weight formal-realization gap of 0.14. These author-coded scores indicate uneven implementation; a small gap may also reflect limited institutional ambition. The findings support clearer administrative responsibilities, public performance reporting, and selective adaptation of cooperation mechanisms. The assessment provides an institutional diagnostic rather than a causal estimate of economic effects.

Keywords: Central Asia; regional economic integration; institutional transfer; formal–realization gap; documentary assessment; implementation; regional cooperation; Uzbekistan.

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1. Introduction

Regional integration is not merely an expansion of trade, and its economic mechanisms cannot be inferred from the existence of a treaty, summit, or corridor. International experience is relevant only when it explains how political commitments are converted into lower transaction costs, denser production and infrastructure links, credible institutions, regional public goods, and distributively sustainable outcomes. These outcomes require organized implementation [1].

The central argument of this study challenges the mechanical transplantation of established regional integration models into institutional environments characterized by different political, economic, and administrative conditions. The European Union (EU), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and project-led Asian programs arose from different security settlements, sovereignty bargains, administrative capacities, and development asymmetries. Treating them as successive positions on one institutional ladder mistakes legal centralization for economic effectiveness. Taghizadeh-Hesary et al. emphasize that Asian integration requires a cautious approach reflecting regional political and social conditions, while European experience offers useful lessons in infrastructure financing and institutional coordination [2]. From Central Asian practice, Linn identifies gradual implementation, regional ownership, adequate financing, and performance monitoring as conditions for effective cooperation.

The post-2016 shift in Uzbekistan's regional policy gives this problem particular relevance. Bilateral normalization, reopened border crossings, restored transport links, and efforts to resolve water and territorial disputes expanded opportunities for cooperation. Kobilov interprets this development as a form of soft regionalism, characterized by closer governmental collaboration in priority areas without equivalent progress toward institutionalized integration. Uzbekistan's more active regional engagement therefore provides evidence of political rapprochement, while leaving open the question of how consistently cooperation becomes administrative practice [3].

Political rapprochement does not implement itself.

A treaty registry shows what a state has accepted; it does not show whether trucks cross more quickly, certificates are recognized, power is delivered, or migrants can transfer social rights. Assessing institutional effectiveness requires a traceable connection between commitments, responsible agencies, financing, administrative procedures, and observable delivery. The analytical problem concerns both the design of regional arrangements and the evidence used to judge their implementation.

This article therefore asks: to what extent has the post-2016 architecture of Central Asian cooperation converted political and legal commitments into recurrent administrative practice, and which elements of international institutional experience can support that conversion? Particular attention is paid to Uzbekistan's contribution [4]. The regional unit of analysis comprises Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan; wider organizations and cooperation formats are examined as overlapping institutional arrangements that influence this five-country system.

The study combines comparative institutional analysis with a documentary pilot covering seven policy fields, using an evidence cutoff of 1 August 2026. Its first contribution is a Selective Institutional Transfer Matrix that evaluates mechanisms through four filters: functional relevance, institutional compatibility, delivery feasibility, and distributional resilience. The object of transfer is a specific mechanism, such as coordinated border administration, project financing, or compliance monitoring, whose operation can be assessed under regional conditions.

Its second contribution is the application of a formal–realization gap measure to compare documented commitments with evidence of implementation [5]. The resulting scores are author-coded diagnostic assessments. A small gap can reflect either effective delivery or alignment at a low level of ambition, so the commitment and realization scores must also be examined separately. Together, these instruments connect the selection of institutional mechanisms with scrutiny of their practical operation.

The literature on Central Asian integration connects institutional design with political ownership, economic interdependence, and implementation capacity. These perspectives address different parts of the same problem. Comparative institutional studies identify mechanisms that may support cooperation; regional scholarship explains why their operation depends on leadership preferences, administrative resources, and the distribution of expected gains. Their combined relevance lies in explaining how commitments become recurring practice.

International experience offers mechanisms and warnings. Taghizadeh-Hesary et al. examine European integration as a source of lessons for Asia, particularly in infrastructure financing, institutional coordination, and the creation of conditions that allow participating economies to benefit from cooperation. Their argument also recognizes the political and social diversity of Asian subregions, which requires caution when adapting European arrangements. The implication is that institutional applicability depends on the conditions under which a mechanism operates. Legal similarity alone provides an insufficient basis for transfer.

ASEAN provides a different institutional reference. Its *Economic Community Blueprint 2025* links regional objectives to practical instruments, including national and ASEAN single windows, simplified customs procedures, mutual-recognition arrangements, standards cooperation, and measures facilitating the temporary movement of skilled professionals. Sectoral work plans, national implementation targets, and Secretariat monitoring connect these commitments to administrative responsibilities. The blueprint

also accommodates flexibility within a framework of consensus-based decision-making. These provisions describe an institutional design and implementation agenda; their inclusion in a regional document does not establish that every measure has been delivered.

For Central Asia, the analytical distinction concerns flexibility of participation and precision of obligations. States may participate at different speeds while still specifying responsible bodies, deadlines, reporting requirements, and procedures for resolving implementation problems. Selective adaptation therefore requires examining individual instruments rather than treating an entire regional model as transferable.

Structural economic conditions complicate institutional choice. Amirbek et al. identify inherited production patterns that connected Central Asian economies to external industrial centers more strongly than to one another [6], [7]. Their analysis also associates limited regional exchange with landlocked geography, transport costs, border barriers, infrastructure deficiencies, and weak institutions. Shared history consequently provides an incomplete explanation of either integration potential or institutional feasibility.

The same study identifies a tension in Eurasian integration: arrangements that deepen cooperation among participating states can divide Central Asia between members and nonmembers. This is a qualitative interpretation supported by descriptive evidence, rather than a controlled estimate of the economic effects of membership. Nevertheless, it directs attention to an important design problem. A common procedure may reduce costs within one institutional grouping while creating adjustment burdens for neighboring economies outside it [8].

Accordingly, regulatory compatibility should be assessed instrument by instrument. Customs information exchange, certification procedures, and technical standards may have different implications for administrative capacity, market access, and national policy discretion. The relevant question is whether a particular arrangement improves cross-border coordination under existing institutional constraints.

Project-led cooperation offers an institutional route organized around sector priorities, investment preparation, financing, and administrative coordination. The Asian Development Bank's *CAREC 2030* strategy assigns strategic direction and overall accountability to the Ministerial Conference, monitoring responsibilities to senior officials, sectoral functions to committees, and technical and administrative support to the Secretariat. It also proposes a results chain linking interventions, outputs, and outcomes, with indicators and baselines to be developed subsequently. The strategy thus specifies responsibilities without, by itself, demonstrating their effectiveness.

Linn's assessment of CAREC provides an earlier evaluation of this approach. He identifies practical strengths in sector focus, investment planning, corridor monitoring, and knowledge support, alongside weaknesses in regional ownership, business participation, and the connection between regional strategies and national plans. These findings qualify the assumption that external financing necessarily produces durable regional cooperation. Financing can support implementation, but national agencies must incorporate regional obligations into their own decisions and budgets.

Project completion is an intermediate result.

A completed transport asset, for example, still requires coordinated operating procedures, maintenance responsibilities, and predictable border administration. This distinction supports evaluating both the delivery of a project and the institutional arrangements that sustain the regional service it is intended to provide.

International lessons must be filtered through regional history. In her analysis of integration initiatives during 1994-2005, Kazhenova argues that divergent Kazakh and Uzbek leadership preferences obstructed the development of a shared institutional direction. Sovereignty concerns, competing leadership ambitions, external alignments, and different approaches to economic reform shaped those preferences. Her interpretation shows why institutional proposals cannot be assessed independently of the political commitments required to sustain them. It does not imply that leadership preferences explain every regional outcome.

Kobilov examines the subsequent shift in Uzbekistan's regional foreign policy through content analysis of 71 official speeches and additional evidence. His explanation connects the leadership change after 2016 with domestic economic needs, regional security concerns, transport opportunities, and efforts to resolve longstanding disputes. The resulting cooperation is characterized as soft regionalism, with closer governmental interaction in selected fields [9].

Together, these studies explain how political leadership can obstruct or enable regional cooperation. A separate question remains: whether cooperation acquires administrative continuity beyond presidential initiatives. For the present study, that question connects Uzbekistan's regional engagement to the responsibilities, resources, and monitoring procedures through which commitments are implemented.

Laruelle and Peyrouse distinguish the value of dialogue from the achievement of substantive integration objectives. Their assessment of regional organizations identifies difficulties arising from unclear performance benchmarks, limited public access to audits, and declarations unsupported by adequate implementation mechanisms. At the same time, they recognize that consultation and informal communication can produce benefits even where formal integration remains limited [10]. Their historical analysis therefore cautions against both counting organizations as evidence of success and dismissing all institutional activity as ineffective.

The unresolved issue addressed here is how to connect institutional selection with a transparent assessment of delivery across policy fields. The reviewed literature supplies criteria concerning political compatibility, ownership, financing, and monitoring. This article brings those criteria into a Selective Institutional Transfer Matrix and applies a documentary comparison of formal commitments and observed implementation. The assessment retains both component scores because alignment can occur at different levels of institutional development. It also distinguishes limited public evidence from demonstrated non-performance.

2. Materials and Methods

The study combines comparative institutional analysis with a documentary assessment of Central Asian cooperation, focusing on Uzbekistan's participation. International mechanisms are examined through four filters: functional relevance, institutional compatibility, delivery feasibility, and distributional resilience. The evidence comprises scholarly literature, treaties, official policy documents, institutional reports, and documented implementation events, with an information cutoff of 1 August 2026.

The documentary pilot compares formal commitment (L) and implementation performance (P) across seven policy fields. Both dimensions are author-coded on an anchored scale of 0, 0.25, 0.50, 0.75, and 1.00. For L, the categories progress from no common commitment through declarations, signed sector instruments, and formally adopted frameworks to binding regional rules supported by implementation resources and enforcement procedures. For P, they progress from no observable action through pilots, recurrent partial implementation, and broad delivery to consistent cross-border application with public monitoring and corrective mechanisms.

Each policy field receives an equal weight of 1/7. The formal–realization gap is calculated as:

$$G_t = (1/7) \sum_{j=1}^{7} |L_{j,t} - P_{j,t}|. \quad (1)$$

Here, j identifies the policy field and t denotes the assessment date. Commitment and performance scores are reported alongside the aggregate gap because a small discrepancy can also reflect limited institutional ambition. The results constitute a documentary diagnostic, not a causal estimate. Interpretation remains sensitive to coding judgments, equal weighting, and the availability of public implementation evidence.

To improve the transparency of the documentary assessment, each policy field was evaluated using two separate dimensions: the institutional strength of formal commitments and the documented extent of their practical implementation. The commitment score reflects the legal status, institutional specificity, and implementation provisions of regional arrangements, whereas the realization score reflects documented

administrative activity, continuity of implementation, and observable cross-border application. The assessment distinguishes the absence of publicly available implementation evidence from demonstrated non-implementation. Scores represent analytical judgments based on the available documentary record rather than directly observed quantitative proportions of implemented commitments. The documentary justification for each assessment is presented in Table 3.

3. Results

The comparative assessment identifies several mechanisms that could support Central Asian cooperation, each subject to different institutional conditions. European experience contributes implementation discipline and the connection between obligations, financing, monitoring, and corrective procedures. ASEAN provides instruments for regulatory interoperability and flexible participation. Eurasian arrangements offer experience in technical compatibility, while CAREC demonstrates how sector priorities can be organized through project preparation, financing, and administrative coordination. Their relevance depends on the specific function being transferred [11].

Table 1. International mechanisms and their selective applicability to Uzbekistan and Central Asia

Experience	Organizing logic	Transferable mechanism	Non-transferable risk
European Union	Binding rules, monitoring, adjudication, cohesion finance	Implementation scoreboard; mutual recognition; territorial-incidence and compensation mechanisms	Premature legal supremacy, excessive delegation, or a one-speed sequence
ASEAN	Consensus, variable geometry, regulatory interoperability, open regionalism	Interoperable single windows; selected MRAs; business consultation; willing-state pilots	Soft-law non-compliance and consensus reduced to declarative lowest-common-denominator outcomes
EAEU	Common customs and technical rules, supranational coordination, sectoral programs	Selective technical compatibility; digital customs data; traceability and industrial-cooperation modules	Uniformity that conflicts with differentiated external commitments or creates asymmetric adjustment costs
GMS / CAREC	Project pipelines, sector committees, development finance, results monitoring	C5 project-preparation facility; corridor, energy, water, health, and digital public-goods governance	Counting assets or expenditure as integration while local productive linkages remain shallow

Experience	Organizing logic	Transferable mechanism	Non-transferable risk
Nordic / EU power markets	Technical interconnection, operating rules, cost-benefit sharing, soft and hard enforcement	Regional dispatch protocols; transparent capacity allocation; shared balancing and emergency rules	Building physical interconnection before agreeing operating, settlement, and distributional rules

Table 1 provides the comparative basis for applying the Selective Institutional Transfer Matrix. Functional relevance identifies the problem a proposed mechanism would address. Institutional compatibility tests whether it can operate within national legislation, sovereignty preferences, and differentiated external commitments. Delivery feasibility examines the responsible bodies, financing, information requirements, and implementation timetable. Distributional resilience considers who receives the benefits, who bears adjustment costs, and whether participation can survive economic or environmental shocks.

Failure at one filter blocks mechanical transfer.

For example, an interoperable customs information system may address a clear regional need, yet remain infeasible if participating agencies lack compatible data standards or resources for maintenance. A transport project may satisfy financing requirements while distributing transit revenues, environmental burdens, and local employment unevenly. These cases require changes to the mechanism before implementation.

The resulting portfolio is therefore selective: implementation scoreboards, interoperable single windows, targeted mutual recognition, project-preparation capacity, and agreed operating procedures for shared infrastructure. These are candidates for adaptation and testing. The comparison does not establish their economic returns in advance.

The post-2016 architecture has acquired greater organizational continuity. The Treaty on Friendship, Good-Neighbourliness and Cooperation was signed in 2022; the decision to establish the Council of National Coordinators followed in 2023; and the Central Asia-2040 cooperation concept was adopted in 2024. These developments expanded the formal basis for regional coordination. They do not, by themselves, establish consistent implementation across participating states [12], [13].

Legal authority, financing, technical expertise, and political coordination remain distributed across several institutional layers. Regionally owned consultations coexist with bilateral commissions, sectoral organizations, project platforms, and wider regional arrangements. Table 2 systematizes their different functions and implications for Uzbekistan (Table 2).

The November 2025 summit illustrates why institutional status must be recorded precisely. President Mirziyoyev proposed a Community of Central Asia, a rotational secretariat, and an upgraded status for national coordinators. These initiatives appeared as proposals in the official account.

The separately published list of adopted documents included Azerbaijan's full participation in the Consultative Meeting format, a regional security concept, and a security-risk catalog, but did not list adoption of the proposed Community or secretariat [14].

Table 2. Institutional layers of Central Asian economic integration and Uzbekistan's position

Institutional layer	Legal and implementation capacity	Uzbekistan's participation	Formal-realization implication
Consultative Meetings, Council of National Coordinators, 2022 Treaty, Central Asia-2040	Regionally owned political coordination; broad treaty commitments; recurring summits and follow-up mechanism; no confirmed autonomous budget, adjudicatory organ, or fully operational permanent secretariat	Initiator of the consultative format; treaty signatory; chair in 2025; proposer of the Community, rotating secretariat, trade program, investment declaration, and infrastructure council	Stronger agenda continuity, but many instruments remain programmatic; proposals must not be coded as adopted rules
Bilateral and trilateral treaties, commissions, funds, border and infrastructure arrangements	Narrower scope, quicker bargaining, identifiable implementing agencies and projects; rules differ by partner and sector	Active use with all four neighbours; ID-card mobility with Kyrgyzstan; water–energy and industrial projects; participation in the 2025 Khujand border settlement	Delivers visible results, yet creates a patchwork that may not scale into five-state rules
IFAS, ICWC, and ICSD	Established sectoral bodies for transboundary water, environment, and the Aral Sea; executive and commission structures; legal and organizational reform remains unfinished	Founding state; national water authorities participate in governance and projects	Institutional continuity is real, but enforcement, financing, data exchange, and basin-wide reciprocity remain uneven
CAREC	Project finance, ministerial and senior-official oversight, sector committees, secretariat, results frameworks, corridor monitoring; membership extends beyond Central Asia	Member and major corridor country; uses finance, technical assistance, customs modernization, and performance measurement	Strong delivery and monitoring capacity; not an endogenous five-state legal order and cannot settle all regulatory conflicts

Institutional layer	Legal and implementation capacity	Uzbekistan's participation	Formal-realization implication
SPECA	UN-supported platform for connectivity, trade, digitalization, energy, and sustainable development; mainly soft-law coordination, roadmaps, and proposed trust-fund mechanisms	Founding participant and active agenda setter	Useful for standards and project preparation; implementation depends on national and donor follow-through
EAEU, CIS, SCO, OTS, and "Central Asia Plus" formats	Overlapping memberships and unequal bindingness; some provide detailed rules or external finance, others political dialogue	EAEU observer since 2020; selective cooperation through a 2024-2026 action plan; active in several non-exclusive formats	Preserves open and multi-speed integration, but produces legal asymmetry and forum-shopping

The summit record thus supports distinguishing proposals from adopted arrangements. It does not establish whether every proposal remained unchanged throughout the subsequent period. Azerbaijan's participation also expands the consultation format without changing this study's five-country geographical scope.

Differentiated external participation introduces another coordination problem. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan participate in the EAEU as members, whereas Uzbekistan engages as an observer. Its cooperation plan with the Eurasian Economic Commission provides channels for sectoral interaction, including trade, industry, finance, and transport. Observer cooperation, however, does not constitute accession. Consequently, common regional procedures must accommodate differences in existing obligations and administrative authority.

Uzbekistan's domestic treaty legislation supplies a potentially useful implementation chain. The Law on International Treaties provides for a state register, designated implementing bodies, inter-agency coordination, and monitoring by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These provisions establish responsibilities for following up on international commitments.

The legal framework exists. Delivery requires additional evidence.

A treaty register records accepted obligations; evaluating their economic operation requires information on administrative outputs, expenditure, delays, service quality, and unresolved barriers. The analytical task is therefore to connect the legal record with evidence from the agencies and operators responsible for implementation.

The documentary pilot applies the proposed formal-realization gap methodology to seven policy fields of Central Asian regional cooperation, using an evidence cutoff of 1 August 2026. The assessment encompasses five-state initiatives, bilateral and trilateral cooperation arrangements, and relevant sectoral institutions operating within the regional integration framework. Particular attention is given to the distinction between the formal adoption of institutional commitments and their translation into observable administrative practices and operational outcomes. The resulting scores characterize the institutional development and implementation performance of individual policy fields

rather than the performance of particular countries. They should therefore be interpreted as comparative institutional assessments, not as estimates of the proportion of regional obligations fulfilled.

The evaluation follows the five-level coding scale established in the methodology, with formal commitment (L) and implementation performance (P) assessed independently. Formal commitment captures the institutionalization of cooperation through agreements, regulatory frameworks, designated responsibilities, and implementation provisions. Implementation performance reflects the extent to which these arrangements have generated observable activities, recurrent administrative procedures, and operational coordination. Documentary evidence is evaluated with reference to the predefined scoring criteria, distinguishing the existence of institutional arrangements from evidence of their practical application. Where public implementation information is incomplete, the assessment recognizes that limited documentary observability does not necessarily establish implementation failure. Table 3 presents the results of the pilot assessment, including the commitment and performance scores, the absolute discrepancy between them, and the principal documentary rationale underlying each evaluation.

Table 3. Pilot coding of institutional commitment, realization, and gap in Central Asia, as of 1 August 2026

Policy field	L	P	Absolute gap	Documentary rationale
Strategic five-state coordination	0.75	0.50	0.25	Treaty, annual summits, national coordinators, Central Asia-2040; no adopted permanent secretariat, consolidated budget, public compliance system, or adjudicatory mechanism
Borders and short-term mobility	0.75	0.75	0.00	Border settlement, reopened crossings, Khujand documents, and Uzbek–Kyrgyz ID-card travel; portability of labor and social rights remains outside this narrower field
Trade and customs administration	0.50	0.25	0.25	Repeated liberalization commitments and wider trade regimes exist; five-state regulatory uniformity, mutual-recognition coverage, and predictable border performance remain limited
Transport and corridor governance	0.75	0.50	0.25	Dense portfolio of corridors, agreements, border-post investment, and monitoring; permits, interoperability, scheduling, and cross-border procedures remain uneven

Policy field	L	P	Absolute gap	Documentary rationale
Water, energy, and environment	0.75	0.50	0.25	IFAS architecture and new joint projects provide continuity; basin-wide enforcement, financing, data transparency, and allocation rules remain incomplete
Investment and industrial cooperation	0.50	0.50	0.00	Joint funds, enterprises, industrial projects, and a 2025–2027 action plan are observable; most machinery is bilateral rather than governed by common regional rules
Labor mobility and portable social rights	0.25	0.25	0.00	Political recognition and limited facilitation exist; no comprehensive five-state labor regime or portable-benefits system is operational
Equal-weight mean / gap	**0.61**	**0.46**	**0.14**	**Author's calculation; rounded to two decimals**

The results reveal differentiated institutional development across the seven policy fields. Mean formal commitment is 0.61, while mean implementation performance is 0.46, producing an equal-weight formal-realization gap of about 0.14. Four policy fields exhibit an absolute discrepancy of 0.25, while the remaining three record no discrepancy between commitment and implementation scores. The aggregate indicator is calculated from the underlying field-level differences, yielding 1.00/7 = 0.1429. The apparent difference between this value and the subtraction of the two rounded component means (0.61 − 0.46 = 0.15) results from rounding.

To examine whether the aggregate finding is disproportionately influenced by an individual policy field, a leave-one-out sensitivity analysis was performed. The procedure recalculates the formal–realization gap after sequentially excluding each of the seven policy fields and assigning equal weights to the remaining six. The resulting estimates range from 0.1250 to 0.1667, compared with the baseline value of 0.1429. Excluding any of the four fields with a discrepancy of 0.25 reduces the aggregate gap to 0.1250, whereas excluding any of the three fields with a zero discrepancy increases it to approximately 0.1667. Thus, the aggregate discrepancy remains positive under every single-field exclusion, indicating that the observed divergence between formal commitments and implementation is not attributable to one policy field alone.

4. Discussion

Nevertheless, this sensitivity analysis provides only a limited assessment of robustness. The range of estimates reflects the influence of individual observations within the existing coding framework but does not address uncertainty arising from the assignment of scores, the selection of policy fields, or the equal-weighting assumption. In particular, the use of author-coded documentary evidence introduces an element of interpretive judgment, while differences in the availability and transparency of official implementation information may influence the assessment of individual fields. The resulting indicator should therefore be understood as an exploratory institutional diagnostic rather than a statistically validated measure of regional integration effectiveness or a causal estimate of economic outcomes.

A further limitation concerns the relationship between institutional formalization and the substantive ambition of regional cooperation. No policy field receives the maximum score for either formal commitment or implementation performance. Within the adopted coding framework, this indicates that the assessed arrangements do not simultaneously demonstrate fully developed institutional obligations and consistently documented regional implementation. However, relatively small discrepancies may reflect either effective realization of existing commitments or limited institutional ambitions. For this reason, the aggregate formal–realization gap must be interpreted alongside the separate commitment and performance scores and the qualitative characteristics of the arrangements under examination.

Strategic coordination. Formal commitment is coded at 0.75 and realization at 0.50. Treaties, recurring consultations, national coordinators, and long-term cooperation programs provide a substantial organizational basis. The lower performance score reflects the more limited documentary evidence of consolidated implementation arrangements and publicly traceable delivery across the regional agenda. The distinction between proposed and adopted institutions is especially relevant here.

Borders and short-term mobility. Both dimensions receive 0.75. The documentary record includes the March 2025 agreement on the junction point of the Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Tajik borders and the use of identity cards for travel between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan since September 2023. These measures demonstrate concrete changes in border relations and travel procedures. Their scope nevertheless remains specific: progress in bilateral travel arrangements does not establish uniform mobility rights throughout the five-state region.

Trade, customs, and transport. Trade and customs administration receive scores of 0.50 for commitment and 0.25 for realization. Transport and corridor governance are coded at 0.75 and 0.50, respectively. The common discrepancy of 0.25 indicates that formal arrangements and infrastructure initiatives are assessed as more developed than their consistent administrative operation.

CAREC's shipment-based monitoring provides relevant contextual evidence by documenting variation in corridor performance across transport modes and locations. Its geographical coverage extends beyond the five Central Asian states, so its aggregate findings cannot be treated as direct measurements of this study's regional sample. The practical implication is narrower: improved infrastructure must be assessed alongside customs procedures, permits, scheduling, and operational interoperability.

Water, energy, and environment. This field receives 0.75 for commitment and 0.50 for realization. Established sectoral bodies and cooperative arrangements provide institutional continuity, while the pilot identifies incomplete evidence of consistent regional execution. Institutional development also remains active: the IFAS working group met on 25-26 February 2026 to discuss organizational reform and prepare a preliminary work plan. Continued reform reflects an unfinished institutional agenda; it does not, by itself, demonstrate poor project performance or inadequate water-management outcomes.

Investment and industrial cooperation. Commitment and realization both equal 0.50. The pilot records joint funds, enterprises, and industrial projects as evidence of activity, while recognizing that much of the implementation machinery operates through bilateral arrangements. The zero gap therefore represents alignment at an intermediate institutional level. It does not establish a common investment space, uniform investor protection, or dense regional production networks.

Labor mobility and portable social rights. Both scores are 0.25. Here, the zero discrepancy reflects limited commitment accompanied by limited implementation. Short-term entry facilitation must be distinguished from access to employment, recognition of qualifications, social insurance, and the portability of accumulated benefits.

Zero discrepancy does not mean deep integration.

Borders, investment, and labor rights all produce a zero gap, although their paired scores differ substantially. Reporting the gap alone would conceal this distinction and could reward low institutional ambition. The component scores are therefore indispensable to interpreting the aggregate result.

The field pattern is consistent with several potential implementation constraints identified in qualitative research. In Izteleuova's study of 28 experts based in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, bureaucratic inertia received 23 mentions, institutional competition 22, asymmetry of national interests 20, and limited implementation capacity 17. These findings describe expert perceptions within a nonrepresentative sample. They do not establish the prevalence or causal contribution of each constraint across Central Asia.

The documentary assessment nevertheless identifies a related organizational problem: political authorization, agency responsibilities, financing, and performance information do not consistently form a traceable implementation chain. Bilateral arrangements can deliver visible results, but their extension to additional states requires agreement on compatible procedures, reciprocal obligations, and the distribution of costs.

The principal finding is therefore uneven institutional conversion. Formal coordination has developed alongside concrete achievements in selected fields, while implementation remains differentiated by policy area and participating countries [15], [16]. The Selective Institutional Transfer Matrix identifies potentially adaptable mechanisms; the documentary pilot indicates where closer examination of delivery is needed. Together, they provide a basis for institutional diagnosis without treating legal commitments, completed projects, and economic integration outcomes as interchangeable evidence.

5. Conclusion

The analysis identifies substantive institutional development in Central Asian cooperation alongside uneven implementation across policy fields. Regional consultations, formal agreements, sectoral institutions, and bilateral initiatives have expanded the organizational basis for cooperation. Their economic significance, however, depends on whether commitments become predictable administrative practice. Uzbekistan's contribution is most visible in convening regional dialogue and advancing practical arrangements with neighboring states. The documentary pilot records mean formal commitment of 0.61, mean realization of 0.46, and an equal-weight formal-realization gap of 0.14. These author-coded values indicate incomplete conversion of commitments into implementation within the seven fields examined. The aggregate discrepancy requires careful interpretation: borders and short-term mobility, investment cooperation, and portable labor rights all produce zero gaps, although their commitment and performance levels differ substantially. Alignment alone cannot establish integration depth. International experience offers no regional constitution ready for import. It supplies mechanisms and warnings. The Selective Institutional Transfer Matrix provides a structured basis for assessing those mechanisms through functional relevance, institutional compatibility, delivery feasibility, and distributional resilience. Implementation scoreboards, interoperable administrative systems, targeted mutual recognition, and project-preparation arrangements warrant consideration where their operation is compatible with regional capacities and differentiated external commitments. A compact implementation protocol should connect each regional decision to its legal status, participating states, responsible agencies, financing, milestones, reporting schedule, and procedure for addressing delays. A small technical unit supporting national coordinators could maintain institutional records, reconcile implementation reports, and preserve continuity between chairmanships. Sector agreements should specify reciprocal obligations, service standards, information-sharing duties, and review procedures. Firms and border users also need accessible channels for reporting inconsistent administration and unresolved barriers. Project financing should incorporate maintenance responsibilities and disclose the distribution of expected benefits and costs. Successful bilateral arrangements could then be considered for optional regional adoption after assessing their performance. Uzbekistan's coordinating role will remain credible where participation is voluntary, project selection is transparent, and smaller economies can influence decisions. The pilot provides an initial diagnostic basis for this approach. The leave-one-out sensitivity analysis indicates that the aggregate discrepancy is not driven by a single policy field. Nevertheless, independent coding, alternative weighting schemes,

and more comprehensive administrative and user-level evidence are necessary to establish the reliability and broader applicability of the proposed diagnostic framework. Institutional progress should ultimately be demonstrated through reliable regional services and sustained implementation.

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