

CENTRAL ASIA: WHAT ROLE FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION?

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CENTRAL ASIA: WHAT ROLE FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The European Union is not living up to its potential as a geopolitical actor in Central Asia. The level of EU interest has been low, and Brussels is doing little to shape developments in a region that has mostly seen marked declines in its economic fortunes, political freedoms and social development in recent years but remains of considerable strategic significance. If this is to change, Europe must move away from largely unsuccessful policies, particularly the promotion of region-wide projects, and take on a more focused and active role geared to the distinct characteristics of each of the region's five states. It needs also to raise the level of its representation, spend more money and stick to its political ideals if it is to have a positive impact.

The EU cannot afford to ignore Central Asia, where despite a surface calm, the potential for instability and conflict is high. Central Asia is important for the EU's future energy security. Public health systems there are in a critical state, creating ideal conditions for epidemics. Islamic radicalism, though not a current danger, is another potential challenge. Progress on human rights and good governance has been slow. The region is a major route for drug trafficking, and instability, if it develops, would seriously hinder efforts at nation-building in neighbouring Afghanistan.

EU assistance to the region has largely taken the form of technical assistance implemented through the program (TACIS) that was designed in 1991 to support transition to market economies and reinforce democracy and the rule of law in the post-Soviet space. That program has included a number of large trans-national projects in transport, drugs, border controls and energy which show few results for the time and money invested. Despite some assistance given to combating drug trafficking, the potential for ill-gotten gains from the drug trade continues to undermine efforts.

The approach to development has been fragmented and project-driven, rather than strategic, and has clung to a model of regional cooperation that has proven to be a non-starter due to the reluctance of Central Asian states to work together. The EU has attempted to promote food security through budget support in return for reforms but progress is difficult to measure. While existing development

and aid mechanisms are to be combined into a new single instrument in 2007, the nature of this new instrument remains to be determined; there are concerns that it, too, will be informed by an unrealistic attempt to foster regional cooperation.

Political involvement has likewise been limited, with only a handful of European diplomatic missions in the region. Although the EU has taken the lead in responding to the May 2005 Andijon massacre in Uzbekistan, it has generally been uneasy about addressing such difficult issues. There is some basis for concern that efforts to "engage" even the region's worst offenders – Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan – may be undermining the EU's stand on human rights and democratisation. The appointment of a European Union Special Representative is a welcome sign of interest, but it is not yet clear exactly how his role can be integrated with existing political mechanisms. Member-state activity has likewise been somewhat limited, although it has served to address areas overlooked by TACIS, notably public health.

If the EU is to be a force for stability and development in the region, it must take steps to increase its visibility and raise public awareness of its institutions, aims and activities. There must also be a move away from failed regional projects and recognition that the five Central Asian states face very different domestic political and economic situations. Regional cooperation should remain a goal but local needs should take priority until the Central Asian states are more willing to work together.

The EU should also balance technical assistance with long-term strategies designed to prevent conflict or, in the worst case, mitigate its effects. These should include planning for large humanitarian crises, including refugee flows, and finding ways to prevent instability in one state from infecting the region as a whole. Recognition is needed that engagement with regimes such as Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan is unlikely to yield results, and that policies should focus on how to ease their eventual transition from dictatorship. Engagement with moderate religious groups, not limited solely to official organisations and institutions, should be pursued more vigorously, and the EU should be unequivocal in its commitment to human rights and

democratisation. This will be especially important if the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) becomes increasingly straitjacketed and U.S. credibility on these issues continues to decline. The admittedly modest leverage the EU can exert means that common ground should be sought with Russia. But again this must be done realistically, with realisation that at present not much is likely to be found.

The EU has several advantages. It generally does not evoke in the region the same concerns as encroaching U.S., Russian or Chinese influence does. It has relevant experience in helping some former Soviet bloc countries make successful transitions to democracy and prosperity. It should not allow apathy and indecisiveness to squander its opportunity to have a similar impact in Central Asia.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the European Union and its Member States

1. Increase the EU's visibility and effectiveness by:
 - (a) increasing the staffing of European Commission delegations in Bishkek and Dushanbe and appointing an ambassador-level delegation chief in both capitals;
 - (b) promoting closer cooperation between the Commission delegations and the EU Special Representative (EUSR);
 - (c) supporting the study of Central Asian languages, history, and culture in Europe to develop more regional experts;
 - (d) providing educational materials in Russian and local languages to Central Asian universities, particularly those which train future diplomats and officials, and providing greater opportunities for Central Asian students to study in Europe;
 - (e) increasing consultation between Brussels and EU offices in the field; and
 - (f) giving more attention to public outreach and information campaigns about the EU, its values, institutions, and programs.
2. Move away from treating Central Asia as a unified region and focus more on country-specific issues, keeping ideas of regional cooperation and integration as longer-term goals.
3. Maintain a consistent and united front on human rights abuses, notably in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, without allowing a desire for engagement to eclipse these efforts, and specifically:
 - (a) take a more robust public stance on democracy and human rights issues throughout the region, keeping these issues in the foreground of relations, particularly in discussions held by the EUSR;
 - (b) reject any attempt by EU institutions to revive closer trade links with Turkmenistan until there has been meaningful human rights and economic liberalisation progress that would justify such a step;
 - (c) continue to support human rights and democracy projects, particularly as they relate to women; and
 - (d) end the institutional belief that the OSCE handles Central Asia, and issues like human rights can be left to that forum.
4. Insist on concerted efforts by the states in the region to combat corruption and provide incentives for progress against clearly-defined benchmarks.
5. Launch a review to develop ways to improve the EU's institutional knowledge and analysis of energy issues in the region.
6. Explore areas of possible cooperation with Russia and China, identifying those where interests coincide without conflicting with concerns over human rights.
7. Work to counter terrorist recruitment and radicalisation by promoting human rights and good governance, and by engaging with local religious authorities, including those outside official structures.
8. Work to improve north-south road connections between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan, as well as those countries' road connections with China.
9. Make support for the public health sector a major part of assistance to countries in the region.

Bishkek/Brussels, 10 April 2006

CENTRAL ASIA: WHAT ROLE FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION?

I. INTRODUCTION

As the EU has become a more visible geopolitical actor, it has sought to enhance its ability to respond to and prevent deadly conflict.¹ Moreover, its expansion in 2004 has caused it to re-think relations with a number of parts of the former Soviet Union. Some (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) are now full-fledged EU member states; others (Moldova, Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia) have been brought into the new European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).² Less certain is how the EU will define relations to more distant former Soviet republics: the five Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

This report examines EU engagement in Central Asia since the Soviet Union's break-up and suggests how the EU could enhance its profile and ability to impact the political, economic, and social environment. It is based on a wide review of EU policy documents and more than 100 interviews (both in Central Asia and Europe) with representatives of the European Commission, member states, government officials, local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), political analysts and politicians in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Direct access to Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan has been impossible, so Crisis Group has relied on extensive experience and, where possible, contact with individuals currently or recently in the two countries.

¹ Crisis Group has produced a number of recent reports on EU policy in areas of current or potential conflict, including Crisis Group Europe Report N°173, *Conflict Resolution in the South Caucasus: The EU's Role*, 20 March 2006; Asia Report N°107, *Rebuilding the Afghan State: The European Union's Role*, 30 November 2005; Europe Report N°168, *EU Visas and the Western Balkans*, 29 November 2005; Africa Report N°99, *The EU/AU Partnership in Darfur: Not Yet a Winning Combination*, 25 October 2005; Europe Report N°164, *Bosnia's Stalled Police Reform: No Progress, No EU*, 6 September 2005; and Europe Report N°160, *EU Crisis Response Capacity Revisited*, 17 January 2005.

² The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was developed in the context of the 2004 enlargement, with the objective of strengthening stability and security in the EU's southern and eastern neighbours. For detailed information, see the Commission ENP website http://europa.eu.int/comm/world/enp/index_en.htm.

II. WHY SHOULD CENTRAL ASIA MATTER TO THE EU?

A. CONFLICT AND INSTABILITY RISKS

Serious and prolonged instability in one Central Asian country could have disastrous consequences for the entire region; this is particularly so with Uzbekistan, which, with a population of over 25 million, is Central Asia's most populous state. For the most part, borders in the region are porous and poorly demarcated, and there is little to prevent people or groups from crossing illegally. Unrest in one state could result in refugee flows which could quickly overwhelm the capacity of neighbours to respond. As the infrastructure of these countries is still closely intertwined, unrest in any one could have severe economic consequences for the others.

Humanitarian concerns aside, Central Asian instability could affect the EU and its member states in many ways. Europe is a potential refugee destination, as recent experience shows. There are more direct security concerns as well: events in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere indicate that failed states and chronically unstable regions are ideal havens for terrorist and criminal groups. "There is a global interest in stability in this region", a European observer said. "Central Asia is anonymous in the West because it's been relatively stable. If it becomes unstable, it will no longer be anonymous, and people will ask why we weren't interested earlier".³

1. Kazakhstan

Thanks to income from its energy reserves, Kazakhstan has long been seen as the most stable and promising Central Asian state. Yet there are troubling signs. President Nursultan Nazarbayev has entered what most believe will be his last term,⁴ and the competition between rival elites

³ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, 31 January 2006.

⁴ Nazarbayev was re-elected in December 2005 with a reported 91 per cent of the vote. In its final report on the elections, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) found that "despite some improvement in the administration of the election in the pre-election period, the

for succession is likely to be intense. In February 2006, the brutal murder of a prominent opposition politician, Altynbek Sarsenbayev, shocked many in Kazakhstan and the region.⁵ The background is still unclear but some see a harbinger of turbulent times.

2. Kyrgyzstan

In March 2005, President Askar Akayev was overthrown after protests over rigged parliamentary elections.⁶ President Kurmanbek Bakiyev's government has struggled to assert its authority.⁷ A low-intensity competition for power and control of the country's limited economic resources has resulted in prolonged instability and occasional violence. State institutions are all but non-existent, with criminal groups filling the vacuum. Promised reforms, such as constitutional changes to limit presidential power, a reinvigorated anti-corruption campaign and efforts to improve living standards have gone nowhere, further eroding popular support.

3. Tajikistan

Tajikistan appears to be one of the more stable countries in the region but the lingering effects of its civil war in the 1990s can still be felt in economic and political life.⁸ The country is very poor, relying heavily on

remittances from hundreds of thousands of Tajiks working abroad. Corruption is rife, and the income from trafficking in Afghan heroin corrodes institutions. Fear of renewed civil war has meant public manifestations of dissent are all but unknown, and the government of President Emomali Rahmonov has been largely successful in marginalising the opposition. Continued stability should not be taken as a given, however; a new generation is emerging with fewer memories of the war and much less likely to accept it as an excuse for poverty and authoritarianism. Relations with Russia are close, but a downturn there, or in the Russian economy, could mean reduced opportunities for Tajik migrant labour, with disastrous social and economic consequences.

4. Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan is one of the world's most closed and repressive regimes, ruled by President-for-life Saparmurat Niyazov.⁹ The combination of his absolute control of political life and revenue from vast natural gas reserves provide a semblance of stability. Yet Niyazov's systematic dismantling of civil society, education, and health care and the complete absence of even the semblance of independent political institutions mean that the country could experience a humanitarian emergency and even state failure in the medium to long term.

5. Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan presents the greatest risk of serious instability. It is second only to Turkmenistan in Central Asia for political repression, and the overt brutality of President Islam Karimov's regime exceeds that of Niyazov's. Anger at ruinous and exploitative economic policies, which leave millions struggling to survive, has been building for years.¹⁰ In May 2005, Uzbek security forces suppressed an uprising in the eastern city of Andijon, in which hundreds of unarmed civilians are believed to have been killed.¹¹ Since then, the government has cracked down on independent journalists, human rights activists, and civil

election did not meet a number of OSCE commitments and other international standards for free elections". It cited "undue involvement of the authorities in the election campaign, undue restrictions on campaigning, cases of harassment of campaign staff and an atmosphere of intimidation." Full text at http://www.osce.org/documents/html/pdf/18133_en.pdf.html.

⁵ Sarsenbayev's murder was the second apparent political killing in recent months; opposition leader Zamanbek Nurkadilov was shot and killed in November 2005. Officials ruled his death a suicide, though he had apparently been shot three times. See Gulmira Arabaeva, "Murder widens political gulf in Kazakhstan", IWPR Reporting Central Asia, no. 436, 24 February 2006, http://www.iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=259857&apc_state=henprca.

⁶ For more on Kyrgyzstan under Askar Akayev, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°81, *Political Transition in Kyrgyzstan: Problems and Prospects*, 11 August 2004; Crisis Group Asia Report N°37, *Kyrgyzstan's Political Crisis: An Exit Strategy*, 20 August 2002; and Crisis Group Asia Report N°22, *Kyrgyzstan at Ten: Trouble in the "Island of Democracy"*, 28 August 2001.

⁷ For more on political developments in Kyrgyzstan since the ouster of Akayev, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°109, *Kyrgyzstan: A Faltering State*, 16 December 2005, and Crisis Group Asia Report N°97, *Kyrgyzstan: After the Revolution*, 4 May 2005.

⁸ For more, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°33, *Tajikistan's Politics: Confrontation or Consolidation?*, 19 May 2004; Crisis Group Asia Report N°51, *Tajikistan: A Roadmap for*

Development, 24 April 2003; and Crisis Group Asia Report N°30, *Tajikistan: An Uncertain Peace*, 24 December 2001.

⁹ See Crisis Group Asia Report N°85, *Repression and Regression in Turkmenistan: A New International Strategy*, 4 November 2004, and Crisis Group Asia Report N°44, *Cracks in the Marble: Turkmenistan's Failing Dictatorship*, 17 January 2003.

¹⁰ For more, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°76, *The Failure of Reform in Uzbekistan: Ways Forward for the International Community*, 11 March 2004; Crisis Group Asia Report N°46, *Uzbekistan's Reform Program: Illusion or Reality*, 18 February 2003; and Crisis Group Asia Report N°21, *Central Asia: Uzbekistan at Ten – Repression And Instability*, 21 August 2001.

¹¹ See Crisis Group Briefings, *Uzbekistan: In for the Long Haul* and *Uzbekistan: The Andijon Uprising*, both op. cit.

society. Relations with the West – cooling in recent years – have been all but severed, while relations with Russia and China, which endorsed the handling of the Andijon events – have never been closer. A kind of calm has held sway since Andijon but the government does not seem inclined to address the underlying causes for the disturbances. As in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, the combination of years of authoritarian rule and the presence of lucrative resources mean the president's eventual departure from the scene is likely to be accompanied by a potentially violent succession struggle. The danger of further instability in the short to medium term is high.

B. ENERGY SECURITY

Since the January 2006 Ukraine-Russia gas dispute, energy security has risen to the top of the European policy agenda, with officials in Brussels and member-state capitals scrambling to reduce over-reliance on Russia.¹² Belatedly, the EU has begun to realise Central Asia's potential importance. Its oil and gas reserves, which could be linked directly to Europe via the South Caucasus and Turkey, are seen as at least a partial solution to the need to diversify energy supply. "This has become the biggest issue for us this year", an Eastern European diplomat said. "We shouldn't just depend on Russia – this is very dangerous in terms of energy security. The dispute showed us we should regard Central Asia as an important economic and energy partner".¹³

1. The EU's growing vulnerability

The statistics of EU reliance on Russian energy speak for themselves:

- ❑ The EU imports around half its energy requirements. By 2030, it is expected to import 94 per cent of its oil and 84 per cent of its gas.¹⁴
- ❑ 46 per cent of EU gas imports come from Russia.¹⁵
- ❑ Russia is the sole gas supplier to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Finland and the major supplier to Hungary, Austria, Poland, the Czech

¹² A new European Commission Green Paper on energy strategy was published on 8 March 2006, and was reportedly extensively revised after Russia cut off gas to Ukraine. See "Call for EU to boost energy security", *Financial Times*, 20 February 2006. The Green Paper is available at http://europa.eu.int/comm/energy/green-paper-energy/index_en.htm.

¹³ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, 16 February 2006.

¹⁴ See the Annex to the European Commission Green Paper, "A European Strategy for Sustainable, Competitive and Secure Energy", at http://europa.eu.int/comm/energy/green-paper-energy/doc/2006_03_08_gp_working_document_en.pdf.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Republic, and Greece (and EU candidate Bulgaria).¹⁶

Moreover, Russia's energy sector influence is increasing through acquisition of production and transportation infrastructure in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, control of Central Asian export routes and an agreement with Germany to construct a gas pipeline under the Baltic Sea. The gas giant Gazprom is also seeking to increase its share of Uzbekistan's gas reserves.¹⁷

Diversifying the EU's gas – as opposed to oil – supply is the key challenge. Oil is more fungible than gas as it is liquid and can be transported easily by ship. Gas must be cooled to -160°C before it takes liquid form (LNG).¹⁸ The technology is becoming more affordable but LNG will remain a relatively small percentage of European gas imports in the near future.

2. Central Asian energy

Three of the five Central Asian states have significant energy reserves. Kazakhstan has by far the largest – oil reserves in the global top ten, gas in the top fifteen. Turkmenistan has large, unexplored gas reserves; Uzbekistan is also a significant gas producer.¹⁹ Almost all Turkmen gas exports go northward through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to Russia, where part continues to Ukraine through Russian-controlled pipelines. Kazakh gas is also mostly shipped to Russia. Uzbek gas is primarily consumed in the region but a significant quantity is exported to Russia.

Indeed, other than a little Turkmen gas shipped southward to Iran, Russia monopolises import of Central Asian gas. Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan pumped over 50 billion cubic metres²⁰ of gas there in 2005, over 10 per cent of Russian consumption.²¹ This is due to the north-south axis of the pipeline infrastructure left over from the Soviet Union, designed to bring Central Asian energy to Russia's industrial core. With Russia controlling

¹⁶ See "World Energy Outlook 2005", International Energy Agency, and "Statistical Review of World Energy", BP, June 2005.

¹⁷ See Crisis Group Briefing, *Uzbekistan: In for the Long Haul*, op. cit.

¹⁸ Liquefied natural gas.

¹⁹ Statistics on reserves and production and export levels are available in the "Statistical Review of World Energy", op. cit. See also the U.S. Energy Information Agency, www.eia.doe.gov.

²⁰ This includes gas imported by Ukraine through Russian pipelines and comprises approximately 37bcm from Turkmenistan, 8bcm from Uzbekistan, and 6bcm from Kazakhstan.

²¹ For comparison, this is equivalent to 10 per cent of EU consumption: the EU consumed 467bcm in 2004.

transport, the countries have little negotiating clout and are forced to sell gas at well below market prices. According to a European energy executive, Russia has been “mopping up” Central Asian gas and reselling it – or Russian gas in its place – to Europe at significant mark-up.²²

Russia relies heavily on Central Asian gas, both for domestic use and European export. Experts are sceptical it has the storage or spare production capacity to maintain domestic and international supply during even a short disruption.²³ It would then face a choice of cutting off domestic consumers or neighbours. EU member states do not generally have strategic gas reserves (gas reserves, unlike oil reserves, are not a common practice), and so would be at risk of a critical shortage if Central Asian instability disrupted supply.

3. Direct transport options

The well-known Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline is due to begin deliveries in Ceyhan in May or June 2006, while a lesser known gas pipeline along the same route is due to be completed in October, terminating in Erzurum, Turkey, where it will link up with the Turkish pipeline system and the rest of Europe. Initially, this BTE (Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum) pipeline is due to carry gas only from Azerbaijan’s Shah Deniz field. But since the Ukraine-Russia dispute, there is growing talk of reviving plans for a Trans-Caspian pipeline connecting Central Asia – likely Turkmenistan or Kazakhstan or both – with Baku and the BTE pipeline. This would allow Central Asian countries to export gas directly to Europe.²⁴

Several hurdles would need to be overcome. Turkmenistan and Iran refused to join a 2003 agreement between Azerbaijan, Russia and Kazakhstan dividing the northern Caspian Sea between them and would need to create some sort of legal framework on seabed rights before a pipeline could be laid. A trans-Caspian pipeline would also pose some technical challenges given the sea’s depth and topography.

4. Europe’s competition

In addition to Russia, a number of other countries are interested in acquiring Central Asian gas. A U.S.-backed proposal to build a pipeline from Turkmenistan across Afghanistan to markets in Pakistan and India was shelved for several years because of unrest in Afghanistan but with the Taliban’s ouster is again under discussion.²⁵ China, which has an oil pipeline connecting with Kazakhstan, has also talked with Turkmenistan about importing natural gas and recently signed a deal to invest \$600 million in gas production in Uzbekistan.

Whether EU member states are willing to import gas from a region home to some of the world’s most repressive states requires weighing human rights as well as strategic concerns. Assuming infrastructure obstacles can be overcome, effective delivery of energy would depend upon regional stability, and economic cooperation would require attention to issues of transparency and good governance. Finally, as recent experience in Nigeria and elsewhere has shown, there must be attention to local development in areas where extractive industries operate. In any case, if the EU is to have influence over the development of Central Asian energy and associated export routes, it must be far more active in the region than it has been to date.²⁶

²² Crisis Group interview, European energy company executive, 8 February 2006. Russia has also appeared to favour buying more Central Asian gas as a way of putting off costly investment in energy extraction in less hospitable parts of its own territory.

²³ Crisis Group interviews, Keith C. Smith, CSIS, Brussels, 27 January 2006; European energy company executive, op. cit.

²⁴ The proposed pipeline has garnered much recent interest from Western policy-makers. The EU’s latest energy Green Paper notes the pipeline is “getting more support as it would be a direct route to import gas from Central Asia to the EU (and to Ukraine)”. U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Bryza met with Turkmen president Niyazov on 13 January 2006, discussing, among other things, “diversifying European energy supplies”. On 20 January 2006, Turkish energy minister Hilmi Güler discussed with Niyazov resumption of “previously negotiated projects on gas supplies by pipeline to Turkey”, and later confirmed that the two countries are discussing construction of the pipeline, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/turkmenistan/hypermail/news/0003.shtml>. According to the U.S. State Department: “For several years, Turkmenistan was a key player in the U.S. Caspian Basin Energy Initiative, which sought to facilitate negotiations between commercial partners

and the Governments of Turkmenistan, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey to build a pipeline under the Caspian Sea and export Turkmen gas to the Turkish domestic energy market and beyond – the so-called Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline (TCGP). However, the Government of Turkmenistan essentially removed itself from the negotiations in 2000 by refusing all offers by its commercial partners and making unrealistic demands for billion-dollar ‘pre-financing’”, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35884.htm>.

²⁵ Many obstacles must be overcome before this pipeline is built. Continued instability in Afghanistan and a growing insurgency in Balochistan mean construction is unlikely to begin soon. It would also require significant investment in production in Turkmenistan and infrastructure in Pakistan. Such Western investment in Turkmenistan is unlikely while Niyazov is in power; also Pakistan’s subsidised gas pricing would hinder development of the pipeline and associated infrastructure.

²⁶ European governments are unlikely to invest directly in energy infrastructure but EU and member-state political engagement in

C. PUBLIC HEALTH

Health systems in Central Asia are in crisis. The potential spill-over effects of epidemics such as HIV/AIDS and drug-resistant tuberculosis present long term threats to the EU. More immediately, the EU must consider the potentially dire consequences of a major outbreak of avian flu in a region where health services are frail, overburdened and under-funded. While Central Asia does not border on the EU, avian flu has demonstrated a capacity to travel rapidly across the Eurasian landmass, and Europe hosts thousands of migratory birds from Siberia and Central Asia each year. Furthermore, the social consequences of Central Asia's multiple health crises – in particular the HIV/AIDS epidemic – threaten the overall stability and development prospects of the region, with implications for European security.²⁷

Health conditions declined in all Central Asian republics after the break-up of the Soviet Union as a result of increasing poverty and the impact of the post-Soviet transition on social services. In Tajikistan, these factors were exacerbated by civil war. In Turkmenistan, the crisis is the direct result of the government's purposeful dismantlement of the health system through measures such as the 2004 dismissal of 15,000 skilled workers and the 2005 presidential order to close all hospitals outside the capital, Ashgabat. The government has also all but banned diagnosis or reporting on a number of communicable diseases, including tuberculosis and cholera.²⁸ Life expectancy decreased sharply in all five

the region is important for preparing the ground for European energy companies to do so. As a European energy executive noted, "consideration of good international relations and a strong presence in a given region form a genuine part of the risk analysis undertaken by energy companies in deciding whether to invest....The EU should improve its institutional knowledge and capacity within the energy sector in Central Asia". Crisis Group interview, European energy company executive, op. cit. EU governments could also spur investment via tax incentives to energy companies, technical assistance and loans from the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

²⁷ The percentage of development aid devoted to health in the region varies considerably: Kazakhstan 6.33 per cent, Kyrgyzstan 0.07 per cent, Tajikistan 8.16 per cent, Turkmenistan 11.60 per cent, Uzbekistan 18.38 per cent (1997-1999 averages). Marc Suhrcke, Bernd Rechel, Catherine Michaud, 2005 "Development Assistance for health in central and eastern European region", Bulletin of the World Health Organisation 200; 83:920-927.

²⁸ "Health & Human Rights Organisations Condemn Turkmenistan Plan to Close Hospitals", Human Rights Watch, March 2005; "Public Health Crisis in Turkmenistan: International Responses" summary, Open Society Institute Forum; "Turkmen Leader Closes Hospitals", BBC, 1 March 2005. A 2005 study by the European Centre on Health of Societies and Transition and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine,

states after 1990 and by 2001 was about ten years lower than the EU average.²⁹ Maternal mortality in 2002 was six to eight times (and ten times in Tajikistan) the EU level.³⁰

These trends are unlikely to improve significantly soon. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan will probably not meet Millennium Development Goals (MDG) on child and maternal mortality.³¹ All but Turkmenistan are unlikely to meet the targets on HIV/AIDS and TB incidence.³² The region is struggling against increases in both infectious diseases and non-communicable ones such as cancer, "exhibiting some of the worst features of both developed and developing countries".³³ Governments are increasingly unable to meet health needs, with costs falling on patients already struggling with wider effects of poverty.

The spread of infectious disease – in particular HIV/AIDS and TB – is a key problem. One estimate puts the numbers now living with HIV/AIDS in the region at 90,000, despite much lower official figures.³⁴ Given the pattern seen elsewhere of epidemics along drug trafficking routes, an explosion in rates along the Central Asian drug route may be imminent.³⁵ Officially reported cases in the region increased sixteen-fold from 2000 to 2004,³⁶ with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan most affected.³⁷ The World

funded by the Open Society Institute (OSI), concluded that "the health of the population in Turkmenistan has suffered the consequences of dictatorship and is now worse than in any other country in Europe or Central Asia". Bernd Rechel and Martin McKee, "Human rights and health in Turkmenistan", policy brief, 2005, available at www.lshtm.ac.uk/ecohost/projects/health-turkmen.htm.

²⁹ Numbers began to improve in the late 1990s but were still much lower in 2003 than 1990. "Central Asia Human Development Report", UNDP; "Health Care Systems in Transition, Uzbekistan 2001", European Observatory on Health Systems & Policies.

³⁰ Martin McKee & Laurent Chenet, "Patterns of Health", in "Health Case in Central Asia. Health Care Systems in Transition, Tajikistan 2000", European Observatory on Health Systems & Policies, 2002.

³¹ "2004 Central Asia, South Caucasus & Moldova Regional Assistance Plan", DFID.

³² Ibid.

³³ Martin McKee & Laurent Chenet, op. cit, p.64.

³⁴ Centre for Disease Control and Prevention in Central Asia figures, cited in "Combating HIV/AIDS in Europe & Central Asia", World Bank 2005.

³⁵ Intravenous drug use is considered the major factor in the spread of HIV in the region, fuelled by overlap with commercial sex. World Bank website, updated February 2005.

³⁶ From 500 to 8,000; "Combating HIV/AIDS in Europe & Central Asia", World Bank 2005.

³⁷ "AIDS Epidemic Update: December 2005", UNAIDS/WHO. See also <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/2/E78782D7-F6B9-4FDD-933B-505A84E0E13A.html>.

Bank warns of “an explosive HIV crisis unless concerted preventive efforts are undertaken now”.³⁸ National government-initiated and internationally supported programs are to varying degrees in place, framed by a regional UNAIDS strategy, but the underlying causes, in particular the drug problem, complicate efforts to combat the epidemic. James Callahan of the UNODC states: “70 to 80 per cent of new HIV cases are injecting drug users. It is the biggest threat for most governments, in terms of what this is doing to Central Asia”.³⁹ Increasing incidence of sexually transmitted diseases, especially syphilis, is an additional worry and sign of a potential HIV/AIDS epidemic.⁴⁰

Tuberculosis has reached critical levels throughout the region, with a significant increase in a multi-drug resistant strain as a result of health system failings and inadequate emphasis on follow-up treatment.⁴¹ Since 1990, TB incidence has more than doubled in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, tripled in Uzbekistan and increased five-fold in Tajikistan.⁴² The U.S. and the World Health Organisation (WHO) are engaged in an initiative to promote directly observed treatment (DOTS) to limit the spread of drug resistant forms of the virus. “The problems of drugs, HIV/AIDS and TB are inextricably linked”, a UN representative said. “In Kyrgyzstan, 90 per cent of drug addicts are intravenous drug users, where we see the highest numbers of HIV infections. And most people with AIDS die of TB. So you have a triangle: drugs, AIDS, TB”.⁴³

Avian flu spread from China to Central Asia in 2005, with Kazakhstan experiencing an outbreak in poultry resulting in the culling of more than 9,000 birds. Its relatively high rural demographic population distribution has led to concerns that the region is vulnerable to outbreaks similar to those which occurred recently in Turkey. The international focus is on building regional capacity to deal with these but Central Asian governments are heavily reliant on foreign aid. The EU’s recent earmarking of €5 million towards this end is positive, as are pledges at a January 2006 donors conference in Beijing. But such aid will not be enough to tackle the serious infrastructure failings plaguing the health and emergency response systems, which leave Central Asian governments ill-equipped to handle a major outbreak.

D. RADICALISM AND TERRORISM

Anger at repression, corruption, and poor governance has led to some support in Central Asia for radical Islamist groups.⁴⁴ Most prominent is Hizb ut-Tahrir, a clandestine movement active throughout the Islamic world which seeks to unite Muslims in an Islamic caliphate. Cells of activists are present throughout most of the Central Asian states, engaged chiefly in spreading leaflets and audio and video materials which condemn the practices of the region’s governments and assert justice will only be attainable under the caliphate. Supporters insist their movement seeks to achieve its goals through wholly non-violent means. Governments in the region have responded variously to the appearance of Hizb ut-Tahrir, which has been active at least since the mid-1990s. The movement has been most harshly suppressed in Uzbekistan, where accused members face lengthy prison terms. Tajikistan has likewise taken a hard line against the organisation, which is particularly active in the northern province of Sughd. Arrests of 99 accused members were reported in 2005.⁴⁵ The Kyrgyz authorities have generally been somewhat more relaxed, with only occasional arrests.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Crisis Group has reported extensively on Islamic radicalism in Central Asia, including Asia Report N°72, *Is Radical Islam Inevitable in Central Asia? Priorities for Engagement*, 22 December 2003; Asia Report N°59, *Central Asia: Islam and the State*, 10 July 2003; Asia Report N°58, *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Responding to Hizb ut-Tahrir*, 30 June 2003; Asia Briefing N°11, *The IMU and Hizb ut-Tahrir: Implications of the Afghanistan Campaign*, 30 January 2002; and Asia Report N°14, *Central Asia: Islamist Mobilisation and Regional Security*, 1 March 2001. Crisis Group will revisit the issue in detail in a forthcoming report.

⁴⁵ See Gulnoza Saidazimova, “Central Asia: Hizb ut-Tahrir’s Calls for Islamic State Find Support”, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 17 January 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/01/e73441be-0bd5-4e98-8046-4eba329d890c.html>. Representatives of Tajikistan’s security services say Hizb ut-Tahrir increasingly seeks to recruit women, because they tend to attract less attention than men. A Bishkek-based researcher with extensive familiarity with women’s issues in the Ferghana Valley noted a similar trend, explaining: “Women are useful to Hizb ut-Tahrir because they’re such good conduits for spreading Hizb ut-Tahrir’s message to young people”. Crisis Group interviews, Dushanbe, 18 August 2005, and Bishkek, 13 January 2006.

⁴⁶ “We know that force won’t work against them”, a Kyrgyz government official said. “If we put them in prison, they’ll just convert hundreds more”. Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, 23 August 2005. In early April 2006, police in the southern cities of Osh and Özgön (Uzgen) arrested six people for allegedly possessing weapons, ammunition, and Hizb ut-Tahrir leaflets, compact discs, and audio and video cassettes. “Na iuge zaderzhany neskol’ko chelovek, u kotorykh iz”iaty oruzhie, boeprirasy i ekstremistskaia literature” [In the south, several people have been detained, from whom weapons, ammunition,

³⁸ “HIV/AIDS in Central Asia”, World Bank briefing note, March 2002.

³⁹ “Central Asia’s deadly cargo”, BBC, 22 November 2005.

⁴⁰ Martin McKee & Laurent Chenet, op. cit.

⁴¹ WHO considers the TB epidemic in all five states “critical”. “Combating HIV/AIDS”, op. cit.

⁴² Calculated from data in “Central Asia Human Development Report”, UNDP, op. cit.

⁴³ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, November 2005.

Kazakhstan, too, has been more tolerant, though members have come under increasing pressure recently.

Although Hizb ut-Tahrir is often portrayed in official statements as a dangerous organisation, no convincing evidence has yet linked members to a terrorism act. However, other groups have shown a willingness to use violence. Foremost among these was the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which emerged after the suppression of Uzbekistan's Islamist opposition in the early 1990s. Under Tohir Yuldotshev and Jum'a Namangani (the political and military leaders, respectively), the IMU fought beside the Islamist-dominated United Tajik Opposition (UTO) during the Tajik civil war and in 1999-2000 staged armed incursions into Kyrgyz and Uzbek territory from bases inside Tajikistan and Afghanistan. These were repelled, and supporters were expelled from Tajikistan. The IMU then seems to have joined with the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan; Namangani was apparently killed during the U.S. campaign to oust the Taliban in 2001; the remaining IMU forces are believed to be holed up along the Afghan-Pakistani border, with Taliban and al-Qaeda remnants.

The IMU's break-up may have led to the appearance of smaller cells of "freelance" militants throughout the region, engaged largely in criminal activities, albeit with some religious overtones. Tajikistan has targeted a number of such groups and individuals. In 2004, authorities conducted an operation to break up a group active in the Isfara district of Sughd province, a deeply conservative region and centre of support for the opposition Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT). Known as "Bay'at" (The Oath), it was suspected of crimes, including armed robbery, arson attacks on mosques and stores selling alcoholic beverages and the murder of a Baptist missionary.⁴⁷ A number of alleged leaders were arrested and in May 2005 received sentences of from six to 25 years in prison.⁴⁸ Much about Bay'at remains unclear,

although security officials say it had been active since 1992 and had close ties to the IMU, raising funds for the movement through crime.⁴⁹ In July 2005, authorities announced the arrest of six alleged IMU supporters in Dushanbe in connection with the murder on 1 April of police investigator Asad Mazoriyev and customs inspector Sheralâ Saidov.⁵⁰ Police sources say Mazoriyev was targeted because he had been investigating IMU activity in Tajikistan and had previously arrested six members of the organisation.⁵¹

IMU splinter cells may be operating elsewhere as well. In late March/early April 2004, a spate of bombings and shootouts between police and alleged terrorists in Tashkent and Bukhara resulted in dozens of fatalities. Simultaneous suicide bombings were carried out that July in front of the U.S. and Israeli embassies and the prosecutor general's office in Tashkent, resulting in the deaths of the bombers and two guards outside the Israeli embassy. In November, Kazakh security services announced they had broken up a terrorist ring in the southern city of Shymkent, not far from the Uzbek border, with ties to the bombings; the group's leaders are alleged to have been former IMU fighters who were trained at camps in Tajikistan and Afghanistan.⁵² In early June 2005, the U.S. embassy in Tashkent, acting on "information that terrorist groups are preparing attacks, possibly against U.S. interests, in Uzbekistan in the very near future", authorised the departure of non-emergency personnel and family members and urged its citizens to "consider departing Uzbekistan".⁵³ Speaking off the record, U.S. officials indicated the groups they were most concerned about included the IMU "and its offshoots".⁵⁴ The warning was lifted soon after. In late March 2006, Kyrgyz security services announced the arrest of eleven alleged IMU members in the southern cities of Osh and Özgön (Uzgen).⁵⁵

and extremist literature was confiscated], AKIpress, 7 April 2006, <http://news.akipress.org/news/27174>.

⁴⁷ See Crisis Group Briefing *Tajikistan's Politics*, op. cit.

⁴⁸ After the sentences were announced, some 25 to 30 relatives attempted to demonstrate in front of Khujand's city hall, but were driven away by police. A demonstration of an estimated 50 women and children, all relatives, reportedly took place in Isfara on 1 June, with some threatening suicide if the sentences were not reduced. One alleged senior member of Bay'at, A'lo Aminov, remains at large after shooting his way past police in December 2004. See "V Tadjikistane k razlichnym srokom prigovoreny sem' chlenov gruppirovki 'Baiat'" ["In Tajikistan, seven members of the group 'Bay'at' have been sentenced to varying terms"], Avesta News Agency, 25 May 2005, <http://avesta.tj/articles/31/9272.html>; "Rodstvenniki osuzhdennykh chlenov gruppirovki 'Baiat' proveli miting v Isfare", Avesta News Agency, 1 June 2005, <http://avesta.tj/>

articles/31/9519.html; and Igor Rotar, "Tajikistan Officials Fail to Apprehend Key Member of Bayat", Eurasia Daily Monitor, 5 January 2005.

⁴⁹ Crisis Group interview, Dushanbe, 18 August 2005.

⁵⁰ Z. Tadzhibaeva, "V Tadjikistane skhvacheny shest' chlenov Islamskogo dvizheniia Uzbekistana" ["Six members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan seized in Tajikistan"], Avesta News Agency, 5 July 2005, <http://avesta.tj/articles/31/10636.html>.

⁵¹ Crisis Group interview, Dushanbe, 18 August 2005.

⁵² Daniel Kimmage, "Kazakh Breakthrough On Uzbek Terror Case", Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 15 November 2004, at <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2004/11/f85202a7-d2ce-4c73-b3be-c280401be768.html>.

⁵³ Travel Warning, United States Department of State, 2 June 2005, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_2533.html.

⁵⁴ Crisis Group interviews, June 2005.

⁵⁵ "V gorodakh Osh i Uzgen zaderzhano 11 grazhdan, podozrevaemykh v prichastnosti k IDU" [In the cities of Osh and Özgön, 11 citizens have been detained, suspected of links to

The extent to which the IMU still is a serious terrorist threat is unclear; reliable information is rare, and certain governments, particularly the Uzbek, are inclined to exaggerate the terrorist threat to justify further suppression. There does appear to remain a threat of isolated violence from individuals or small, previously affiliated groups, though it is not clear how capable these groups are of organising large-scale terror attacks. No violence attributed to extremist organisations in recent years has specifically targeted Europeans or European interests. Nonetheless, the political environment – weak state institutions, endemic corruption, disillusionment with mainstream religious institutions, heavy-handed law enforcement, and, to varying degrees, limitations on legitimate dissent – is one in which radical groups of all stripes, terrorist or otherwise, can expect to find recruits. Seeking to suppress radicalism by force alone, without addressing the underlying contributing issues, is likely to make matters worse.

A fundamental Hizb ut-Tahrir argument – that Muslims can only expect justice under a caliphate – might find a receptive audience in the region. “There’s no justice here,” a woman in Khujand, Tajikistan, said in 2004, after describing how her son, accused of being a member of Hizb ut-Tahrir, had been tortured in police custody. “There’s no respect for human rights”.⁵⁶ “People used to shun me”, the father of an imprisoned member from Ferghana, Uzbekistan, said in 2006. “Now more and more people are telling me that Hizb ut-Tahrir was right about Karimov all along”.⁵⁷

E. HUMAN RIGHTS AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

The human rights picture is varied: somewhat better in Kyrgyzstan, poorer in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan and appalling in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.⁵⁸ Certain issues are common to all, to varying degrees: poor prison

conditions, arbitrariness and impunity of security services, violence and discrimination against women and corruption.⁵⁹ Economic desperation causes increasing numbers to fall prey to human trafficking schemes: women and girls for sexual exploitation, men for labour exploitation. Forced labour, including child labour, is a concern in the cotton-growing areas of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.⁶⁰ Torture is a major concern, particularly in Uzbekistan.⁶¹

Central Asia has yet to conduct an election, presidential or parliamentary, judged wholly free and fair by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). Widespread corruption and abuse of office produce increasing resentment, particularly in areas already hard-hit by poverty.⁶²

F. DRUG TRAFFICKING

Europeans consume an estimated 135 metric tons of heroin each year,⁶³ 90 per cent of which originates in

the IMU], AKIpress, 31 March 2006, <http://fergana.akipress.org/?id=18695>.

⁵⁶ Crisis Group interview, Khujand, July 2004.

⁵⁷ Crisis Group interview, January 2006.

⁵⁸ In its “2005 Country Report on Human Rights Practices”, the U.S. State Department noted improvements in the human rights situation in Kyrgyzstan following Akayev’s ouster but also a number of concerns, including “security force abuse of persons, particularly detainees”, “poor prison conditions”, “corruption”, “trafficking in persons” and “violence against women and children”. Kazakhstan’s record was characterised as “poor”. Tajikistan likewise received a rating of “poor”, for, among other things, “torture and abuse of detainees and other persons by security forces”. The report also noted the deteriorated human rights situation in Uzbekistan following the Andijon uprising. Turkmenistan received a rating of “extremely poor”; among key concerns, the report cited “torture and mistreatment of detainees.” Available at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/index.htm>.

⁵⁹ Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan received the worst possible rankings in Freedom House’s reports on political freedoms and civil liberties, along with North Korea, Cuba and Zimbabwe. Tajikistan and Kazakhstan did better but were still low on the scale. Kyrgyzstan received the best rating in the region. [http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/pdf/Charts 2006.pdf](http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/pdf/Charts%202006.pdf).

⁶⁰ For more, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°93, *The Curse of Cotton: Central Asia’s Destructive Monoculture*, 28 February 2004.

⁶¹ UN Special Rapporteur Theo van Boven called torture in Uzbekistan “systematic”. Josh Machleder, “Despite limited access, UN envoy finds torture throughout Uzbekistan”, Eurasianet, 9 December 2002, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/rights/articles/eav120902a.shtml>. According to Human Rights Watch, in 2005, “the government has made no visible progress on ending the use of torture in practice, and only minimal progress in implementing the recommendations made by the UN special rapporteur on torture after his visit to Uzbekistan in 2002”, “Human Rights Overview for Uzbekistan”, at <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/01/18/uzbeki12288.htm>.

⁶² The anti-corruption NGO Transparency International ranks most Central Asian countries near the bottom of its Corruption Perceptions Index; in 2005, for example, Kazakhstan ranked 110th of 159, Kyrgyzstan 134th, Uzbekistan 143rd, Tajikistan 150th, and Turkmenistan 157th. http://www.transparency.org/policy_and_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2005.

⁶³ EU heroin consumption shows no signs of decreasing. “The market is stabilising or slightly decreasing in some Member States, there is an increase in the demand for heroin in others, particularly in some of the new Member States. There are no indications that this general situation will drastically change in the next few years”. Crisis Group email communication, EUROPOL official, January 2006 and “European Union Situation Report on Drug Production and Drug Trafficking 2003 – 2004”,

Afghanistan.⁶⁴ Central Asia is the transit route for as much as 30 per cent of Afghan heroin, largely for Russian markets (most of the rest is sent through Pakistan and Iran to Turkey).⁶⁵ As a result, Central Asian states suffer from trafficking-related organised crime and corruption as well as addiction and associated health and social problems, with major implications for regional stability.⁶⁶

1. The source

Afghanistan produces nearly 90 per cent of the world's opium.⁶⁷ This is increasingly exported as heroin or morphine rather than untreated opiates, increasing the value while decreasing the bulk and risk of detection. In 2005, Afghanistan exported over 400 metric tons of heroin and morphine (and over 1,000 tons of opium), enough to supply the EU heroin market for over three years.⁶⁸

Afghanistan's opium production – around half its GDP⁶⁹ – is an increasing obstacle to security and development.⁷⁰ The EU is committed to being a “major partner” of the new Afghan administration,⁷¹ and with the transition from the “Bonn Process” to the “Afghanistan Compact”, the international community has made counter-narcotics a “cross-cutting priority”.⁷² The European Commission pledged €1 billion for development between 2002 and

2006,⁷³ including significant amounts to counter-narcotics.⁷⁴ Despite international efforts, however, very little progress has been made in reducing narcotics production.

The opium industry undermines security and the rule of law in Afghanistan by providing income to insurgent groups, empowering regional drug lords at the expense of the legitimate government and increasing corruption.⁷⁵ It also obstructs development of legitimate industry by over-inflating the economy and ensuring that infrastructure suits opium production, not other, legitimate sectors.⁷⁶ Limiting Central Asian trafficking would alleviate such economic distortions by driving up the price of opium production.⁷⁷

2. The Central Asia transit route

Central Asia suffers from its strategic location at the centre of global narcotics flows. Traffickers have reopened old silk trade routes to transport opiates from Afghanistan into Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, which are then sent on by air, rail or car to Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan and on to Russia and the EU. Traffickers exploit border controls weakened by corruption, poor infrastructure and a lack of national and regional level cooperation among law enforcement agencies. While only 1.64 tons of heroin were seized in Central Asia in 1997, 7.1 metric tons of opiates were seized in 2003 – an increase attributed to growing trafficking rather than more effective interdiction.⁷⁸

The influx has created an addiction crisis. The region experienced a seven-fold increase in drug abuse between 1990 and 2002. Close to 1 per cent of the population now abuses drugs – almost exclusively heroin – which represents around 550,000 cases (compared with 0.41 per cent prevalence in Western Europe).⁷⁹ Fuelled by

EUROPOL, at <http://www.europol.eu.int/publications/SeriousCrimeOverviews/2005/SC2Drugs-2005.pdf>.

⁶⁴ Crisis Group email communication, EUROPOL official, January 2006.

⁶⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “2005 World Drug Report”, p. 49.

⁶⁶ For previous reporting on drug trafficking in Central Asia, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°25, *Central Asia: Drugs and Conflict*, 26 November 2001. Crisis Group will address this issue in more detail in a subsequent report.

⁶⁷ “2005 World Drug Report”, op. cit., p. 40.

⁶⁸ “The Afghanistan Opium Survey 2005”, United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, November 2005.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 3.

⁷⁰ Crisis Group has raised this issue in the past; see Crisis Group Asia Report, *Rebuilding the Afghan State*, op. cit., and testimony by Mark L. Schneider, sr. vice president, International Crisis Group, to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on “Afghanistan – Continuing Challenges”, Washington DC, 12 May 2004, at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=2751&l=1>.

⁷¹ Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner, “Joint Declaration confirms the EU's continued commitment to Afghanistan”, Brussels, 6 November 2005.

⁷² See “The Afghanistan Compact: Building on Success”, London 31 January-1 February 2006. Full text at http://www.unama-afg.org/news/_londonConf/_docs/06jan30-AfghanistanCompact-Final.pdf.

⁷³ The Commission and member states together have pledged \$3.75 billion.

⁷⁴ Including: €75 million for the Afghan National Police, a €3 million project to strengthen border control on the Afghan-Iranian border, and €175 million for developing the rural economy to provide alternative livelihood opportunities for rural communities which might otherwise depend on illicit poppy cultivation.

⁷⁵ “Afghanistan's opium economy has unambiguous and serious harmful effects on governance, with profound implications for security, politics and state-building”, William Byrd and Christopher Ward, “Conflict Prevention & Reconstruction, Drugs and Development in Afghanistan”, World Bank Social Development Paper no. 18, December 2004, p. 10.

⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 20.

⁷⁷ “World Drug Report 2005”, op. cit., p. 49.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ “Central Asia Strategic Program Framework, 2004-2007”, UNODC, June 2004, p. 2.

increasing drug abuse, HIV/AIDS in Central Asia represents a potential pandemic on the EU's doorstep.

Organised crime has increased through trafficking and creation of new domestic drug markets. Drug revenue is invested in legitimate businesses, giving narco-criminals control of local industry.⁸⁰ Limited capacity and pervasive corruption hamper law enforcement. Bribery, particularly of poorly-paid border guards, is widespread and engenders economic practices that hinder development.⁸¹ All five Central Asian states rank near the bottom of Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index.⁸² A continuation of negative regional political and economic trends would reduce the limited resources available for anti-smuggling and counter-narcotics operations and increase radical groups' scope to use the drug trade to fund their activities.

It appears that the vast majority of drugs passing through Central Asia are either consumed locally or end up in Russia, with only a small amount ultimately reaching Europe.⁸³ This has, in the words of a member-state representative, led to a "lively debate" on policy, with some arguing that resources would be better spent on shutting down other routes with direct, demonstrable flows into the EU.⁸⁴ Yet there are ample reasons for European concern. As noted, heroin income is a potential source of funding for terrorist organisations. Secondly, as a European law enforcement official observed:

A major objective of criminal groups anywhere is to develop capabilities to project themselves outside the region in which they start operating. We need to evaluate the capabilities [of Central Asian drug traffickers] to establish connections with groups outside the region. When we notice that they have connections in France or Germany or the UK, it will already be too late.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Niklas Swanstrom, Program Director, Program for Contemporary Silk Road Studies, "Central Asia as a transit region for drugs", *Asia Times*, 27 August 2003.

⁸¹ Central Asia Strategic Program Framework 2004-2007, op. cit.

⁸² See fn. 62 above.

⁸³ Crisis Group interviews, Dushanbe and Almaty, January and February 2006.

⁸⁴ Crisis Group interview, Almaty, 20 March 2006.

⁸⁵ Crisis Group interview, 20 March 2006. The appearance in Central Asia of synthetic drugs such as ecstasy (produced in Europe) may indicate that such connections are beginning to form. Crisis Group interview, Almaty, March 2006.

G. AFGHANISTAN

If Central Asia once had relatively little intrinsic importance to Europe, its location gives it new significance in the post-9/11 world. "Proximity to Afghanistan is the main reason Europe is interested in Central Asia", voiced one European diplomat.⁸⁶ With Afghanistan now a major European priority, Central Asia can hardly be overlooked. Quite simply, stability in Afghanistan requires stable neighbours. "We need Central Asia's support to help stabilise Afghanistan", a European military officer said. "Can you imagine solving Afghanistan's problems without Central Asia's cooperation? It would be impossible".⁸⁷

Part of this cooperation has involved allowing NATO forces to maintain airbases. France has had a small base at Dushanbe's international airport since 2001.⁸⁸ Germany put some 300 troops at the southern Uzbek city of Termez in 2003 to support NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. Germany is currently the only NATO country with troops in Uzbekistan, and, along with the U.S., the only country permitted to use Uzbek airspace; the U.S. was ordered to abandon the so-called "K2" airbase near the city of Qarshi in July 2005, and most other NATO countries have since been denied permission to fly over the country.⁸⁹ "We can do without flying over Uzbek airspace", a European officer said, "but it's a bit uncomfortable".⁹⁰ In January 2006, Uzbek authorities accused the Germans of allowing other NATO forces to travel to Afghanistan via the base and demanded more payment.⁹¹ Alexander Rahr of the German Council on Foreign Relations recently stated that "Germany does not want to be used by the Uzbek authorities to split NATO", and the German military would probably withdraw from Central Asia if the U.S. did so.⁹²

⁸⁶ Crisis Group interview, Almaty, 20 January 2006.

⁸⁷ Crisis Group interview, Almaty, 10 February 2006.

⁸⁸ Only two aircraft are currently based at the airport; they were reinforced by Mirage fighter jets during Afghanistan's 2005 parliamentary elections; two additional tankers were also based at Bishkek's Manas International Airport in mid-2005. In return for the use of Dushanbe's airport, the French military has spent some €3 million on runway renovations. Crisis Group interviews, Dushanbe, 30 January 2006; Bishkek, 1 February 2006; and Almaty, 10 February 2006.

⁸⁹ See Crisis Group Briefing, *Uzbekistan: In for the Long Haul*, op. cit.

⁹⁰ Crisis Group interview, 10 February 2006.

⁹¹ Germany may have been allowed to continue using Termez, some speculated, because it permitted Interior Minister Zokirjon Almatov to receive medical treatment in Hannover despite an EU visa ban. Crisis Group Briefing, *Uzbekistan: In for the Long Haul*, op. cit.

⁹² "Uzbekistan: Germany Likely To Leave Uzbek Base", Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 21 February 2006. The fate of the

III. WHAT HAS BEEN DONE?

A. EU ASSISTANCE

1. TACIS: An overview

Following the Soviet collapse in 1991, EU relations with the newly independent states (NIS) were largely conducted along the lines of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) signed two years earlier with Moscow. In 1991, the EU also launched the Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) program, modelled on its assistance program for Central and Eastern Europe.⁹³

TACIS was intended to “promote the transition to a market economy and to reinforce democracy and the rule of law in the partner States”.⁹⁴ The hope was that European technical and financial assistance would promote economic growth and strengthen democracy and so lead to political and economic stability on the EU’s doorstep.⁹⁵ In 1991, five sectors were identified as priority areas for assistance: training, energy (including nuclear safety), transport, support for industrial and commercial enterprises, and food production and distribution. After entry into force of Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs, see below) with nine of the thirteen states covered by TACIS (including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan), these priorities were gradually revised to reflect better the specific needs of the recipients.

fourth NATO base in Central Asia, Ganci Airbase at Bishkek’s Manas International Airport, is being decided in U.S.-Kyrgyz negotiations, with the Kyrgyz reportedly asking that the U.S. significantly increase its annual payments.

⁹³ That program for Central and Eastern Europe, known as PHARE (*Pologne, Hongrie Assistance à la Réconstruction Économique*), was created in 1989, originally to provide economic assistance to Poland and Hungary. It was used to fund the pre-accession strategy for the countries of the region, and following the May 2004 enlargement, has been converted into the main aid mechanism for eight new EU member states (the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia) as well as soon-to-be members Bulgaria and Romania.

⁹⁴ Article 1, Council Regulation (EC/Euratom) No99/2000, 29 December 1999. Participating states are: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. Mongolia was initially included but in 2003 was moved into the Commission assistance program for Asia and Latin America.

⁹⁵ Murat Laumulin, “Kazakhstan and the West: relations during the 1990s in retrospect”, *Central Asia and the Caucasus Review*, no. 2, 2000, p. 39.

Under the current TACIS regulation, adopted in 2000, the European Commission outlines its priority areas in each partner country in Strategy Papers (SP), covering five to seven years. In parallel, it draws up Indicative Programs (IP) (two to three years), with specific objectives, and a preliminary financial assessment for each priority area. Annual Action Programs (APs) are then prepared, detailing the specific projects to be financed.

From 1991 to 2002, the five Central Asian states received some €366 million in TACIS assistance.⁹⁶ Since 2002, however, they have been grouped together under a Regional Strategy Paper, unlike the other seven beneficiary states, which continue to have individual country strategy papers. Under this regional strategy in 2002-2004, annual Commission allocations for TACIS projects doubled from €25 million to €50 million.⁹⁷ There have been further increases in 2005-2006 for the region, to €66 million and €60 million respectively.⁹⁸

Debates over how to approach Central Asia – as a unified region, or five distinct countries – have long haunted Commission policy. This ambiguity is reflected in the three-track scheme for TACIS assistance introduced by the 2002-2006 Regional SP. Projects under Track 1 focus explicitly on encouraging regional cooperation in transport, energy networks and environmental protection. Projects under Track 2, however, aim to provide a “regional support program ... implemented via tailored national activities” to address the challenges of sustainable economic development common to several countries. Projects under Track 3 implement poverty reduction schemes in two or three selected target areas.⁹⁹ In practice, most TACIS projects in Central Asia are said to be projects with a national orientation under a regional strategy rather than, as desired, regional projects with national implementation.¹⁰⁰

As part of the reform of the entire EU development assistance system, TACIS programming ends in 2006. However, given the time-lag in implementing the annual Action Programs for each country, TACIS-funded projects can be expected to run through 2011. Delays can be

⁹⁶ “European Commission Regional Strategy for Central Asia 2002-2006”, 30 October 2002, p. 12, at http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/ceeca/rsp2/02_06_en.pdf.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁹⁸ The 2005 budget included €15 million for Track 1 projects, €33 million for Track 2 projects, and €18 million for Track 3 projects. The 2006 budget allocated similar amounts for Track 1, with significant cutbacks in Track 2 and some in Track 3. Presentation by Adriaan van der Meer, head of EC Delegation to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan, to donors and NGO representatives, Bishkek, 15 February 2006.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁰ Crisis Group interview, Brussels, January 2006.

attributed to both sides; for example, Brussels approved the 2005 Action Plan only in November 2005, while Kazakhstan has still not approved the Action Plan for 2004. Turkmenistan took eighteen months to sign the 2004 plan.¹⁰¹ Security concerns caused suspension of TACIS in Tajikistan from 1998 to 2002,¹⁰² so the TACIS program for 2002-2003 is only now being implemented there.¹⁰³ Why Central Asian countries take so long to adopt the Action Plans is something of a mystery to European officials;¹⁰⁴ perhaps it is attributable to a lack of understanding of the opaque TACIS processes, a lack of political importance placed on the assistance, or, particularly in the Kazakh case, the relatively small size of the funding.¹⁰⁵

Assessments of TACIS's effectiveness have been mixed. Extensive use of Western contractors has led to scepticism among local observers. "The problem is that there's been a lack of capacity-building in the country itself", a former Kyrgyz government official said, adding:

The EU is using its own companies to implement projects, instead of building up local companies. So we have these "wise aunts and uncles" coming here who were in Africa yesterday and in Latin America the day before yesterday, and think they can just do the same things here that they've done everywhere else. Then they write a report and they leave, and the money just goes into the sand.¹⁰⁶

A Kazakh analyst agreed, saying:

These projects are implemented by big consulting companies who are focused on getting the project done, and not on any real long-term goals. So they implement the project, and they leave, and nothing is left behind except a book which will lie on a shelf in someone's office. Right now there are two totally different universes – one centres around

these organisations, and another around the societies where people actually live. There need to be more connections between international experts and locals. Yes, if locals are implementing projects themselves, maybe the quality won't be as good to begin with, but you need to begin with something. If the EU did more work directly with local companies or organisations, this would really improve their image.¹⁰⁷

TACIS contractors often complain about Byzantine Commission bureaucratic procedures.¹⁰⁸ Some, too, question the quality of some consulting firms. Commission representatives cite difficulty in finding qualified partners, both local and foreign.¹⁰⁹ Some critics have suggested that the Commission switch to more in-house development work. "That way", an ex-TACIS implementer said, "they could interact with the government as the Commission, and not as mere contracting NGOs, which would give them much more weight".¹¹⁰ Others go further, suggesting the Commission should get out of the development business altogether.¹¹¹ While this may not presently be realistic, the Commission might wish to consider relying less on consulting agencies with little or no on-the-ground experience and giving priority to international NGOs with long regional experience and good local connections and to developing further the potential of local partners and organisations.

¹⁰¹ Turkmenistan had no appointed National Coordinator much of this time. Crisis Group interview, Brussels, 12 January 2006.

¹⁰² In November 1997, two French nationals working for TACIS were abducted by the forces of Rizvon Sodirov, a UTO field commander who did not accept the peace treaty signed earlier that year. One, Kareen Mane, was fatally wounded during a rescue operation. See the newsletter of the United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT), 25 November-8 December 1997, at <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/tajikistan/links/unmo6.html>.

¹⁰³ Crisis Group interview, government official, Dushanbe, 24 February 2006.

¹⁰⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Brussels, January 2006.

¹⁰⁵ For example, TACIS aid to Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan from 2001 to 2005 totalled only €22.4 million and €1.75 million, respectively. Statistics provided by AIDCO official, Brussels, March 2006.

¹⁰⁶ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, 17 March 2006.

¹⁰⁷ Crisis Group interview, Almaty, 21 March 2006. A local TACIS-funded project employee in the Ferghana Valley expressed similar concerns: "In the last two years, we've had four ex-pats come through our project. They get €500 a day, which eats up all the money. They don't want to stay here because the conditions are too hard, so they live somewhere else, and just come to see us from time to time. Yes, it's good for us because we have work, and it's useful to meet foreigners. But maybe instead of flying these people in, they should think about other ways of doing things, like cooperating more with people – including other foreigners – already on the ground who know the region and have experience", Crisis Group interview, 9 March 2006.

¹⁰⁸ EC representatives insist strict protocols are necessary to prevent corruption. Crisis Group interview, Dushanbe, March 2006.

¹⁰⁹ Crisis Group interview, March 2006.

¹¹⁰ Crisis Group interview, February 2006.

¹¹¹ A contractor with extensive experience with Commission-funded projects in different parts of the world put it bluntly: "At the moment, I really feel that it would be better for aid to go through the individual development agencies – later, if you can strengthen the Commission a bit more, then aid from the Commission might be useful, but for the time being there is a good case for interim measures. The Commission needs to strengthen oversight and implementation – they just don't have the necessary competence to evaluate implementation", Crisis Group interview, March 2006.

2. The “flagship projects”

BOMCA/CADAP

Brussels has recognised that the fight against drugs is a matter for EU action,¹¹² which “may include relations with non-Member States and relevant international fora”,¹¹³ and will include, “assisting third countries ... including key drug producing and transit countries, to be more effective in both drugs demand and drugs supply reduction”.¹¹⁴ For this reason, in January 2001, the EU established CADAP (Central Asia Drug Action Program) to support the anti-trafficking efforts of four of the five Central Asian states (Turkmenistan did not initially participate.) The Border Management in Central Asia (BOMCA) program was launched in 2003, with the objective of strengthening border management and facilitating legal trade and transit. The two projects were merged in February 2004, with a combined budget for 2002-2006 of €38.5 million. While money comes almost entirely from the EU, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) is the implementing organisation and also provides some funding. Given the relatively small amounts allocated, BOMCA has focused on a “demonstration approach”, carrying out pilot projects with the hope partner countries will be convinced of their viability and usefulness and take steps to implement them. BOMCA also provides policy and legal advice and institutional capacity building.

CADAP seeks to implement the model of the EU Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EUMCDD), combating drugs and focusing on border interdiction, information sharing, intelligence, and prevention. It has emphasised providing equipment and training staff at the major Central Asian airports, as well as seaports in Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, and helping Tajikistan’s Drugs Control Agency (DCA). It is intended to operate in tandem with other TACIS-funded counter-narcotics projects in the Southern Caucasus and Eastern Europe.

Just after BOMCA was launched, it faced an unexpected challenge: the announcement that the Russian Border Forces (RBF), at Tajik insistence, would leave the Tajik-Afghan border, which they had controlled since the early 1990s. This prompted concern over how under-funded, poorly-equipped Tajik border guards would cope.¹¹⁵ As a result, much of BOMCA’s attention and resources were

diverted to address this issue.¹¹⁶ This has led to a feeling in some quarters that BOMCA has lost its original focus and become “politicised”, with the geopolitical interests of individual member states wielding undue influence.¹¹⁷ Such criticism may be unfair, given the difficulties the Russian withdrawal created. Still, it means projects intended to facilitate legal movement of people and goods across Central Asian borders have been put aside. “There are too many branches on the BOMCA tree right now”, a Commission representative said. “We need to slim down and get back to our original aims”.¹¹⁸

BOMCA/CADAP goals are indeed ambitious, and the programs have been popular with Central Asian governments. “Programs like BOMCA address many of the key issues of border protection”, a senior official of Tajikistan’s DCA said. “If they can be fully realised, this will be a big help”.¹¹⁹ The project has been fortunate with many of its local partners; Tajik DCA chief Rustam Nazarov and State Border Defence Committee Chairman Saidamir Zuhurov enjoy excellent reputations in the donor community for professionalism and honesty. Even the Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan governments, uncooperative on most regional initiatives, are said to be enthusiastic participants.¹²⁰ Russian authorities have reportedly also approached the Commission to implement projects along the Kazakh-Russian border, an idea which one Commission official dismissed as “hopeless given the scale of the border”.¹²¹

European assessments are somewhat guarded. Publicly, the Commission says “progress has been limited to date”.¹²² Privately, some officials are gloomier, citing corruption and collusion of some local officials in drug trafficking. “It is not a success story”, one said. “Millions of euros have been spent, we trained dogs, we reinforced airport controls, we gave some equipment, we trained some trainers with the hope that they would pass on some basic principles, when everybody knows how drugs

¹¹² “EU Drugs Strategy (2005 – 2012)”, Council of the European Union 15074/04, paragraph 4.

¹¹³ Ibid, paragraph 11.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, paragraph 30.

¹¹⁵ See Crisis Group Briefing *Tajikistan’s Politics*, op. cit.

¹¹⁶ A good deal of the impetus for BOMCA to shift focus to the Tajik-Afghan border reportedly came from the UK, which contributed an additional €2 million. Crisis Group interview, Dushanbe, 18 August 2005. The U.S., the main sponsor of the Tajik and Kyrgyz Drug Control Agencies, has also invested heavily in improving Tajik-Afghan border management.

¹¹⁷ Crisis Group interview, Almaty, January 2006.

¹¹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Almaty, March 2006.

¹¹⁹ Crisis Group interview, Dushanbe, 26 January 2006.

¹²⁰ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, 19 January 2006.

¹²¹ The Kazakh-Russian border stretches some 7,000 kilometres and has approximately 40 crossing points. “Our program is already too wide, with too many issues”, the official said. Crisis Group interview, Almaty, January 2006.

¹²² http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/kyrgyz/intro/index.htm.

trafficking in Central Asia works”.¹²³ Another official concurred, calling BOMCA “a hopelessly designed and implemented project”, which failed to take into account two key problems of border management in Central Asia: the sheer number of unofficial border crossings and the miserable conditions and poor salaries that most border guards in the region endure.¹²⁴ “As long as border-guard salaries are low and the Afghans are growing poppies”, a third official said, “anything we do is like bringing ice to the North Pole”.¹²⁵

Some Central Asian officials also express concerns in private. “BOMCA spends a great deal of money bringing in experts and organising regional conferences and seminars”, a Kyrgyz official said, “but we don’t need seminars – we need real working meetings with our counterparts across the border to resolve real, pressing issues”.¹²⁶

There is clearly a need for effective border management in Central Asia. Legitimate movement of people and goods is vitally important for the region’s economic survival. Yet the problems are legion, particularly in the Ferghana Valley, which Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan share. In many areas, borders are not demarcated, and disputes over where they lie have haunted relations since independence.¹²⁷ Border security is often entrusted to competing institutions: military, police, customs officials, and so on. Much cross-border movement is in uncontrolled areas, and even at official crossing points, cash often counts for more than proper documents. Europe certainly has valuable technical know-how to contribute, and BOMCA/CADAP objectives are worthwhile. The project’s supporters acknowledge the difficulties but hold out hope they can at least establish precedents of good practice and honesty which can be built on in coming years.¹²⁸ Nonetheless, given the sheer scope of the problems and the general lack of political will in Central Asian governments to solve them, this may be a thin hope.

TRACECA and INOGATE

Two other major Commission projects have an even wider focus, encompassing both Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus. The Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA), conceived at a 1993 Brussels conference, envisions construction of a vast east-west corridor linking

the EU to the three South Caucasus and five Central Asian states via the Black and Caspian Seas. It funds both technical aid and infrastructure rehabilitation projects – €10 million between 1993 and 2002.¹²⁹ When a secretariat was established in Baku, Azerbaijan, in 2001, the high level of EU interest was shown by the attendance of then Swedish Foreign Minister Anna Lindh representing the EU presidency, High Representative for the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana, and EU Commissioner for External Relations Chris Patten.¹³⁰ Countries such as Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan have expressed interest in joining TRACECA.

The Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe (INOGATE) program is part of EU efforts to enhance energy security. With a technical secretariat in Kiev, Ukraine, it is a massive endeavour; 21 countries are party to its “umbrella agreement” on the integration of oil and gas transport systems.¹³¹ The budget was €3 million for 1996-2003 and is €18 million for 2004-2006.¹³² Some €10 million has been allocated for supporting INOGATE initiatives in Central Asia in 2005-2006, including a technical audit of oil and gas pipelines, rehabilitation of gas transport systems (specifically the Bukhara-Tashkent-Bishkek-Almaty pipeline) and coordination of national energy policies in the region.¹³³

Elements of TRACECA and INOGATE came together in the “Baku Process”, launched by representatives of the Commission and fifteen states from the Black Sea and Caspian regions in the Azerbaijani capital in November 2004.¹³⁴ Participants pledged to hold regular energy and transport ministerial conferences and discuss increased harmonisation of the two sectors. Thematic working groups¹³⁵ were convened between April 2005 and

¹²⁹ 39 technical assistance projects (€8 million) and fourteen infrastructure projects (€2 million).

¹³⁰ Lord Patten of Barnes is now the co-chairman of the International Crisis Group.

¹³¹ INOGATE participating states are Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Greece, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

¹³² Information from INOGATE’s website, www.inogate.org.

¹³³ Information from the website of the European Commission Delegation to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, <http://www.delkaz.cec.eu.int/index>.

¹³⁴ Participating states were: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia (as an observer), Romania, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

¹³⁵ Four working groups were devoted to energy issues (investment, sustainable development, the safety and security of energy production, transportation, and supplies, and the harmonisation of hydrocarbon and electricity markets).

¹²³ Crisis Group interview, Almaty, March 2006.

¹²⁴ Crisis Group interview, Brussels, January 2006.

¹²⁵ Crisis Group interview, Almaty, March 2006.

¹²⁶ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, April 2006.

¹²⁷ See Crisis Group Asia Report N°33, *Central Asia: Border Disputes and Conflict Potential*, 4 April 2002.

¹²⁸ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, January 2006.

February 2006, whose conclusions and recommendations are to be presented at a second ministerial conference in November 2006.¹³⁶ The Baku Process demonstrates the EU's commitment to anchor Central Asian countries in broader policies promoted under the Neighbourhood Policy to enhance regional cooperation and integration.

Despite the fanfare with which it was launched, the project has little to show as yet. "We need new roads like we need air", a Kyrgyz analyst said, "but it's hard to see what TRACECA has brought us. The Japanese and the Chinese have been much more active".¹³⁷ Funding has been small, given the geographical scope, and, as with many Central Asian regional initiatives, certain states show little interest. "The problem is that a domestic view still predominates in many of the countries", a Commission official said. "Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan just want to avoid passing through other countries as much as possible. There's been a lot of road work done in Uzbekistan, for example, which has no justification as far as international transportation of goods is concerned". "Transport is so crucial that the project is absolutely worthwhile", another said, "but the problem is that key countries like Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are hardly participating". If TRACECA is to benefit the region, it may be necessary to accept political realities and shift its focus to improving routes north-south between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan, and east-west to China.

3. Humanitarian aid

ECHO

The European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO) opened its regional office in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, in response to the humanitarian crisis brought on by the civil war and was long the Commission's only representation in the country. Since 1992, ECHO has given Tajikistan some €155 million in aid for public health, food security,

and transport issues (aviation, security, road and rail, and infrastructure).

¹³⁶ Information from the website of the European Commission Delegation to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, op. cit. EU Regional Policy Commissioner Danita Hübner said: "There should be no major disparity between the privileged relations that an enlarged EU enjoys with its immediate neighbours and the close cooperation that it seeks to develop with the Central Asian region. This is why the priorities for cooperation with Central Asia laid out in the draft Regional Strategy paper for 2007-13 mirror closely the target sectors highlighted in the ENP Action Plans for our immediate neighbours". Speech at the plenary of the Europe-Central Asia Forum organised by the Foundation Institute for Eastern Studies at Krynica Górská, Poland, 14 December 2005, at http://europa.eu.int/comm/commission_barroso/hubner/speeches/pdf/krynica.pdf.

¹³⁷ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, 16 March 2006.

and sanitation.¹³⁸ In 2004, however, the EU began gradually phasing out this funding, citing "improvements in the humanitarian situation and the greater engagement in the country by other development actors".¹³⁹ While it is true that ECHO's chief mandate is to work in areas of ongoing humanitarian emergencies (or areas suffering the immediate aftermath of emergencies), some call this decision "worrying" and express concerns about the sustainability of ECHO initiatives once the office closes.¹⁴⁰ A second strand of ECHO's work has been on natural disaster preparedness through the DIPECHO program, which in 2003 allocated €3 million for disaster preparedness in Central Asia (mostly in Tajikistan, but to a lesser extent in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan), followed by €2.5 million in 2004 and €3.5 million in 2005. DIPECHO programs are likely to continue even after ECHO closes its office.¹⁴¹

The Food Security Program

Another form of humanitarian aid has come through the Commission's Food Security Program (FSP), begun in 1996 when it became clear that some former Soviet states faced problems that went beyond issues of "transition" to which TACIS could not adequately respond. The FSP was established to address concerns about inadequate access to food in areas of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. It operates mainly through providing budget support to ministries and government agencies (particularly agriculture, social protection and state statistical agencies) to carry out reforms. Release of funds is conditional upon the extent to which reform targets are met.¹⁴² Since the program's start, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have each received some €8 million to €10 million per year in budget support. FSP also funds NGOs in high food insecurity areas, particularly Tajikistan's impoverished Khatlon province and mountainous areas around the Ferghana Valley. Such funding totalled nearly €3 million in 2005 but will be gradually reduced to less than €0.5 million in 2008.¹⁴³

Not all donors agree with promoting reform through budget support. "The thing with conditions is that you only have to meet them on paper", one critic said. "And the people in the Tajik government understand this. Give something the right paper title – even if you're never going

¹³⁸ Between 1992 and 1999, ECHO also gave €20 million worth of assistance to Kyrgyzstan.

¹³⁹ Information from the website of the European Commission Delegation to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, op. cit.

¹⁴⁰ Crisis Group interview, Dushanbe, 6 February 2006.

¹⁴¹ Crisis Group interview, Dushanbe, 7 March 2006.

¹⁴² A Commission representative said bluntly, "we're trying to buy reforms". Crisis Group interview, Dushanbe, 9 February 2006.

¹⁴³ Crisis Group interview, Almaty, 20 March 2006.

to implement it – and they have to give you the money”.¹⁴⁴ “All the donors have come to the conclusion that the Tajik budget and financial system are not good enough to receive budget support”, the representative of one donor organisation complained, continuing:

But if one donor goes along and does it, this sends the wrong message – that the government doesn’t need to listen to the donors, and doesn’t have to make any changes. And it’s not enough to give the money to the NGO sector either – they’re doing things the government should be doing itself. What you need to do is help the government raise its own capacity, to become more transparent and to improve its financial practices. *Then* you can talk about budget support. Why is the Commission so pleased with the FSP? It’s very hard to measure its success. The Tajik government, on the other hand, should be very happy – no one’s asking them what they’re using the money for.¹⁴⁵

Commission representatives insist there are strict conditions for budget support and call it “a good tool to push through reforms”,¹⁴⁶ though some acknowledge difficulties in finding good indicators to measure progress.¹⁴⁷ In the meantime, serious problems persist. A 2004 survey by Action Against Hunger (AAH) showed that, in many areas of Tajikistan, acute malnutrition in children under five had increased over the previous year.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview, international financial institution representative, Dushanbe, 15 February 2006.

¹⁴⁵ Crisis Group interview, February 2006.

¹⁴⁶ Crisis Group interview, February 2006.

¹⁴⁷ Crisis Group interview, March 2006. Some greater leverage may result from an \$80 million shortage in Tajik government requirements to fund the 2006 cotton crop; foreign traders have grown increasingly leery of dealing with local middlemen (so-called “futures companies”), whose often unfair and exploitative agreements with local cotton growers are partially to blame for a debt of over \$200 million; see Crisis Group Report *The Curse of Cotton*, op. cit. Donors, including the Commission, have proposed footing the bill in return for sweeping reforms; it is not yet clear whether the government will agree or look elsewhere. Crisis Group interviews, Almaty and Dushanbe, March 2006. Yet even if progress is made, it will be due not to a great FSP success or a surge of political will among the Tajik authorities, but fortuitous circumstances.

¹⁴⁸ According to the survey, rates of acute malnutrition rose from 5.4 per cent to 11 per cent in the Qurghonteppa region, from 7.1 to 9.9 per cent in Kulob, from 3.7 to 8.7 per cent in Badakhshon and from 4 to 6.1 per cent in the Regions of Republican Subordination (RRS). The situation improved only in Sughd province, where the rate fell from 3.3 to 2.5 per cent. The situation was said to be particularly severe in mountainous regions of Khatlon province such as Mu’minobod, Shuroobod, Baljuvon, and Khovaling. Crisis Group interview, Dushanbe, December 2005.

The situation does not seem to have improved since then.¹⁴⁹ Despite this, a representative of an international humanitarian NGO expressed concern that food security was not receiving the attention it deserved, and funding for NGOs working on food security seemed to be drying up, saying “I would be more than happy to close if the most immediate needs of the people were being met, but not because of donor fatigue”.¹⁵⁰

4. Beyond TACIS

The Commission is finalising its new Regional Strategy for Central Asia for 2007-2013 and the Indicative Assistance Program – which details the areas of engagement.¹⁵¹ The new SP retains the regional approach by making promotion of regional cooperation a priority area for assistance.

When TACIS formally ends in 2007, a major overhaul of EC external assistance will condense more than 30 funding mechanisms into six. Two of these will be applied to current TACIS recipients: the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine¹⁵² and the Development Cooperation and Economic Cooperation Instrument (DCECI) in the five Central Asian countries.¹⁵³ It is hoped that combining all the Commission instruments currently employed in Central Asia will produce more flexibility and interconnectedness between projects. “We think that the quality of aid will improve after TACIS”, a Tajik official said.¹⁵⁴

Uncertainty remains, however, about exactly what form DCECI aid will take. Its budget has yet to be determined, and there is some concern that, “as a consequence of technical decisions”, funding may decrease as much as 20 to 30 per cent.¹⁵⁵ Nor is it clear on which precise areas

¹⁴⁹ AAH was unable to find a donor to fund a nationwide survey for 2005. Crisis Group interview, Dushanbe, December 2005.

¹⁵⁰ Crisis Group interview, Dushanbe, December 2005.

¹⁵¹ On 1 March 2006, the Interservice Quality Support Group (IQSG) reviewed the documents and gave them qualified approval, subject to incorporation of a number of written recommendations. The Commission will present the papers to the EU’s Working Party on Eastern Europe and Central Asia (COEST) to receive member-state comments, before preparing final versions for translation in April. The Council must adopt the regulation on the new financial instruments as a precondition for implementation.

¹⁵² For detailed information on the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) see the Commission ENP website http://europa.eu.int/comm/world/enp/policy_en.htm.

¹⁵³ The four remaining instruments are: pre-accession, stability, humanitarian aid and macro financial assistance.

¹⁵⁴ Crisis Group interview, Dushanbe, 24 February 2006.

¹⁵⁵ Crisis Group interview, Almaty, March 2006.

DCECI will focus, although the new Regional Strategy 2007-2013 is expected to allocate 35 to 40 per cent of its budget for regional cooperation, 45 to 50 per cent for poverty reduction and 15 per cent for good governance.¹⁵⁶

Moreover, the nature of DCECI risks inflaming certain political sensitivities. The instrument breaks the formal link between Europe and Central Asia that was at the heart of the TACIS philosophy and ranks the five countries with all other recipients of EU assistance. Proud of their superpower heritage, Central Asians often take umbrage at being compared with other parts of the developing world – particularly Africa – and may be less than enthusiastic about participating in projects that associate them with developing countries.¹⁵⁷ Sensitivities are particularly high in Kazakhstan, which would prefer not to be seen as needing development aid.¹⁵⁸ In general, however, the response has been muted – whether due to lack of awareness of the details of the impending change, general indifference toward EU projects, or approval is difficult to say.¹⁵⁹

Financial tools other than DCECI are available should the EU wish to employ them. The Commission has left open the possibility for Central Asia to be included in ENPI Regional Programs, especially for energy and transport, reinforcing the view that the region is on the fringes of Europe rather than in the heart of Asia.¹⁶⁰ The Stability Instrument might also be used for conflict prevention and

crisis management and resolution. But the draft Regional Strategy 2007-2013 only highlights the possible effects on civilians of anti-personnel mines or other explosive devices and not the political dimension, which is more likely to lead to conflict in the region.

B. POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

1. Commission representation

On-the-ground representation in Central Asia is rather limited. Since 1994 a Commission delegation office in Almaty headed by an ambassador handles relations with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. It is supported by small field offices (led by *chargés d'affaires*) in Bishkek and Dushanbe. The Commission also has a Europa House in Tashkent, staffed by a consultant with no diplomatic status and a few local personnel. There is no representation in Turkmenistan: relations are handled from Brussels.

This state of affairs is not to everyone's liking. A Tajik official called the absence of an autonomous Commission delegation in Dushanbe "a pity".¹⁶¹ "People would just rather live in Almaty than in Dushanbe", another sighed.¹⁶² The delegation in Almaty is expected to relocate to Astana in 2006, at which point there is a possibility the Bishkek delegation will be upgraded. The Dushanbe delegation has been growing slowly, although it seems unlikely an ambassador will be based there any time soon. Any possibility of enhanced Commission representation in Tashkent currently seems dead.

Commission delegations often complain of a disconnect with headquarters. It is not uncommon to hear that Brussels does not consult adequately and is somewhat divorced from the realities of Central Asia. One delegation member complained Brussels had not engaged with field offices while developing its post-TACIS strategy, asking "what can be expected if it's concocted without consultations in the region?"¹⁶³

Relations between the delegation and member-state missions are not always smooth either, with occasional sparring over turf, particularly on political issues. "The Commission is blurring the picture", an EU diplomat said. "They make their own demarches, which are very confusing for our partners, who don't know who is speaking for the EU. It gives the impression that Europe is a very amorphous entity and not united".¹⁶⁴ Commission

¹⁵⁶ Presentation by Adriaan van der Meer, op. cit.

¹⁵⁷ For example, a recent proposal that Kyrgyzstan join the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative met with indignation from parliamentarians who feared a negative impact on the country's image.

¹⁵⁸ Kazakh officials also took offence to the poverty reduction objective. The Commission has tried to assuage concerns by substituting the phrase "raising living standards". Crisis Group interviews, Brussels, January 2006.

¹⁵⁹ In general, Central Asian civil servants and diplomats have a poor understanding of EU mechanisms. For example, since March 2005 Kyrgyz diplomats have been asking EU officials for a status similar to Ukraine, without understanding what the EU-Ukraine special relationship consists of or being able to detail what they want. Crisis Group interview, Brussels, January 2006. An exception is Kazakhstan, whose foreign ministry has a European cooperation section, including a desk officer for European integration. Crisis Group interview, Astana, March 2006.

¹⁶⁰ Article 27, "Commission proposal for a Regulation establishing a European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument", COM 628/2004, 11 October 2004; Draft Commission Central Asia Strategy; and Crisis Group interview, Commission officials, January 2006. The channel is also open in the other direction: ENP countries can participate in regional programs under DCECI, Article 29, "Proposal for a regulation establishing a financing instrument for development cooperation and economic cooperation", COM 629/2004.

¹⁶¹ Crisis Group interview, Dushanbe, 21 February 2006.

¹⁶² Crisis Group interview, Dushanbe, 25 February 2006.

¹⁶³ Crisis Group interview, March 2006.

¹⁶⁴ Crisis Group interview, March 2006.

representatives, however, often feel they are uniquely placed to address political issues candidly in a way that member states, sometimes hampered by business or other bilateral interests, are not able or willing to.

2. Partnership and Cooperation Agreements

In 1995, the EU moved to formalise its ties with the members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the organisation developed by most of the former Soviet republics, through Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs), which provide the main framework for political dialogue to this day.¹⁶⁵ PCAs were signed with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan in 1995 and entered into force for ten years in 1999. Due to the civil war, PCA negotiations began with Tajikistan only in 2003, and an agreement was signed the next year. Tajik ratification was delayed until November 2005, and early complete EU ratification does not seem likely.¹⁶⁶ Though Turkmenistan signed a PCA in 1998, one observer quipped ratification was likely only “in another couple hundred years”.¹⁶⁷

A PCA establishes a legal basis for bilateral cooperation across a wide range of sectors, including trade, legislative approximation to EU laws and standards and improving the business and investment climate, in addition to the central task of forging closer economic cooperation. Provision is made for a political dialogue, covering human rights, constitutional reform, and regional affairs, although the specifics of cooperation in these areas are not elaborated in the document itself.

Pursuant to the PCA, dialogue between the EU and the partner country takes place at ministerial level through an annual Cooperation Council, at senior civil servant level in an annual Cooperation Committee and at parliamentary level in a Parliamentary Cooperation Committee. Expert

subcommittees can also be established for more focussed, issue-specific discussions.¹⁶⁸

A senior Commission official noted that the PCA model (like TACIS) was designed for countries at the level of development of Russia and Ukraine and thus is ill-suited for the significantly less advanced Central Asian states.¹⁶⁹ When their PCAs were signed in 1995, the Kazakh, Uzbek and Kyrgyz leaderships were keen to advance relations with the EU but their enthusiasm was not reciprocated, especially at the most senior levels in Europe.¹⁷⁰ In an effort to exploit the full potential for cooperation before the PCAs expire in 2009, however, the Commission is undertaking an internal mid-term assessment on implementation for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. It has also called upon both to draw up national PCA implementation plans as demonstrations of their commitment to furthering cooperation with the EU.

3. The European Union Special Representative

The political upheavals of 2005 prompted the European Council to appoint an EU Special Representative (EUSR) to the region in July. Its choice – Slovak diplomat Ján Kubiš¹⁷¹ – seems in many ways an ideal choice; he speaks fluent Russian and has extensive experience in the region, having served as UN special envoy to Tajikistan during the post-war transition and Secretary General of the OSCE since 1999. In private, however, some European officials complain that his long experience in dealing with Central Asian governments has its drawbacks, including a tendency to favour engagement at all costs and stability in relations over innovation and constructive criticism. The EUSR’s principal mission is interpreted as enhancing EU visibility and effectiveness in the region and “addressing key threats, especially specific problems with direct implications for Europe”. He has no oversight or control of TACIS programs implemented by the Commission. A

¹⁶⁵ For example, the 60-page Kazakhstan-EU PCA begins with a declaration on “general principles”, which declares that “respect for democracy, principles of international law and human rights ..., as well as the principles of a market economy, ... underpin the internal and external policies of the Parties and constitute an essential element of partnership and of this Agreement”. It then lays out procedures and mechanisms in areas such as political dialog, trade (including the granting of Most Favoured Nation status), business and investment, establishment and operation of companies, supply of services, intellectual, industrial and commercial property protection and legislative and economic cooperation. PCA texts can be found online at http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/ceeca/pca/index.htm.

¹⁶⁶ Only three EU member states have ratified the PCA. European Commission delegation representatives say the Tajik authorities did not announce ratification, and they learned of it “by chance”. Crisis Group interview, March 2006.

¹⁶⁷ Crisis Group interview, January 2006.

¹⁶⁸ The PCA framework did not take into account the specificity of the new states of Central Asia. The Central Asian PCAs include subcommittees for Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) and Trade, Investment, Energy and Transport (TIET).

¹⁶⁹ “Looking back, we could have included some elements culturally sensitive to Central Asian societies, taking into account that their identity and specific civilisation had been almost completely suppressed under Soviet rule”. Crisis Group interview, Brussels, January 2006.

¹⁷⁰ “It was always a struggle to find high-level EU officials to attend the annual Cooperation Council meeting, while the Central Asia delegation would easily be composed [of] the Prime Minister or the Foreign Minister”. Crisis Group interview, Brussels, January 2006.

¹⁷¹ Council Joint Action 2005/588/CFSP. Kubiš’s mandate runs to February 2007.

German diplomat working for the EUSR is posted in the delegation in Almaty.¹⁷²

Kubiš has visited Central Asia a number of times since becoming EUSR and has demonstrated his ability to gain access to officials at the highest levels, meeting with Uzbek President Karimov in September 2005 and Turkmen President Niyazov in March 2006. His views are said to carry great weight in Brussels. However, there are worries that his stated commitment to maintaining “dialogue” with the region’s two worst dictators may trump concerns about “the strengthening of democracy, the rule of law, good governance, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedom”, which he is mandated to advocate. Given the inflexibility of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, the EUSR mission risks appearing to be diplomacy for its own sake, increasingly disconnected from a full representation of European principles of human rights and democracy. A Commission delegation representative commented that “some people feel he needs to cooperate a bit more with the delegation. He has the access, but we have the instruments to get things done”.¹⁷³

4. The Regional Political Dialogue

As follow up to the visit of then Commissioner for External Relations Chris Patten in March 2004, the Commission established a regular Regional Political Dialogue with the Central Asian countries. The idea was to create a more informal forum that could bring the five countries together and contribute to building confidence and mutual trust between them. Two preliminary meetings have been held at political director level, the first in Bishkek in December 2004, the second in Brussels in 2005.

The Regional Dialogue is meant to complement the Regional Strategy but again it relies on all parties having the requisite political will. Discussions have focussed on a limited number of concrete issues of common concern, including drug trafficking, water and energy management and terrorism. The Commission has tried, with mixed results, to hold informal bilateral talks on the margins to address political and human rights issues. There will be rounds at the level of officials in April 2006 and ministers in June 2006, both in Almaty.¹⁷⁴

5. The European Parliament

An inter-parliamentary delegation for the countries of Central Asia and Mongolia was established in 1994,¹⁷⁵ consisting of eighteen parliamentarians who meet for an hour on average every two months. Representatives from the national parliaments, embassies, and opposition groups of Central Asian states are often invited to exchange views on pressing issues of mutual concern.

The delegation discusses and agrees on agendas for the annual Parliamentary Cooperation Committee (PCC) sessions with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. These committees offer a formal structure in which members of the European and the national parliaments can exchange information and discuss questions of political and economic cooperation arising within the framework of the PCAs. In May 2005, the fifth PCC with Kazakhstan was held in Almaty. The delegation also sent an ad-hoc fact-finding mission to Kyrgyzstan to assess the situation following the fall of President Akaev two months earlier. In light of the partial suspension of the PCA with Uzbekistan announced by the European Council in October 2005, however, the PCC due for Tashkent later that month was suspended.

The European Parliament (EP) has also been active in promoting democratic reform, sending observers to monitor the Kyrgyz presidential elections in July 2005. On the initiative of the European People’s Party and European Democrats group, it invited Kazakh government and opposition representatives, international NGOs and journalists to a November 2005 hearing scrutinising the political climate in the lead-up to the 4 December presidential election in Kazakhstan. The EP also maintains pressure for reform by periodically adopting resolutions on developments in the region. The most recent (16 March 2006) expressed concern over the death of two prominent opposition figures in Kazakhstan in the three months since President Nazarbayev’s re-election and called for the issue to be included on the agenda of the May 2006 PCC.¹⁷⁶

Given the EP’s generally commendable stance on political and human rights issues, it is puzzling that its Foreign Affairs and International Trade Committees seem to be considering authorising the Commission to negotiate an interim agreement on trade and trade-related matters between the EU and Turkmenistan, citing recent

¹⁷² No Commission staff is seconded to the Kubiš office, due both to a lack of human resources to spare and the general inclination of member states to second their own diplomats to such a post. Crisis Group interview, January 2006.

¹⁷³ Crisis Group interview, March 2006.

¹⁷⁴ The first round was in Almaty in summer 2005, the second in Brussels in December 2005.

¹⁷⁵ Central Asia had hitherto been dealt with by a working group within the delegation for former Soviet republics.

¹⁷⁶ There is unlikely to be an explicit agenda item but European parliamentarians will be able to raise the matter under a more general discussion of the overall political situation in Kazakhstan. Crisis Group interview, Brussels, April 2006.

“improvements” in the latter’s human rights record which appear little more than cosmetic and are unlikely to improve the lives of Turkmen citizens much; the only likely beneficiaries of enhanced European trade would be President Niyazov and a few select members of the governing elite.¹⁷⁷

6. Human rights

Respect for human rights is a fundamental condition of the PCAs. The European Initiative on Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) provides funding for NGOs seeking to implement human rights projects.¹⁷⁸ Recently, the Commission delegation in Almaty announced it would give, through TACIS, €700,000 to support the office of the Human Rights Ombudsman in Kazakhstan.¹⁷⁹ The EU is also an important contributor to ODIHR.

EU diplomatic missions address human rights in their public statements. EU member state ambassadors in Dushanbe issued a joint request in May 2005 to visit the imprisoned leader of the opposition Democratic Party of Tajikistan (DPT), Mahmadrúzî Iskandarov.¹⁸⁰ Tajik law allows pre-trial detainees to be visited only by lawyers or immediate family, so the request was brushed aside by the authorities.¹⁸¹ Nonetheless, the EU has continued to follow the case, and in March 2006 the Austrian presidency issued a statement expressing concerns about the conditions of his arrest and detention, warning that the issues “send a mixed message about

democratic reform and the respect of Human Rights in Tajikistan with respect to its OSCE and other international commitments”.¹⁸²

The main test has come in the wake of the massacre in Andijon, Uzbekistan. The EU quickly condemned the killings in May 2005 and took a principled, albeit belated, step in November 2005, following verdicts in the first of the many show trials, when it imposed a visa ban on senior Uzbek officials identified as having links to the massacre. The credibility and symbolic value of these sanctions, however, was undermined when it was revealed that then Interior Minister Zokirjon Almatov – literally and figuratively at the top of the visa ban list – was receiving medical treatment in Germany.¹⁸³

The EU and its member states have also taken principled stands on defending those who have fled Uzbekistan in the wake of the Andijon events (including offering some asylum in Europe) and condemning apparent cases of the forced return of some refugees from other former Soviet states.¹⁸⁴ There have, however, been hitches. In July 2005, Romania agreed to house temporarily over 400 refugees, provided they would be resettled to third countries in Europe and North America. According to the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), it did so after intense debate among European governments and because no other suitable country came forward.¹⁸⁵ Partly this was because governments felt they did not have enough time to do the necessary due diligence on individual applicants and did not have legislative procedures in place to deal with so many people arriving simultaneously.¹⁸⁶ Of the 439 refugees sent to Romania, only 75 have been accepted in Europe for permanent resettlement.¹⁸⁷ The remainder are to be resettled in the U.S. (196), Canada (118) and Australia (51).¹⁸⁸ The EU’s ten largest countries together accepted only twenty. Meanwhile, an EU representative commented: “We had to protest after Andijon, and vehemently, but it’s not

¹⁷⁷ On 20 March 2006, Crisis Group, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, and Human Rights Watch expressed these concerns in a letter to members of the European Parliament. The text is at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=4041&l=1&m=1>.

¹⁷⁸ The annual amounts for these projects are fairly small: for example, some €1.4 million annually for Kazakhstan and €0.7 million for Tajikistan. Crisis Group interview, Almaty, March 2006.

¹⁷⁹ See the Delegation’s press release at http://www.delkaz.cec.eu.int/index.php?lang=en&link_to=press_releases&view=00199.

¹⁸⁰ Iskandarov had been an opposition field commander during the civil war; after the 1997 peace, he held government posts and became leader of the DPT in 1999. His relations with the Rahmonov government were often strained, and he repeatedly accused it of violating the 1997 accords. Crisis Group Report, *Tajikistan’s Politics*, op. cit. He was dropped from his last government post as head of the state gas company in November 2003. In July 2004, after a former lieutenant was arrested for attacking a police station in his native Tojikobod, Iskandarov left Tajikistan for Moscow. In April 2005 he was kidnapped and returned to Tajikistan, where he was charged with crimes, including embezzlement, forgery, and terrorism. Iskandarov was long denied visits from lawyers and relatives, and he alleged that he was tortured while in custody. In October 2005 he was sentenced to 23 years in prison.

¹⁸¹ Crisis Group interview, Dushanbe, 28 June 2005.

¹⁸² http://www.austria.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=144&Itemid=30.

¹⁸³ See Crisis Group Briefing, *Uzbekistan: The Andijon Uprising*, op. cit. European officials cite “humanitarian grounds” for allowing Almatov into Germany; he is believed to have cancer.

¹⁸⁴ See Crisis Group Briefing, *Uzbekistan: In for the Long Haul*, op. cit.

¹⁸⁵ Polishing its image with a view to EU accession was also a likely motivation for Romania. Crisis Group interview, UNHCR representative, 15 February 2006.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ This includes ten accepted by Switzerland, as well as Sweden (28); Netherlands (six); Czech Republic (fifteen); Finland (two); and Germany (fourteen).

¹⁸⁸ 439 refugees arrived in Romania, but with one birth, 440 require resettlement.

the only issue in our relations. And now we're in a situation which nobody knows how to get out of".¹⁸⁹

7. Bilateral issues

Member-state embassies are scarce in Central Asia, with the most in Almaty and Astana¹⁹⁰ and the fewest (one) in Bishkek.¹⁹¹ Relations with Central Asia are not, by and large, a priority for EU member states, though a few have been relatively active. The following discussion is intended not to be exhaustive, but simply to outline some of the activities and concerns.

France

France moved quickly to recognise the five Central Asian countries after independence in 1991 and has embassies in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, as well as a less formal "*antenne politique*" at its consulate in Bishkek.¹⁹² Its engagement in the region prior to 2001 focused principally upon relations with Kazakhstan, by far its largest local trading partner, and to a lesser extent Turkmenistan. A defence attaché was appointed to Almaty in the 1990s to assist with denuclearisation issues; the office was closed in 1999 but reopened in 2002 in connection with NATO operations in Afghanistan.¹⁹³ The Afghan operation also led to an *antenne politique* in Dushanbe, upgraded to a full embassy in 2002. An embassy was opened in Ashgabat in 1994, but cooperation was curtailed five years later due to "choices" made by the Turkmen government.¹⁹⁴ France maintains police attachés at its embassies in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in support of the BOMCA/CADAP projects and the OSCE's project for police reform. The missions also provide support for the study of the French language.

Germany

Germany has been one of the more active EU member states, opening embassies in all five countries early on. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan all have the status of "partner countries" for Germany's overseas development cooperation, indicating their significance but at a lower level than "priority partner countries".¹⁹⁵ Cooperation with the region has included a wide array of grants and loans from the German federal and state (*Länder*) governments. Turkmenistan has not been included in these programs because it is believed aid would not reach its intended recipients as a result of government policy, although it has been included in region-wide programs to which Germany has contributed.¹⁹⁶ Since 1993, Germany has provided Kazakhstan with €11.37 million for development projects, €32.35 million in technical cooperation aid (distributed largely through the German Technical Assistance Association, GTZ), and €79.02 million in financial cooperation (largely distributed through the German Development Bank, KfW).¹⁹⁷ KfW has been actively involved in combating tuberculosis; in Tajikistan, it plans to renovate a TB hospital near Dushanbe as well as build a hospital for children infected with the disease.¹⁹⁸ The German government has forgiven €700,000 of Kyrgyzstan's debt on the condition that €300,000 be devoted to combating TB.¹⁹⁹

While reaffirming that "the German Government's efforts to help bring about long-term stability and development in the five Central Asian states ... are undiminished",²⁰⁰ Berlin adopted a new Central Asia concept in March 2002 that involved a more diversified approach. Its initial policy in the early 1990s had tended towards regional approaches, and it only gradually recognised after 1995 that the countries would take different trajectories.²⁰¹ Germany has declared its intent to make Central Asia a foreign

¹⁸⁹ Crisis Group interview, Almaty, February 2006.

¹⁹⁰ Most embassies are still in Almaty, although a gradual migration north to the new capital, Astana, has begun.

¹⁹¹ For a complete list, see Appendix B.

¹⁹² All information in this paragraph, unless footnoted otherwise, is taken from the French foreign ministry website, www.diplomatie.gouv.fr.

¹⁹³ Crisis Group interview, Almaty, January 2006. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan inherited one of the world's largest nuclear arsenals, which was subsequently dismantled.

¹⁹⁴ French private business involvement has continued. The construction firm Bouygues has received contracts for a number of projects connected with President Niyazov's cult of personality, including a \$95 million mosque and a presidential palace. See Crisis Group Report, *Repression and Regression in Turkmenistan*, op. cit.

¹⁹⁵ Tajikistan has been a partner country since 2002. German foreign ministry website. For more information on "partner" and "priority partner" classifications and their implications, see German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) website, www.bmz.de. BMZ financial assistance to Central Asia is largely channelled through the KfW development bank, while the GTZ handles technical assistance.

¹⁹⁶ Crisis Group telephone interview, German foreign ministry official, March 2006.

¹⁹⁷ German foreign ministry website.

¹⁹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Dushanbe, 6 February 2006.

¹⁹⁹ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, November 2005.

²⁰⁰ German foreign ministry, "The German Government's Central Asia policy" (translation), Berlin, 18 March 2002.

²⁰¹ Crisis Group telephone interview, German foreign ministry official, March 2006.

policy priority when it holds the EU presidency in 2007.²⁰² Part of its interest is driven by concern for the fate of the small ethnic German community in Central Asia.²⁰³

At the same time, however, there have been some concerns that the German government may be assigning a higher priority to working with the Uzbek government than to issues such as human rights and democratisation. The “Almatov affair” sent troubling signals that continuing efforts at engagement with President Karimov have not eased.²⁰⁴

The Netherlands

The Netherlands opened its embassy in Almaty in 1995. Prior to that, it had been a major contributor to efforts to promote agricultural and water-management reforms in Central Asia, particularly in the Aral Sea region. There was renewed Dutch interest from 2002 to 2004, when The Netherlands held the OSCE chairmanship. It was at this time that it established an office in Tashkent to support human rights and regional cooperation. The office was closed when local authorities pronounced that it had been totally successful and was “no longer needed”. The Netherlands has since been unable to obtain Uzbek accreditation for its ambassador.²⁰⁵

The Netherlands funds some human rights and media projects in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and contributes to a number of UNDP and OSCE projects. It also assists the fight against TB in prisons through the Royal Netherlands Tuberculosis Association. Willem Hendrik de Beaufort, the former secretary general of the Dutch

parliament, has advised the speaker of the Kyrgyz parliament (originally Ömürbek Tekebayev, now Marat Sultanov) on parliamentary and procedural issues since February 2006.²⁰⁶

Sweden

Sweden has been an active provider of humanitarian aid to Central Asia since 1998, largely through the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). The government’s 2003-2005 strategy for the region called for increased annual funding – from SEK 25 million (€2.7 million) in 2002 to SEK 100 million (€10.7 million) by 2005 – targeted largely towards poverty reduction, agricultural reform, gender equality, and conflict prevention in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.²⁰⁷ The 2006-2009 strategy focuses squarely on Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, deeming Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan unlikely to have any interest in reform projects, while development aid to Kazakhstan has been phased out (despite continuing needs there for improvement in human rights, democracy, and gender equality). Aid for 2006 is expected to total SEK 120 million (€12.8 million). Sweden sees itself becoming one of Tajikistan’s major donors, with support for good governance, land reform, poverty reduction, health care, and social protection.²⁰⁸

The United Kingdom

The UK maintains embassies in all Central Asian capitals except Bishkek, where plans to open one were upset by budget cuts.²⁰⁹ In 2003, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) published a white paper outlining foreign policy priorities for the coming years. Central Asia was identified as important in a number of ways, including combating terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and international crime, the promotion of “sustainable development, underpinned by democracy, good governance and human rights”, and enhancing energy security.²¹⁰

As noted, the UK has been an important donor for BOMCA/CADAP. Human rights initiatives it supports include death penalty abolition and penal reform. The UK

²⁰² Crisis Group interview, March 2006.

²⁰³ During World War II, ethnic Germans in the Soviet Union were deported to Central Asia. In 1991, some 1.5 million ethnic Germans lived in the country. Germany has made concern for ethnic Germans outside its borders (manifested in either support for emigration to Germany or efforts to improve living standards in resident countries) an important foreign policy goal.

²⁰⁴ In a recent article, Uzbek journalist Galima Bukharbaeva, an eyewitness to the Andijon massacre, calls German efforts at engagement “a disgrace” and accuses Germany of sacrificing human rights for strategic interests. She asserts the base in Termez “is apparently more important to Berlin than the lives of innocent residents of Andijon, human rights, or even Germany’s own democratic image”. She describes a press briefing by two German parliamentarians who recently visited Uzbekistan, in the course of which they shrugged off questions about human rights issues and refused to listen to a BBC tape recording of the massacre. “It does not matter”, she quotes one as saying. Galima Bukharbaeva, “Germany’s dialogue with the Uzbek regime: a disgrace for German democracy”, Fergana.ru, 24 March 2006, <http://enews.ferghana.ru/detail.php?id=4552999602.451,2071,4582565>.

²⁰⁵ Crisis Group interview, Netherlands foreign ministry, 14 March 2006.

²⁰⁶ Crisis Group interview, Almaty, February 2006.

²⁰⁷ “Regional Strategy for Development Cooperation with Central Asia 2003-2005”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sweden, 2003, <http://www.sweden.gov.se/sb/d/574/a/39626>.

²⁰⁸ “Samarbetsstrategi för sveriges utvecklingssamarbete med Centralasien 2006-2009”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sweden, 2006, <http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/01/14/20/ddf4ed b7.pdf>.

²⁰⁹ Crisis Group interview, Almaty, January 2006.

²¹⁰ See “UK International Policies: A Strategy for the FCO”, December 2003, at <http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/FCO StrategyFullFinal,0.pdf>.

has also been a major backer of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). Bilateral aid is largely channeled through the Department for International Development (DfID), which has been active in all countries save Turkmenistan since the early 1990s; the DFID office in Kazakhstan was closed in 2005 when the country was judged to have moved from “low-income” to “middle-income” status; that same year, the Uzbek office was closed as well, due in part to difficulties in working post-Andijon. DFID priorities include health care (particularly combating the spread of HIV/AIDS in the region), poverty reduction, conflict prevention, and agrarian reform.

Poland

One promising prospect for a positive EU impact on Central Asia may be engagement between regional governments and the new member states, many of which come from the former Soviet bloc, and three of which (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) were once Soviet republics. However, such engagement is relatively limited; Poland, for example, has sponsored projects in journalism training and support for ethnic minorities – it is concerned about the fate of a Polish community numbering between 50,000 and 100,000 in Kazakhstan. For obvious reasons, Warsaw’s engagement with Ukraine and Belarus has been much more vigorous. Nonetheless, a Polish diplomat was optimistic about what his country might do in Central Asia: “Every people should choose its own way but we can show them how we did it, how our media and government works, and perhaps they can adapt something from this to their own situations”.²¹¹

IV. WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

A. GETTING NOTICED

Though it is a major donor, in many ways the EU is all but invisible as an institution in Central Asia, and its political weight and leverage are consequently diminished. There is little public knowledge about the EU, what it does in the region, or how it differs from the OSCE or the UN. Confusion can also be met among officials, which can make negotiations difficult. The EU has taken some steps to raise its profile and tries to ensure that all EU-funded projects are clearly presented as such²¹² but more could be done, particularly in providing basic information through press releases and public events. Other possible strategies would include giving educational materials to schools and universities, particularly departments and institutes training future diplomats, officials, or businessmen. Increased opportunities for study in Europe would also be beneficial.

B. THINKING LOCALLY

After almost fifteen years of independence, the Central Asian states hardly seem any closer to “regional integration”. Despite countless declarations of eternal friendship and cooperation and a veritable alphabet soup of regional organisations, there has been little substantive progress. Some have hailed Uzbekistan’s entry into the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) as potentially positive but the step seems born of political expediency, not necessarily a new commitment to genuine regional cooperation.²¹³

The persistent EU tendency has been to approach Central Asia as a single region and to devote much energy to enhancing regional cooperation. Symptomatically, previous TACIS action plans were entirely regional, and the draft DCECI strategy also presents a regional agenda. In public at least, many EU representatives remain bullish about regional integration, citing the EU’s own experience:

In all our policies our goal is to work towards the integration of these countries. We feel that we are in the best place to do this because of our own experience in integration, which has been going on for 50 years and which is still continuing. We don’t

²¹¹ Crisis Group interview, January 2006.

²¹² Again, however, slight public knowledge about the EU often is an obstacle. “We always put the EU flag before our own logo on all our materials”, a representative of an NGO implementing a TACIS project said, “but I don’t think people know what it means”. Crisis Group interview, 2 March 2006.

²¹³ For more information, see Crisis Group Briefing, *Uzbekistan: In for the Long Haul*, op. cit.

want to do the same things here, not exactly, but we feel that we have something to contribute.”²¹⁴

However, regional initiatives backed by the EU have, by and large, failed. This is due to a certain extent to a lack of political will and continuing poor relations between the countries involved, many of which are still seeking to forge their own political and cultural identities and jealously guard their national interests. Turkmenistan in particular shows little interest in regional projects, and Uzbekistan’s growing hostility towards such initiatives was a major stumbling block even before Andijon. Insistence on a regional approach ignores that the five states have taken very different political and economic routes since independence and have different needs and priorities. “A regional approach doesn’t make sense”, a senior Tajik foreign ministry official said. “Kazakhstan is rich because of its oil, Turkmenistan because of its gas, Uzbekistan is in the middle, and Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are worse off. But our [European] partners don’t analyse this”.²¹⁵

There seems to be a growing sense within the Commission as well – in Brussels and in the region – that a regional approach may not be the best fit.²¹⁶ The European Aid Cooperation Office (AIDCO) in particular has consistently questioned the value added of regional projects. Instead, its officials believe the type of national programs used elsewhere in Asia would be more effective to achieve the DCECI’s primary objectives of poverty reduction and improved living standards in line with Millennium Development Goals.²¹⁷ At the same time, it will be important to continue to work with local governments to identify joint priorities for development aid. Unfortunately, it appears such concerns were not considered in drafting the 2007-2013 Strategy Paper, which still commits up to 40 per cent of funding for promoting regional integration.

No one can deny the importance of regional cooperation in Central Asia; so many problems spill across borders which no one state can solve alone, as the most recent UNDP Human Development Report eloquently argues.²¹⁸ And certain issues – border and natural resource management, to name two – can indeed only be approached regionally. But to approach regional cooperation issues without taking account of political realities would yield

nothing. Regional integration should remain a long-term goal, but the immediate focus should shift more towards shoring up individual states, particularly Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Regional cooperation projects, to the extent they are pursued, should concentrate on those states willing to participate and should not be scuttled by the refusal of one or two.

C. THINKING AHEAD

There is a clear need to complement project-driven thinking with longer-term, strategic planning. This is particularly true in crisis response. The EU should thoroughly review its ability to respond to serious instability in one or more Central Asian states, including to assist in the event of large refugee flows. Thought should also be given to finding ways of preventing conflict in one state from “infecting” neighbours.²¹⁹

The EU should likewise enhance its on-the-ground analytical capacity so it can better predict and respond to crises. Despite the new sense of the region’s strategic importance after 11 September 2001, EU institutions have not developed much better knowledge of Central Asia. The number of personnel covering the five countries in both Council and Commission in Brussels barely reaches double figures.²²⁰ There is equally a need to increase staff at Commission delegation offices, where possible, and to improve communication and consultation between those offices and Brussels.²²¹ Regular consultations between member-state embassies, the delegations and the EUSR are vital. Over the longer term, the EU will need a core of strong regional specialists to create and implement policy in Central Asia effectively; more support for the study of Central Asian languages, history, and culture in European universities could be immensely useful.

Recognition is needed that little can likely be done at present to influence the political situations in either Turkmenistan or Uzbekistan. What can still be done should be continued, of course, but attention should also be given to “lifeboat strategies” that lay the

²¹⁴ Crisis Group interview, Almaty, 10 February 2006.

²¹⁵ Crisis Group interview, Dushanbe, February 2006.

²¹⁶ “The regional approach has come too late, and to little effect: perhaps it might have worked at the beginning of the ‘90s when the five countries were closer, their leaders came from the same school and people spoke the same language, but not now”. Crisis Group interview, Brussels, January 2006.

²¹⁷ Crisis Group interview, Brussels, January 2006.

²¹⁸ See “Bringing down barriers: Regional cooperation for human development and human security”, UNDP, 2005, at <http://europeandcis.undp.org/?wspc=CAHDR2005>.

²¹⁹ See Crisis Group Briefing, *Uzbekistan: In for the Long Haul*, op. cit.

²²⁰ In 1998 one official in the Commission’s Brussels directorate general for external relations (RELEX) was responsible for the five countries of Central Asia and Mongolia. In 2001 there were two. Currently there are six in RELEX and about the same in AIDCO. Two officials cover Central Asia in the Council.

²²¹ Regarding plans for DCECI, for example, a Commission delegation official complained, “no one came from Brussels to discuss plans or strategies. What they decide will affect the region, but what can be expected if their new strategy is concocted without consultations on the ground?” Crisis Group interview, March 2006.

foundation for future political change. These might include increased support for independent media in Central Asian languages, for example, support for NGOs working among Central Asian refugee, migrant labour or diaspora communities, and increased opportunities for Central Asians, particularly citizens of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, to study in Europe.²²²

Any strategy that seeks to prevent crises must of necessity focus on the public health sector. This has until now largely been left to the member states but given the dire status of public health in the region, it deserves the concentrated, coordinated attention of the donor community as a whole, including the Commission; this should be taken into account when finalising the DCECI strategy.

In its 2003 Security Strategy, the EU listed terrorism as one of the five key threats facing member states.²²³ Since then, it has adopted a Counter-Terrorism Strategy, involving four strands: preventing radicalisation and recruitment, in Europe and internationally; protecting citizens and domestic infrastructure; pursuing and investigating terrorists, in Europe and globally; and improving responses to the aftermath of terrorism.²²⁴ “We would like to engage with Islam more”, a European diplomat said. “We need to think about what we can do to keep people in countries with significant Muslim populations from turning to extremist groups”.²²⁵ Very little has been done on this as yet. No initiatives have been launched in the priority areas named in the Counter-Terrorism Strategy – North Africa, the Middle East and South East Asia – and EU officials say Central Asia is near the bottom of the list, after the countries covered in the EU Neighbourhood Policy.²²⁶

To deal with the potential challenge of terrorism, the EU would perhaps do best to follow its own advice, outlined in the 2004 “European Union Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism”, which enjoins it to, among other things, “promote good governance, human rights, democracy, as well as education and economic prosperity, through our political dialogue

and assistance programs”. Enhancing cooperation on security is also important but any approach to combating radicalisation and extremism that does not balance security needs with human rights and good governance is self-defeating. There must also be enhanced efforts to engage with the religious community in Central Asia,²²⁷ including not only officially-sanctioned structures and institutions, but also informal ones – particularly women’s religious institutions, which have been all but overlooked but wield influence in many areas.²²⁸

D. ENGAGING WITH OTHER REGIONAL POWERS

Engagement with other geopolitical actors in Central Asia – particularly China and Russia – has become fashionable, born in part of the recognition that Western influence in the region seems to be ebbing. And certainly there are issues in the region of great concern to all. The need to combat the spread of drugs and prevent the growth of organised criminal and radical groups evokes little disagreement. It is only natural that Russia should play an important role, given historical ties, and China is rapidly emerging as a major regional economic force. “It’s not that we *should* work together”, a Chinese diplomat said. “It’s that we *must*”.²²⁹

The difficulties come on how to proceed. Russia seems greatly concerned about what it perceives as Western encroachment (often there is little differentiation between the U.S. and Europe) on its spheres of influence and perceived efforts to “squeeze Russia out” of Central Asia.²³⁰ Relations between Russia and Europe have grown chillier with strains over gas, but also over political issues elsewhere in the former Soviet space, such as Belarus²³¹ and Moldova-Transdniestria.²³² A belief is

²²² For more detail on what such lifeboat strategies should consist of, see Crisis Group Briefing, *Uzbekistan: In for the Long Haul*, op. cit. Also, see Andrew Stroehlein (Crisis Group Media Director), “A Lifeboat for the Media”, 22 March 2006, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=4044&l=1>.

²²³ “A Secure Europe in a Better World”, European Security Strategy, Brussels, 12 December 2003.

²²⁴ “The European Union Counter-Terrorism Strategy”, Council of the European Union, Brussels, 30 November 2005. <http://register.consilium.eu.int/pdf/en/05/st14/st14469-re04.en05.pdf>.

²²⁵ Crisis Group interview, Almaty, 20 January 2006.

²²⁶ Crisis Group interview, officials of the Counter-Terrorism Unit, Council Secretariat, Brussels, 24 February 2006.

²²⁷ For more suggestions on engagement, see Crisis Group Report, *Is Radical Islam Inevitable in Central Asia*, op. cit.

²²⁸ As women are banned from attending mosques in many parts of Central Asia, they have developed their own informal, often marginalised, religious institutions. If this marginalisation continues, it may create new avenues for militant recruitment.

²²⁹ Crisis Group interview, 8 December 2005.

²³⁰ Crisis Group interview, Russian diplomat, March 2006.

²³¹ In March 2006, Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko was re-elected with a reported 82.6 per cent of the vote; the EU declared the elections flawed and said it would consider imposing a travel ban on Lukashenko. “Belarus protests take to the streets”, BBC News, 25 March 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4843690.stm>.

²³² Transdniestria is a region of Moldova whose secessionist aspirations have long been supported by Moscow. See Crisis Group Europe Report N°157, *Moldova: Regional Tensions over Transdniestria*, 17 June 2004; Crisis Group Europe Report N°147, *Moldova: No Quick Fix*, 12 August 2003.

often encountered in Russia that it is the only actor which properly understands the region and its peoples' mentality and that endeavours by "outsiders" seeking to impose their own models are doomed to failure. "We're the ones helping the regional economy the most", a Russian diplomat said. "The U.S. and the West are doing nothing substantive, just supporting the opposition, the media, propaganda, and giving a few small grants here and there".²³³

Indeed, Russian pledges to invest billions of dollars in industry and energy may be an easier sell than the European offer of technical help and capacity building.²³⁴ "Our priority is energy", a Tajik official said. "We want to sell energy to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran, but the EU isn't participating. They may be fighting with Iran now, but we need to be realistic".²³⁵ While asserting that the Central Asian states were "happy to have us here doing the little that we are doing", a European diplomat complained that "with the Russians promising their billions, it makes all our little contributions look futile and useless".²³⁶

The divide is not only over economic issues, but over what constitutes stability as well, with Russia generally seeming to prefer maintaining the status quo, arguing that the alternative to Karimov and Niyazov, for example, would be chaos.²³⁷ Many in Europe see the policies of those presidents in particular as creating conditions for serious future instability. "It is extremely difficult to talk to the Russians about these issues", a European diplomat said. "They see the same problems we do, but their solution is entirely different".²³⁸

One must be modest about the prospects for EU-Russian cooperation in Central Asia, at least for now, but there may be small steps which could be taken. Cooperation and information-sharing about drugs and human trafficking may be promising to explore.²³⁹ If Russian businessmen

are to deliver the promised investments, they will hardly be willing to see them squandered, so there may be room for cooperation on promoting some degree of economic liberalisation in Uzbekistan, for example, and better business practices elsewhere. This is an area where China could perhaps be usefully engaged as well. In no way, however, should the need for "engagement" mean compromising the fundamental principles which the EU espouses.

E. TAKING A STAND

The EU is uncertain how to approach democracy and human rights in Central Asia. Whether to allocate money for their promotion in the DCECI is said to be an ongoing debate in Brussels.²⁴⁰ "Perhaps we have over-emphasised the issue of human rights in the past", an EU representative said.²⁴¹ It is difficult to understand what motivates these concerns, when the human rights picture remains mostly poor (and occasionally horrendous), and democratic institutions largely weak or nonexistent. Part of it may be a sense of futility, given the difficulties and often scant political will on the part of some of Europe's interlocutors. It may also derive from uncertainty over how to proceed in light of Uzbekistan's aggressive response to EU sanctions post-Andijon.²⁴² Some may be looking for an easy exit from the impasse, but it should be the Uzbek government which blinks first.

It is important for other Central Asian governments to see that Uzbekistan is paying a price for its actions; a return to business as usual would demolish EU and wider Western credibility and send the wrong message about the costs for killing unarmed civilians. In the meantime, Europe and the rest of the international community must continue to do what they can to improve the lot of ordinary citizens in Uzbekistan, as indeed throughout Central Asia.

Some critics have derided the approach of political pressure and continued aid as "beating with one hand and feeding with the other",²⁴³ but steps should be taken to see to it that Uzbek citizens do not suffer for their government's

²³³ Crisis Group interview, August 2005.

²³⁴ Visiting Dushanbe in October 2004, President Vladimir Putin announced that Russian private and state-owned companies would invest \$2 billion in Tajikistan over the next few years, including funding to complete the Sangtuda-1 and Roghun hydroelectric plants and expand Tajikistan's aluminium smelting sector. RFE/RL Newline, 18 October 2004.

²³⁵ Crisis Group interview, Dushanbe, 25 February 2006.

²³⁶ Crisis Group interview, 18 August 2005.

²³⁷ Russia's decision to form a military alliance with Karimov in 2005 may be evidence of this. Crisis Group Report, *Uzbekistan: In for the Long Haul*, op. cit.

²³⁸ Crisis Group interview, 9 March 2006.

²³⁹ "The Russians have done nothing to engage with us on these matters", a European diplomat said, "and we haven't particularly asked, either". Crisis Group interview, March 2006. A Russian diplomat stated: "It's possible to cooperate with the Europeans,

but they haven't approached us. And we don't really need their cooperation. We have a lot of experience in the region, we know the background, the problems, and we have very good local cooperation. We don't need to do things with other actors – though we're certainly not against it". Crisis Group interview, March 2006.

²⁴⁰ Crisis Group interview, January 2006.

²⁴¹ Crisis Group interview, Almaty, February 2006.

²⁴² "We are still trying to understand the lessons of Andijon", an EU representative said. "For example: was it a good idea to impose sanctions?" Crisis Group interview, Almaty, March 2006.

²⁴³ Crisis Group interview, Dushanbe, March 2006.

misdeeds. At the same time, neighbouring states must be encouraged to abide by their commitments under international law, particularly on refugee rights. Demarches may not be enough, especially where states such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, easily susceptible to various Uzbek pressures, are concerned. Pragmatism will be necessary, with incentives for compliance, otherwise neighbouring states may well decide that forced return to Uzbekistan is their easiest option.²⁴⁴

There must be continued, perhaps increased, European support for human rights initiatives, and adherence to fundamental principles of human rights should be the point of departure for normal relations between the EU and its member states and Central Asia. EU embassies and Commission delegations should regularly exchange information about these issues and present a united front in condemning abuses. The human rights clauses of those PCAs that have been ratified ought not to be overlooked. If “engagement” with Uzbekistan is to be pursued, this must not contradict the stance the EU took in November 2005. Support to local organisations seeking to protect and raise awareness about human rights should be continued, and increased where possible, particularly where women’s issues are concerned.

A further debate is over the importance – indeed, appropriateness – of promoting democratic values. Conversations with Central Asian governments on this do not always proceed smoothly. As a diplomat pointed out, “the Central Asians are very fond of telling us that they’re more European than Asian, and therefore it makes sense for us to deal with them. But if we criticise them on political issues, suddenly they point out to us that they are an Asian country, and that European ideals don’t always match their mentality”.²⁴⁵

Yet it is not only Central Asians who use this argument when the conversation gets difficult. Some Europeans who point to the European cultural values which the Soviet

experience provided Central Asia backpedal over democratisation. “This is a clan society”, one EU representative said, expressing a view which seems fairly typical. “We can’t have democratic elections here. We need to think about what to do about this. We need for them to learn what [democracy] is about, but if we just base our relationships on this, we will not get anywhere”.²⁴⁶ Perhaps not, but pushing the concept into the background hardly seems a suitable alternative. Those in the West who advance such arguments should remember who ultimately benefits from them. An opposition politician reminds that:

Of course democracy takes time, but this is too often used as an excuse. Bad governments always use this argument to justify staying in power. They can talk for 40, 50 years about how much more time they need, and just go on doing whatever they please.²⁴⁷

Indeed, in a recent press conference, Uzbek President Karimov denounced what he saw as an “information war” being waged against his country by the West. “We want to live as all Europe lives. We want to live like all democratic countries”, Karimov said, before continuing:

Your model of democracy is absolutely inappropriate for us. Your model and your values are absolutely unacceptable because we live in Uzbekistan, where 85 per cent of the population is Muslim. These are people who profess Islam. And our values are naturally different from the values that we call Western values.²⁴⁸

The values the EU represents are unacceptable to regimes such as those of Karimov and Niyazov. But the EU must make it clear they are not mere words and be prepared to espouse them openly and robustly. “Engagement” with Karimov is unlikely to yield results, especially if the efforts are informed by a false assumption that European values are foreign to Central Asians. Journalist Galima Bukharbaeva is right when she says it was not that the Uzbek government “did not know that it [the Andijon massacre] was wrong or because it needed advice and dialogue”.²⁴⁹ Rather, those events, and the subsequent crackdown, came after years of persistent Western engagement with the regime and show how little it was possible to influence its behaviour.

At a time when the EU is taking a stand against the dictatorial regime of Aleksandr Lukashenko in Belarus,

²⁴⁴ This is especially relevant for Kyrgyzstan, which came under massive Uzbek pressure after the arrival of the Andijon refugees, and whose relations with Tashkent following their relocation to Romania have been strained. The fate of four Andijon refugees is still undecided; though the Kyrgyz Supreme Court has upheld a foreign ministry decision that they do not qualify for refugee status and thus are subject to extradition, UNHCR has declared them refugees and there is international pressure on the government not to extradite. Some officials seem to feel their situation is not adequately understood in the West and that the support received has not been sufficient. “We were promised help in return for standing up to the pressure”, an official said, “but what did we get in return? Only bad relations with the Uzbeks”. Crisis Group interview, Kyrgyz government official, Bishkek, April 2006.

²⁴⁵ Crisis Group interview, Almaty, 17 January 2006.

²⁴⁶ Crisis Group interview, February 2006.

²⁴⁷ Crisis Group interview, March 2005.

²⁴⁸ See Central Asia Report, Radio Free Liberty/Radio Europe, vol. 6, no. 9, 27 March 2006.

²⁴⁹ Bukharbaeva, “Germany’s dialogue”, *op. cit.*

seeming willingness to turn a blind eye to political issues in Central Asia is the more troubling, suggesting at least a certain double standard, as a Tajik commentator pointed out with some exaggeration:

What do the Europeans want? They're not pushing hard for human rights, for democratisation, for fighting corruption, for anything! Democratisation shouldn't be perceived as just a U.S. agenda, but as something from all democratic countries. But because the EU is so passive it's seen as a U.S. agenda. So what are they still doing here? It seems to mean they aren't interested in promoting all those things. Is it good for the EU to have such an image? Is democracy only an issue for the EU and accession countries, and don't they care about the rest of the world? Do they think, do they care about the Muslim world? The average person could think not.²⁵⁰

More than moral issues are at stake. If the West, including Europe, is seen as not taking a clear and determined stand against authoritarian practices and in favour of the values of democracy and human rights, there may be troubling consequences, as a Central Asian opposition activist suggested:

Why do some Muslims and people in developing countries hate the West? I think one reason is this: Westerners come and tell us about democracy, they tell us to go and demand our rights, and then when the elections come and are terrible, they make statements that try to point out the "progress". There has been no progress, so it all looks like a lie. People say the West deceived us, and they begin to hate them.²⁵¹

A further argument against promoting "Western" values is that they can undermine stability. This argument, like that about "mentality", is often advocated by those with an interest in the status quo but seems to have found a receptive audience in some quarters.²⁵² The potential for serious instability unquestionably exists in Central Asia. Yet, it is fair to ask which is the greater threat to stability: efforts to *promote* human rights and democracy, or their continuing *absence*? In many instances – most notably Uzbekistan – the greatest danger to stability seems to come from oppressive and exploitive government policies. It should be remembered that the ouster of Akayev

in 2005 was triggered by his government's attempt to rig elections.

As noted above, the EU has made a number of statements on politics and human rights. These mean little, however, unless they are backed by concrete and consistent actions of all member states. The EU should also devote greater efforts to making its statements on these issues available to a wider public. Press releases can play a role but obviously are only effective if they are actually reported, and given the poor state of the independent media in many Central Asian states, this is difficult. EU missions in the region should do more to disseminate the statements on their own, through measures such as electronic mailing lists and press conferences.

A determined push to persuade local governments to get serious about combating corruption, through clear incentives (economic or otherwise) given for meeting precisely defined benchmarks,²⁵³ should be central to efforts to promote good governance. It is corruption, more than anything else, that erodes public faith in institutions and undermines campaigns to combat drug trafficking.

It is important that the EU take more of an independent role in this region. The OSCE, which the EU has relied on in many instances,²⁵⁴ may become less and less of an option as certain of that organisations participating states attempt to undermine its political work.²⁵⁵ Moreover, with the controversy over abuses at Guantánamo, Abu Ghraib, and Baghram, U.S. credibility as the chief human rights advocate has suffered.

In summary, if the EU is serious about improving its visibility in Central Asia, pre-empting recruitment to radical movements, encouraging long-term, sustainable development, and, most fundamentally, advancing the

²⁵³ For more on the use of benchmarks in dealing with corruption, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°51, *Tajikistan: A Roadmap for Development*, 24 April 2003.

²⁵⁴ Comparing the role of the European Commission and the OSCE in supporting human rights in Kazakhstan, a senior official of that country's ombudsman's office said, "the Commission's participation is not adequate. It needs to be expanded and made more systematic in order to make changes that are not reversible. The OSCE, on the other hand, is very active, and is not afraid to speak out about what is important here". Crisis Group interview, Astana, 30 March 2006.

²⁵⁵ Russia, for instance, has condemned the OSCE for espousing "double standards" in one of its most important and useful endeavours, elections monitoring (carried out by ODIHR). "Russian foreign minister slam's OSCE's double standards", RIA Novosti, 3 December 2005, at <http://en.rian.ru/world/20051203/42301881.html>. In Central Asia, there has been increasing pressure on the OSCE to turn away from human rights and focus more on security, defined narrowly, and economic development. Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, March 2006.

²⁵⁰ Crisis Group interview, Dushanbe, March 2006.

²⁵¹ Crisis Group interview, March 2005.

²⁵² "Keeping the region stable is a priority for us", a European diplomat said. "We have to be pragmatic about democracy. Yes, we need to promote democracy and human rights but first and foremost we need economic development and stability. Democratisation must not lead to instability". Crisis Group interview, February 2006.

principles on which it is founded, it needs to be much tougher-minded, consequential and determined in advancing that agenda, even when it meets self-interested opposition from parts of the region.

V. CONCLUSION

At a time when the EU should be paying increased attention to Central Asia, and making every effort to raise its profile and effectiveness, it risks losing its opportunity to make a positive impact in the region. Part of this is understandable. Geographically and culturally remote, hardly known in Europe, and with no EU member state having a particularly close relationship with them to push for deepening ties, the five Central Asian states are low on the EU's priority list. The chequered balance sheets of regional cooperation initiatives within areas where the EU has been able to invest much greater political and diplomatic resources – for example, the Middle East and the Barcelona Process²⁵⁶ – suggest the need to be modest about how much impact the EU can realistically aspire to in Central Asia.

Nevertheless, the EU's seeming indifference to Central Asia is frustrating to some in the region, who feel that their recent history as part of the Soviet Union makes them politically and culturally closer to Europe in many ways than to Asia. The statement by a Kyrgyz analyst that "Kyrgyzstan's borders are Europe's borders"²⁵⁷ may be something of an overstatement but reveals a certain desire for closer ties. A Tajik analyst expressed similar sentiments: "We Tajiks are a European people, and we speak an Indo-European language. We would feel much better to be getting aid from Europe".²⁵⁸ Some in Tajikistan feel their country can offer Europe an important service as a largely secular interlocutor in its dealings with Iran and Afghanistan, countries with which Tajikistan shares a common language.²⁵⁹ Kazakhstan's ambitions for political and economic leadership in Central Asia have translated into active lobbying for inclusion in the

²⁵⁶ The Barcelona Process, also known as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), includes the 25 EU member states and ten Mediterranean neighbours (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey, with Libya in observer status). It was established in 1995 to seek "the definition of a common area of peace and stability through the reinforcement of political and security dialogue...the construction of a zone of economic prosperity through an economic and financial partnership and the gradual establishment of a free-trade area...[and] the rapprochement between peoples through a social, cultural and human partnership aimed at encouraging understanding between cultures and exchanges between civil societies". http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/euromed/.

²⁵⁷ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, 17 March 2006.

²⁵⁸ Crisis Group interview, Dushanbe, February 2006.

²⁵⁹ Crisis Group interview, Dushanbe, February 2006. Tajik is basically the same language as Farsi (Iran) and Dari (Afghanistan).

European Neighbourhood Policy; that it is not included while South Caucasus states are rankles.²⁶⁰

At the same time, however, there may be a widening gap in perceptions between Central Asian governments and Europe as to what constitutes useful EU help. European Commission representatives seem to feel strongly that their brand of technical know-how is what will benefit the region in the long run, more than either large construction projects or a confrontational stance on human rights and democratisation. “It’s all about standards”, a senior Commission representative said. “It’s very technical stuff – independent audit agencies, competition agencies, regulatory authorities, data protection and so on. It’s not sexy, it’s not glamorous, but the key to transformation is in transforming administrations to have more effective policies all around.”²⁶¹

Many in Central Asia see things differently, particularly in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, where the kind of technical fine-tuning which proved successful in Central and Eastern Europe may not be as readily applicable. “We need investment, not aid”, a Tajik commentator said.²⁶² As a consequence, the EU may find its influence in the region further eclipsed by countries more willing to put up the cash, most notably Russia, China, and Iran. “Iran is winning compared to the EU here”, a Tajik analyst said, “because they’re doing things that speak for themselves – Anzob,²⁶³ Sangtuda,²⁶⁴ and so on. If the EU in the future would pay attention to projects like these, then there could be real growth in Tajikistan”.²⁶⁵

If the EU wants to emerge as an effective geopolitical player in Central Asia, it will have to rethink its approach – perhaps radically. This may involve moving away from regional strategies and focusing on programs specifically tailored to meet the needs of individual states. Technical aid may be more applicable in Kazakhstan, but Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan will need more classical development help, particularly in infrastructure and public health.

Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan should not be isolated more than they are already isolating themselves but it should be made clear that regional projects will go on without them if need be. The EU must also send a clear signal that gross human rights violations will carry real consequences.

The EU views itself as a possessor primarily of “soft power”, a less potentially threatening alternative for its regional interlocutors than Russia, China, or the U.S. There is merit to this approach, but the opportunities that do exist in Central Asia may be lost unless it is prepared to use that power more often and more consistently than it has done.

Brussels/Bishkek, 10 April 2006

²⁶⁰ Crisis Group interview, foreign ministry officials, Astana, 31 March 2006. Apparently many in the Commission favoured Kazakhstan’s inclusion but political support was lacking.

²⁶¹ Crisis Group interview, Almaty, March 2006.

²⁶² Crisis Group interview, Dushanbe, March 2006.

²⁶³ Iranian contractors are tunnelling through the Anzob Pass between Dushanbe and Khujand to make possible year-round road travel between northern and southern Tajikistan; the pass is closed from November through May each year.

²⁶⁴ In February 2006, Iran began construction of the Sangtuda-2 hydroelectric plant on the Vakhsh River, as well as a power line to carry electricity to Iran and Afghanistan. Construction is expected to take three and a half years, with profits from the plant to go exclusively to Iran for the first twelve and a half years of operation. *The Moscow Times*, 20 February 2006.

²⁶⁵ Crisis Group interview, Dushanbe, March 2006.

APPENDIX A

MAP OF CENTRAL ASIA



APPENDIX B

EU DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATION IN CENTRAL ASIA

Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan
Commission	Commission ²⁶⁶	Commission	France	Czech Republic
Belgium	Germany	France	Germany	France
Czech Republic		Germany	United Kingdom	Germany
Estonia		United Kingdom		Italy
France				Latvia
Germany				Poland
Greece				Slovakia
Hungary				United Kingdom
Italy				
Lithuania				
The Netherlands				
Poland				
Slovakia				
United Kingdom				

²⁶⁶ The Commission delegations in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are led by chargés d'affaires; the Kyrgyzstan delegation may be upgraded once the Commission delegation in Kazakhstan is relocated to Astana.

APPENDIX C

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AAH	Action Against Hunger
BOMCA/CADAP	Border Management in Central Asia/Central Asia Drug Action Program
DCA	Drugs Control Agency
DCECI	Development Cooperation and Economic Cooperation Instrument
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DOTS	Direct Observation, Short Term
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EC	European Commission
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Office
EIDHR	European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights
ENPI	European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument
EurAsEC	Eurasian Economic Community
EUSR	European Union Special Representative
FSP	Food Security Program
INOGATE	Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe
GTZ	<i>Gesellschaft für technische Zusammenarbeit</i> (Association for Technical Cooperation)
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
KfW	<i>Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau</i> (German Development Bank)
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MSF	<i>Médecins sans frontières</i> (Doctors without Borders)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE)
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
PCC	Parliamentary Cooperation Committee
RBF	Russian Border Forces
SIDA	Swedish International Development Association
TACIS	Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States
TRACECA	Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UTO	United Tajik Opposition
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organisation

APPENDIX D

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with over 110 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers are distributed widely by email and printed copy to officials in foreign ministries and international organisations and made available simultaneously on the website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policy-makers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by Lord Patten of Barnes, former European Commissioner for External Relations. President and Chief Executive since January 2000 is former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans.

Crisis Group's international headquarters are in Brussels, with advocacy offices in Washington DC (where it is based as a legal entity), New York, London and Moscow. The organisation currently operates fifteen field offices (in Amman, Belgrade, Bishkek, Bogotá, Cairo, Dakar, Dushanbe, Islamabad, Jakarta, Kabul, Nairobi, Pretoria, Pristina, Seoul and Tbilisi), with analysts working in over 50 crisis-affected countries and territories across four continents. In Africa, this includes Angola, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Liberia, Rwanda, the Sahel region, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe; in Asia, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Kashmir, Kazakhstan,

Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar/Burma, Nepal, North Korea, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan; in Europe, Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro and Serbia; in the Middle East, the whole region from North Africa to Iran; and in Latin America, Colombia, the Andean region and Haiti.

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