

## The New EU Strategy towards Central Asia: A View from the Region

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### Key features of the new EU strategy: Interests, approaches and selected areas for cooperation

The German Presidency of the EU in the first half of 2007 inspired great hopes regarding the development of relations between the European Union and the states of Central Asia. In Brussels and other European capitals, it was expected that Germany, as an EU political and economic heavyweight and one of the key promoters of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, would be able to foster a coordinated Central Asian policy giving direction and coherence to European engagement in the region. It was widely hoped – within both the governments of Central Asia and the societies of the region – that Germany, which has traditionally been the most pro-active European country in the region, would elevate the relations between the EU and Central Asian states to a higher level.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of the German Presidency, in June 2007, the EU adopted “The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership”.<sup>2</sup> It was the first-ever EU strategy developed for Central Asia, and in this way, it marked a real breakthrough in the relations between European and Central Asian countries. In this document an attempt is made to go beyond the assistance programme with generic developmental goals based on the perceived needs of the region, to define European interests in the region, find prospective areas for cooperation and improve the approaches by making them more effective.

<sup>1</sup> Germany is the only European country to maintain an embassy in all five Central Asian states.

<sup>2</sup> Council of the European Union (2007), *The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership*, Document 10113/07, Brussels, 31 May (endorsed by the EU Council Presidency Conclusions of the Brussels European Council, 21-22 June 2007).

The Strategy indicates that the EU is interested in “a peaceful, democratic and economically prosperous Central Asia”. The transformation of the region in this direction is to alleviate the present and potential negative impact of developments in Central Asia and its even-more problematic southern neighbourhood on European security. Central Asian security became more important for Europe in view of the EU enlargement that brought the region closer to European borders, and therefore made the potential of the impact stronger.

The EU approach to security within the Strategy is comprehensive. It will continue to provide direct assistance to the security sector: helping to combat human, drugs and arms trafficking, proliferation, organised crime and international terrorism. It will also help to address the causes of instability, such as poor governance, lack of rule of law, poverty and violation of human rights, through various aid programmes.

Another EU interest in the region lies in the energy sphere. European countries would like to have access to Central Asia oil and gas resources, and the region’s aim is to diversify trade partners and supply routes. The EU member states and the countries of Central Asia share an ambition to reduce their dependence on Russian supplies and pipelines. Therefore, the EU and Central Asian partners have complementary energy security needs and interests.

By articulating its interests in Central Asia, the EU creates a more solid base for EU policy in the region. From the point of view of Central Asia, the adoption of the Strategy is also a positive development. It signals that the EU recognises that

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it has certain interests in the region and that the Union's engagement is long-term. With Central Asia the adoption of the Strategy strengthens the perception of the EU as a political and even strategic actor in the region with its own agenda, supported by significant resources.

As for changing approaches, the Strategy envisages an intensification of political ties (regular dialogue on a variety of topics with top officials), more assistance (double the amount/budget for the period of 2007-13) and a strong focus on bilateral relations. The previous assistance programme was criticised for excessive emphasis on the regional approach that proved largely ineffective in the circumstances of Central Asia.<sup>3</sup> In the Strategy it was decided to maintain a regional approach for issues that need regional solutions (organised crime, drugs trafficking, water management, etc.) and to develop more tailored policies and cooperation programmes to deal with issues better solved on a bilateral basis, taking into account different needs and conditions in Central Asian states. These developments can only be welcomed, for they indicate more engagement, more resources and more attention to specificities and pragmatic ways of interacting with Central Asia.

While the articulated interests and improved approaches to the region are very important, the core (real 'meat') of the Strategy is the section that specifies a number of areas for "a strengthened EU approach". It shows what areas the EU is planning to focus on in order to promote its interests. These areas can be sub-divided into two groups. The first consists of areas that are fairly straightforward and imply a clear action plan with easily identifiable objectives and activities.

One such area is headed 'Investing in the future: Youth and education'. It is a very promising and forward-looking policy aimed at bringing up a new generation of Central Asians that would be more familiar with and attuned to European values and norms. The Strategy envisions the launch of the European Education Initiative for Central Asia to assist "the adaptation of the education systems of Central Asian states to the needs of the globalised world", and support at all levels of education, from primary to higher. Europe has a lot to offer in this respect, and the will of European countries to help is met by the desire of Central Asians to study in Europe or according to European standards.

Another unproblematic area is the 'Promotion of economic development, trade and investment'. The

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<sup>3</sup> International Crisis Group (2006), *Central Asia: What Role for the European Union?*, Asia Report 113, 10 April (<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=4065>).

accession of Central Asian states to the WTO, encouraging exports and economic diversification to be promoted by the EU are objectives that coincide with the agendas of Central Asian governments. The same can be said about the Environmental Stability and Water subsection. Considering the poor level of environmental policies in the region, to achieve the goals will not be easy. However, the spirit of partnership between Europeans and Central Asians can be strong, since the cooperation is in the interests of Central Asian states.

'Combating common threats and challenges' can also be placed in the first category, albeit with some reservations. European assistance in border management, fighting regional criminal activity and international drug trade has been and will be appreciated by Central Asian governments. The Border Management Programme for Central Asia (BOMCA), considered one of the most successful European projects in the region, is to broaden its activities.

Difficulties might arise from differences in how Europe and Central Asian counterparts approach the problem of security. The understanding of security in Central Asia is strongly state-centred and determined by the logic of authoritarianism; political dissident is considered as a security challenge.<sup>4</sup> The opposite assessments of the Andijan events given by European and Central Asian governments (supported by Russia and China) illustrate this point.<sup>5</sup> Since the EU is not a guarantor of security in the region, however it will not have to face major dilemmas in this regard.

The second group consists of areas of European action that do not have clear-cut solutions, that are subject to difficult dilemmas and where full-fledged cooperation of Central Asian partners is not guaranteed due to various reasons. One such area is Human rights, rule of law, good governance and democratisation, which that is outlined at the outset of the Strategy. It arises from the interest of the EU in a 'democratic and prosperous' Central Asia. In the Strategy the EU commits itself to launching a

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<sup>4</sup> For an in-depth discussion of differences between European and Central Asian approaches to security, see Daniel Kimmage (2007), *Security Challenges in Central Asia. Implications for the EU's Engagement Strategy*, CEPS Policy Brief No. 139, Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels, July.

<sup>5</sup> On 13 May 2005, the Uzbek government used indiscriminate violence to suppress unrest in the city of Andijan located in the Ferghana Valley. As a result, several hundred people died. While the EU and the US demanded an independent investigation of the events, Russia, China and other Central Asian states supported the actions of the Uzbek government.

Rule of Law initiative, conducting training for regional legal experts and holding a regular dialogue on human rights with the government of the region, and other activities to promote good governance in Central Asia. The problem with this area is that the EU does not have enough leverage with the governments of Central Asian states, for the European ‘sticks’ and ‘carrots’ are not that big. The strategy introduces a sentence on conditionality for EU engagement, noting that the intensity of cooperation will reflect the commitment to transition and reform in each country. However, this can work only with the states that are strongly interested in strengthening ties with Europe for geopolitical or other reasons.

European countries have already faced difficult choices with regard to their Central Asian partners. They had to decide how to react in cases of heavy violations of human rights (the Andijan massacre being the extreme case), what to do in respect to other instances of the violation of rights and how to assess largely fraudulent elections. It is clear that more uneasy choices are in store. It is likely that two dilemmas will remain central for the EU in Central Asia: how to balance the liberal goals of the promotion of democracy and human rights and realist interests of securing access to the region’s energy reserves, and how to engage and not to ‘lose’ the region without becoming too soft on local authoritarian regimes.

Another area that implies making difficult choices is “strengthening energy and transport links”. Diversification of European energy supply means the development of infrastructure to bring Central Asian oil and gas to European consumers bypassing Russia. It is in the interests of both Europe and Central Asia, but European projects in the region have very slim chances of being realised as Russia is strongly opposed to them. Central Asian states are vulnerable to Russian pressures and so are European energy companies that have valuable assets in Russia. As noted by many experts, Moscow has been very successful in playing the energy card and dividing the European countries.<sup>6</sup> It is also important to keep in mind the third competitor for Central Asian resources – China, whose influence in the region has been consistently growing. If the EU is to make progress in this area, it will need to pool its resources and determine routes and arrangements that most closely comply most with its interests.

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<sup>6</sup> For the latest overview of Russian policies, see Marc Leonard and Nicu Popescu, (2007), “A Power Audit of EU-Russia Relations”, European Council on Foreign Relations, 2 November (<http://ecfr.eu/page/-/documents/ECFR-EU-Russia-power-audit.pdf>).

For the EU to answer these questions, it will need to address a number of serious geopolitical challenges: How to build a relationship with an increasingly assertive Russia and how to enhance European energy security without antagonising Russia? Whether to engage in Central Asia with the aim of seeking to become a strategic actor in the area, thereby significantly shaping local developments or whether to let the region slip under the traditional Russian control and new Chinese supervision. In this regard, the EU strategy is unusual for it does not dwell on the geo-political context. Russia and China are not mentioned once.

### Why does Central Asia need greater EU engagement?

Most of 20<sup>th</sup> century Central Asia endured the domination of Russia. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Central Asian states found themselves on their own and in a complex geopolitical environment. They could go back to their roots and establish ties with Muslim states, become members of their organisations, and in this way rejoin the Islamic world; they could follow Russia in integrating with the Euro-Atlantic community; and they could start cooperation with neighbouring China. In the end, all of these courses were followed by governments of the region in the form of their ‘multi-vector’ foreign policies. This balancing act worked for a decade, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain due to the new assertiveness of Russia which wishes to strengthen its positions in the ‘near abroad’, a development that is coinciding with the growth of Chinese influence in the region. Both Russia and China are interested in squeezing out the West from the area. At the same time, the engagement of the US and Europe has also been on the rise.

The four actors with the strongest capacity to influence the developments in the region are Russia, China, the US and the EU. If the interests of the region are considered in a comprehensive manner, from the point of view of the costs and benefits of cooperation with each of these powers, then the EU would come at the top of the list.

Russia is the traditional patron that Central Asians are used to and feel relatively comfortable with. It has an array of tools to use in order to maintain influence in the region (security guarantees, cheap arms, economic projects and investments, etc.). However, at present Russia cannot offer Central Asia real solutions to the problems of the region (poverty, poor governance and potential instability). It does not have enough resources, but more importantly, it does not provide a good example of how to deal with these problems. Besides, there are

concerns about the Russia's 'big brother' complex that makes it psychologically difficult for Central Asians to give up the 'multi-vector' diplomacy.

China is politically and economically more successful than Russia. It is also able and willing to contribute to security and to the development of the region. However, further integration with China is even more problematic than that with Russia. Firstly, China cannot offer appropriate models for the transformation of Central Asian states into well-functioning polities because its current Communist party-controlled system is a political 'yesterday' for post-Soviet republics. Indeed, the Chinese government is in the process of experimentation itself and it is not clear how the political system of this country will evolve. Secondly, integration with China is problematic from the psychological perspective. There are already considerable fears of Chinese economic expansion and migration into the region, particularly in Kazakhstan, where the influx of Chinese migrants has been the largest due to economic opportunities in this republic. Unlike Russia, China is perceived as 'the other', a very different civilization threatening the local identity.<sup>7</sup> Similar to Russia, in Central Asia the Chinese immigration is often discussed in terms of 'slow infiltration' and 'taking over the territories.'<sup>8</sup>

Ensuring the long-term security and prosperity of Central Asia are impossible without political reforms, and neither Russia nor China is interested in the democratisation of the region. Instead they have legitimised fraudulent elections and generally act to shelter Central Asian governments from international criticism of their repressive policies. Russia and China position themselves as leading security-providers for Central Asia through the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). However, their narrow approach to security can render their engagement in these issues

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<sup>7</sup> The attitudes of the general public are reflected in the results of the Asia Barometer Survey 2005. 25.5% of Kazakh respondents, 30.5% of Kyrgyz respondents and 21.9% of Uzbek respondents assessed the influence of China on their country as bad or rather bad, The attitude of Tajik respondents was more positive, only 8.6% of respondents said that the influence of China is bad. This contrasts with the perception of Russia by Central Asians – 2% of Kazakh respondents, 0.8% of Kyrgyz respondents, 0.6% of Tajik respondents and 1.9% of Uzbek respondents defined the influence of Russia as bad or rather bad.

<sup>8</sup> For a brief overview of various opinions held by Central Asian political experts with regard to Chinese expansion see *Kitaiskaya ekspansiya v Srednyu Aziyu: igra na operezhnenie*. Mnenie ekspertov (<http://pda.regnum.ru/news/issues/866290.html>).

counterproductive. The latest SCO military exercise 'Peaceful Mission 2007' used the scenario of the Andijan events and joint forces were trained to suppress an uprising.<sup>9</sup> It implies that Central Asian authoritarian governments can expect external support in case of a serious dissent by some of their citizens. At present, it is hard to imagine Russian or Chinese soldiers engaged in military actions in Central Asia. However if this happens, a flare-up of anti-Russian and anti-Chinese sentiments can be expected which might result in the destabilisation of Central Asia. The suppression can also lead to further radicalisation of dissenting factions, which is not beneficial for the security of the region.

The extent to which the US can deploy international and national support for maintaining and strengthening the sovereignty of the Central Asian countries make it a very attractive partner for Central Asian states. However, the US is far away and its policies and level of engagement in the region are determined by the general considerations of Eurasian geopolitics, and are therefore subject to change. The emerging rivalry between the US and the leading neighbours of Central Asia – Russia and China – suggest that deeper cooperation between the states of the region and Washington could lead to increased tensions in the region.

Unlike the US, the EU has long-term interests in Central Asia for it is directly affected by the developments in the region. It has the resources and, as the new strategy indicates, the intention to engage seriously in Central Asia. It wants to contribute to the transformation of the region into a secure and well-governed area, which is in the best interests of Central Asians as well, and it can offer models of political development and good governance and patterns of cooperation that can be emulated to achieve this goal. It can provide an alternative gravitation pole for Central Asia, creating real opportunities for security and sustainable development. What has been lacking so far is a coherent European policy based on clearly defined interests and guided by *realistic but ambitious goals* in the region. The strategy is the first attempt to find this policy. Deeper partnership between the EU and Central Asia will be mutually beneficial. It remains to be seen whether the EU can master the political will to shape and carry out its agenda in the region.

## Democratisation, rule of law and human rights

The EU Strategy contains a commitment to the promotion of the rule of law in Central Asia, rightly

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<sup>9</sup> "Rossiya vypisla povestku SHOS", *Kommersant*, No. 146, 16 August, 2007.

claiming that it is the basis of political and economic development. It is planning to support legal and judicial reforms, share experiences and best practices, train local experts, organise and sponsor specialised conferences, etc. However, it is clear that no real legal and judicial reforms can take place in the absence of political reforms. The judicial sector is not independent and is subject to corruption to the same degree as the rest of the political system. Sharing experiences and organising training sessions are very unlikely to have any impact beyond minor cosmetic improvements. On the other hand, training young people who have yet to enter the system might be more productive.

Good governance, rule of law and compliance with human rights are impossible without democratisation and the introduction of proper mechanisms of checks and balances. The EU cannot democratise Central Asia, but it can continue pushing for the enhancement of the political space and greater political pluralism. The pressure of European countries and organisations has been the great support and often the factor of survival of pro-democracy forces in the region. As a result, Europe has become the most important ‘reference group’ for Central Asian representatives of civil society, political opposition and their supporters.

The ‘sticks’ Europe has in the region are not big, but not they should be underestimated. Central Asian political elites do not want to be left to the mercy of Russia and China; they also need Western investments and technologies, factors that account for the persistence of the ‘multi-vector’ foreign policies of Central Asian states. It is important that they do not acquire the impression that European states and organisations can be blackmailed or bribed (which would fit into their worldview better). It is vital for Central Asia that Europe does not give up on the region and can summon up the necessary patience and strength to ensure its transformation into a ‘peaceful, democratic and prosperous’ area.

### Developing energy and transportation links

Discussing energy and transportation links, the strategy dwells on the Caspian Sea - Black Sea - EU energy transport corridor. If it is built, Europe will acquire an alternative source of oil and gas supplies, and Central Asian states will receive access to lucrative markets and become less vulnerable to Russian pressure. The project is mutually beneficial, however, as already mentioned, it faces considerable constraints. The EU pipeline aspires to connect Caspian resources with European markets, such as Nabucco, and the trans-Caspian pipeline is meeting strong resistance, for Russia does not want to lose

its monopoly control over Central Asian gas. Considering the leverage Moscow has with regard to Central Asia, European countries and European companies, it can be argued that the development of Caspian resources and their transportation directly to Europe cannot be implemented without a certain accommodation of Russian interests and the participation of Russian companies in the deals.

Obviously, this is not an easy task. However, Europe has a number of strong cards to play. Firstly, without European and generally Western participation, it will be impossible to develop the Turkmen gas fields that are to provide the future gas for export. Secondly, Russia is unlikely to ratify the European Energy Charter, but it would need a legal framework for the protection of its pipelines from transit risks.<sup>10</sup> The EU can negotiate such a framework keeping in mind the desired access to Central Asian resources. Overall it would be more profitable for Russia and Europe to have a more cooperative framework that would allow choosing more economically viable pipeline routes over expensive geopolitics-driven ones.

Apart from oil and gas, the Strategy touches upon the development of hydro-power and its distribution in the region of Central Asia. It deems the development of this energy resource crucial to promoting stability and prosperity in Central Asia and beyond, including Afghanistan and Pakistan. It does not make it clear, however, whether the EU supports the increase of links between Central Asia and South Asia via Afghanistan beyond the water and hydropower sector, in effect supporting the integration projects currently promoted by the US and development institutes and often known as the ‘Greater Central Asia Partnership’.<sup>11</sup>

Such an integration project constitutes a very important issue for Central Asia. On the one hand, the project promises benefits to the landlocked Central Asian states, especially to impoverished Tajikistan, by creating opportunities for it to be integrated in the world economy. On the other hand, the risks of such an opening of the region to the highly unstable southern neighbourhood are so significant that they can easily outweigh any potential benefits. Drug trafficking, Islamic extremism are among the threats that Central Asian government believe will be aggravated, and the

<sup>10</sup> V. Milov (2007), “Energodilaog Rossiya-ES; zapolnit vacuum” (Energy Dialogue Russia-EU: To Fill the Vacuum), *Rossiya v globalnoi politike*, No. 5, Sept-Oct (<http://www.globalaffairs.ru/numbers/28/8546.html>).

<sup>11</sup> S. Frederick Starr (2005), *A Greater Central Asia Partnership for Afghanistan and Central Asia*, Silk Road Paper, March (<http://www.silkroadstudies.org/CACI/Strategy.pdf>).

already-fragile security of the weak Central Asian states, which are only separated from each other by porous borders, might be completely undermined. Since there is a connection between Central Asian and European security (notably in the areas of drug trafficking, weapons and WMD smuggling, international terrorism and the spread of pandemics), Europe will be affected too.

Regional experts tend to be very negative about the 'Central Asian Partnership' project. Kazakh scholar Murat Laumulin stated that "the merger of Central Asia with archaic Afghanistan can change the European vector in the development of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, that is interrupt the process of modernisation, which by fits and starts has been going on for many decades."<sup>12</sup> In the opinion of his Kyrgyz colleague Alexander Knyazev, "any liberalisation of a border regime with a country producing 90% of the world's opium and heroin and that remains a haven for extremists and terrorist organisations, would turn the whole region into a huge Afghanistan".<sup>13</sup> Thus, there are fears that pushing Central Asia in the southern direction would undermine the achievements of the Soviet modernisation project and distance it from Europe.

### The special case of Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is often singled out by European policy-makers and experts as the most promising partner for cooperation. It owes its favourable status to its rapid level of economic development, certain freedoms permitted by the relatively benign authoritarian regime, and very importantly some freedom of geopolitical manoeuvre that the country can afford due to its strengths.

The Western vector of Kazakh foreign policy has always been strong. Its European orientation was driven both by the practical reasons mentioned above and also by the sense that the country is a part of Eurasia and, therefore, has a European identity (since part of the territory of the country is geographically in the European part of the continent). President Nazarbayev from time to time stresses that Kazakhstanis are Europeans.<sup>14</sup> The

successful bid made by Kazakhstan for the chairmanship of the OSCE indicates that the political elites of Kazakhstan view the country as part of the European space, where they want to play a more active role.

The political opposition in Kazakhstan is even more strongly pro-European oriented. The programme of the single opposition presidential candidate in 2006 was entitled "By way of justice – toward a dignified life!" (A Democratic Civilisational Alternative), and promoted the European orientation of Kazakhstan's foreign policy.<sup>15</sup> It stated that the survival and strengthening of the young nation-state of Kazakhstan is possible if it makes the right choice in terms of civilisational affinity and if it makes a conscious decision to deepen ties with Europe.

It is a telling detail that when the US State Department reorganised and moved the Central Asian states from the Eurasian Bureau to the newly created South and Central Asia Bureau in 2006,

Kazakh political elites were particularly perturbed. No Kazakhstani expert assessed this move positively, while, for example, a Tajik expert Rashid Abdullo evaluated the new grouping as more reasonable.<sup>16</sup> The sense of separateness that Kazakhstanis have with regard to the rest of Central Asia can be traced to the Soviet times when the region was referred to as Kazakhstan and Middle Asia (*Kazakhstan I Srednyaya Aziya*).

The EU can draw on these Kazakhstani perceptions and stress the integration possibilities. It is clear that Kazakhstan cannot be offered membership, but it can aspire to be part of the European neighbourhood programme at some point in the future and to participate in elements of the programme on an ad hoc basis. Unlike Russia, Kazakhstan will have no psychological difficulties in becoming a junior partner of the EU.

Although Kazakhstani political elites are attracted to Europe, they are held back by the political legacy they have accumulated (corruption, repressive policies, lack of meaningful political reforms). They would not want to become pariahs in the West, however The Kazakh leadership draws a

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<sup>12</sup> M. Laumulin (2005), "Bolshaya tsentralnaya Aziya – novyi megaproekt SShA.?" (Greater Central Asia – A new US mega-project?), *Kontinent* No. 22 (158), pp.16-29, November.

<sup>13</sup> A. Knyazev (2007), "Bolshaya Tsentralnaya Aziya – eto vpolne ochevidnyi geopoliticheskii marazm" (Greater Central Asia is an obvious geopolitical insanity), interview given to Ferghana-ru information agency on 5 July (<http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=5214>).

<sup>14</sup> BBC (2006), "Nazarbayev: kazakhi – evropeitsy, a ne aziaty" (Nazarbayev: Kazakhs are Europeans and not

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Asians), interview given to BBC, 28 September. ([http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/russian/international/newsid\\_5386000/5386272.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/russian/international/newsid_5386000/5386272.stm) htm).

<sup>15</sup> Programma predvybornogo kandidata Zharmakhana Tuyakbaya 'Putem spravedlivosti – k dostoinoi zhizni! (demokraticeskaya tsivilizatsionnaya alternativa)' (<http://www.akzholparty.kz/action.php?go=content&set=showpage&pid=515>).

<sup>16</sup> Rashid Abdullo (2007), "US Policy in Tajikistan: From Recognition of Its Independence to Partnership", *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 4 (46).

considerable portion of its pride and legitimacy from the relatively positive image it enjoys in the West, and that is why it does not hesitate to spend a lot of money on PR campaigns targeted at Western audiences and it makes the effort of imitating democratic processes.<sup>17</sup>

At present, Kazakhstan is entering a systemic political crisis. The country cannot further develop in the current institutional framework. Besides, if until now, the growing economy served as a cushion for the regime, the major problems experienced in the banking and construction sectors (two pillars of the national economy) in 2007 have challenged the ‘euphoria of success’ of recent years and have made the system more vulnerable. Difficult years lie ahead, and a lot will depend on whether *Kazakhstan has accumulated sufficient potential in institutional consolidation and economic development* to help the young nation-state get through this crisis.

Therefore, it is premature to expect Kazakhstan to play the role of locomotive for regional integration. It is not yet ready. Also importantly, other Central Asian states are not ready for Astana to lead a process of integration for a variety of reasons, the most important being that they are all authoritarian states. The main priority in Kazakhstan today is to establish the conditions for institutional change and political reforms. The EU can make a considerable contribution to this aim through the use of its ‘soft power’, which can prove effective if the EU policy is clear, consistent and supported by greater engagement.

### Recommendations for the EU

1. It is important to clarify the EU interests in the region against the background of other external actors’ interests, particularly those of Russia, China and the US. In the areas where the interests overlap, cooperation projects can be pursued. In cases where they differ, the EU should steadfastly pursue its own agenda.
2. The EU policies aimed at the promotion of good governance, democratisation, rule of law and human rights in the region of Central Asia are extremely important. Central Asian states are located in an authoritarian neighbourhood. The EU and the values it embodies create an alternative gravitational pole for Central Asian

societies that have been undergoing a serious transformation since the collapse of the USSR. The EU cannot democratise Central Asia, but it can continue pushing for the enhancement of the political space and greater political pluralism in the region. If it is done gently but consistently if the right incentives are offered, the Central Asian authorities would come to the conclusion that the EU can not be bought off or easily pacified. As for the Rule of Law initiative, only very small progress can be expected under the current political regimes. The most productive way seems to be through the education of young people.

3. It is of great importance both for the EU and the Central Asian states to build a transport corridor to connect Caspian resources with European markets. The success of the enterprise will be in doubt, however, unless some kind of cooperative framework is developed with Russia. If the EU can develop such a framework, this will be beneficial for all parties involved.
4. The ongoing process of integrating Central Asia with Afghanistan, as is being promoted by the US, can have very serious consequences for the security of the region and push back rather than advance its development. The EU should make a thorough analysis of the situation and with the aim of identifying possible risks of such integration for Central Asia and for European security.
5. Taking into account the pro-European sentiments in Kazakhstan and given the country’s advanced economic development, it offers itself as among the most promising in the region not only for cooperation with the EU, but also as a possible candidate for the European Neighbourhood Policy. Such a reconfiguration of the Eurasian geopolitical space would be extremely beneficial for the region of Central Asia at large.

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<sup>17</sup> Nikola Krastev (2006), “Kazakhstan: Long Delays Sap Strength from ‘Kazakhgate’ Case”, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), 29 September (<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/09/30c0e4ca-9f32-4cf3-b7e8-862ff58214f8.html>).

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