

**Tadeusz Wallas, Radosław Fiedler,  
Beata Przybylska-Maszner**

## **EUROPEAN UNION-CENTRAL ASIA COOPERATION IN TRANSITION. CHARACTERISTICS, DETERMINANTS, IMPLICATIONS**

Central Asia is a significant element of the international security system. The region plays an important role in international politics not only as an object of rivalry for political and economic influence amongst regional actors, but also because of considerable security concerns. After 1990, intense political and economic transitions began in the states of the region. The development of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have been of interest to many international actors, including the European Union.

The EU's increased involvement in Central Asia was initiated by a meeting of the EEC ministers of foreign affairs, held on December 16, 1991, in which they agreed on a joint standpoint on the dissolution of the Soviet Union. One important decision made at that meeting concerned the establishment of the TACIS program, addressed at the Community of Independent States and Mongolia. Although EU delegations had visited the Soviet republics in Central Asia before they officially became independent, formal talks on mutual relations were held from 1992-1993. Kazakhstan was the first state which established official relations with the EU in February 1993. In December of the same year, the first Kazakh representation appeared in Brussels. The framework of relations between the EU and the Central Asian states was to be provided by partnership and cooperation agreements with the EU. The first talks on these agreements took place in 1993. The agreements with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan were concluded in

1995, and came into force in 1999. The agreement with Tajikistan came into force as late as 2010. The 1998 agreement with Turkmenistan remained unratified by the EU for a long time, on the grounds of Turkmenistan's poor human rights record. Therefore, relations with Turkmenistan were governed by the 1998 Interim Trade Agreement, which came into force on August 1, 2010. The partnership and cooperation agreements signed with the states of Central Asia are non-preferential trade agreements, whereby the parties granted each other 'most favored nation' treatment with regard to tariffs. The agreements also provide for the gradual alignment of respective national legislations and practices with EU norms on trade, including: technical regulations, sanitary and phyto-sanitary standards, protection of intellectual property rights, and border customs matters.

The focus of the first years of cooperation between the Central Asian states and the EU concerned trade and investment. After 2002, due to the evolution of the internal situation of the states in the region, and competition of China and the Russian Federation, the scope of cooperation was gradually expanded to include matters related to energy, which was important for the EU. Another important field of cooperation addressed by the EU encompassed political dialogue on fundamental rights. EU postulates in this area were difficult for the Central Asian governments to understand, let alone accept. Bilateral relations between the EU and individual countries in the region, prevailed at the beginning of cooperation. Regional summits were rare. Due to the potential and economic importance of Kazakhstan, the EU treated the Kazakh delegation as a regional leader. The changing economic conditions forced the European Union to commence negotiations on a new framework of partnership and cooperation agreements.

Relations between the EU and the Central Asian states have developed since a strategy for a new partnership was adopted in June 2007. The strategy has strengthened mutual ties through regular political dialogue and cooperation in a number of areas. It emphasizes the importance of the Central Asian states as the EU's partners. The EU reaffirmed its intention to develop closer relations, and intensify dialogue and cooperation regarding: human rights, education, sustainable development, and new challenges in the area of security faced by the Central Asian states. The strategy was also designed to provide an incentive for trade and economic cooperation. It was drawn up in a period when the European Union member states were confident of the growing opportunities afforded by forming an effective EU foreign policy. Their expanding ambitions and political declarations were spelled out in the

EU strategy, but they translated poorly into actual cooperation. This necessitated a revision of the EU's policy on the region, which resulted in the adoption of the conclusions of the EU Council. The EU Council urged the High Representative and the European Commission to design a new strategy for the Central Asian states, which would be in line with the tenets of the EU's global strategy by 2019.

This publication is the outcome of a research project entitled *The European Union and Central Asia – regional and international determinants*. This was carried out by the Faculty of Political Science and Journalism of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, from 2015 until 2019, with Professor Tadeusz Wallas as Coordinator. The project investigated the issue of the European Union's relations with the Central Asian countries. The fundamental goal of the studies presented in this publication was to analyze the policy of the European Union for Central Asia. The intention of the project team was to emphasize the advancements of the process shaping mutual relations, and its different determinants. The point of focus was the activities of the EU and, more importantly, the factors that affected EU involvement given the changes in the region. The detailed objectives of the project were as follows:

1. To analyze the EU's political and economic influence in Central Asia.
2. To identify the areas in which it was necessary for the EU to review its involvement in the transformation processes in Central Asia, in new geo-strategic conditions.
3. To identify the short and long-term outcomes of EU involvement.
4. To indicate the potential directions of the EU's influence in Central Asia, and define the guidelines for the entrenchment of European presence in the region.

Another significant element of the study concerned the involvement of the EU in Central Asia, compared to other external international actors.

The interdisciplinary character of this project has directly translated into research methods, applied in the course of its implementation. Key significance was attributed to the methods typical of political science (and in particular of international relations), history, and law. An important element of the study concerned the interviews we ran in EU institutions, and other centers that the team members considered valuable, in order to obtain answers to the research questions.

The authors of the successive parts of the publication formulated research questions in relation to the elements they had identified, such as: the determinants of the EU's involvement, its repertoire of actions, the role of the in-

stitutional apparatus, the organizational scheme of the implementation of EU instruments, and the outcomes and importance of EU involvement. This defined and restricted scope allowed us to indicate the changes, given the political determinants, and show the factors impacting the effectiveness of EU policies in the region. Having identified the premises for and feasibility of individual EU member states' involvement, vis-à-vis the EU's previous achievements, allowed us to present noticeable trends in the development process of EU-Central Asian relations.

The book consists of eight parts. In order to show how active the EU has been in Central Asia, the authors focus on sectorial issues. In the first chapter, Sebastien Peyrouse confirms that the European Union has identified education in Central Asia as a key area of cooperation. However, the EU's engagement in this area, which has faced considerable difficulties since the fall of the Soviet Union, has so far not had the desired impact. Based on a case study of Uzbekistan, Peyrouse argues: that the EU should revise its strategy by adopting a more targeted approach, which is consistent with the longer-term funding it is able to commit to Central Asia and better tailored to the local social context, through strong engagement with local stakeholders. Instead of imposing broad concepts designed in Brussels - which have generally not been fully accepted or implemented by local political authorities - this new approach would involve setting up specific projects with local input, such as the opening of campuses of European universities, providing financial and logistical support for school infrastructure, and increasing the involvement of potential employers. With local ownership, EU education assistance will allow a new generation in Uzbekistan to breathe life into long-term reforms; by drawing on the European concepts of their instruction, rather than viewing them as imposed from outside.

Tadeusz Bodio outlines the EU's policy in Central Asia, stressing its specific two-track development. Starting with first diplomatic contacts, through negotiations on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements to the design and implementation of a political strategy in the region. Considerable attention is given to explaining the fundamental tenets of this strategy and its successive adjustments. He identifies strengths and weaknesses of the EU's policy in Central Asia. The 2014-2016 period marked a new type of process in Central Asia and its geopolitical surroundings, which Brussels should carefully observe and respond to appropriately. In 2019, the European Union will make another crucial adjustment of its Central Asian policy in the face of the region's slow but clear departure from a pro-European scenario

in favor of an Asiatic one, attempts to overcome the crisis in Russo-EU relations, pragmatic redefinition of the priorities in the region and the EU's approach to competitive integration projects – Eurasian Economic Union and Chinese Belt and Road Initiative.

Beata Przybylska-Maszner analyses the factors that led to the EU adopting the strategy for Central Asia in 2007. The effectiveness of implementing the strategy was analyzed by assessing previous achievements, on the basis of a full range of legal documents defining: the framework of relations between EU and Central Asia, programs and cooperation instruments, and a wide spectrum of mutual political declarations. She also presents the challenges faced in the key dimensions of relations between the Central Asian states, and the EU. The final part of this analysis presents conclusions which make it possible to assess the feasibility of the goals of EU policy, regarding the priorities of political and economic cooperation with the Central Asian states after 2019.

Radosław Fiedler maps out the EU's role as the promoter of democracy and its impact on Civil Society in Central Asia. After a period of relatively low activity in this region, in 2007, the European Union offered a strategy for Central Asia. This strategy addressed many issues, including democratic deficit, and human rights violations. The main obstacles to the implementation of the strategy are: autocratic tendencies and corruption, the influence of neighbors strongly leaning towards autocracy, and the post-Soviet legacy. Additionally, the EU's activity is overshadowed by the US, and has minimal capacity for pursuing its own policy toward Central Asia. Another problem is the fact that after implementing this EU strategy toward Central Asia, there are no new initiatives which contribute to more visible European activity in that region.

Filip Kaczmarek offers an overview of how the European Parliament shares the ambitious attitude to the geographical scope of EU democracy, and intends to partake in the forging of EU external policy in all its aspects. This chapter deals with the questions: What approach to Central Asia does the EP take?, and, what are the essential issues in the view of the EP?. The answers to these questions can be sought in: EP resolutions pertaining to this region, the analysis of the work of the bilateral delegation in charge of relations with Central Asian states, and the analysis of the work performed by other EP agencies in this respect (parliamentary committees and Election Observer Delegations). The analysis of the EP's standpoint is evidence that MEPs support EU strategy towards Central Asia. Despite some success-

es, in general, the EP is not effectively implementing its political priorities in terms of human rights and democracy. Occasionally the EP applies the strongest pressure instrument at its disposal, and resorts to blocking these international agreements that require the EP's consent.

Bakytbek Kainazarov shows an interplay between Russia and China for geopolitical dominance in the region, including how it negatively influences for political volatility, civil society suppression and deterioration of human rights issues. He considers important to analyze the EU strategy in democratic reforms in Central Asia and to investigate why it matters for the EU in the field of engagement in human rights and democracy promotion in Kyrgyzstan. When Soviet Union collapsed, there were different hypothesis regarding democratic reforms and political system changes in Kyrgyzstan. It was believed that Kyrgyzstan would develop its independent policy and democratic governance. Since early 1990s European countries through OSCE, and later through the EU launched development projects have been playing central role in democracy promotion and civil society development in Central Asia. At the same time, as analysis show geopolitical interests of neighboring powerful states such as Russia and China increased in the region, which resulted the creation of regional institutions such as Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Collective Security Organization (CSO), Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and Silk Road Belt Initiative (SRBI). While being the fully-fledged member of China and Russia led regional institutions, Kyrgyzstan is under heavy political and economic influence.

Robert Kmiecik focuses on local government in Kazakhstan. He argues that twenty-five years of a sovereign Kazakhstan naturally inspires the consideration, that decentralization might be attractive and effective in a state which has not had any experience of this sort. Local self-government has recently been increasingly emphasized in official declarations and political platforms, including relevant constitutional provisions. All these are worth examining in order to determine whether the political positioning of local government actually corresponds to the European standards of local government.

The last chapter, by Marek Rewizorski, deepens the debate on the most serious problems facing contemporary Central Asia. Successive parts of the chapter investigate the conditions of water management, particularly in relation to the main security narratives approaching it either as a strictly security-related or cooperation-driven issue. He analyzes the reasons for the low efficiency of institutions set up to regulate water resource management

in Central Asia. Then the author sheds light on the efforts made by dedicated regional institutions, the European Union, and other international bodies such as the UN, to settle the water resource management issue. The conclusions contain suggestions for strengthening the cooperation narrative in regard to access to water – a resource of fundamental importance to the politically, economically and socially unstable Central Asian republics.

The series of studies presented in this publication address an extensive audience, in particular experts dealing with issues related to European integration and international relations.

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