

Beyond Europe

Reconnecting Eurasia

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THE WAYS OF RECONNECTING EURASIA

The second decade of the twenty-first century has brought a renewed interest in the Eurasian integration. For most of the twentieth century, renowned scholars of geopolitics (like Mackinder, Spykman or Brzeziński) have painted a picture of an integrated landmass acting as a central stage of the international politics. The geopolitical and geoeconomic reality, however, lagged behind these sweeping ideas. From the standpoint of regional integration or trade flows, the Eurasian supercontinent remained divided into several distinct regions, affairs of which seemed only to cross each other, not flow like a one, united stream. Many factors contributed to this state of affairs. One of the most important was the Cold War and concurrent global influence (and post-1989 hegemony) of the United States. Privileged position and influence of the extra-Eurasian superpower meant that the geopolitical and geoeconomic mental map of this supercontinent remained divided between separate trans-Atlantic and trans-Pacific areas.

The second decade of the current century, however, has brought a new (or renewed) interest in the Eurasian integration. The biggest manifestation of this trend is, naturally, the Chinese initiative of the “Silk Road Economic Belt” and “Maritime Silk Road” (currently known as the Belt and Road Initiative - BRI) officially launched by President Xi Jinping in 2013. Although, by far, the most ambitious, it is not the only scheme meant to encourage the Eurasian integration. The Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) lacks the scale and financial clout of the Chinese proposal; nevertheless, it offers an alternative template of regional integration grounded in Eurasian geopolitical vision. The current decade has also seen the expansion of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to include two South Asian powers – India and Pakistan. Moreover, on several occasions, Turkish leaders suggested that their state might also join this club. Although no concrete steps followed these

statements, they are indicative of a broader shift in the Turkish foreign policy. In the broadest terms possible, it can be viewed as a turn from identification with the transatlantic community towards a more independent and neighborhood-focused activity. All these elements might be viewed separately, as various moves (small and large) on the great global political chessboard. However, they might also be treated as symptoms of a broader trend amounting to Eurasia's emergence as a viable geopolitical and geoeconomic megaregion and as a focal point for many power's foreign and security policy.

This publication is the outcome of the research project entitled *The European Union and Central Asia: regional and international conditions*, carried out by the Faculty of Political Science and Journalism, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, from 2015 to 2019 with Professor Tadeusz Wallas as the Coordinator. The project investigated the issue of the European Union's relations with the Central Asian countries. The fundamental goal of studies presented in this publication was to analyze the policy of the European Union toward Central Asia. The intention of the project team was to emphasize the advancements of the process shaping mutual relations and its different determinants. The paperes were presented and discussed at the international conference: *Beyond Europe – Reconnecting Eurasia*, organized by Adam Mickiewicz University in 2018.

The research team prepared following monographs in English : *European Union and Central Asia: Policies and Reality*. Tadeusz Wallas, Radosław Fiedler, Przemysław Osiewicz (eds), Berlin: Logos-Verlag, 2018 and *European Union and Central Asia: Cooperation in Transition* ed. Tadeusz Wallas, Radosław Fiedler, Beata Przybylska-Maszner, Logos-Verlag 2018.

The newest volume is divided into three parts corresponding to three research problems. The first one deals with strategies of great and regional powers towards the megaregion in question. Great powers' role in shaping the evolution of international order is well recognized in the study of international relations. It is, thus, doubtless that policies of key states will play disproportionate role in determining shape and outcomes of the Eurasian integration. Besides the major global players (like the USA, China, and Russia), the Eurasian chessboard also accommodates some important regional powers (such as, for example, Turkey, Iran, India or leading EU states). The first section of this book is devoted to the analysis of their strategies in Eurasian geopolitics.

Special attention has been given to the region of Central Asia. In the geopolitical setting characterized by the Trans-Atlantic and Trans-Pacific inter-

actions, this region had been relegated to the role of a perennial periphery. However, with the rise of Eurasian connectivity, it has become a space of significant geopolitical and geoeconomic value. We propose to call it a potential “crossroads of integrating Eurasia,” mainly due to its central location in proposed transcontinental infrastructure and trade corridors. It has also become a scene of competition between various cooperation and integration schemes promoted by the major players (like the EU, China, and Russia). For these reasons, we have identified it as a promising subject of research amounting to a kind of a “laboratory of Eurasian integration.” Finally, the authors analyzed and discussed various topics covering the broad area of numerous patterns shaping the politics of Eurasia and tools used by regional states. This includes, for example, the characteristics of Eurasian states’ political regimes or policies they pursue to secure themselves for asymmetric (or hybrid) threats.

The section concerning great and regional powers’ strategies in Eurasia opens with **Claude Zanardi’s** chapter *The Rise of China and Connecting Eurasia & Asia-Pacific*. In the article, the author places the current Chinese foreign policy strategy, and the BRI specifically, in the context of classical geopolitical theories. In her reading, the current reorientation of international politics towards the Asia-Pacific corresponds with the visions of Mackinder, Mahan, and Spykman. Thus, the chapter opens the great power themed section of the volume by presenting a wide picture of the geopolitical arena of Eurasia and the strategy of one of its most prominent players. The issue of Beijing’s ambitious foreign economic policy is explored in more detail by **Filip Kaczmarek** in the chapter under the title: *African dimension of the Belt and Road Initiative*. It contains a comprehensive description and analysis of BRI-related projects realized in Africa. Besides its intrinsic value for the study of China-Africa relations, it highlights many trends and issues characteristic for the initiative as a whole – all this while providing a balanced view of opportunities and challenges which the BRI presents for Africa. In the following chapter, **Sang-Chul Park** looks at two Eurasian powers which don’t carry as much diplomatic and military weight as America, China, and Russia but are primary global economic players – the European Union and Japan. The chapter provides a detailed analysis of the newly introduced EU-Japan Free Trade Agreement. Drawing on International Political Economy’s theoretical background and rich statistical data, the author provides a detailed picture of costs and benefits stemming from this new arrangement for the two big economies. The text also takes into account the wider political

ramifications of the deal, which has been reached in the context of growing US assertiveness and trade protectionism under the presidency of Donald Trump.

While the first three chapters dealt with great powers of Eurasia, the final two in the first section concern important regional Middle Eastern players who are poised to play an ever-increasing role on the Eurasian chessboard. **Karol Bieniek** analyses Anti-Americanism in Turkish foreign and domestic policies, while **Rafał Ożarowski** focuses on Iran's foreign policy after the US' withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Bieniek's chapter chronicles the rise of anti-Americanism as one of the principles of Turkish foreign policy under the rule of Recep Tayyip Erdogan. By analyzing the foreign-domestic policy nexus under the AK party leadership, it shows how anti-Americanism became an important element of the ruling party's political identity, while also providing background for the evolution of Ankara's foreign policy away from the Euro-Atlantic orientation. Ożarowski's chapter provides an overview of Iran's reaction to Washington's abandonment of the nuclear deal. It also outlines the options available to Teheran in order to secure its position in the Middle East. He predicts that Iran will have to balance its relations with EU, Russia, and China in order to successfully confront US pressure and secure its regional position.

The volume's second section focuses on Central Asia, as the proverbial "Crossroads of Eurasia," as well as the scene of a potential new "Great Game" between major powers. It opens with a chapter by **Tadeusz Wallas** and **Bar-tosz Hordecki** dealing with a complicated but highly relevant issue of inter-play between interests and values in EU-Central Asia relations. The authors highlight the reality of the fact that the EU policy towards the region has not taken sufficient account of the peculiarities and challenges of their partners' identity and nation-building efforts. The text is a reminder that, despite many similarities, Central Asian states should not be treated as a homogeneous group when it comes to their politics, society, and culture. The question of relations between interests and values in foreign policy is one of growing relevance in integrating Eurasia. This is mainly due to growing ideological heterogeneity of the main regional powers and growing role of regime-type differences in at least rhetoric of diplomatic relations. The following text by **Radosław Fiedler** also deals with the EU-Central Asia relations. However, it focuses on the impact which the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has on them. SCO is another important piece of emerging Eurasian integration mosaic. It has proved to be a platform for managing Chinese and Rus-

sian influence in Central Asia. With its latest expansion to include India and Pakistan, it made a step towards playing a role in more than one subregion. Thanks to that, it is an institution which all players vying for influence on the Eurasian chessboard (including the EU) must take into account.

Two further chapters, by **Rafał Wiśniewski** and **Baktybek Kainazarov**, tackle the issue of China's policy and influence on Central Asia. They complement each other rather well. The first one paints a broad picture of Chinese vision of international order and analyses possible impact of its potential realization on the region in question. The second, focuses specifically on Chinese investment in Central Asia and its impact on receiving states. Using this two angles, both authors highlight that Chinese international activism brings numerous benefits and opportunities for the CA states (chiefly economic in nature), but also creates numerous challenges and risks. This is chiefly connected with potential for Beijing's domination and its uncertain effects on regional states' autonomy. This section ends with **Przemysław Osiewicz's** chapter on Turkish policy towards Central Asia. By using the grand strategy framework, the author shows how Ankara's policy towards post-Soviet Central Asia evolved. Although some early expectations regarding the scope and impact of Turkish influence in the region proved to be overstated, Ankara should not be discounted from the ranks of important players in this area.

The third section provides a broader reflection on trends shaping politics across Eurasia. **Roman Bäcker** and **Joanna Rak** provide a comprehensive outline of the "closed society" theory. Their chapter is rich in theoretical insight, specifically relevant for the study of political regimes and their evolution. It also provides useful context for understanding important political trends visible across Eurasia. They include both the renewed strength of authoritarian regimes, proliferation of hybrid regimes (balancing in the space between democracy and authoritarianism) but also the possible rise of radical and populist tendencies across democratic states. Furthermore, **Joanna Rak** complements this reflection in subsequent chapter by providing an overview of how Juan Linz's model of distinguishing political regimes has been developed, with a special emphasis on ideology/mentality criterium. This richly theoretical text provides another interesting vantage point on the role of ideational factors in politics at the time when its relevance is on the rise. In his chapter, **Nir Barkan Nagar** provides an overview of Israel's use of asymmetric strategies' components as tools for deterring terrorist elements. Israeli counterterrorism policy is well developed but also controver-

sial. Based on the state's long history of confronting asymmetric and hybrid threats, its experiences and insights can prove incredibly useful for theory and practice of contemporary armed conflicts.

As evidenced in the above overview, the authors have tackled a wide range of issues coalescing around three subject areas (great powers' policies towards Eurasia, Central Asia's role in Eurasian politics and trends shaping politics of this megaregion). The multitude of perspectives and vantage points allows for a broader and richer understanding of complicated and nuanced processed, labeled together by the editors as "Reconnecting Eurasia."

Tadeusz Wallas

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THE PROBLEM OF HARMONIZATION OF VALUES AND INTERESTS IN RELATIONS BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES¹

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The issue of values and interests in the relations between the European Union and the countries of Central Asia remains the very frequently raised one. However, it does not mean that the level of contemporary knowledge about the subject can be evaluated as satisfactory. The public discourse on axiology and pragmatism as important elements of the EU-Central Asian state relations is full of courteous slogans, ritual gestures, and comments. What is more, there is a whole set of problems that both the EU and Central Asian countries have learned not to perceive as significant discrepancies when cooperation in some areas appears to be provisionally advantageous. At the same time, there is also a rich repertoire of excuses that allow them to broaden distance from each other if circumstances seem to require it (for some examples of critique of this state of affairs see: Spaiser, 2018; Voloshin, 2014; Warkotsch, 2011).

In connection with the above, the discourse on common values and interests of the EU and the Central Asian states ought to be analyzed with great

¹ This publication has been prepared as part of the project financed by the National Center of Science: "The European Union and Central Asia – regional and international conditions" 2014/15/B/HS5/01591.

attention. It should also be remembered that, to a large extent, it remains declarative – many phrases are produced *ad hoc* and their authors do not attach much importance to them. Nevertheless, the common patterns of communication in this matter allow us to define the horizon of current imaginations, which seem to be guided by the political elites of the EU and Central Asia. Within the space of their consciousness, it is not hard to identify noble goals that the EU and the Central Asian states could, theoretically, successfully implement. The general direction of actions, as well as basic hopes and motivations associated with cooperation of Europeans with Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, Turkmen, and Uzbeks, are also determined. Nevertheless, the dominant discourse in question seems to lack a thorough and reliable analysis of barriers and limitations – in the sphere of EU-Central Asian values as well as interests. However, these barriers and limitations mean that many of the alluring assurances, made by the EU and Central Asian politicians alike, must remain only in the sphere of ideas, with no chance for effective implementation in the foreseeable future.

It cannot be denied that the contemporary discourse on the EU-Central Asian cooperation had taken on a shape in 2007. At that time, referring to Jos Boonstra and Riccardo Panella, along with the EU's adoption of Central Asian policy, the interest of this organization clearly focused on issues related to energy security (In Europe, hopes were largely encouraged to create efficient routes to this continent for gas extracted from the bottom of the Caspian Sea and in Central Asia, especially in Turkmenistan). With time, the EU has begun to modify its approach, trying to emphasize its role as an advocate of democracy and human rights in the said area (still, understanding these concepts and related institutions in the European way, without considering the socio-cultural realities of Central Asia). Despite that fact, the European elites understood that there was a serious convergence of interests between the EU and the Central Asian states. These countries, above all, appeared as an attractive partner that could potentially balance and stabilize the geopolitical situation, distributing significant players whose interests intersect in the Central Asian space (in particular Russia, China, Turkey, Iran). Moreover, especially in the years 2011-2013, the EU tried to counteract the destabilization of the region, the threat of which resulted from the US involvement in Afghanistan. Finally, at present, the EU is increasingly perceiving Central Asia as an area of rivalry between Russia and the West. One of the most important factors stimulating this perception is the Russian activity aiming at the economic integration of post-Soviet states. The EU ob-

serves with special attention the process of establishing and development of the Eurasian Economic Union, which was initiated by Belarus, Russia, and Kazakhstan in May 2014, to be broadened in a short period of time by Armenia and Kyrgyzstan.²

At the same time, as J. Boonstra and R. Panella have rightly noticed, the European Union remains attractive to Central Asia for three reasons. Firstly, as claimed by the authors, the Central Asian states treat the EU as a reasonable axiological-praxeological alternative, as well as a competitive institutional model, to Russia and China.³ Additionally, at least some of the elites of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan are convinced that Europeans can help in socio-political, as well as the economic, transformation of their countries – in particular by offering proven and de-

² The aforementioned authors summarize the history of relations between the EU and the Central Asian states since 2007 as follows: “The EU’s initial interest in Central Asia was based to a large degree on energy security issues. In the 2007–2010 period, the EU hoped that it could open up the Caspian and Central Asia to gas imports to Europe (via the Nabucco pipeline, for instance). Azerbaijan, Iran, and—especially—Turkmenistan would deliver gas to Europe, possibly at the expense of sales to Russia. This interest in Caspian energy projects slowly evaporated, even as China built pipelines to import gas from Turkmenistan; the 2011–2013 EU Strategy for Central Asia was instead geared toward ensuring that instability in Afghanistan as a result of NATO withdrawal did not spill over to the Central Asian states. Increasingly, debates focused on security and on linking Europe’s Central Asia and Afghanistan policies. More recently, from 2014 onwards, the EU has seen Central Asia in the light of tensions between Russia and Europe” (Boonstra, Panella, *Three Reasons*; see also Boonstra, *The EU’s Interests*; Freire, Kanet, 2010; Kavalski, 2010; Romanowski, 2016; Patnaik, 2016; Tanrisever, 2013).

³ According to J. Boonstra and R. Panella: “Central Asia is squashed in between two major powers: Russia and China. Its *central* location and history have made it a popular object of geopolitical strategizing. Although Chinese investment and Russian security cooperation are often welcomed in Central Asia, there is a high demand for alternatives. This makes the EU a welcome partner, for several reasons. Firstly, the EU is seen as fairly neutral, without substantial geopolitical interest in the region. Secondly, it has become clear to Central Asian states that the EU plans to remain engaged in the region for the long haul, with a modest but steady level of investment and engagement. Thirdly, Central Asian countries are young states that seek to harness their independence and develop their identity. They want to be recognized as attractive destinations (as in the case of Kyrgyzstan) or as regional actors (an example being Kazakhstan). Informally, the EU can offer this recognition through the agreements it concludes with Central Asian states, as well as the visits of high-level Central Asian officials to Brussels and other European capitals, and vice versa” (Boonstra, Panella, *Three Reasons*).

velopment-oriented patterns in education.⁴ Furthermore, the EU structure also appears as one of the factors that may encourage Central Asian societies to regulate and deepen their cooperation, which has the potential of solving significant problems afflicting the entire region (threat of development of extremist ideologies, terrorist movement, drug trafficking, smuggling, environmental degradation).⁵

All the issues quoted above have found a more or less distinctive reflection in the EU Strategy for Central Asia, implemented in 2007-2013⁶. It is worth to understand *the 2007 Strategy* as a declaration and carrier of specific axiology and expectations, which were expressed explicitly and implicitly. This material constituted the fundamental basis for thinking and communicating about the relations between the EU and the Central Asian states during its applicable term. What is more, it remains the benchmark in the process of reflection on a new document defining the main goals of the strategy, which were adopted in 2019.

It should be pointed out that *the 2007 Strategy* supported an optimistic picture of the future of Central Asian countries. In the light of its view, the space of Central Asia at the beginning of the 1990s became an arena of change which, in the near future, would result in building strong and stable socio-political organisms. These, due to accurate and consistently implemented transformation choices, were to be able to satisfy the expectations of the citizens of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The introductory words to *the 2007 Strategy* were at the same time

⁴ The authors emphasize that, in the field of education, the academic and youth exchanges promoted and financed by the EU can play a particularly positive role. According to their view: "the most valuable contribution Europe can make to Central Asia's development probably lies in the sphere of education. The EU is active on higher education through the worldwide Erasmus+ program. There is also an EU regional education initiative specific to Central Asia, and education is considered a priority sector in development cooperation with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. The focus should not be on higher education alone, but also on elementary and vocational education. This is clearly a two-way street: Europe can have a lasting impact on Central Asia through educational reforms and programs, while Central Asian states probably have a keen interest in preparing their growing and ever-younger populations for the future" (Boonstra, Panella, *Three Reasons*).

⁵ This area remains underdeveloped. However, voices are to be heard in the light of which the cooperation in these spheres should trigger one of the most important aspects of the future EU strategy towards Central Asian countries. (Boonstra, Panella, *Three Reasons*).

⁶ The document in question had been supported by the Permanent Representatives Committee on May 30, 2007. Then it was adopted by the Council of the European Union (*The European Union and Central Asia: the new partnership in action*, 2009).

a kind of encouragement: the authors of the document – through praise addressed to the countries of Central Asia – tried to motivate them to strengthen ties and deepen cooperation with the EU (but on conditions determined by the EU bodies).

In the introduction, the authors wrote about the great historical past of the Central Asian states, depicted Central Asia as the bridge connecting Europe with Asia, and showed the democratization efforts undertaken by these countries (their accession to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the adoption of principles, values and standards of this institution). Moreover, the document presented the above-mentioned countries as reasonable international players. These states, in the light of the EU's preferred narrative, having built their statehood, assumed the role of the guardians of the inter-ethnic and inter-confessional peace in the region⁷. On this basis, the document makers acknowledged that "At the beginning of the 21st century, the time has come for a new partnership between the EU and Central Asia states in a globalised world" (*The European Union and Central Asia: the new partnership in action*, 2009).

Thenceforth, defining the common challenges and needs that are facing the EU and the Central Asian states, the promoters of *the 2007 Strategy* have calculated the main tasks for the coming years. Hence, it was concluded that, within the planned timeframe, the European Union should (*The European Union and Central Asia: the new partnership in action*, 2009):

- "establish a regular regional political dialogue at Foreign Minister level;
- start an *European Education Initiative* and support Central Asian countries in the development of an *e-silk-highway*;
- start an *EU Rule of Law Initiative*;
- establish a regular, result-oriented *Human Rights Dialogue* with each of the Central Asia states;
- conduct a regular energy dialogue with Central Asia states".

⁷ "Central Asia has a centuries-old tradition of bringing Europe and Asia together. It lies at a strategically important intersection between the two continents. The Central Asia states of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have known considerable evolution in political and economic transformation since attaining independence. They have established statehood, safeguarded multi-ethnic understanding and inter-religious communication. By joining the OSCE, they subscribed to the Organization's values, standards and commitments. By signing the United Nations Millennium Declaration, they set themselves ambitious goals" (*The European Union and Central Asia: the new partnership in action*, 2009).

Additionally, the main strategic EU interests in Central Asia were considered to be security and stability, which, according to the authors of *the 2007 Strategy*, are closely related to building states based on the rule of law and respect towards human rights. To justify why the EU is interested in the implementation of the aforementioned values in the region, three main reasons have been indicated:

- "strategic, political and economic developments, as well as increasing trans-regional challenges in Central Asia, impact directly or indirectly on EU interests";
- "with EU enlargement, the inclusion of the Southern Caucasus into the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Black Sea Synergy Initiative, Central Asia and the EU are moving closer together";
- "significant energy resources in Central Asia and the region's aim to diversify trade partners and supply routes can help meet EU energy security and supply needs."⁸

The 2007 Strategy also declares that it "aims at a balanced bilateral and regional approach". The document indicates that it was created with respect towards different needs of a number of individual countries in the region. For this reason, the EU emphasizes the "special importance" of bilateral cooperation with each of the Central Asian States separately. At the same time, according to the authors of the document, the above diversity in terms of bilateral cooperation does not exclude multilateral cooperation on some of the issues. In particular, in line with the constitutional provisions of *the 2007 Strategy*, these are the problems that appear to be a common challenge for the EU and each of the Central Asian countries.⁹

Balancing of bilateral and multilateral relations between the EU and the Central Asian states still seems the only method that can bring tangible results. The countries of the discussed region are not only very diverse but also strongly divided. Therefore, many projects in the joint cooperation with

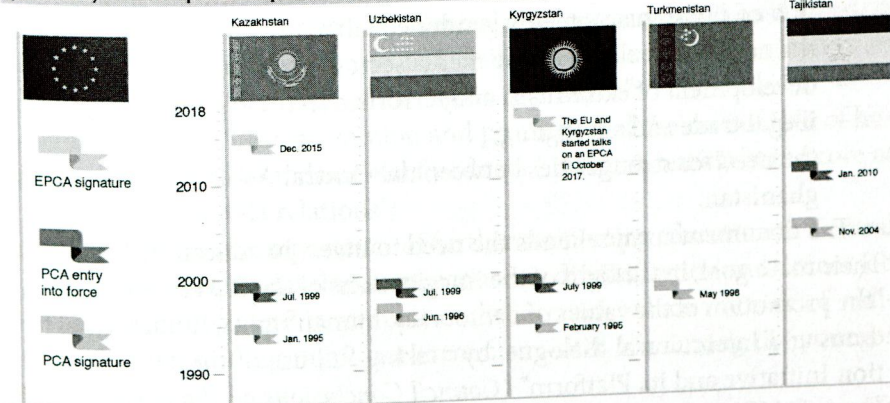
⁸ "It is essential to cooperate bilaterally on issues such as human rights, economic diversification, energy and other sectoral issues, including youth and education. The intensity of the cooperation will reflect the commitment to transition and reform of each country" (*The European Union and Central Asia: the new partnership in action*, 2009).

⁹ "A regional approach is suitable for tackling common regional challenges such as organised crime, human, drugs and arms trafficking, terrorism and nonproliferation issues, inter-cultural dialogue, energy, environmental pollution, water management, migration as well as border management and transport infrastructure. In this regard the EU will cooperate with international financial institutions, multilateral and regional organisations and institutions" (*The European Union and Central Asia: the new partnership in action*, 2009).

Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, Turkmen, and Uzbeks cannot be implemented. In addition, five parallel bilateral dialogues - in the light of the EU calculation - should provide specific benchmarks, allowing to determine which Central Asian countries will turn out to be more, and which less, engaged in deepening cooperation with Europe. In this way, a mechanism of mutual, positively oriented, competition would develop (a kind which would be striving for the EU considerations and co-financing). Owing to this, and in the light of the presented model, all five countries would encourage each other not to reverse the reforms that the EU considered, and continues to consider, as a condition for the deepened institutionalization of its relations with Central Asian partners. At the same time, it should be noted, using the discussed approach, that the EU underestimated - and still seems to underestimate - the fact that it may not so much favor the democratization of Central Asia but rather stimulate mutual animosities between the countries of the region.

The subsequent years of the implementation of *the 2007 Strategy* established the time of verifying its assumptions in practice. The process of institutionalizing cooperation in this area proceeded at a different pace and with different results. In general, it is illustrated by the infographics prepared by J. Boonstra and R. Panella. Nevertheless, regardless of what has been achieved in the past years, first and foremost, the conviction finally settled that the conditions of effective cooperation between the EU and the Central Asian states should be considered far more complex and difficult than expected.

(Enhanced) Partnership and Cooperation Agreements



Source: J. Boonstra, R. Panella, op. cit., http://voicesoncentralasia.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Infographic_EU_02_Partnership_corrected.jpg.

On 19 June 2017, the Council of the European Union adopted the Council Conclusions on the EU strategy for Central Asia. The accepted document stated: “The main objectives and priority areas of the 2007 EU Strategy for Central Asia and the Council Conclusions on the EU Strategy for Central Asia of June 22nd, 2015 **remain pertinent**” (*Council Conclusions on the EU Strategy for Central Asia*).

The authors of the document also declared their will to maintain and build “strong and lasting relations” between the European Union and the Central Asian countries. The Council also noted that these relations are, and will be, mainly bilateral. Nevertheless, in the future, in the Council’s opinion, one should focus on the development and support of multilateral projects, promoting intra- and supra-regional cooperation (it is not indicated, however, which instruments could be used for this purpose). What is more, the document emphasizes that bilateralism allows for diversifying the pace and quality of the EU cooperation with the Central Asia countries. These, on the other hand, are the subsequent aspirations of individual Central Asian partners, as well as the degree of advancement of the reforms introduced by them (and therefore the concept has been repeated, according to which leaders in harmonizing their socio-political systems with the EU standards can count on more than others) (*Council Conclusions on the EU Strategy for Central Asia*).

Among the main challenges faced by the countries in the discussed region, *the 2017 Conclusions* mention (*Council Conclusions on the EU Strategy for Central Asia*):

- violations of human rights, including problems with the implementation of rights guaranteeing gender equality;
- the need to develop the free media sector;
- development of extremism and terrorism in the region;
- illegal trade and smuggling;
- the need for stronger ties between the Central Asian countries and Afghanistan.

The document comprehends the need to invest in educational programs. Their main goal, in the light of the imaginations of the EU representatives, is “the promotion of the values of democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms and intercultural dialogue, by making full use of the existing Education Initiative and its Platform” (*Council Conclusions on the EU Strategy for Central Asia*). According to the following narrative: “People-to-people contacts and international cooperation contribute substantially to this effort.

Ensuring links between quality secondary and tertiary education and vocational training, as well as between research and labour markets, will further promote innovation, employment and gender equality. It will also help prevent exclusion and reduce radicalisation risks among the younger population” (*Council Conclusions on the EU Strategy for Central Asia*).

In 2019 The European Union has adopted the New Strategy on Central Asia. It is determined in two documents, which are *Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council. The EU and Central Asia: New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership* and *Council Conclusions on the New Strategy on Central Asia (Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council; Council Conclusions on the New Strategy on Central Asia)*.

The New Strategy can be treated as a continuation and development of the *2007 Strategy* as well as the *2017 Council Conclusions*. Its adoption means that the European Union wants to “focus on three interconnected and mutually reinforcing priorities”, which are “Partnering for resilience”, “Partnering for resilience”, and “Working Better Together” (*Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council*). Due to this, among others, the Council of the European Union (*Council Conclusions on the New Strategy on Central Asia*):

- “welcomes the new focus of the EU’s Strategy on promoting resilience, prosperity and regional cooperation in Central Asia”;
- “recalls the EU’s commitment to support regional cooperation”;
- “stresses the importance of encouraging further political and economic engagement between the Central Asian countries and Afghanistan to jointly promote an inclusive peace process and sustainable development”;
- “emphasises that further EU-Central Asia cooperation should focus on promoting the sovereignty and resilience of Central Asian countries and societies as well as of the region as a whole”;
- requires that “The promotion and protection of the rule of law, of human rights and fundamental freedoms (...) must remain at the core of EU-Central Asia relations”;
- “underlines the importance of further supporting education in Central Asia to promote development, economic diversification and decent job opportunities, and to prevent exclusion and reduce the risk of radicalisation leading to violent extremism inter alia among the younger population”.

From the moment *the 2007 Strategy* was accepted, until the EU Council’s adoption of *the New Strategy*, twelve years have passed. Over this period the

EU and the countries of Central Asia have taken and implemented many common initiatives. In the course of this time and beyond it, these entities have repeatedly summarized and defined the goals, nature, limitations, and possibilities related to shaping their mutual relations. In particular, the EU has been publishing many documents reflecting its experience in cooperating with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The materials in question more or less reflect the beliefs and ideas that we find in *the 2007 Strategy, the 2017 Conclusions, the 2019 Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council or the 2019 Conclusions*. At the same time, they constitute a record of the axiological and praxeological ideas and wishes of the twenty-first century EU elites in relation to the problem of cooperation with these countries (see for example: *EU human rights dialogues in Central Asia; EU cooperation in education in Central Asia; EU Rule of Law Initiative for Central Asia; EU action on water resources in Central Asia; EU supports well-managed borders in Central Asia; Central Asia Multi-annual Indicative Programme (2011-2013) of the EU Development co-operation Instrument (DCI); EU-Central Asia relations, factsheet; EU-Kazakhstan relations; EU-Kyrgyz Republic relations; EU-Tajikistan relations; EU-Turkmenistan relations; EU-Uzbekistan relations*).

In the light of the documents presented above, it seems that for a long time, the European Union has sought to develop contacts with Central Asian countries (in particular, youth exchange programs should be considered an instrument that has had a very positive role in deepening of mutual relations). At the same time, however, the EU strategy hasn't sufficiently focused on processes aimed at strengthening the identity of individual nations in Central Asia.¹⁰

Needless to say, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan are still "young" states. Their societies are looking for goals and roles that could be fulfilled primarily in the region and secondarily in the supra-regional dimension. In other words, in all of these countries, which the EU does not seem to include or emphasize to a sufficient degree, there are

¹⁰ We are dealing here with the construction of national identity by societies whose history appears to be seriously discontinuous. For ages, the present-day territories of Central Asian countries were comprised of terrains inhabited by tribal communities cultivating native, original patterns of socio-political organization, which were then conquered by Tsarist Russia or Soviet Russia/USSR. Absorbed by the Russian or Soviet empires for a long period of time, these traditional entities were subjected to cultural pressure, which led to their deep transformation and reconfiguration based on the absorption of imperial institutional patterns.

difficult, not without internal tensions and conflicts, processes of constructing continuously fragile and uncertain (though often appealing to centuries-old traditions) national identities. What is more, they run not parallel, but network-like, which means that the Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, Turkmen, Uzbeks (re)construct narratives about themselves and their identity in relation to, and often at the expense of, their neighbors (Omelicheva, 2014; Burghart, Sabonis-Helf, 2018).

Aiming to formulate only careful heuristic hypotheses rather than authoritative conclusions, we can observe the process in question already at the most widely available levels of intra and inter-ethnic communication in the region. Of course, it should be kept in mind that symbolic choices in Central Asia are very often made *ad hoc* or mainly for declarative purposes. Nevertheless, even a cursory analysis of the preambles to the constitutions of individual Central Asian states, or basic manifestations of regional symbolic communication (flags, national emblems, anthems), encourages us to claim that the nations living in Central Asia carry among them a constant, multi-level discussion about who they are and what they represent. In other words, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, Turkmen, and Uzbeks create their identities and, consequently, axiologies and praxeologies they want to implement by positioning themselves in relation to each other, comparing themselves and claiming true or imaginary preponderance over their neighbors.

Indeed, it can be said that the preambles of the Basic Laws of the Central Asian states are largely similar. Nevertheless, details that distinguish the text of a given constitution from others remain interesting. Based on these differences, one can presuppose how the given state suggests its specificity and comparative advantages over its neighbors (which also allows masking real or imagined internal, as well as external, threats to the integrity and stability of a socio-political system).

Therefore, quite interesting is the fact that in the preamble to the Basic Law of Kazakhstan, which is the largest of the discussed countries, it is stressed that the Kazakh state has been created on the “indigenous Kazakh land.”¹¹ At the same time, the opening words of the Kyrgyz Constitution are

¹¹ “We, the people of Kazakhstan, united by a common historic fate, **creating a state on the indigenous Kazakh land**, considering ourselves a peace-loving and civil society, dedicated to the ideals of freedom, equality and concord, wishing to take a worthy place in the world community, realizing our high responsibility before the present and future generations, proceeding from our sovereign right, accept this Constitution” (*The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan*).

devoted to paying off the debt to the heroes who sacrificed their lives to regain freedom for their people. The phrase can be interpreted as a reference to the *Epic of Manas*, which is treated as a masterpiece of Kyrgyz culture and a literary source of Kyrgyz national pride and identity.¹² Furthermore, the Basic Law of Tajikistan, unlike the Basic Laws of the other four Central Asian countries, puts a strong emphasis on the inseparable belonging of Tajik people to the international community. It is worth noticing that the culture of this nation, in the light of numerous sources, has always strongly emphasized the importance of the intellectual and spiritual progress, stressing also the need to develop cosmopolitan feelings and beliefs in the nation.¹³ The Constitution of Turkmenistan strongly accentuates that the state is characterized by a consistent choice of neutrality policy in international relations. Neutrality, as the absolute principle of Turkmen attitude towards other nations, was defined in the 1990s by the first President of independent Turkmenistan, Saparmurat Niyazov. He intended to apply it as an important element of the strategy aimed at creating a distinguished identity of his people. Currently, the policy of neutrality is still a factor that, in the understanding of the elites of Turkmenistan, should be taken into account to differ Turkmens from other nations in the region.¹⁴ Eventually, in the preamble of

¹² "We, the people of Kyrgyzstan, - **Paying tribute to the memory of heroes who rendered life for freedom of the people**; - Confirming adherence to the goal to build free and democratic state based on respect and protection of human rights; - Expressing unstinting conviction and firm will to develop and enhance the Kyrgyz statehood, protect state sovereignty and unity of the people; - Aspiring to root the rule of law as well as ensure social justice, economic welfare and spiritual development of the people; Acting on behest of our ancestors to live in peace and accord, in harmony with nature, hereby adopt the present Constitution" (*The Constitution of the Kryrgyz Republic*).

¹³ "**We, the people of Tajikistan, as an inseparable part of the world community**; recognize our responsibility and duty before past, present, and future generations; understanding the necessity of providing the sovereignty, and development of our state; asserting human rights and liberties; recognizing the equality of rights and friendship of all nationalities and peoples; make our aim to built the just society; Hereby adopt and declare this Constitution" (*The Constitution of Tajikistan*, <http://www.president.tj/en/taxonomy/term/5/28>).

¹⁴ "We, the people of Turkmenistan, based on our inalienable right to determine our destiny; Proceeding from the responsibility for present and future of the Motherland; Expressing loyalty to the covenant of ancestors to live in unity, peace and harmony; With the aim of protecting the national values and interests, strengthening the independence, sovereignty, **the status of permanent neutrality of Turkmenistan**; Guaranteeing the rights and freedoms of each person and citizen, and seeking to ensure civil peace and national accord in the society, to substantiate the foundations of democracy

the Uzbek Basic Law, the fidelity of the Uzbek tradition and historical experience in the creation and development of the state institutions was particularly stressed. This can be linked to the fact that Uzbek's historiography tends to describe them as a nation which turned out to be particularly active and creative in establishing and developing political mechanisms¹⁵.

As for the anthems, emblems, and flags, it is easily noticeable that they are peculiar hybrids of symbolism from the Soviet era and patterns adopted by the elites of newly formed states, mainly in the 90s of the twentieth century. The patterns and symbolism in question typically constitute specific references to real or mythical inhabitants of Central Asia in the past. Contemporary residents of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan are often prone to focus attention on their ancestors, frequently wishing to (re)construct and (re)cultivate the olden traditions (these, however, due to a specific course of history, remain something largely lost and impossible to recover) (*History of Civilizations of Central Asia*; Akyildiz, Carlson, 2013).

Other spheres in which the progressing differentiation of the Central Asian nations are clearly discernible (this may mean serious tensions and conflicts in the region), are the historical and cultural policies pursued by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Narratives about national cultures offered by the elites to the societies of these countries often oscillate around events or myths which can encourage them to perceive their national community as better than the others. This tendency can be easily found by analyzing contemporary Central Asian cinematography, discourses concerning national heroes, rich space of local symbolic politics (monuments, topographic names, calendar and overtones of national holidays, attitude to specific religions, degree and form of symbolic connection of the countries with particular religious communities) (Cummings, 2010).

and democratic, legal, secular state, we adopt the present Constitution – the Basic Law of Turkmenistan” (*The Constitution of Turkmenistan*).

¹⁵ “The people of Uzbekistan, solemnly declaring their adherence to human rights and principles of state sovereignty, aware of their ultimate responsibility to the present and the future generations, **relying on historical experience in the development of Uzbek statehood**, affirming their commitment to the ideals of democracy and social justice, recognizing priority of the generally accepted norms of the international law, aspiring to a worthy life for the citizens of the Republic, setting forth the task of creating a humane and democratic rule of law, aiming to ensure civil peace and national accord, represented by their plenipotentiary deputies adopt the present Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan” (*The Constitution of Uzbekistan*).

Conclusions

All of the aforementioned complexities, as well as the problems resulting from them, are not sufficiently reiterated in the official EU documents. In principle, what has been stressed several times in this paper, this organization develops bilateral contacts with the Central Asian states, balancing implicitly between their aspirations and goals, as well as navigating between the disputes and conflicts eventuated from them. Thus, the EU, at least in the space of public communication, belittles axiological and praxeological conflicts that determine the shape of relations between the states of the region. At the same time, the European Union appeals to the declared, but not consistently implemented, community of values and interests that allegedly exists in the context of the EU-Central Asian relations, in particular due to the involvement of Russia and China as well as the US (perceived by the Central Asian states as a significant threat, not only in terms of geopolitics, but also culture and civilization). Thus, the EU, referring to such categories as human rights, universal values, but also diversification of Central Asian relations, technology transfer, construction of modern societies, exchange of experience – strives to present its presence in Central Asia as a counterbalance or alternative to the presence of powers from outside the region. This counterweight remains, however, one of the several important factors that the Central Asian states are trying to balance or between which they try to navigate. In this system, it is difficult to assume that the promotion of the EU axiology, as well as the implementation of the EU interests in Central Asia, have to automatically turn into the stabilization of relations between the countries of this region (Fiedler, Wallas, 2017; Axyonova, 2014; Melvin 2008; see also: Christiansen, Kirchner, Murray, 2013).

Moreover, as mentioned above, the creation of a specific ranking of Central Asian states by the EU, which better or worse adjust to the expectations of the Europeans, may fuel the old or constitute a source of new conflicts in the region. Furthermore, it should be expected (based on extensive experience) that the situation in which the EU acts as a kind of educator who promotes specific values and evaluates others depending on the degree of their implementation, cannot last indefinitely. Sooner or later - this can be observed today, for example in Southern, Eastern or Central Europe - in transforming societies, rightly or not, the feeling is growing that they are treated unequally, as perpetual pupils, whose European elites can scold and correct.

This is where the frustration comes from, as well as the climate conducive to dissemination of populism, and a kind of rebellion against the standards of liberal democracy (more and more often perceived/described as a product of egocentrism and arrogance of Western elites).

It seems that the risk of the above can be minimized to some extent, as long as the EU focuses more on internal divergences in Central Asia. And these call for deep knowledge and understanding. This, however, requires a serious dialogue aimed at getting to know the Central Asian cultures, in particular, to capture the sources of pride and self-perception of the societies operating there (as well as the socio-political cleavages formed within them). Besides, however idealistic it may sound, the Europeans, if they want to be effective and constructive in Central Asia, they should move away from Eurocentric perspective, which still accompanies them in defining their position towards Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, Turkmen and Uzbeks.

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Summary

Cooperation of the European Union with Central Asian countries does not develop in an axiological vacuum. Values shared by communities co-creating the European and Central Asian societies remain an important dimension of mutual relations. Convergence, but also discrepancies in this sphere, appear as a chance as well as a threat for future contacts. Moreover, the axiological debate between players pursuing to strengthen the EU-Central Asia bonds emerges as a complicated and multileveled phenomenon.

However, links between the European Union and Central Asian states cannot be supported exclusively by the appeals to common values. Additionally, only in

case of a careful and arduous realization of the substantive interests of all partners engaged in the process, further development and enrichment of mutual relations would seem to be possible. Determination of these substantive interests is not obvious and requires increased endeavors from the European Union as well as Central Asian players.

The proposed paper is an effort to analyze the conditions of contemporary attempts to harmonize interests and values in various areas of cooperation between the European Union and Central Asian countries. Presentation of the research outcomes will be embedded in the context of theoretical reflection on sustainable development and regionalization of international relations.