

**Tadeusz Wallas, Radosław Fiedler,
Przemysław Osiewicz**

REGIONAL DIMENSION OF EUROPEAN UNION AND CENTRAL ASIA COOPERATION

In the early days of the twenty-first century, little change seemed to be taking place in Central Asia and, as a result, the media and public in the West were showing it a limited interest. Yet new developments, especially new attitudes of Russia and China toward the region; the so-called global war on terrorism; new initiatives of political and economic integration; as well as regional tensions, have forced Westerners to modify their strategies. Such actions prompted both Russian and the Chinese to react and change their regional approaches as well. As a consequence, Central Asia regained its political and economic significance. And everything suggests that its role will only increase in the coming years.

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 a 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 point of focus was the activities of the EU, and, more importantly, the factors that affected the EU involvement, given the changes in the region. The detailed objectives of the project were as follows:

1. To analyze EU's political and economic influence in Central Asia;

2. To identify the areas in which it is necessary for EU to review its involvement in the transformation processes in Central Asia in new geostrategic conditions;
3. To identify the short- and long-term outcomes of the EU involvement;
4. To indicate the potential directions of the EU influence in Central Asia and define the guidelines for the entrenchment of the European presence in the region.

Another significant element of the study concerned the involvement of EU in Central Asia as 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 methods characteristic to the political science (and, in particular, of international relations), history and law. An important element of the study concerned the interviews which members of the project have ran in the 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 institutional apparatus, the organizational scheme of the implementation of EU instruments, and the outcomes and importance of EU involvement. This defined and restricted scope has allowed 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 the authors to present noticeable trends in the development process of EU-Central Asian relations. The publication draws also attention to the issue of how the EU strategy is perceived by individual countries in Central Asia. It is also an attempt to answer why various EU programs and initiatives have not been fully implemented and have sometimes been criticized by individual governments in the region.

The publication is divided into eight chapters.

In the opening chapter, Tadeusz Wallas writes about autocratic regimes as exemplified by Tajikistan and Turkmenistan in Central Asia. The author analyses reasons for the durability of autocratic regimes in Central Asia. In the article following issues are analysed as such as (1) dependence of stability on the skills of political leaders in efficient state management, the institutions

continuing to play a small role and being subordinated to the decision-making centre; (2) insufficient modernization and economic backwardness that generate tensions; (3) corruption which continues to be at a high level, the waste of state resources and prevention of other groups from taking part in decision processes; (4) political and economic dependence on China and Russia. All of the abovementioned issues are also the main reasons for hindering the democratization of political systems in Central Asia

Bakytbek Kainazarov focuses on the world powers' rivalry in Central Asia. In this context, he points out that even though there are four main contenders for power in Central Asia, it can equally be argued that the historical overlords of Central Asia – Russia and China, have increased activity in this strategic region. Kainazarov argues that the development of regional organizations involving Russia and China in Central Asia shows not only the increased interests of the two major players in the region, but also their competition for economic expansion and regional dominance. When analyzing the current regional integration process in Central Asia, it can be concluded that Central Asian states see China- and Russia-led organizations as an opportunity to balance alliances between Moscow and Beijing, both of which have greater ambitions towards economic and political dominance in the region. The latest statistics and reports clearly show how Chinese trade with the Central Asian region has exceeded Russian economic turnover in the area. In contrast to Russia and China, EU and the USA have limited their geopolitical presence in the region, whereby their partnership and cooperation focus mostly on soft issues, such as cultural and educational programs, technical assistance and development aid.

Piotr Baranowski's chapter offers an outlook on the New Great Game which is being played in Central Asia. The text aims to examine the motives behind comparisons of the current situation in the region to the Great Game. Baranowski concludes that in terms of the original Great Game and the New Great Game, though, there is very little in common. Strategic rivalry between Russia, China and the United States is more of a global game, and because of that, it will naturally manifest itself in many different spheres and in various parts of the world. It is easier to point out certain differences that are observable when one compares the features of the original and new Great Games.

The chapter written by Maciej Walkowski examines the dilemmas of the socio-economic development of Central Asian states in the framework of their specific position between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China. He finds out that the growing economic power of the PRC,

its model of development, and a conceptually sophisticated idea of the so-called New Silk Road, based on the win-win principle, will probably be the proverbial final nail in the coffin of all regional competitors. They will either join this idea and follow China's principles, or gradually disappear from Central Asian societies and states. This holds true also for the Russian Federation – provided that China is not struck by a financial and economic crisis any time soon. For various reasons which are not the subject of this analysis this scenario cannot be ruled out.

Belt and Road through Central Asia and its Meaning for the Region – Recommendations for European Union is addressed in Radosław Fiedler's article. In 2013, the Chinese Belt and Road initiative was announced, and it is the most comprehensive modernization, development and infrastructure proposal, as compared to the EU's existing activities towards the Central Asia region, which enables this region to have a more effective communication network able to connect Europe and Asia. It is both an opportunity and a challenge for the Central Asian states and the EU. In recent years, China's involvement in Central Asia has manifested itself in a multifaceted network of pipelines and gas pipelines, commercial and lending, as well as cooperation on security issues and other issues within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The Chinese see the potential of Central Asia as an economic corridor to the Middle East and Europe. In the new strategy for Central Asia being prepared, the European Union should take into account the importance of the OBOR for the development of this region and the possibilities and limitations of European partners with regard to this project.

Przemysław Osiewicz discusses Iran's position and engagement in Central Asia. The article is dedicated to a detailed analysis of the Iranian foreign policy in order to find out whether one can observe continuity or change in the framework of the Iranian attitude toward Central Asia. The author underlines the fact that Iran's political influence in the region has been very limited since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Osiewicz concludes that objectives of the Iranian foreign policy toward Central Asia are formulated *ad hoc* and do not constitute any coherent strategy. The Iranian authorities attempted to change it in the 1990s, nevertheless, they were not successful. Political and economic sanctions, imposed by the international community, have only worsened the situation. Not to mention the fact that the priority was given to the Persian Gulf region instead of the Caspian Sea and Central Asia. Iranian presidents did not prioritize Central Asia in their strategies, although there has been a noticeable change since the presidency of

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The author concludes his chapter with the claim that Iran should consider Russian and Chinese influences in the region into consideration. Without any significant increase in trade turnover with Central Asian states, all political initiatives of Iran may be doomed to failure.

The aim of Artur Pohl's chapter is to analyse the problems and advantages resulting from the geographical location of Turkmenistan in the context of its cooperation with European Union, as well as this country's potential to play the role of an important actor in international relations, not only in the region, but also globally. Pohl points out that Turkmenistan is a country whose geographical location may be viewed as both an advantage and a disadvantage. On the one hand, it determines access to rich deposits of energy resources, mainly gas, which is an important element in the functioning of many economies in the contemporary world. Furthermore, it creates an alternative land route passing through the territory of Turkmenistan, connecting the Chinese and European markets. On the other hand, the location of the country involves the unfavourable conditions for its functioning – hydrological or export-related.

Water issues and their role in relations between Russia, China, and Central Asian states are elaborated in the chapter written by Ewelina Morawska. She emphasizes the fact that economic issues dominating regional cooperation and water aspects are of minor international consequence. The risk of military conflict over water between Russia and Central Asian countries is negligible. She concludes saying that Russia and Central Asian countries might influence the water management plans of China. Unlike during the Russian and British imperial conquests, the area of rivalry is no longer filled with entities that could be easily described as an imperial sphere of influence, despite the fact that currently the major actors are active in the region to secure their interests.

We would like to express our gratitude to all those scholars who supported us in the process of writing and editing. The support and assistance of a number of individuals have been critical over the years. Finally, we wish to specify that the views expressed in this volume represent those of the individual contributors.

The Authors would like to extend their particular thanks for support they obtained in the course of the project from the following institutions: European Commission, European External Action Service, European Parliament, Permanent Representation of the Republic of Poland to the European Union in Brussels, Al Farabi Kazakh National University, The American University of Central Asia.