

# **The European Union's Strategy for Central Asia 2020 – 2027**

A Review of Past Achievements  
and Recommendations for the Next Stage



 **EURASIAN COUNCIL**  
ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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## Preface

The *Eurasian Council on Foreign Affairs* is a forum for the discussion of Central Asia's relationship with Europe and is dedicated to the deepening of economic and institutional ties between these two interdependent regions.

As the European Union prepares its new strategy for Central Asia to cover the period 2020 – 2027, we are pleased to publish a detailed report setting out our thoughts and recommendations for the consideration of the European External Action Service.

Our report is a considered analysis of the views of a wide range of expert European, Central Asian and international institutions who have submitted their ideas to the ECFA. These institutions have a stake in the EU-Central Asia relationship and, like us, they are deeply committed to its success. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to the distinguished institutions and individuals who have contributed their time and valuable insights to our report.

The conclusions that we have drawn and the recommendations that we make build upon the successes of the EU's current strategy and set out fresh ideas for the future.

Our analysis of the issues suggests that, in formulating its new Strategy for Central Asia, the EU should direct its focus in a realistic and practical way that plays to European countries' unique strengths. A good balance has to be struck between the needed political consultations at the regional level and the country-specific projects. By focusing its time and resources on a select set of "soft power" initiatives, aimed at improving education, security and law enforcement in the region, among other areas, the EU will continue to make an important contribution in Central Asia and avoid counter-productive competition with the other major actors, active in the region - Russia, China and, in new circumstances, the U.S.

We, the undersigned members of the Advisory Council, hope that the ECFA's report will contribute to the debate and help guide the formulation of the EU's new Strategy, to be announced in 2019. We support the best possible outcome for all parties and we renew our commitment to work constructively to deepen the ties that bind the countries of the European Union and Central Asia together, for the prosperity and benefit of all.

- José Maria Aznar, OIC, former Prime Minister of Spain

- Kjell Magne Bondevik, OStO, former Prime Minister of Norway
- Dr. Benita Ferrero-Waldner, former Foreign Minister of Austria and former EU Commissioner for External Relations
- François Fillon, former Prime Minister of France
- On. Franco Frattini, Chamber President of the *Council of State* of Italy; former Foreign Minister of Italy and former EU Commissioner for Justice
- Dr. Václav Klaus, former President and former Prime Minister of the Czech Republic
- Aleksander Kwaśniewski, GCB, GCMG, GCollH, former President of Poland
- Lord Lamont of Lerwick, PC, former Chancellor of the Exchequer of the United Kingdom
- Lord Lilley of Offa, PC, former Secretary of State for Trade & Industry of the United Kingdom
- Jack Straw, PC, former Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom
- Boris Tadić, former President of Serbia
- Dr. Danilo Türk, former President of Slovenia

## **Editor's Note**

In early 2018 Dr. Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Chair of the ECFA Advisory Council, invited a number of major European and global institutions that address Central Asian topics to contribute their ideas to this report. The editorial team cast a wide net and our wish-list included some of the most influential think tanks, NGOs, IGOs and educational establishments with departments or faculty members whose main area of expertise is EU-Central Asia relations.

We also turned towards the institutions of the European Union, and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of EU and Central Asian countries, including relevant diplomatic representatives. In each case, we addressed letters to the relevant contact or authority, explained the aims of the Report and the timeline for publication, and invited them to submit their views on the subject in whichever format was most congenial to them.

We received formal submissions from sixteen important institutions. These are listed in alphabetical order on pg. 30. Each of these submissions can be read in full [here](#). Although not every submission has been directly quoted, we have endeavoured to be as objective as possible and have drawn as many views as possible into a coherent and practical report which contains our considered conclusions and recommendations. Most submissions have been included under the third chapter, entitled “Main Priorities for the EU’s New Strategy for Central Asia”.

We have also included excerpts of papers and articles by other respected institutions which did not contribute directly to this Report, but whose opinion on the EU’s new Strategy for Central Asia we consider to be important and relevant. These sources have been attributed in footnotes and their names have been highlighted throughout the report.

# **The European Union's Strategy for Central Asia 2020 – 2027**

## **A Review of Past Achievements and Recommendations for the Next Stage**

### **Chapter One: The EU's Strategy for Central Asia**

#### **Introduction**

Ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the European Union has sought to establish partnerships with the countries of Central Asia. Today it can claim a stable presence in the region, due in part to the EU's Strategy for Central Asia, adopted in its initial form in May 2007 as an embodiment of "*the long-term commitment of the European Union to regional and bilateral cooperation with its Central Asian partners.*"<sup>1</sup>

This report examines the history of the EU's Strategy for Central Asia since 2007 in the context of the European External Action Service's preparation of a new Strategy for the next decade, which is due in 2019. It considers the achievements of the current Strategy to date, as well as criticism levelled at it by a number of institutions, including some within the framework of the EU itself.

Finally, the report considers the EU's stated objectives for the new Strategy and contrasts these with a number of suggestions and conclusions, in some cases directly contributed to this Report by European and Central Asian institutions, for the improvement of the new Strategy.

#### **The Present Position**

The EU is set to adopt a new Strategy for Central Asia in 2019. It will be synchronised with the adoption of the next 2020 - 27 multi-annual development assistance budget for the region, as per the call to action included in the June

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/sites/ecas/files/st\\_10113\\_2007\\_init\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/sites/ecas/files/st_10113_2007_init_en.pdf)

2017 European Council conclusions.<sup>2</sup> The new Strategy will remain in effect until at least 2027.

The European Commission and its Vice President, HRVP Federica Mogherini, are responsible for drafting the new Strategy. Ms. Mogherini is assisted by the European External Action Service (EEAS), the EU's diplomatic service.

The European Council's conclusions state that: *“The new Strategy should take stock of the achievements of EU action in support of Central Asia since 2007. It should be broadly discussed with Member States and lay the foundation for a renewed and enhanced partnership with the region and guide the upcoming EU assistance to Central Asia. The EU intends to involve the Central Asian partners in the preparation of the new strategy.”*

In a speech to the European Parliament in March 2018, she notes: *“Central Asia is a crossroads between Europe and the Far East, between Russia and South East Asia. We see clearly that, as the world is changing, this region is changing, too. Free elections and peaceful transitions of power are becoming a more regular feature. Central Asia has become more independent and stronger, a partner for the East and for the West, not the chessboard for some great game among empires. Today, Central Asian countries are seeking a closer partnership with the European Union.”*<sup>3</sup>

In order to address the issues and changing priorities of the relationship between the EU and the Central Asian countries, we need to understand the origins of the current Strategy and analyse its achievements and shortcomings to date.

## **The Original Objectives**

The EU's current Strategy for Central Asia was put forward by the German EU Presidency and adopted in its initial form in May 2007. According to the European Union External Action Service (EEAS): *“The main goal of the Strategy is to increase the resilience of the region as a whole, as well as the resilience of individual states. The Strategy foresees a reinforced regular political dialogue at ministerial level and enhanced cooperation in key initiatives: rule of law, education, environment and water. Specific attention is devoted to the region's security and stability, notably to common threats related to border management and drugs trafficking.”*

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<sup>2</sup> [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/34927/eu-central-asia-relations-factsheet\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/34927/eu-central-asia-relations-factsheet_en)

<sup>3</sup> [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/41364/speech-high-representativevice-president-federica-mogherini-european-parliament-plenary\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/41364/speech-high-representativevice-president-federica-mogherini-european-parliament-plenary_en)

The EU pledged “to, within the framework of this Strategy:

- *Establish a regular regional political dialogue at Foreign Minister level;*
- *Start a ‘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 Asian states;*
- *Conduct a regular Energy Dialogue with Central Asian states.”*

Addressing the instruments for the implementation of the Strategy, it stated: “*The EU will make full use of the potential of Partnership and Cooperation Agreements, Commission and Member State programmes, cooperation frameworks such as the Baku Initiative and political dialogue. Cooperation with the UN, in particular the ECE (Economic Commission for Europe), the OSCE, the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, NATO, international financial institutions, and with other regional organisations and fora will be enhanced. The EUSR, EU Member State embassies and European Commission delegations should seek to strengthen cooperation with the OSCE. In addition, the EU seeks to put into place, together with Central Asian states, new forms of cooperation such as a regular bilateral human rights dialogue.*”

In June 2015 the Strategy document was updated, with new emphasis on priorities such as “*the promotion of respect for the freedoms of assembly, association, expression, and religion or belief, as well as encouraging the rights of women, children, and minorities.*” The EU pledged to “*further enhance its efforts to address the serious challenges to human rights in the region.*” A further priority was cooperation on the rule of law, with the EU considering linking budget-support programs to specific anticorruption measures in the Central Asian states.<sup>4</sup>

Subsequently, speaking at the 11<sup>th</sup> EU-Central Asia Ministerial Meeting in Astana in December 2015, HRVP Mogherini stated: “*The new EU Strategy on Central Asia is a strong sign of the political investment by all EU Member States and the European institutions in a strategic partnership, a strategic relationship with Central Asia. Only through strengthened cooperation can we solve the challenges we have and take full advantage of the many opportunities our regions have.*”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.rferl.org/a/central-asia-eu-to-push-harder-on-rights/27068625.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://thediplomat.com/2015/12/central-asia-extremely-important-to-the-european-union/>

## **Chapter Two: Observations on the EU's Strategy Towards Central Asia**

### **Progress To-Date**

Since the adoption of the initial Strategy in 2007, the EU has established a stable presence in Central Asia, with diplomatic representations in each of the five states, four fully-fledged Delegations and one liaison office, and has signed bilateral Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCA) with all but one country (Turkmenistan) in the region. In 2015 it signed an Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA) with Kazakhstan, and appointed a new special representative for Central Asia, Slovak diplomat Peter Burian, intended to be the main EU voice in the region and tasked with enhancing the effectiveness of Brussels' actions.<sup>6</sup> The ECFA is honoured to publish this Report in the presence of Ambassador Burian at its 2018 Annual Meeting at Cliveden House, Berkshire, United Kingdom.

There have been thirteen European Union-Central Asia Ministerial Meetings since 2007, the most recent before last in Samarkand in November 2017, attended by all five Central Asian Foreign Ministers, HRVP Mogherini and Mr. Neven Mimica, European Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development.<sup>7</sup> (The most recent one took place in Brussels in November 2018 as this report was being finalised).

Assistance provided by the European Commission (EC) and by EU Member States individually makes the EU the number one donor in the Central Asian region. The global envelope for EU assistance to Central Asia increased to €1 billion for the period 2014 - 20, up from €750 million in the prior financing period. Regional programmes aim at supporting a broad-based process of dialogue and collaboration between the five Central Asian countries, focusing on energy, the environment, water and socioeconomic development, as well as reform of legal and judiciary systems, strengthening cross-border cooperation and tackling drug-related issues.<sup>8</sup>

The Regional Multiannual Indicative Program for Central Asia focuses on two sectors: Sustainable Development (energy, environment, water and socio-

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.eurasiancouncilforeignaffairs.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/ECFA-Occasional-Paper-Eurasia-and-the-EU-The-Next-Chapter.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/35580/13th-european-union-central-asia-ministerial-meeting\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/35580/13th-european-union-central-asia-ministerial-meeting_en)

<sup>8</sup> [http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top\\_stories/pdf/eu-central\\_asia\\_cooperation\\_infographic.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eu-central_asia_cooperation_infographic.pdf)

economic development) and Regional Security (border management, fight against drugs and crime, Rule of law and judiciary reforms). The EU has allocated €360 million for regional cooperation projects in Central Asia for the 2014 - 20 funding period, including €115 million for the Erasmus+ programme.

The Investment Facility for Central Asia (IFCA) was set up by the European Council in 2010, via the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI):  
*“Through the IFCA, the European Union backs the priorities of partner governments in the Central Asian region and supports them in undertaking priority investments contributing to inclusive and sustainable growth. The Facility aims at leveraging funds with eligible Financing Institutions for such investment projects. The Facility intervenes in cases where the regular market fails to offer sufficient or affordable financing which may hinder the timely realisation of high priority investment projects with the potential to promote inclusive and sustainable socio-economic development. For the period 2010 - 15, 22 projects were approved for grant financing of €119 million, representing total financing from the Finance Institutions of approximately €553 million and total investment budget of approximately €830 million. The leverage effect of IFCA grants was thus in the range of 1:7.”*<sup>9</sup>

The European Council presented its conclusions on the Strategy in June 2017 on the tenth anniversary of its adoption, during a meeting of foreign ministers in Luxembourg. The conclusions document restates the EU’s commitment to developing a *“strong and durable relationship based on joint ownership and aimed at fostering peaceful, prosperous, sustainable and stable socio-economic development of the Central Asian region, in line with the EU Global Strategy and United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.”*<sup>10</sup>

The EU’s Special Representative for Central Asia, Ambassador Peter Burian, noted that: *“Over the years of implementing the strategy, the EU has been able to accumulate substantial experience and made significant progress in many priority areas”*, adding that the EU will work on updating the document taking into account the experience gained.<sup>11</sup>

Kazakhstan’s Deputy Foreign Minister Roman Vassilenko described the strategy as *“an effective and integrated tool for interregional interaction”*, arguing that projects implemented as part of the strategy contributed to the development of the region. *“A key component of a new strategy, in our opinion,*

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<sup>9</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/regions/central-asia/investment-facility-central-asia-ifca\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/regions/central-asia/investment-facility-central-asia-ifca_en)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/23991/st10387en17-conclusions-on-the-eu-strategy-for-central-asia.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <https://astanatimes.com/2017/09/conference-considers-updating-10-year-old-european-union-central-asia-strategy/>

*should be unlocking the region's economic potential, which implies implementation of programmes aimed at improving investment climate, ensuring sustainable economic growth, developing human capital and boosting employment.*"<sup>12</sup> During the February 2018 international conference "25 years of EU-Central Asia Relations: From the Past to the Future" in Astana, Kazakh Foreign Minister Kairat Abdrakhmanov noted that the EU's presence provides "*a balance of forces in this region*", adding: "*We urge the European Union to expand its presence and help transform Central Asia into an important global player.*"<sup>13</sup>

## **Criticism of the EU's Strategy**

Although the EU's Strategy for Central Asia has led to some notable achievements, it has also attracted criticism from think-tanks and media outlets, some countries of Central Asia and EU member states, and even the institutions of the EU itself.

The main charge levelled at the Strategy is its perceived failure to establish the EU as a major actor in Central Asia and increase the resilience of the region. The European Parliament's Directorate-General for External Policies has offered perhaps the sharpest critique in this regard: "*Over the last eight years, the EU has successfully established several institutionalised mechanisms for strengthening relations and working with Central Asian governments, including an increased presence on the ground. Despite this, the EU's engagement in Central Asia is one of limited to no impact. The region has become more unstable; forecast gas deliveries from the region to Europe have so far not materialised; trade is minimal with the exception of EU-Kazakhstan links, democracy is seen by the Central Asian regimes as a threat to their survival; corruption severely undermines economic development and siphons off much of the development aid; and the human rights situation has been backsliding.*"<sup>14</sup>

The Central Asian states' attitudes to democracy over the years is often held up as an example of the limited impact the Strategy has had on local affairs. According to analysis by *The Diplomat* magazine, "*There's a disconnect between the EU's (and other Western nations') stated strategy goals and what has transpired in the region over the past 25 years. Take democracy, for*

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.eurasiancouncilforeignaffairs.eu/2017/09/18/brussels-hosts-conference-10-years-eu-strategy-central-asia/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.efe.com/efe/english/world/kazakhstan-urges-eu-to-expand-presence-in-central-asia/50000262-3532382>

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[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/535019/EXPO\\_IDA\(2016\)535019\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/535019/EXPO_IDA(2016)535019_EN.pdf)

*example. Since the EU adopted its 2007 Central Asia strategy, the only changes in top leadership in the region have come via revolution (Kyrgyzstan, 2010) or death (Islam Karimov, 2016). Only Kyrgyzstan's elections, such as the 2015 parliamentary polls, have been viewed as relatively free and fair. This isn't to say that the EU is responsible for Central Asia's democratic dysfunctions, but rather that its efforts in this regard have met with little tangible success.”<sup>15</sup>*

The article, which appears in a publication that covers the region more regularly than others, concludes: *“Ultimately, the EU's Central Asia strategy is built around energy and security, but even here there is delay and disappointment. [...] A decade later, Afghanistan remains a war zone that has never spilled northward in any grand fashion and regional energy trading remains fraught with difficulty. Pipelines bringing gas from Turkmenistan to Europe remain a topic of discussion, but not progress. Political stability in the region is truly in the hands of regional leaders, rather than troubled or troublesome neighbours. And most regional leaders have done as [Tajik President Emomali] Rahmon has: accepted financing for reforms and then continued with business largely as usual.”*

It is true that with the exception of Kazakhstan, trade remains limited between the EU and Central Asian states, despite the EU being the second-highest trading partner of the Central Asian region after China. According to a recent paper by security think tank PONARS Eurasia, *“Since the beginning of the 1990s, Kazakhstan emerged as the principal Central Asian partner of the EU, with trade rising exponentially, from \$6.2 billion in 2003 to \$38.2 billion in 2014, despite a sharp decline in 2015 and 2016 (\$22 - 23 billion). Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan follow in second place (\$1.9 billion each in 2016), far behind their Kazakh competitor. Trade with Kyrgyzstan (\$0.32 billion) and Tajikistan (\$0.27 billion) remained minuscule in 2016 and the settlement of European companies in these two countries is still very limited and often linked to EU assistance programs.”*

*“The EU is one of the largest donors to the region but one of the least known. Several EU projects, like TRACECA, have been nearly forgotten. Infrastructure projects are today clearly dominated by Chinese investment, especially by the ‘Belt and Road’ Initiative in which Beijing is investing tens of billions of dollars. Although most EU program publications are conventionally upbeat about successes, numerous observers have given reserved, even critical, assessments of the results obtained and the visibility of the EU.”*

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<sup>15</sup> <https://thediplomat.com/2017/07/the-disconnect-between-the-eus-central-asia-strategy-and-reality/>

The report goes on to state that: *“Many European programs have been roundly criticized by Central Asian actors, both official and unofficial, with different motives. For example, some critiques are that: they have grandiose objectives but only modest means, there is an absence of transparency in the recruitment of European companies to work on EU programs in the region, there are disproportionate salary levels offered to European expatriates, a lack of monitoring of allocated funds (which favors misappropriation), and an overly opaque bureaucracy for NGOs and social activists who wish to benefit from offered opportunities. Broad-ranging EU aspirations therefore tend to work against the focused pursuit of achievable and measurable objectives.”*<sup>16</sup>

A September 2017 Paper by the Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst (CACI) notes that: *“Despite an ambitious set of policy initiatives for Central Asia, the EU is punching below its weight in a region where Russia and China are far more influential. Ten years after the EU launched a strategy for Central Asia, the EU is still facing substantial challenges in implementing its strategy successfully. In the meantime, the dynamics in and around the region have changed and these new realities are not reflected in the 2007 strategy.”*<sup>17</sup>

It is also true that EU initiatives in the region are often hampered by a lack of coordination or focus among its Member States. According to a report by the Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, *“Member states have conflicting perceptions of their interests in the region. Germany, Italy and to a lesser degree France have advocated for a clearly utilitarian view of Central Asia, while the UK and Nordic countries wish to emphasize the values agenda. Local governments encourage the competition patterns between external actors, as they enable the regimes to enforce ‘multi-vector’ strategies by pitting these actors against each other. This results in multiple uncoordinated initiatives over which they can exert greater control. Meanwhile the status of the Euro area, the economic crisis in Greece and in Ukraine, and the Islamic State in Syria and in Iraq (ISIL) divert attention from non-priority areas such as Central Asia. The EU’s impact on ‘moral’ norms of behaviour in the region is therefore very likely destined to remain limited.”*<sup>18</sup>

The structure of the EU’s Strategy and its funding mechanisms have also come under fire from its own institutions. A 2013 European Court of Auditors (ECA) audit of the EC and EEAS’ assistance to Central Asia concluded that while *“planning and allocation of assistance were generally satisfactory”*, *“implementation was less so”*, noting that *“implementation was slow overall”*

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/donor-without-influence-european-union-central-asia>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/feature-articles/item/13464-the-european-union%E2%80%99s-political-and-security-engagement-with-central-asia-how-to-move-forward.html>

<sup>18</sup> <http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2015/12/20151269842242676.html>

and “*the Commission could and should have been more rigorous in managing its budget support programmes in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and tied these to specific anti-corruption measures.*”<sup>19</sup>

In a letter addressed to Dr. Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Chair of the ECFA, dated 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2018, Mr. Eduardo Ruiz Garcia, Secretary-General of the European Court of Auditors, stated: “*After consulting the Director in charge of this area, I consider that we do not have enough information and that our current knowledge on this area is not sufficiently updated to make a relevant contribution to your report*”. This correspondence gives rise to the worrying concern that the EU’s only financial watchdog may not currently be in a position to assess or comment on over €1 billion of the EU’s overseas spending.

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<sup>19</sup> [https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR13\\_13/QJAB13014ENN.pdf](https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR13_13/QJAB13014ENN.pdf)

## Chapter Three: Main Priorities for the EU's New Strategy for Central Asia

### The Consensus View: Revise and Refine

Over the past few years, the individual Central Asian states have discussed their priorities and suggestions for the new Strategy with the relevant EU institutions.

In March 2018, HRVP Mogherini met with the Foreign Ministers of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and the Deputy Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan, ahead of the Tashkent Conference on Afghanistan.<sup>20</sup> The meeting enabled the Ministers to give further detailed feedback to the EU's High Representative on the new EU Strategy for Central Asia, and discuss priorities such as sustainable development, reform and modernisation, human rights, the rule of law and good governance, business, security, regional cooperation, and connectivity.

Ambassador Peter Burian stated: "*We heard very clearly the suggestion to include new technologies, digital transformation and energy efficiency from the Kazakh side. These are things which we need to reflect in the document and find ways to adjust our mechanisms, including financial instruments, for supporting more economic cooperation and more investments in the region.*"<sup>21</sup> And in an earlier interview, Ambassador Burian identified the prevention of violent extremism, education and climate change as three major priorities in EU-Central Asia cooperation going forwards.<sup>22</sup>

The most widely accepted suggestion, which is echoed across EU institutions, think-tanks and several contributors to this report, is that the EU should refine its Strategy going forwards and focus only the areas where it can make a significant impact in the region.

Specifically, in the words of the European Parliament's Directorate-General for External Policies: "*The EU should not and cannot compete with Russia and China in the region. The EU would do best to focus on a few key areas where it can achieve concrete results. Besides broader economic and some security cooperation, the EU should focus on education in supporting the region's*

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<sup>20</sup> [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/42076/federica-mogherini-meets-central-asian-foreign-ministers\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/42076/federica-mogherini-meets-central-asian-foreign-ministers_en)

<sup>21</sup> [https://www.inform.kz/en/new-eu-strategy-for-ca-reflects-new-technologies-and-digital-transformation\\_a3168021](https://www.inform.kz/en/new-eu-strategy-for-ca-reflects-new-technologies-and-digital-transformation_a3168021)

<sup>22</sup> <https://astanatimes.com/2017/11/eu-central-asia-a-new-generation-of-partnership-and-cooperation/>

*development while further emphasizing human rights and strengthening political and financial support to civil society.”<sup>23</sup>*

PONARS Eurasia adds that: *“The EU should seek to have more of an impact by focusing in a few specific areas and making better use of its prestige in Central Asia, which admires its culture, education, know-how, and quality of life. In focusing on long-term development and on the security-development nexus, Europe may acquire the means to influence the reshaping of Central Asian societies, perhaps rather slowly but without any geopolitical jolts.”<sup>24</sup>*

Reflecting on the EU’s new Strategy for Central Asia, EUCAM concluded that: *“We lean towards an updated document that is concise, is values- and interest-driven (strategic), and is closely linked to concrete policy formulations, foremost through a sound development budget dedicated to Central Asia (tactics).”* Shrewdly, it noted that *“Member states are likely to press for the inclusion of some ‘pet projects’, but without committing to invest in their implementation in Central Asia. In this sense, member states are likely jointly to decorate ‘a Christmas tree strategy’ to its maximum capacity. If this ends up being the case, EU member states should provide additional funding for those priorities they wish to include.”<sup>25</sup>*

The September 2017 Paper by the Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst (CACI) recommends that: *“In light of the upcoming review of the EU’s strategy for Central Asia, the EU needs to redefine its interests in the region, thereby taking into account the new dynamics in and around it, while being realistic in terms of what can be achieved and what leverage the EU has in Central Asia. Moreover, the EU needs to limit the areas of cooperation. In particular, the main areas to be covered in future EU-Central Asia cooperation should reflect a match between the EU’s comparative advantages (namely areas where the EU can provide real added value and achieve concrete results) and the vital needs of the Central Asian countries. Possible focal areas include education, health and borders. In implementing a more focused strategy, the EU should pursue a mix of regional and highly targeted national programs.”*

In a formal contribution to the ECFA’s Report, the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Austria stated: *“There appears to be a broad emerging consensus that the new EU strategy needs to narrow its focus and set a few, clear priorities. This is a recurrent message in most contributions and in most discussions and workshops held so far. Austria fully supports ideas to*

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<sup>23</sup> [http://www.eucentralasia.eu/uploads/tx\\_icticontent/Implementation-EU-Central-Asia-Strategy-Recommendations-2015.pdf](http://www.eucentralasia.eu/uploads/tx_icticontent/Implementation-EU-Central-Asia-Strategy-Recommendations-2015.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/donor-without-influence-european-union-central-asia>

<sup>25</sup> <https://eucentralasia.eu/2018/02/towards-a-new-eu-strategy-for-central-asia/>

*concentrate EU priorities on two or three main clusters (for instance on sustainable economic development and on security & resilience). Finally, in light of the overall geopolitical context, the new strategy should emphasize that the EU is not interested in any geopolitical games in the region and that it is looking for synergies with other partners with a view to creating win-win solutions for Central Asia.*"<sup>26</sup>

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic drew a similar conclusion in its submission to the ECFA: *"The new Strategy needs to respond to new geopolitical realities and challenges, address specific needs of the countries concerned, and to target the ever-growing opportunities in the region. While confirming a comprehensive approach, the new Strategy needs to be flexible in its nature and focused on a selective list of priorities."*<sup>27</sup>

In conclusion, the broad consensus among expert observers of the EU-Central Asia relationship is that the new Strategy should be based on a realistic analysis of the EU's influence in the Central Asian region, the limits exposed by the implementation of the current strategy, and the geopolitical changes that have taken place since 2007.

## **Priority Areas for EU Action**

The European Council's conclusions on the existing Strategy, presented in June 2017, suggest that it does not share the common external perception that it should focus its activities on a limited number of objectives. It sets out instead a broad series of priorities which it considers to be the main areas for EU-Central Asian cooperation going forwards, and these may well form the basis of the new Strategy.<sup>28</sup> These include:

- **Maintain current instruments for cooperation:** *"The Council emphasises the importance of the current formats of cooperation between the EU and the Central Asian countries, such as the EU-Central Asia ministerial meetings, the Cooperation Councils with the individual countries and the High Level Political and Security Dialogue, and recognises the important work of the EUSR for Central Asia."*
- **Multi-country programmes:** *"Welcoming the recent trend for more regional exchange in Central Asia, the Council encourages the*

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.eurasiancouncilforeignaffairs.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/1.-20180904093736957.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.eurasiancouncilforeignaffairs.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/10.-180731-ECFA.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10387-2017-INIT/en/pdf>

*Commission and Member States to pursue multi-country programmes wherever appropriate to advance regional cooperation.”*

- **Human Rights dialogue:** *“The Council reaffirms the crucial importance of continuing a meaningful dialogue with the Central Asian countries on good governance, the rule of law and human rights.”*
- **Security Challenges:** *“The Council stresses the need to strengthen dialogue and cooperation on security challenges such as prevention of violent extremism (including addressing radicalisation and foreign fighters) and counterterrorism, with an increased focus on prevention.”*
- **Education:** *“Education programmes provided by the EU and individual Member States should play a key role in helping Central Asian institutions to build capacity to offer modern and inclusive curricula that respond to the needs of the labour market and contribute to 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.”*
- **Investment Opportunities:** *“The Council stresses the importance of promoting a reliable and attractive climate for sustainable and responsible investments in Central Asia, together with stability of the legal framework, legal certainty, transparency, involvement of the business community and regional integration.”*
- **Energy Security:** *“The Council emphasises that cooperation between the EU and Central Asia should prioritise the integration of the Central Asian countries with each other and into international markets and transport corridors. The EU will continue to seek to extend the Southern Gas Corridor to Central Asia, and to further promote the EU's multilateral and bilateral energy cooperation. The EU will also continue to promote renewable energy and energy efficiency in Central Asia by offering its expertise in the development of sound regulatory frameworks and by supporting investment cooperation with European financial institutions”*
- **Water Security:** *“The Council invites the High Representative, the Commission and the Member States to support the Central Asian countries to better define approaches to the sustainable use and efficient management of natural resources, particularly water at national and trans-boundary level, and to support the region in coping with climate change impacts and ensuring the preservation of environment.*

These priorities need to be assessed in the context of the external concerns that the EU is spreading itself too thinly in Central Asia and missing the opportunity to score measurable successes. For example, while the European Council looks to maintain its current instruments for cooperation, the Austrian MFA's contribution suggests that this should not be a priority: *“EU cooperation and dialogue with Central Asia should in our view become more result-oriented and needs-based. This is also a point that Central Asian partners keep raising. In general, it would be preferable to shift cooperation from a conference and dialogue-centred to a more practical and operational approach. The inclusion of some sort of road-map in the new strategy with concrete targets, timelines and possible deliverables would be desirable.”*

Similarly, the EU's focus on *“multi-country programmes wherever appropriate to advance regional cooperation”* runs contrary to the opinion expressed in a submission to the ECFA by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, which suggests the EU should adopt a more individualistic approach to the countries of Central Asia: *“One point of criticism with the old strategy was the EU's regional approach to Central Asia, thereby treating the region as one block – without sufficiently differentiating between the different countries. In times when regional cooperation was basically non-existent, the regional approach met with disapproval by the Central Asian states. With recent developments in the region – namely the change of leadership in Uzbekistan – prospects for intra-regional cooperation have significantly improved and initial progress to solve longstanding disputes has been made. This tendency provides the EU with an optimal starting point to increase its impact in the region. The EU is the ideal actor to provide assistance for closer coordination and cooperation processes and can make a significant difference by sharing best practices from its own experiences. Notwithstanding the improved regional cooperation within Central Asia, the differences between the Central Asian countries still need to be taken into account with the new strategy.”*<sup>29</sup>

The Slovak MFA's Paper reaffirms this point: *“Tailor-made approaches to each of the five [Central Asian] countries, formed in accordance with their ambition to strengthen basic universal values as the cornerstone of stability and development, are necessary.”*

A submission by the National Institute for Strategic Studies (NISS) of the Kyrgyz Republic notes that *“intercultural dialogue”* can also play a *“decisive role”*, suggesting non-traditional projects for furthering cooperation, including *“children's camps for rest and development; the University of Friendship of Peoples (for youth); the dialogue of civilizations (for the expert community);*

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<sup>29</sup> [http://www.eurasiancouncilforeignaffairs.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/6.-Recommendations-New-EU-Central-Asia-Strategy\\_KAS.pdf](http://www.eurasiancouncilforeignaffairs.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/6.-Recommendations-New-EU-Central-Asia-Strategy_KAS.pdf)

*innovation platforms; technological parks; an EU-Central Asia Silicon Valley (for professionals); and a tourist belt (for the interchange of cultures)”.*<sup>30</sup>

The discussion surrounding the EU’s priorities for the new Strategy has tended to downplay its influence on human rights and democracy in Central Asia, which is understandable given the lack of recent progress on this front. However, the issue is still a pressing one, as the submission to the ECFA by the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) makes clear: *“The value of the ongoing dialogue on human rights between the EU and individual Central Asian countries is rising. It is important that the EU, as it negotiates new cooperation agreements with the individual Central Asian countries (including enhanced PCAs), fully reflects its human rights concerns. Cooperation and regular consultations between the EU and the UN and OHCHR on human rights are crucial to maximize synergies and increasing impact through joint messaging in the region.”*<sup>31</sup>

The Universities of Cambridge and Kent, in a joint contribution to the ECFA’s report, suggest that future human rights dialogue would be best approached from a more regional perspective: *“The EU is doing a lot of good in the region, but often ‘good’ is unintentionally defined in Eurocentric terms. [...] Understanding community and innate societal structures could play an important role in bridging the aspiration of integration and migrant populations, energy use and environmental values, radicalisation and community resilience. Often these issues are side-lined in favour of a prescriptive discourse on democracy and human-rights in a generic way, at the cost of confidence building measures, which would provide the opportunity to co-develop institutions which lead to an equitable and prosperous society.”*<sup>32</sup>

On the topic of human rights, the Slovak MFA adds: *“As other influential regional players like Russia and China have a very limited capacity and interest to implement the mentioned values, the EU will be the main provider of indispensable assistance. Here, intensive and close co-operation with like-minded countries like USA, Canada, Japan, South Korea and others will be an undoubted advantage. The EU has to change its tactic from “teaching and preaching” towards dialogue, focused on explaining the benefits the whole society would gain.”*

Security is an area where the EU’s involvement in Central Asia can be considered at least a partial success – particularly with the implementation of the EU-Central Asia High-Level Security Dialogue, which the UNRCCA

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.eurasiancouncilforeignaffairs.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/15.-NISS.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.eurasiancouncilforeignaffairs.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/4.-180810-SRSGs-GHERMAN-Response-to-Dr.-Benita-Ferrero-Waldner.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.eurasiancouncilforeignaffairs.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/13.-COMPASS-Policy-Brief-EU-strategy-for-CA.pdf>

claims has “*advanced regional cooperation on existing and potential sources of insecurity and instability in the region*” – but there is still room for improvement. The UNRCCA continues: “*The EU’s flagship regional projects such as the Border Management in Central Asia (BOMCA) programme and the Central Asia Drug Action Programme (CADAP) continue to be valuable efforts and should not only continue but consideration should be given to expanding them. BOMCA could make valuable contributions by focusing further on border security and management in the context of the reviving cross-border trade throughout the region. [...] And in light of the recent record-levels of heroin production in Afghanistan, greater cooperation between CADAP, United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and its Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre (CARICC) project could enable greater attention to the supply aspects of drug-trafficking, in addition to demand.*”

This view is supported by a contribution from the Embassy of the Republic of Tajikistan to Belgium, the EU and NATO, which also calls for increased EU assistance for “*projects aimed preventing and combating terrorism and extremism*”, among others.<sup>33</sup>

BOMCA themselves have contributed to the ECFA’s report, and argue for maintaining the status quo in the new Strategy, “*with some changes addressing steadily ongoing Central Asian region security sector reforms which have influence on border management.*”. The agency also notes that “*the time gap that occurred between BOMCA 8 and BOMCA 9 (in reality, spring 2014 – autumn 2015) [should] be avoided as it had negative consequences both for the EU policies in Central Asia, and for BOMCA Programme sustainability. Many achievements of BOMCA previous phases collapsed because of such gap.*”<sup>34</sup> This provides another insight into certain failings of the current EU Strategy that should be avoided going forwards.

Meanwhile, the Institute of World Economics and Politics (IWEP), under the Foundation of the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, notes that: “*An essential issue in relations between Europe and the countries of Central Asia is security and joint struggle against the threats of terrorism, drug trafficking and organized crime. Between 2007 and 2017, the situation in this area has changed significantly. The main center of instability has moved from Afghanistan to Syria. Both the European Union and Central Asia are in a zone of direct terrorist threat. In turn, given that the EU does not have a military infrastructure in the region, Brussels should focus on the development of soft security instruments. One of the ways is to institutionalize the EU-Central Asian*

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<sup>33</sup> [http://www.eurasiancouncilforeignaffairs.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/7.-2824\\_180816154042\\_001.pdf](http://www.eurasiancouncilforeignaffairs.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/7.-2824_180816154042_001.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> [http://www.eurasiancouncilforeignaffairs.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/3.-Eurasian-Council\\_BOMCA-reply-2018.pdf](http://www.eurasiancouncilforeignaffairs.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/3.-Eurasian-Council_BOMCA-reply-2018.pdf)

*dialogue on security. For this, it is necessary to establish a special structure with a high-level of participation on both sides and with a clearly defined agenda.”*<sup>35</sup>

The University of Sussex’s Asia Centre notes that in the ongoing dialogue on security challenges in Central Asia, it is important not to vilify the region’s migrant transnational communities, or “*everyday diplomats*” as it describes them, who are integral to the region’s economy and interconnectivity but who tend to be viewed primarily as a security risk at a national and international level due to isolated incidents of terrorism and organised crime.<sup>36</sup>

Education is often mentioned as an area in which the EU’s new Strategy could make a substantial difference, free from the regional influence of China and Russia, and with positive knock-on effects for regional security. As the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung emphasizes, “*the EU does stand out in soft policy areas. One activity, with which the EU could most significantly contribute to the stability of the region, is support for the reform and modernisation of the Central Asian education sector – one of the most pressing issues to be addressed! Certainly, measures in the education sector are not sufficient to combat radical groups and should be complemented by security measures. But education can be a key to attenuate many of the challenges Central Asia is struggling with: By imparting universal secular values such as democracy, rule of law and human rights alongside general education and implementing anti-corruption education, much can be done to prepare the new generation for the challenges ahead. The European involvement does of course not need to be limited on school education, but should be extended to vocational training and higher education. A European University in one of the Central Asian capitals could significantly contribute to increase the EU’s popularity in the region and at the same time add to the local education standards.*”

The OECD echoes these suggestions in its own submission to the report. It argues that: “*Two domains in which EU support could advance both economic diversification and more inclusive societies, as well as political and security goals, [are] improved support for returning migrants and greater educational opportunity. ‘Youth and education’ constituted an important pillar of the 2007 strategy, and they should remain a major focus in future. This is where EU ‘soft power’ intersects with economic co-operation, and much more can be done, not least to expand the scope of educational exchanges – the region’s participation*

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<sup>35</sup> [http://www.eurasiancouncilforeignaffairs.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/14.-EU-strategy-on-CA\\_IWEP\\_27-09-2018.pdf](http://www.eurasiancouncilforeignaffairs.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/14.-EU-strategy-on-CA_IWEP_27-09-2018.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.eurasiancouncilforeignaffairs.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2.-Eurasian-Council-on-Foreign-Affairs-July-2018.pdf>

*in programmes like Erasmus has hitherto been fairly limited. Support could also focus on fields in which skills are scarce, such as engineering and IT.”<sup>37</sup>*

The EU’s new Strategy for Central Asia will no doubt rightly continue to focus heavily on investment opportunities and economic development in the region. When considering new opportunities for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the Central Asian region, the EU would be well-advised to consider the major economic developments currently affecting both regions. As the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) points out in its contribution to the ECFA: *“The EU is formulating its new strategy towards Central Asia in a time characterized by a number of major global developments, which will significantly impact both Europe and Central Asia, and the relation of the two regions with each other: the rise of Asia’s – especially China’s – economic power; the global green transition, and; the digital technological push and the transition to the ‘industry 4.0’. These developments will shift the strategic focus of the EU’s engagement with Central Asia even more than before towards issues of connectivity, energy efficiency, green technologies, digitalization, know-how and capacity building and technology transfer.*

*“Central Asia is in many ways strongly affected by these developments. It is a major transit route for trade flows between the EU and Asia. Most importantly, increased EU-Asia connectivity will provide opportunities for a better inclusion of Central Asian businesses into global value chains. The opening up of Uzbekistan offers new opportunities for regional integration, allowing a better use of economies of scale, resulting in a higher weight of the region in the global economy. While Central Asia will remain an important supplier of energy, metals and other natural resources, there is a strong potential for advancing cross-border trade in agricultural and food products, for tourism, and other goods and services. The large European market is among the most important export destinations for Central Asian producers, though both regions still have to work to improve the access to this market, bilaterally and also via support for joining WTO for the Central Asian countries not yet being members.”*

The EBRD concludes: *“More than ever the development of strong institutions supportive of investment and business activities and of private sector development and engagement will be required to advance technological change. Stepping up capacity building and education will be necessary both for the provision of advanced production capabilities and for providing employment opportunities for youth, women and less developed regions and their participation in growing welfare. Central Asia has much to gain from*

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<sup>37</sup> [http://www.eurasiancouncilforeignaffairs.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/11.-Towards-a-new-EU-Strategy-for-Central-Asia\\_Final.pdf](http://www.eurasiancouncilforeignaffairs.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/11.-Towards-a-new-EU-Strategy-for-Central-Asia_Final.pdf)

*European know-how and investment. Support for more efficient natural resource usage and the region's green transition is of special importance, given Central Asia is one of the most energy and carbon intensive regions of the world.*"<sup>38</sup>

The economies of the Central Asian states are currently undergoing significant changes, and this represents an opportunity for EU-based companies looking to invest in the region. Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev's State of the Nation address in October highlighted the increased digitalization of his country's economy, stating: *"In 2020 at least 90% of public services must be digitalized"* to help combat corruption and reduce red tape. Meanwhile Kazakhstan's Astana International Financial Centre is set to play a pivotal role in providing Central Asian businesses with foreign investment and access to capital, with a standalone court, financial regulator system and stock exchange based on UK law.<sup>39</sup>

The Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, meanwhile, stresses the importance of sustainable development in EU-Central Asia economic relations going forwards: *"As a global frontrunner in sustainable development, the EU can provide an added value to the region by offering both financially and environmentally sustainable development solutions and thereby contribute to the urgently needed economic structural change in Central Asia. Strengthening its financial tools, the EU can provide an attractive sustainable alternative to Chinese loans, which have left some recipient countries with an alarming debt and rising debt service charges potentially limiting other necessary spending. At the same time, the option of joint investment projects with China should be examined. This could open up the opportunity to bring investment standards closer to EU and global regulatory, environmental and labour standards."*

The OECD highlights the link between economic development and security concerns and suggests the EU focus on improving labour migration conditions in the region: *"While labour migration has done much to sustain consumption and reduce poverty in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and, to a lesser extent, Uzbekistan, it is more of a coping mechanism than a basis for sustained growth and development. Moreover, there is much that could be done to turn returning migrants into a real economic resource for the sending countries, especially if migrants return with professional skills acquired abroad. However, to a great extent, this depends on creating an environment in which returning migrants can generate new activities: they often tend to be among their countries' most entrepreneurial citizens. Improving the framework conditions for entrepreneurship – which is central to any meaningful diversification policy –*

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<sup>38</sup> <http://www.eurasiancouncilforeignaffairs.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/8.-Contribution-to-the-ECFA-report-on-the-new-EU-CA-strategy-04092018.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> [http://www.akorda.kz/en/addresses/addresses\\_of\\_president/state-of-the-nation-address-of-president-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan-nursultan-nazarbayev-october-5-2018](http://www.akorda.kz/en/addresses/addresses_of_president/state-of-the-nation-address-of-president-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan-nursultan-nazarbayev-october-5-2018)

*could make a huge difference here. [...] In addition to supporting reforms aimed at improving framework conditions for business, the EU could work more closely with Central Asian governments, as well as local and international NGOs and other development partners, to provide returning migrants with basic accounting and other skills needed to start a business. This would not only increase the likelihood of entrepreneurial success, it would also increase the probability that migrant start-ups operated in the formal sector.”*

The Slovak MFA further reinforces this link, noting: “Drivers for stability such as fighting corruption, strengthening good governance and rule of law are the imperative preconditions of improving business and investment climate and enhancing the CA countries’ international prestige. Active implementation of these values will consequently lead to stability, economic growth and modernization. The EU should consider carefully the participation of Eastern Partnership (EaP) forerunners such as Georgia in the sharing process [for the new Strategy]. A shared history, mental proximity and geopolitical closeness could elevate effectiveness, and at the same time cement the partnership between the EU and EaP while working together on a common project, and enhance the latter’s international prestige and self-confidence by turning them from ‘students’ into ‘undergraduates’.”

Renewable energy in Central Asia could greatly benefit from EU input and expertise, according to a unique contribution to the ECFA from the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) which is pursuing a number of initiatives in the region: “The countries of Central Asia region possess large potential of renewable energy. This vast resource potential provides opportunities for increasing renewable energy uptake and countries in the region have been taking positive steps in this direction. Yet they are at different levels of readiness for the adoption of renewable energy solutions to address their energy challenges. These countries have achieved important milestones in 2018, with Kazakhstan conducting the first ever renewable energy auctions in Central Asia, and Uzbekistan signing agreements with SkyPower and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) to develop solar PV capacity in the country.”

*“Despite diverse resource endowments and different stages in renewable energy development, Central Asian countries face certain common challenges that can best be addressed through regional co-operation and action. In these priority areas, the countries of the region could strongly benefit from development cooperation and technical assistance. Sharing international best practices and information exchange could enable a wider diffusion of renewable energy technologies. Further efforts by international development partners, such as the European Union, in the areas listed above could be instrumental in helping the countries of Central Asia in unlocking their*

*renewable energy potential and supporting their efforts towards a sustainable energy future.”<sup>40</sup>*

Meanwhile, the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung’s paper suggests that water security should be a priority when drafting the new EU Strategy, in the wider context of sustainable energy generation: *“Central Asia faces severe environmental challenges with the almost dried out Aral Sea being only the most illustrative example. These challenges are being amplified by factors such as demographic growth, a resource-intensive development model, outdated infrastructure and the consequences of climate change. Therefore, fostering environmentally sustainable growth should remain in the focus of the EU’s Central Asia strategy. The EU can offer its expertise in the fields of sustainable energy generation, energy efficiency, climate change policies, green economy, and sustainable water management. With Kazakhstan hosting the EXPO 2017 under the title ‘Future Energy’, an interest in long-term change towards a more sustainable economic model within the region became evident. As effects of climate change and environmental degradation such as water and air pollution don’t stop at borders, it is recommended to pursue a regional approach working with all Central Asian partners.”*

This suggestion is backed up by the UNRCCA, who suggest working with the EU on a number of projects related to water security: *“Given its interest in development of the ‘East-West’ routes and corridors, the EU could further mobilize European financial institutions and banks in cooperation with the World Bank and the IMF in support of regional infrastructural projects. Such efforts could also be expanded to the water-energy nexus, regarding for instance the construction of dams and hydropower stations or the introduction of modern technologies into the management of water resources in the region. Given that trans-boundary water management is a key area of focus for UNRCCA, EU engagement in this area would provide significant opportunities to expand our cooperation.”*

The **Slovak MFA** adds: *“Besides its environmental meaning, the EU’s assistance in water management will improve bilateral relations between neighbouring countries, increase security, and decrease interethnic tensions.”*

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<sup>40</sup> [http://www.eurasiancouncilforeignaffairs.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/9.-IRENA-inputs-to-the-ECFA-strategy\\_30-Aug-2018.pdf](http://www.eurasiancouncilforeignaffairs.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/9.-IRENA-inputs-to-the-ECFA-strategy_30-Aug-2018.pdf)

## Chapter Four: Conclusions and Summary of Recommendations

The current EU Strategy for Central Asia has achieved a great deal over the past decade. However, nearly all concerned parties – from the governments of European and Central Asian countries to institutions from both regions, many of which have contributed to this Report – agree that the new EU Strategy needs to be substantially adapted to address the shifting geopolitical situation in Central Asia since 2007 and address the perceived shortcomings of the Strategy’s first iteration.

In particular, most stakeholders, including those within the framework of the European Union itself, suggest that the EU should limit the focus of the new Strategy to what the Institute of World Economics and Politics describes as a “*realistic assessment of its interests and competitive advantages in Central Asia.*” It is widely felt that this should be free from the influence of other major actors such as Russia and China, who arguably have the upper hand in the region both diplomatically and economically. The programs and projects of cooperation to be proposed by the EU should be demand-driven and culturally sensitive.

Specifically, the EU’s new Strategy for Central Asia should aim to:

- Consider regional differences, rather than adopt a blanket approach to Central Asian states;
- Shift cooperation from a conference- and dialogue-based relationship to a more practical and operational approach, with hands-on projects and summits in each Central Asian state;
- Bring this approach to bear on human rights dialogue with Central Asian states, and move away from the “Eurocentric” perspective which has prevailed until now, with limited results;
- Focus on effective “soft power” initiatives such as improving health services, justice and law enforcement, as well as fighting corruption;
- Maintain the successful security measures currently in place, while focusing on developing education and sustainable development to further bolster stability;
- Continue to support foreign direct investment in the Central Asian region while accounting for significant shifts in the regional economy, including

the move towards digitalization and the creation of the Astana International Financial Centre, an important new hub that will operate under UK commercial law;

- Avoid unnecessary competition and enhance cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Union and China's Belt and Road Initiative by promoting sustainable projects and capitalizing on Central Asia's growing focus on green energy and water cooperation.

By focusing its time and resources on areas which match its particular strengths and appeal to local audiences, the EU can offer unique expertise and make a significant positive contribution in Central Asia, deepening the ties that bind the countries of these two pivotal regions together, for the mutual benefit of all.

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Contributions can be read in full [here](#).

## **Index of Abbreviations**

(In alphabetical order)

BOMCA	Border Management in Central Asia
CA	Central Asia
CADAP	Central Asia Drug Action Programme
CARICC	Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre
DCI	Development Cooperation Instrument
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EC	European Commission
ECA	European Court of Auditors
ECE	Economic Commission for Europe
EEAS	European External Action Service
EPCA	Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
EU	European Union
EUSR	European Union Special Representative
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
HRVP	High Representative / Vice President
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IFCA	Investment Facility for Central Asia
IGO	Intergovernmental Organisation
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
UN	United Nations
UNODC	United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime
UNRCCA	United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia

## About the ECFA

Central Asia is a region the size of Western Europe and contains five countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Blessed with some of the richest and most diverse resources anywhere in the world, over the last twenty years the region has shown its commitment to become a reliable, long-term partner of the West.

Kazakhstan is Central Asia's engine for economic growth, and the Kazakh Government has taken the lead in developing relations with the European Union. In its commitment to the process of deepening political and economic relations with European states, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan has been instrumental in helping to establish the **Eurasian Council on Foreign Affairs (ECFA)** and its Honorary President is H.E. Kairat Abdrakhmanov, the Foreign Minister.

Since its inception, the ECFA has established a growing reputation as a valuable and independent source of high-quality research, publications and information to keep European countries abreast of the fast-changing development of the Central Asian region. Increasingly seen as a stepping stone between East and West, the need for up-to-the-moment information on Central Asia has never been greater. Now in its fifth year, and in recognition of Central Asia's growing stature in world affairs, ECFA is expanding its remit to include the geopolitical and economic influence of China and the United States on the region.

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