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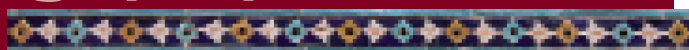


# Security and development approaches to Central Asia The EU compared to China and Russia

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## Abstract

China and Russia are the most influential external actors in Central Asia, while the EU has substantially increased its activity and presence in the region since 2007. The security and development interests of these three actors are sometimes at odds but can also overlap. The three actors are usually perceived in terms of different stereotypes. Whereas the EU is known for its emphasis on democratic values and human rights, Russia is seen as the main security actor (not including the United States and its actions in Afghanistan) and China as the main investor in infrastructure and importer of energy. How do these stereotypes compare in regard to security and development interests? Is there any scope for cooperation and coordination or can policies be boiled down to zero-sum geo-political competition?



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## Introduction

The increased involvement of external actors in Central Asia is often characterised as a new great game. If there is a geopolitical game between Russia and China and to a lesser extent the U.S., EU, Turkey, Iran, India and Pakistan over influence in Central Asia it seems to be centred on energy – primarily gas from Turkmenistan. But there are other factors at play that counter this perception of the region as solely a geopolitical struggle between major powers. First, the Central Asian regimes are not merely subordinates of external actors but have emerged as ‘players’ themselves, choosing who to cooperate with and playing countries against each other. Second, there is more at stake in Central Asia than just energy. There is a long list of security threats ranging from internal threats to stability to regional ethnic tensions and from bad interregional relations to negative spill-over effects from Afghanistan.

This report looks at the activities of three external actors in the sphere of security and development in Central Asia. The first two are Russia and China, the most active and influential actors in Central Asia due to their size and their geographical connection to the region. Both benefit from their territorial contiguity with Central Asia; from their structuring role in the local economies (Russia, thanks to its Soviet past and the dynamics of regional economic integration, and China to its exponential trade);

and from their influence in strategic terms (on the multilateral level with the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and for Moscow also on the bilateral level).

The third actor is the European Union (EU); a relatively new player in the region that has substantially increased its activities with Central Asian states since it formalised a regional strategy in 2007. However, in the eyes of Brussels Central Asia flies under the radar as it is not regarded as belonging to either its southern or eastern neighbourhoods, nor is it part of any European powers’ historical colonial interests, such as in sub-Saharan Africa. Central Asia is not a vital element of European foreign policy strategies and does not have any priority on the external policy agenda compared to the EU’s neighbouring countries and large growing economies such as China and India. Still, one can argue that Europe is overtaking the United States as the third most important actor in the region, as over the last few years the U.S. has seen Central Asia almost exclusively in terms of the conflict in Afghanistan and so has become a less diversified actor.

Russia is the most influential actor in terms of hard security and seems to be the only power that has both the means to react to a crisis and a sense of responsibility to engage. The responsibility to react to or to intervene in events in what it sees as its neighbourhood is limited though and would only be translated into action if key Russian interests (or territory) were to be directly affected. In this sense Russia can be qualified as the ‘reluctant soldier’.

China has increased its economic interests, mainly through energy imports, in combination with development activities – infrastructure projects for instance – over the last few years. China is also concerned with Central Asia’s stability, especially in relation to possible domestic disturbances in the Xinjiang region. Besides playing an active role in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Beijing has largely acted unilaterally and mostly stays out of regional and multilateral forums; hence China could be described as a ‘silent merchant’.

The EU is engaged in many fields in Central Asia ranging from energy interests to soft security activities and from education to promoting human rights standards. This values driven agenda of human rights, democracy, good governance and rule of

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law is often at odds with energy interests but also at times clashes with security and development concerns. Europe's interests in Central Asia are less direct and substantial compared to those of China and in particular Russia. Fine-tuning of such activities is important for the EU due to its lack of leverage and limited resources. This combination of values with other hard interests could be said to resemble a 'hesitant vicar' hovering between devotion to his faith and hesitation over the role of religion in harsh daily life.

This paper will discuss Russian, Chinese and European involvement in the region. It proposes that security and development are the main issues faced by contemporary Central Asia, and that though the role of external actors in shaping them is important the extent of each actor's investment differs. Energy is obviously a driver of interest in the region, and indeed Turkmen gas may become a cause of direct competition between Russia, China and the EU. However, energy diversification does not impact directly upon the local security and development environment.

Where security and development assistance is concerned there is little scope for bringing these countries together in coordinated cooperation. For Europe the most natural allies in Central Asia (and mostly elsewhere) are the U.S. and joint regional organisations, foremost NATO and the OSCE. When it comes to security possible cooperation and coordination could be developed based on Afghanistan's links to Central Asia, most directly in terms of border management and control programmes. In the development sphere there is even less scope for coordination, let alone joint action on a bilateral or trilateral basis outside of international institutions. There might though be a few opportunities for coordination that the EU could explore, for instance with Russia in the field of education or initiatives with China on rural development.

This working paper addresses the following questions:

- How are security and development interpreted by Russia, China and the EU?
- What are the divergences in their approaches and are there overlapping strategies?
- Is there any room for cooperation between the three actors or are patterns of competition destined to intensify?
- How should the EU's role in the security-development nexus develop in Central Asia taking into account the dominant roles of Russia and China?

## 1. The reluctant soldier: Russia

### 1.1. Long term interests

In the first years following the demise of the USSR, Russian political elites, then in a period of total transformation, were largely uninterested in the future of the Central Asian region, and only kept up a minimal influence, centred on the securitisation of its southern borders, denuclearisation, rental of the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan and committing peacekeeping forces to the Tajik civil war. Russian interest in the region was progressively reshaped during the second half of the 1990s, and grew in magnitude in the 2000s.<sup>1</sup> Since the end of the decade, Moscow has considered its re-conquest of great power status to be partly dependant on strengthening its economic, financial and strategic integration with post-Soviet states; mainly Belarus and Kazakhstan; to a lesser extent Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan; potentially Armenia; and if possible Ukraine.<sup>2</sup>

#### Top 4 Russian interests in Central Asia

1.	Protecting Russian territory from destabilising factors emanating from Central Asia (militant extremism and drug trafficking).
2.	Providing security to the region but restricting intervention and engagement by other external actors.
3.	Controlling part of the Central Asian hydrocarbon resources, as well as other raw materials and assets.
4.	Confirming the region's status as part of the Russian "sphere of influence" (through regional integration projects, Central Asian support for Russian stances on the international scene, symbolic protection of Russian minorities, and promotion of Russian culture and language).

<sup>1</sup> L. Jonson, Vladimir Putin and Central Asia: The Shaping of Russian Foreign Policy (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> A. Suzdaltsev, "Politics Ahead of the Economy", Russia in Global Affairs, 9 April 2010, [http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/n\\_14783](http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/n_14783).



Risks of instability constitute the main motivation for Moscow's activism in the region and explain its mainly reactive policy. This potential instability could impact Russia itself: the belief that the country is vulnerable to instability from the south is dominant among Russian elites. But instability could also force the Kremlin to intervene directly though the cost of a military intervention would be high in terms of criticism from the international community, military losses, financial burden and logistical difficulties. Another driver is economic. Control over Central Asian hydrocarbons, uranium and electricity is part of the Russian government's central strategy to gain mastery of the so-called Near Abroad. Finally, for Russia to confirm its great power status and its role as a regional driver in Eurasia, Moscow needs Central Asia, or at least some countries in the region, to identify themselves as being in its "sphere of influence", both economically and strategically, through their participation in regional integration projects.

Soft power elements also play an important, though secondary role. The protection of Russian minorities, the promotion of Russian language, culture and media in a still partly Russian-speaking area, and the flows of labour migration from Central Asia to Russia are barely utilised by the Kremlin, but they do offer tools for building a longer-term partnership between Russia and Central Asia. These offer Russia opportunities for leverage: familiarity with the Russian language, whose dominance has not been unseated by English, Turkish or Chinese, remains a major cultural element for the local middle classes and the elites.<sup>3</sup> Russia continues to be viewed as the intermediary of European culture in Central Asia, and this tradition is strengthened by labour migrations, thanks to which about five million Central Asian migrants and their families, often from rural areas, now have close ties with Russia.<sup>4</sup>

Russia's hierarchy of interests in Central Asia has been reinforced over the last few years. Factors such as the revival of an allegedly Islamic insurgency in the Rasht Valley, the Kyrgyz political crises, and the interethnic conflict in Osh in 2010, as

well as preparations for the post-2014 situation in Afghanistan, are pushing Moscow into prioritising a security-oriented reading of the region and a more proactive position. This hierarchy can also be explained by the diversity of Russian actors involved. Russia's strategy is not cohesive, and the interest in Central Asia among security services, diplomatic circles, state corporations, private actors and the public is not unified. Russia's policy towards the region is primarily shaped by the security apparatus, then by state corporations or large firms with special relationships with the authorities, and only after that by diplomatic circles and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In public opinion, Central Asia is seen as nothing but a burden; a region that generates problems for Russia and in which less involvement would be welcome.

Moreover, some of the drivers of Russia's influence are fragile. The ruling elite have almost no long-term vision of the kind of relationship they would like to build with the region, nor have they developed a strategy that would establish Central Asia as anything other than Russia's geographical and political appendage.<sup>5</sup> This could mean that in the coming years Russia may regress to a position on par with other actors in the region for two main reasons. First, its influence is becoming more and more fragmented on a country-by-country basis: it is expected to remain a vital and global partner for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan; to continue as a still important but less welcome ally of Tajikistan; but to become a more minimal actor in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Central Asia, qua regional entity, has lost its relevance in Russian regional policies. None of the multilateral structures – i.e., the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, the Eurasian Economic Community, and the Customs Union – include all five states, and henceforth Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan will be the countries, almost exclusively, targeted. Second, the Russian economic presence is faced with stiff competition from China and the EU, and specialises in only a few niche areas (hydrocarbons, uranium, electricity and transport) and does not have the resilience of Chinese trade. Moscow's desire to push forward with a Common Economic Space (CES) with supranational functions is mainly targeted at the dynamic economy of Kazakhstan, but is also intended to draw Bishkek and Dushanbe closer into its orbit. This is not so

<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the instruments of pressure that Russia has at its disposal in relation to its immediate neighbours in the former Soviet Union, see Russian leverage on the CIS and the Baltic States, by Jacob Hedenskog and Robert L. Larsson (Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> M. Laruelle (ed.), *Migration and Social Upheaval as the Face of Globalization in Central Asia* (London: Brill, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> M. Laruelle, "Russian Policy on Central Asia and the Role of Russian Nationalism", *Silk Road Papers* (Washington D.C.: The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, 2008).

*Russian imports, exports and total trade with Central Asian states in 2010 in millions of Euros<sup>1</sup>*

	Imports from Russia	Rank	Exports to Russia	Rank	Total trade	Rank
Kazakhstan	4,238.4 (18.7%)	3	1,780.8 (4.9%)	3	6,019.2 (10.3%)	3
Kyrgyzstan	810.4 (15%)	2	268.7 (32.1%)	1	1,079.1 (17.3%)	2
Tajikistan	646.8 (32.2%)	1	76.9 (8.5%)	3	723.7 (24.9%)	1
Turkmenistan	600.6 (14.2%)	3	101.9 (4%)	8	702.5 (10.3%)	4
Uzbekistan	1,382.8 (21.4%)	1	1,047.8 (24.1%)	1	2,430.6 (22.5%)	1

<sup>1</sup> Table based on information from 2011 European Commission statistics, <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/creating-opportunities/bilateral-relations/countries-and-regions/> (accessed 22 October 2011).

much for their economic capabilities but in order to cement Russia's legitimacy in ensuring the security of these two weak states. However, the Kyrgyz and Tajik elites know that the Customs Union and the potential Eurasian Union would make Russia an even more significant stakeholder in their domestic affairs, hence their reluctance to join even if their dependency on Russia at the economic level is very pronounced.

### 1.2. Security

Security remains the first driver shaping Russia's involvement in Central Asia. The challenges are multiple, as any destabilisation in the weakest (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan), or the most unpredictable (Uzbekistan), of the countries could have immediate repercussions in Russia. This could include an Islamist infiltration; an increase in the inflow of drugs reaching the Russian population, which is already widely targeted by drug traffickers; a loss of control over the export networks of hydrocarbons, uranium mines, strategic sites in the military-industrial complex and electrical power stations; a drop in trade; or an uncontrollable surge of migrants, in particular of refugees. It matters little if these challenges are over-estimated: rumours and fears are part and parcel of decision-making processes. Even though Russia has no border with Central Asia other than that with Kazakhstan, and thus no territorial contiguity with the four other states, the securing of the southern borders of Central Asia is seen in Moscow as a question of domestic security, and is done not out of "imperialism", but out of pragmatism. The 7,000 kilometres of Russo-Kazakh border, running through the heart of the steppes, are practically impossible to secure, and require better monitoring of clandestine flows downstream. Central Asia is therefore viewed by Russia as a buffer zone with a "south" that is increasingly subject to strategic uncertainty and non-traditional threats.

To address these challenges Russia presents itself as a reliable partner for the Central Asian governments, ready to collaborate with all of them, even Tashkent and Ashgabat, when they ask for it. Moscow views the security of Central Asia as above all pertaining to military or strategic questions, and prioritises a traditional concept of hard security. The main Russian-Central Asian multilateral framework, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), makes provisions for the sale of military materiel to member countries at Russian domestic market prices, and has revived cooperation between the Russian and Central Asian military-industrial complexes. Combined military exercises are carried out annually in one of the member countries, simulating terrorist attacks (called Rubezh) or anti-narcotics operations (Kanal).<sup>6</sup> The Collective Rapid Deployment Force (CRDF) for Central Asia, comprising about 4,000 troops made up of Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Russian and Tajik units is the only trained armed forces capable of intervening in real time. On the bilateral level, Russia also provides defence equipment including helicopters, planes, spare parts and weapons to the states of Central Asia, as well as personnel training to the majority of soldiers and officers of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and a common air defence system. Moscow has military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, comprising a number of sites, as well as a radar station and firing ranges in Kazakhstan.<sup>7</sup>

But these hard security elements are of no help to Moscow or the Central Asian states in their preparations to counter non-traditional threats. Mechanisms used for soft security or to combat non-

<sup>6</sup> A. Frost, "The Collective Security Treaty Organisation, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and Russia's Strategic Goals in Central Asia", *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2009, pp. 83-102.

<sup>7</sup> S. Peyrouse, "Russia-Central Asia: Advances and Shortcomings of the Military Partnership", in S. Blank (ed.), *Central Asian Security Trends: Views from Europe and Russia* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2011), pp. 1-34.



conventional threats lack regional coordination, since they are considered by the Central Asian regimes to be at the core of state sovereignty. They are also ineffective due to the high level of corruption of local law enforcement agencies. Russian discourse is becoming more focused on non-traditional threats, mainly Islamic terrorism and narco-trafficking. Here again, Moscow aims to reinforce the reaction capabilities of the Central Asian governments (providing aid for intelligence information, selling specialised material and offering training with the Russian FSB), and to establish a joint narrative on collective threats, one in which the Central Asian governments can be presented as the victims.

Even if the Kremlin does not officially endorse interference in the internal affairs of Central Asia, Russian experts are becoming more and more aware of the fact that the absence of development prospects in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan creates insecurity, and that the lack of preparation for political change may have a destabilising impact. In Moscow, some officials are discretely starting to encourage the Central Asian governments to undertake reforms for fear that Egyptian- or Tunisian-type situations may occur because of the potential “cocktail” of political repressions, social and economic depression and the ‘securitisation’ of national resources by a shrinking elite. Such sentiments were expressed by the Russian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Grigory Karasin, at a hearing devoted to the problems of Central Asia at the Duma in April 2011,<sup>8</sup> although there is not a consensus among Russian experts on this parallel with the Arab Spring. Moreover, the return of Vladimir Putin to the presidency in May 2012 and the undermining of his legitimacy among the public, which has given rise to the largest demonstrations the country has seen since the fall of the USSR, is confirmation that the region will not remain unaffected by Russian domestic transformations.

### 1.3. Development

The economy ranks only as a secondary driver of Russian influence. In 2010, trade between Russia and Central Asia rose to nearly €17 billion, placing Moscow third behind China and the European Union,

although it is still the leading importer/exporter to some of the states.<sup>9</sup> Control over the export routes for hydrocarbons dominates Russian regional strategies, but trade with Central Asia also involves other important industries: uranium, electricity, hydroelectricity, telecommunications, railways, the military-industrial complex and some agribusiness sectors. Therefore, Russia remains a dominant economic actor in mineral resources, which are important for the heavy industry sector and infrastructure – old Soviet specialisations – but is a relatively limited and uncompetitive actor in terms of small- and mid-size companies and new technologies.

Moscow’s strategy today is to update the Soviet legacy by promoting an integrated space with some of the republics. Transport, electricity and communications are areas deemed to be “integrating” factors par excellence, and may slow down the growing economic dissociation between Russia and Central Asia created by Chinese pressure.<sup>10</sup> Since 2010, the Russia-Belarus-Kazakhstan Customs Union has enabled Russia to maintain common dynamics. In July 2011 these three member countries abolished all customs borders, and in January 2012 created a common market of over 160 million people. Putin’s statements, in October 2011, in favour of creating a new Eurasian Union have confirmed the political message of regional integration. For the first time, the Kremlin is openly considering the idea of creating a few joint, supranational mechanisms in specific areas – mainly the economic and financial sectors, but also potentially the strategic sector – that would guarantee an integrative dynamic between Russia and some of its closest CIS neighbours; Kazakhstan, Belarus, potentially Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and maybe Armenia.<sup>11</sup>

Moscow’s investments in the Central Asian economies can be explained by the logic of strategic security (hydrocarbons, uranium), of common space (electricity, transport), or classic rationales of profit-making (communications and construction).

<sup>8</sup> “Stranam Tsentral’noi Azii nuzhny reformy, chtoby izbezhat’ povtoreniia sobytii v Severnoi Afrike” [Reforms in Central Asian countries are required in order to avoid a repeat of the events in North Africa], *News.gazeta.ru*, 13 April 2011, <http://news.gazeta.kz/art.asp?aid=338679>.

<sup>9</sup> EU statistics, <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/creating-opportunities/bilateral-relations/countries-and-regions/> (accessed 22 October 2011).

<sup>10</sup> On this topic see: publications by the Research Centre of the Eurasian Development Bank; E. Vinokurov (ed.), *Obshchii elektroenergeticheskii rynek SNG* [A CIS common electric market] (Astana: EABD, 2008); E. Vinokurov (ed.), *Mezhdunarodnye transportnye korridory Evrasii* [International transport corridors in the Eurasian Economic Community] (Astana: EABD, 2009); and the journal *Evrasiiskaia ekonomicheskaia integratsiia*.

<sup>11</sup> M. Laruelle, “Putin Uses Symbols of Soviet Power to Announce Idea of Eurasian Union”, *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 8, no. 195, 24 October 2011.

Russia was, for a long time, the only member of the G8 whose laws and government regulations did not include the concept of official development assistance (ODA). Until recently its aid development was limited to writing off debts under loans lent to the CIS countries within the framework of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, or to offering humanitarian aid on a bilateral basis. Since 2004, Moscow has been trying to systematise its aid development strategy and to comply with international norms, mainly for promoting its soft power prestige. It formulated a first Participation in International Development Assistance Concept in 2007,<sup>12</sup> and since 2010 has been working on a national strategy for development policy. The responsibility for development aid is dispersed among different groups, but from 2012 will be held by a specialised agency affiliated to the Ministry of Finance. In 2010 Russia's aid commitments reached approximately \$500 million. This aid is distributed almost exclusively via international organisations (the World Bank and UN agencies) and does not involve NGOs, although sometimes the aid given to a country contains an open political agenda.<sup>13</sup> In Central Asia, Russian aid is almost entirely allocated to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in the form of debt reduction, foodstuffs, aid for agriculture and relief aid after natural catastrophes, though this is often in exchange for an acceptance of continued Russian military presence. Moscow plans to systematise this Near Abroad development aid strategy with a CIS Assistance and Partnership Programme and an Anti-Crisis Fund as part of the Eurasian Economic Community.<sup>14</sup>

These forms of aid nonetheless remain quite modest. Russia's lack of interest in Central Asia's development can be explained by three factors. First of all, in contrast to the Chinese economy, the Russian economy has no imperative need to find new markets to maintain its own dynamism. Central Asia is not crucial on the economic level except in terms of the transit rights it draws from hydrocarbons. The Russian economy needs partnerships with more developed economies (Europe in particular) in order to

acquire the technologies and know-how it is lacking, rather than investing in less developed economies or in economies that are too similar to its own such as those of Central Asia. Secondly, the Kremlin believes that the maintenance of open borders with the CIS promotes labour migrations flows from Central Asia, and therefore that Russia already offers a considerable safety release valve for the social and economic tensions of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The prevailing idea in Moscow is that the migrants "cost" Russia more than they bring in, and that it already indirectly aids the development of Central Asia, in particular via remittances.<sup>15</sup> Thirdly, the belief of having "given" enough to develop that region during the Soviet period allows the Russian elite to argue that the local regimes, now independent, are themselves responsible for their difficult situation. This view is, however, a short-sighted one, as the destabilisation of Central Asia would also have consequences for the domestic situation in Russia.

## 2. The silent merchant: China

### 2.1. Long term interests

China's key foreign policy strategies are driven by factors far removed from Central Asia; instead Beijing is focused on the relationship with the United States, regional integration in Asia, partnership with Japan and the European Union, as well as improving relations with India.<sup>16</sup> In this foreign policy framework their post-Soviet neighbours occupy a relatively minor place. When the Soviet Union disappeared, China's primary objective was to maintain stability at its north and north-west borders by addressing the issue of its territorial boundaries with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and seeking confirmation that these countries would respect the "One China" discourse. Yet, in the Chinese perception of its environment, Central Asia is not only a part of the post-Soviet world, but also a part of a Muslim world with which Beijing is increasingly hoping to build a privileged partnership. Central Asia is thus part of China's strategy for consolidating its long-standing alliance with Pakistan,

<sup>12</sup> "Russia's Participation in International Development Assistance Concept", approved by the Russian president on 14 June 2007, [http://www.minfin.ru/common/img/uploaded/library/2007/06/concept\\_eng.pdf](http://www.minfin.ru/common/img/uploaded/library/2007/06/concept_eng.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Nicaragua and Nauru for instance received Russian aid after they recognised the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

<sup>14</sup> M. Kaczmarek, and A. Wierzbowska-Miazga, "Russia's development assistance", OSW Papers, 10 November 2011, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2011-10-10/russias-development-assistance>.

<sup>15</sup> O. Troitskaia, "Kolichestvo vmesto kachestva. Pochemu immigratsiia neset Rossii bol'she problem, chem vozmozhnosti?" [Quantity instead of quality. Why immigration means more problem than possibilities for Russia], Russia in Global Affairs, 22 October 2011, <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/Kolichestvo-vmesto-kachestva-15355>.

<sup>16</sup> B. Gill, *Rising Star. China's New Security Diplomacy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2007); Hongyi Lai, *The Domestic Sources of China's Foreign Policy: Regimes, Leadership, Priorities and Process* (London: Routledge, 2010).

and of building a long-term partnership with Iran, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan.<sup>17</sup> Central Asia is also a space that embodies the new relationship between China and India, comprising both patterns of competition and cooperation.<sup>18</sup>

Top 4 Chinese interests in Central Asia	
1.	Stopping Central Asia from becoming a base for Uyghur activism.
2.	Avoiding Central Asia becoming a destabilising force that commits China to increasing involvement in security matters outside its borders.
3.	Controlling a part of Central Asia's hydrocarbons and other raw materials and assets.
4.	Integrating Central Asia into the Chinese market's global strategy by opening up to the north and west.

Central Asia is unique to Beijing in terms of its direct relationship to domestic issues. China's proximity with the region, though an asset in some perspectives, simultaneously involves numerous challenges: its ethnic contiguity with the Uyghur world is perceived more as a danger than as an opportunity.<sup>19</sup> The Chinese stance is first and foremost defensive, avoiding Central Asia becoming a place for exporting the Uyghur conflict and interfering directly in China's domestic management of this issue. At a second degree, Beijing is also in a defensive position in terms of the security of Central Asia. A fragile Afghanistan and a destabilised Pakistan creates an already negative regional environment for China, and so Central Asia's stability is a priority, again at the least possible cost. Finally, Central Asia has come to position itself on the Chinese radar as a partial solution to two concerns. First, to secure continental energy supplies that are not subject to global geopolitical complications; the 2011 gas agreement with Turkmenistan – that will supply 65 billion cu-

bic meters a year – will cover a large part of China's gas needs. And secondly, to help China appear as a peaceful rising power able to play the multilateralism card, and to build a specific partnership, one that is economically-based, with the Muslim world.

However, even if energy and multilateralism remain important components of Chinese international positioning, Beijing's interest in Central Asia will still be primarily driven by domestic stability in Xinjiang, good neighbourly relations with local governments, and the transformation of Xinjiang and Central Asia into areas of transit for the conquest of new markets.<sup>20</sup> Central Asia is thus paradoxically fundamental in terms of domestic stability, because of the Uyghur issue, and marginal to the preoccupations of Chinese foreign policy as a whole. It is not related to Japan, North Korea or Taiwan, since the Central Asian governments have not sought to challenge the "One China" policy. Even if the region is partly associated with relations with the United States, mainly due to the U.S. military base in Kyrgyzstan, it remains a trivial problem compared to the issues of trade, currency and human rights that plague day-to-day U.S.-China relations.

In contrast to Russia and Europe, the Chinese strategy is more cohesive. The influence of its private actors is minimal and "civil society", while vibrant on domestic issues, is not involved on Central Asia-related issues. This does not imply, however, a uniformity of opinion among the elites: the security objectives of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) do sometimes come into contradiction with the preoccupations or modalities of action of the civil elites of the Party and the state. If Chinese activism in Central Asia today appears to be dominated by economic questions – China is the region's largest trading partner – this is because security questions are viewed as either directly controlled by Beijing (this is the case on the Uyghur question), or as dictated in tandem with Russia (internal stability). However, the Chinese elite are concerned about Moscow's lack of security capabilities in the region should significant instability arise.

## 2.2. Security

Initially China's main priority in terms of security was to consolidate its borders and put an end to the conflicts concerning their demarcation. Between

<sup>17</sup> G. Kemp, *The East Moves West. India, China, and Asia's Growing Presence in the Middle East* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> See M. Laruelle, J.-F. Huchet, S. Peyrouse and B. Balci (eds.), *China and India in Central Asia. A new "Great Game"?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

<sup>19</sup> C. Mackerras, and M. Clarke (eds.), *China, Xinjiang and Central Asia: History, transition and crossborder interaction into the 21st century* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> M. Laruelle, and S. Peyrouse, *The Chinese Factor in Central Asia: Domestic Order and Social Change* (London-New York: Hurst-Columbia University Press, 2012).



1994 and 2002, Beijing signed border demarcation treaties with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and today the question is deemed to have been resolved, even if the issue of cross-border river management with Kazakhstan still remains open.<sup>21</sup> The second security objective was to manage Central Asia's Uyghur diaspora of about 300,000 people. The issue has today been brought under control, all of the autonomist Uyghur associations have been dismantled, the Central Asian governments are in control of their own Uyghur minorities, and the bilateral friendship declarations signed between the Central Asian states and China all include provisions for the common struggle against separatism, and sometimes for procedures to expel Uyghur dissidents to China.<sup>22</sup>

The symbol of Chinese security involvement in Central Asia is obviously the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Once the SCO's original aims of demilitarising the Sino-Soviet border zones and of facilitating their delimitation were attained, it set itself the goal of forging a common struggle against the so-called "three evils" (*san gu shili*) of fundamentalism, extremism and secessionism.<sup>23</sup> The SCO has helped to ease long-standing tensions between the Russian and Chinese worlds, to put in place cooperative mechanisms for former Soviet states to learn about their Chinese neighbour, and to establish a collective discourse on the common threats they face, one based on China's own security terminology. Now that this threshold of development and institutionalisation has been reached, the organisation faces new challenges. Since 2008, the SCO seems to have entered a growth crisis. It has not defined any positive long-term goals; has no well-defined priorities; and refuses to discuss divergences in its members' priorities.<sup>24</sup> It has, in particular, failed to coordinate joint activities against drug-trafficking, or to become a forum for discussion on the water issue despite such calls from

Bishkek, Dushanbe and Tashkent. The obsession with consensus and for maintaining the status quo has hampered the SCO's effectiveness and risks delegitimising it in the future.

The gap between the SCO's narrative about the fight against non-traditional threats and its mechanisms that enable collective, or at least concerted action, is immense. As it was not designed to be a supranational organisation, since this would imply the reduced sovereignty of its members, the SCO does not have a defined military structure like the CSTO. It is neither a military defence alliance like NATO, nor does it seek to create multilateral military or police units. Despite the establishment of an anti-terrorist centre in Tashkent in 2004 – the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), designed to develop common approaches to combat terrorist movements – any multilateral security dynamic remains embryonic.<sup>25</sup> The SCO does not provide any military guarantees in cases of domestic crisis. Nor does it offer the structure of a "rapid intervention force", or a collective troop force like that of the Ministry of Emergency Situations in Russia, which would make it possible to intervene in natural disaster situations or a refugee crisis. It has never managed to react to large-scale crises in any one of its member states. Its silence during the Kyrgyz events of 2010 confirmed this, as does its incapacity to offer anything collective to a state that is as strategic as Afghanistan, albeit a non-member. Its greatest successes are probably the extradition treaty between member states and the formation of a 'black list', which includes about one thousand people and forty organisations considered as 'terrorists'.<sup>26</sup> The SCO seems therefore primarily to be a reflection of Chinese willingness to support a so-called "healthy Central Asian order", free of the "three evils" and devoid of pro-Western forces that might act to destabilise China.

For the time being, Chinese bilateral military presence in Central Asia is also limited, unable to rival Russia's major role. Its aid is restricted to electronic material, automobiles and textiles, and includes almost no military hardware sales. However, Astana has expressed its intention to obtain military equipment from the PLA and hopes to take advantage of free transfers of decommissioned military assets when the Chinese army engages in modernising

<sup>21</sup> In the framework of the "Far West" development programme, Beijing has increased its withdrawal of water upstream from the Ili and the Irtysh, thus reducing the water reserves available to Kazakhstan.

<sup>22</sup> A. Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Great Power Contest for Central Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>23</sup> Also called the three extremisms (*sange jiduanzhuyi*) or the "Shanghai spirit". See, for example, M. Oresman, "Catching the Shanghai Spirit", *Journal of Social Sciences (Shanghai)*, no. 12, December 2003, republished at [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2004/05/01/catching\\_the\\_shanghai\\_spirit](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2004/05/01/catching_the_shanghai_spirit).

<sup>24</sup> A. Cooley, "The Stagnation of the SCO. Competing Agendas and Divergent Interests in Central Asia", PONARS Memo no. 85, September 2009.

<sup>25</sup> A.J.K. Bailes, P. Dunay, P. Guang, and M. Troitskiy, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation", SIPRI Policy Paper no. 17, May 2007.

<sup>26</sup> More in A. Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Great Power Contest for Central Asia*.

*Chinese imports, exports and total trade with Central Asian states in 2010 in millions of Euros<sup>1</sup>*

	Imports from China	Rank	Exports to China	Rank	Total trade	Rank
Kazakhstan	7,724.3 (34.1%)	1	7,579.7 (21.1%)	2	15,304.1 (26.1%)	2
Kyrgyzstan	3,391.2 (62.7%)	1	48 (5.7%)	4	3,439.3 (55%)	1
Tajikistan	180.6 (9%)	4	335.5 (37.3%)	1	516.1 (17.8%)	2
Turkmenistan	434.6 (10.2%)	4	722.4 (28.4%)	1	1,157.1 (17%)	2
Uzbekistan	978.9 (15.2%)	4	889.7 (20.5%)	2	1,868.6 (17.3%)	2

<sup>1</sup> Table based on information from 2011 European Commission statistics, <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/creating-opportunities/bilateral-relations/countries-and-regions/> (accessed 22 October 2011).

its equipment.<sup>27</sup> Finally, aid in the form of training is, while modest, slowly developing. Exchanges have been organised to train military cadres, but cultural differences, the language barrier and the cautious attitude of the Central Asians hinders prospects. Courses for Central Asian officers in Chinese military academies are taught in Russian, as Chinese instructors are unable to speak Central Asian languages or Central Asian officers, Chinese. For the Central Asian governments, materiel and training from the PLA is a still theoretical balance to the supplies of outdated Soviet equipment, but for the time being Chinese aid remains focused on non-military support and involves little training.<sup>28</sup>

### 2.3. Development

China has formulated a relatively well-structured narrative on the security-development nexus, originally based on its analysis of its domestic situation, and subsequently transcribed onto foreign policy. Ever since the 17th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 2007, Hu Jintao has promulgated the concept of a “harmonious society” (*hexie shehui*), which is to say one in which development and security are linked together. Due to the country’s extraordinary boom Chinese society today appears highly divided, involving contradictory interests and a sharp rise in economic and cultural disparities between peasants, workers, the middle-classes and the elites, but also between the maritime and continental regions. The need for a better distribution of wealth is therefore considered by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as a solution to a sizeable political liability that might imperil the regime’s stability and the state’s long-term interests. As far as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) is concerned, Beijing, taking its “harmonious society”

principle as a point of departure, believes that the political and ethnic tensions among the Uyghurs will attenuate with economic development and their integration into overall Chinese dynamism. Beijing has therefore adopted a carrot-and-stick policy. The carrot is the economic development of Xinjiang (\$300 billion of planned investments by 2015); while the stick is the willingness to eliminate any elements the Chinese authorities deem to be potentially subversive. However, ethnic riots in 2008, 2009 and 2011 confirmed the inadequacy of the Chinese strategy. Investing massively in the local economy and infrastructures is not enough to defuse secessionist tensions and identity conflicts.<sup>29</sup>

This narrative also has an external component. Under Hu Jintao, the CCP’s aim has been to establish China unambiguously as one of the leaders of a so-called multipolar world, increasingly confident and keen to show it can undertake greater responsibilities in international affairs. This presumes that it can speak as an equal with the major powers, develop cooperation with regional organisations and international donors, as well as foster relations with developing countries by stressing common prosperity. Henceforth, China aims to be a “responsible stakeholder”; an approach that it has tried to stress in its dealings with Africa, Latin America and Central Asia, through a rhetoric of mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence, but also via mechanisms of development aid.<sup>30</sup> China has no official definition or central institution for its development aid. In of-

<sup>27</sup> S. Peyrouse, “Sino-Kazakh Relations: A Nascent Strategic Partnership”, China Brief, vol. 8, no. 21, 2008, pp. 11-15.

<sup>28</sup> S. Peyrouse, “Military Cooperation between China and Central Asia: Breakthrough, Limits, and Prospects”, China Brief, 5 March 2010.

<sup>29</sup> S. Peyrouse, “Security and Islam in Asia: Lessons from China’s Uyghur minority”, FRIDE Policy Brief, no. 87, July 2011, <http://www.fride.org/publication/932/security-and-islam-in-asia-lessons-from-china-s-uyghur-minority>.

<sup>30</sup> J.M. Blanchard, “Harmonious World and China’s Foreign Economic Policy: Features, Implications, and Challenges”, Journal of Chinese Political Science, vol. 13, no. 2, 2008, pp. 165-192.

ficial rhetoric, however, it does not use this term and prefers to talk about “cooperation” between the developing countries.<sup>31</sup> It wants to be an alternative to the major international donors, even though Beijing also participates financially in the Asian Development Bank, in a few of the UNDP’s African programmes, and, as regards Central Asia, has also invested in the CAREC programme.

In the case of Central Asia, this translates into a “good neighbourhood” principle centred on massive involvement in the construction and upgrading of extraction infrastructures (the Caspian Sea-Xinjiang pipeline for Kazakh oil, the Sino-Central Asian gas pipeline, the massive purchase of Kazakh uranium, and a growing interest in rare minerals in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan), transport facilities (upgrading roads, construction of tunnels and bridges in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, building turnkey hydroelectric stations, and delivery of railway material) and communications (huge investments in mobile telephony, internet networks, optic fibres, etc.). China has become, in a mere decade, the main trading partner of Central Asia, with €23 billion in trade in 2010.<sup>32</sup> Beijing sees poverty as the major matrix of the destabilisations in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and the largest share of its aid is directed to those two countries. In 2004, it announced a loan of \$900 million to Central Asia, most of which was given to Dushanbe; and in 2009, China extended \$10 billion to Kazakhstan, half of the sum being made up of a loan from the Export-Import Bank of China (Eximbank) to its counterpart, the Development Bank of Kazakhstan.<sup>33</sup>

Chinese aid for development is granted either by subsidies, which are generally paid in kind through delivery of goods and material in order to reduce the risks of corruption, or by preferential or concessional credit.<sup>34</sup> Though the money from loans is, on paper, granted to the beneficiary country, it is generally transferred to the company or enterprise in charge of the project, which makes it possi-

ble to keep the money within the Chinese system.<sup>35</sup> China’s aid has seen successes for a number of reasons: it is not conditional, as it is not dependent upon reforms of any kind; loans are offered at very advantageous rates; and the “turn-key” services proposed by Chinese companies are inexpensive. However, Chinese aid does not involve competence-building and does not help Central Asian economies to become autonomous actors in their own development. On the contrary, it exacerbates their economic dependency on Chinese aid and products. This aid is therefore not devoid of financial and strategic interests. China is trying to create new export markets for its products; landing contracts for its companies, which are the main benefactors of its bank loans; guaranteeing itself new energy supplies; and making Central Asian governments its “debtors” or even its “vassals”.

### *3. The hesitant vicar: The European Union*

#### *3.1. Long term interests*

More than any other actor Europe presents a multifaceted face, however it is one that is not devoid of contradictions. The European Union itself is a complex structure with several heads – the Commission, Council and Parliament – and with a number of representatives – the Council President, the presiding member state, the President of the Commission, and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, who is part of both the Commission and the Council. Europe is also represented by its member states, some of whom are particularly active in Central Asia and often more visible than the EU. Europe may also be embodied by non-member states (Switzerland, Norway) and transatlantic institutions (OSCE, NATO); and it is a stakeholder in international organisations, especially those linked to the UN (the EU for instance finances the BOMCA project, though it is implemented by the UNDP), and through international donors. Lastly, the European approach is also reflected by non-state actors and private actors, whether companies or civil society. In this paper we will focus mainly on the EU.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the European Union was managing a full agenda: German reunification; the introduction of the Schengen agreement; the wars in Yugoslavia; preparing the Central European

<sup>31</sup> N. Kassenova, *Aide au développement : la percée chinoise au Tadjikistan et au Kirghizstan* (Paris: IFRI, Series Russie. NEI. Vision, no. 36, 2009), p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> 2011 European Commission’s statistics, <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/creating-opportunities/bilateral-relations/countries-and-regions/> (accessed 22 October 2011).

<sup>33</sup> “China loans 10 bln dollars to Kazakhstan”, *Energy Daily*, 17 April 2009, [http://www.energy-daily.com/reports/China\\_loans\\_10\\_bln\\_dlr\\_to\\_Kazakhstan\\_state\\_media\\_999.html](http://www.energy-daily.com/reports/China_loans_10_bln_dlr_to_Kazakhstan_state_media_999.html).

<sup>34</sup> N. Kassenova, *Aide au développement : la percée chinoise au Tadjikistan et au Kirghizstan*, p. 10.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11.



states for membership; and building new relations with Moscow. In this context, Central Asia did not actor in any way as a priority.<sup>36</sup> With the slow but steady growth of EU external policies, Central Asia gradually appeared on the radar. In 2007, under the German EU Council Presidency the “Strategy for a New Partnership with Central Asia” was established with the intention of building relations and giving impetus to cooperation with Central Asia. The ambition of the initiative signalled a palpable evolution in European perceptions to look further beyond Europe’s eastern borders.<sup>37</sup> Despite these advances the strategy for Central Asia remains difficult to compare with European commitments made as a part of the Eastern Partnership. The latter was designed to complement the Union for the Mediterranean by providing an institutionalised forum for discussing visa liberalisation, free trade and Association Agreements with six East European and South Caucasus neighbours, while avoiding the controversial topic of membership. Although Kazakhstan’s accession to the Eastern Partnership has been discussed informally, particularly in 2010 when the country held the chairmanship of the OSCE, Central Asia is not envisaged to be a part of this initiative and EU involvement in the region is destined to remain limited.

#### Top 4 European Union interests in Central Asia

1.	Helping to secure and stabilise Central Asia.
2.	Accessing Central Asian hydrocarbons.
3.	Promotion of democratic values and human rights.
4.	Meeting internationally agreed development criteria.

While the EU Strategy for Central Asia outlines seven priorities,<sup>38</sup> its main interests lie foremost in the stability of the region and countering negative spill-over effects from Afghanistan, as well as in securing energy resources (potential gas imports from Turkmenistan and oil from Kazakhstan). At the same time the EU tries to place an emphasis on democratic values and human rights, which is challenging considering the authoritarian nature of the Central Asian regimes. In practice, these objectives

have competing logics. The European desire to diversify gas export routes in order to reduce its dependence on Russia has led to a relaxation of EU human rights pressure on Turkmenistan. The potential for the country to participate in the Southern Corridor, even at a modest 10 billion cubic metres per year, has led to some human rights and rule of law criticisms being overlooked.

Meanwhile, the Central Asian governments that participate in the Northern Distribution Network, with Uzbekistan at its core, want to be rewarded for their “support” to the Western campaign in Afghanistan. When faced with NATO, the EU has not succeeded in arguing its case and has instead found itself somewhat paralysed by security priorities, which is all the more paradoxical considering that the domestic stability of the Central Asian states partly depends on a secure Afghanistan. Furthermore, the EU’s development investment is limited; it is spread thinly over the region and is having little effect due to the corrupt nature of the Central Asian ruling classes. Taken together, the EU’s objectives seek to link energy, security, values and development goals and interests, though not in a structural or achievable manner.

### 3.2. Security

The EU’s role as a hard security actor on the international scene is limited, and most European countries place their trust in NATO to guarantee their security on a global level. While the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) currently runs a host of smaller civilian and military missions around the world, chances are minimal that a substantial new CSDP will be deployed any time soon. The reasons for this can be attributed to disagreements between member states on the development of CSDP structures, the awkward relationship between the EU and NATO caused by a large overlapping membership and above all to defence cuts around Europe.

In Central Asia, EU mechanisms barely relate to hard security and the soft security initiatives are too dispersed to have a serious impact. Moreover, security assistance is often associated with institutions other than the EU. The OSCE, for instance, has a border guard training programme in Central Asia, while NATO has its own association strategies, via the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme, and an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) for Kazakhstan. Member states are also engaged in bilateral programmes (including aid for police training).

<sup>36</sup> A. Warkotsch (ed.), *The European Union and Central Asia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>37</sup> N. Melvin and J. Boonstra, “The EU Strategy for Central Asia @ Year One”, EUCAM Policy Brief, no. 1, October 2008.

<sup>38</sup> Human rights, the rule of law, good governance and democratisation; youth and education; economic development, trade and investment; strengthening energy and transport links; environmental sustainability and water; combating common threats and challenges; and inter-cultural dialogue.

*The EU's imports, exports and total trade with Central Asian states in 2010 in millions of Euros<sup>1</sup>*

	Imports from the EU	Rank	Exports to the EU	Rank	Total trade	Rank
Kazakhstan	5,389.2 (23.8%)	2	13,601.1 (37.8%)	1	18,990.3 (32.4%)	1
Kyrgyzstan	223.5 (4.1%)	4	14.3 (1.7%)	8	237.8 (3.8%)	5
Tajikistan	197.4 (9.8%)	3	32.9 (3.7%)	6	230.3 (7.9%)	5
Turkmenistan	760.4 (17.9%)	2	332.7 (13.1%)	2	1,093.1 (16.1%)	3
Uzbekistan	1,321.5 (20.5%)	2	356.1 (8.2%)	5	1,677.6 (15.6%)	3

<sup>1</sup> Table based on information from 2011 European Commission statistics, <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/creating-opportunities/bilateral-relations/countries-and-regions/> (accessed 22 October 2011).

Owing to both the multiplicity of European actors and the lack of visibility of some EU mechanisms, no European “grand narrative” on Central Asian security exists to complement that of Russia, China or the United States.<sup>39</sup> Alongside the many indirect programmes that touch upon security it is the EU Special Representative, Pierre Morel, who has the most prominent security portfolio of the European Union in Central Asia, and helps to increase visibility in the region as well as signal urgent security threats.

In Central Asia the EU's focus lies primarily in the sphere of soft security or human security. Development assistance to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan is largely underpinned by stability and security concerns, for instance in the fields of poverty reduction and migration. EU assistance programmes – though mostly limited in size but many in number – seek to build more inclusive societies that can resist security threats such as ethnic violence, internal instability and interstate tensions. In this sense the EU's regional programmes are designed to bring the five countries – that have weak or even strained relationships with each other – to the table in order to foster cooperation on water management or rule of law reform.

The June 2010 Joint EU Council and Commission Implementation Report of the EU Strategy for Central Asia recognises the deficiencies of the 2007 Strategy in terms of security, and called for reinforced efforts in “security broadly speaking”.<sup>40</sup> Its conclusion reads: “It will be necessary to expand the concept of security to include major international and regional challenges such as human security, the combating of drug trafficking and trafficking in human beings, pre-

cursors, nuclear and radioactive materials, uranium tailings, border management, bio-safety, bio-security, and the combating of terrorism and prevention of radicalisation and extremism, including via a continued emphasis on poverty alleviation. Combating corruption is an important element in countering many of these security challenges”.<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile the European Parliament developed its own position on the implementation of the EU Strategy. The December 2011 report on this matter emphasises a connection between EU development policy, democratic values and security. It “underlines the need to explain and promote the EU concept of security and stability in the event that it differs from theirs (Central Asians)” and it “recognises that the denial of basic rights and opportunities that result from the absence of democracy and the rule of law can lead to situations of insecurity”.<sup>42</sup>

EU officials have difficulty explaining to Central Asian counterparts what their security objectives are and how they plan to meet them. The EU's security approach to the region remains vague and all-encompassing. Debates within EU institutions and between member states need to produce a clearer concept. A joint External Action Service and member states review process of the EU strategy this year (expected to be finalised in June) should help clarify EU plans and views on security. It will be a hard nut to crack because the EU will need to broadcast a clearer message while remaining focused on a wide range of issues that fall within the development-security nexus.

The 2007 EU Strategy for Central Asia lists security among its goals, particularly in regards to border management, Afghanistan's proximity and drug

<sup>39</sup> S. Peyrouse, “Human Security in Central Asia. Can the EU help out?”, EUCAM Policy Brief, no. 21, 2011.

<sup>40</sup> The Joint EU Council and Commission Implementation Report of the EU Strategy for Central Asia, 28 June 2010, p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 26.

<sup>42</sup> European parliament resolution of 15 December 2011 on the state of implementation of the EU Strategy for Central Asia (2011/2008, INI), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&language=EN&reference=P7-TA-2011-0588>.

trafficking. Among EU programmes for border securitisation, the best known – BOMCA (Border Management in Central Asia Programme) and CADAP (Central Asia Drug Action Programme), implemented by the UNDP – focus on the upgrading and/or building of border posts, on equipping them with high-tech material, training border guards in searching goods and people, detecting illicit substances, and on performing combined exercises with neighbouring countries. Currently the BOMCA programme is moving increasingly from providing hardware to know-how. In addition, both programmes are also designed, at least in theory, to help improve cross-border trade.

European countries support several multilateral initiatives, one example being the Central Asia Border Security Initiative (CABSI), organised by the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior with support from the European Union, to provide a platform for dialogue and discussion. The EU meets at regular intervals with members of the international donor community and agencies involved in border security technical assistance, such as the UNDP, OSCE, UNODC, IOM, Japan, the Russian Federation and the United States.<sup>43</sup> Another initiative, the Central Asia Regional Information and Coordination Centre (CARICC) for combating the illicit trafficking of narcotics, psychotropic substances and their recursors, is now operational and making plans to establish links with Interpol. However, due to a lack of independent evaluation, it is unclear if any of these Western-led programmes have had a positive impact, or if they are even sustainable.

One could argue that the EU's border management programme BOMCA should be turned into a CSDP mission; at least the part that refers to the Tajik-Afghan border. This would make sense because the CSDP has experience with border management programmes (EUBAM in Moldova) and with border monitoring (EUMM in Georgia). Such a mission, deployed on the Tajik-Afghan border, would be able to prepare for possible negative consequences of NATO troop withdrawal from Afghanistan over the coming years and fit nicely with EU activities in Afghanistan on border control or the CSDP police mission. Also a CSDP border mission might establish greater pressure on Tajik political elites to get serious about reform of border management

and maybe even spur some anti-corruption action. But clearly the EU member states lack the political will and the resources to think ahead and invest in a region far away and of less interest than the EU's Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods. In the event that interest or necessity rises to the level required for the deployment of a CSDP mission, the EU would first need to reach an agreement with Russia; and Moscow is unlikely to be happy to see another CSDP mission be deployed in what it sees as its backyard. Another option for the EU would be to invest in the OSCE and increase its capacity on border control, management and training along the border with Afghanistan. The advantage would be that such an effort would be more inclusive as the U.S., Russia and Tajikistan are all OSCE members. On top of this the OSCE also has extensive experience with border programmes and is already active in this field in Tajikistan through donor coordination efforts and a Border Management Staff College. The OSCE sometimes runs projects that are funded through extra-budgetary means – in most cases paid for by European countries – and the EU remains by far the biggest contributor to the OSCE budget. But this inclusiveness might also limit the OSCE's scope for increased engagement. Member states have not been able to agree on any significant new missions or on the involvement of the OSCE over the last decade, and many participating states have lost enthusiasm for it. The U.S. sees the organisation as a democracy promoter not a security mechanism, while Russia and its partners resist OSCE human dimension programmes, and none take the OSCE serious as a security forum and implementer of new large-scale missions.

### 3.3. Development

With the Strategy, the EU made provisions for doubling its aid to Central Asia between 2007-2013, with a focus on three major objectives: stability and security; the fight against poverty; and regional cooperation between the states of Central Asia themselves and with the EU in the domains of energy, transport, higher education and the environment. In contrast with the EU's earlier programmes, which had a similar approach for all five states, the assistance now increasingly focuses on bilateral relations in order to better target specific problems in each state, with a clear focus on Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as the poorest countries.<sup>44</sup> This

<sup>43</sup> "Press Release: Central Asian Border Security Issues Discussed in Dushanbe", BOMCA, 17 March 2011, <http://www.bomca.eu/en/news/8.html>.

<sup>44</sup> More in J. Boonstra, M. Emerson (rapporteurs), N. Hasanova, M. Laruelle and S. Peyrouse, *Into Eurasia. Monitoring the EU's Central Asia Strategy* (Brussels-Madrid: CEPS-FRIDE, 2010).

dissociation is appreciated locally and seen as proof of growing EU pragmatism. The regional approach, which receives a third of the budget, is reserved for transnational matters including regional EU initiatives on education, water management and rule of law. In addition, EU assistance is often provided in collaboration with other international bodies.

As with security, the EU is not the only European actor active in Central Asia in terms of development. It has coordinated activities with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the European Investment Bank (EIB) and with various member state programmes, including: the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), the German Development Bank (KfW), the UK Department for International Development (DFID), and an increasing number of Finnish programmes. It has also worked with non-EU member Switzerland via the Swiss Cooperation Offices in Central Asia.

Between 1991 and 2006, the Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) distributed more than €1.3 billion among various sectors linked to the promotion of democracy and pluralism, economic modernisation, regional co-operation, energy, and water as well as to struggles against threats such as terrorism, drug trafficking and human trafficking.<sup>45</sup> With the Strategy of 2007, the EU shifted its assistance to focus on poverty reduction and sustainable development. It made public a general Regional Strategy Paper for assistance to Central Asia over the period 2007-2013, and more detailed Indicative Programmes which provide for around €719 million to be spent in Central Asia by 2013.<sup>46</sup>

European aid has been restructured around the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI), which merges various geographical instruments and issues. It is therefore no longer specific to the post-Soviet states as such and includes several institutional tools that the Commission has at its disposal. Within the framework of regional cooperation, the DCI for Central Asia has defined four main objectives: support for energy and transport networks and integration into the world market; improvement on

environmental management, in particular water and forests; border and migration management, as well as the fight against organised crime; and the promotion of educational exchanges. However, two-thirds of EU aid is given to bilateral programmes that are mainly focused on poverty reduction and, to a lesser extent, on good governance and economic reform.<sup>47</sup>

Apart from the DCI, EU assistance is provided through other instruments: The Instrument for Stability (IfS) and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) plus thematic programmes such as Non-State Actors and Local Authorities (NSA-LA) and Food Security Programme. Whereas the global IfS instrument has not been particularly active in Central Asia, with the exception of a few substantial activities in Kyrgyzstan in 2008 and 2010, the EIDHR and NSA-LA have supported civil society projects in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The EIDHR's budget is also used to maintain the practice of organising civil society seminar in Central Asia. These 'open events' are generally connected to the 'behind closed doors' Human Rights Dialogues with all five countries.

Today aid development is centred on Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as low income economies. International donors paid special attention to Kyrgyzstan after the 2010 ethnic violence. In July 2010 international donors pledged \$1.1 billion, of which the EU promised to allocate close to €118 million in extra aid. Additionally Kyrgyzstan will receive €30 million (half in loans and half in grants) macro-financial assistance from the EU, currently subject to the European Parliament's consent. Both countries receive the biggest chunk of DCI funds compared to their neighbours, as well as assistance through the Food Security Program (FSP) and other mechanisms. The EU believes that social and political stability in these two weak states can best be bolstered by poverty reduction, improving living standards and a focus on areas such as rural development. A substantial part of the DCI funding is provided through budget support. This practice saves the EU substantial implementation costs and is meant to foster increased responsibility and good governance in both countries. On the downside, reporting on the use of funds by recipients has so far been weak, and the regimes remain highly corrupt and to different extents non-democratic.

<sup>45</sup> N. Melvin (ed.), *Engaging Central Asia. The European Union's New Strategy in the Heart of Eurasia* (Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies, 2008).

<sup>46</sup> Strategy for assistance to Central Asia 2007-2013 and indicative programme 2007-2010, [http://europa.eu/legislation\\_summaries/external\\_relations/reactions\\_with\\_third\\_countries/eastern\\_europe\\_and\\_central\\_asia/r17106\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/external_relations/reactions_with_third_countries/eastern_europe_and_central_asia/r17106_en.htm).

<sup>47</sup> J. Boonstra and J. Hale, "EU Assistance to Central Asia: back to the drawing board?", EUCAM Working Paper, no. 8, 2010.



The three other states receive assistance through regional programming, and less in the way of bilateral assistance. In Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan the EU feels it can do little about promoting reform and there is concern that support will only bolster the authoritarian regimes. Kazakhstan is likely to be among the countries that will graduate from low income to middle income status. This means it will soon stop receiving DCI bilateral assistance. Instruments that support civil society such as the EIDHR apply to Kazakhstan but barely relate to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan where there are not many independent civil society and human rights organisations to support.

European development aid to Central Asia is a complicated business with many actors involved and even more priorities included. Next to traditional views on aid there seems to be a stronger focus on linking development to security and threats of instability, however European donors have difficulty in spending the few available funds wisely in support of developing stable and well-run states due to the authoritarian character of the region.

## 4. Divergences and overlapping interests

### 4.1. The EU and the Russia-China tandem: The values factor

Russia and China do not share Europe's view on numerous international questions and have criticised Western policies in Central Asia, denouncing interference in internal affairs in the name of human rights and democracy promotion. On the international scene, China is increasingly presenting itself as an alternative to the West (often including Russia). China utilises a narrative in which it presents itself as a developing country in order to criticise the major established powers, and has long refused to get involved in multilateral forums. Russia, on the contrary, critical as it may be of the United States and the EU, is much better integrated at the international level, and part of all major world institutions. In Central Asia these divergences between Moscow's and Beijing's strategies are less visible. Both give support to the Central Asian ruling elites, despite the fact that Russian and Chinese experts voice their concerns about the inability of the governments to reform and modernise. The EU's point of view, which is that long-term state stability is possible only with a certain level of political diversity and realistic alternatives, is not shared by

the two major external actors nor put into practice by Central Asian regimes.

In security thinking the European approach also diverges from that of Russia and China. In contrast to Russia the EU does not give priority to hard security, and does not seek to engage the Central Asian states in new strategic alliances besides having organised two security conferences there in 2009 and 2010. The EU has not put forward any proposals for regional security structures that might compete with the CSTO or the SCO, and believes this issue should be addressed through NATO and the OSCE. The multilateral and soft-security-based approach of the China-led SCO seems closer to European thinking, although in practice the EU is unable to corroborate the SCO's security narrative, which is modelled on the Chinese concept of the "three evils", and which serves to justify the repressive policies conducted in Xinjiang.

Another point of contrast with Russia is the fact that Europe unambiguously emphasises the relationship between long-term security and development. Europe believes that a commitment to economic development and social well-being is a major element of international peace and of internal stability. Russia does not hold a counter-narrative, but neither does it consider its actions in Central Asia in such terms. At first glance therefore, Europe seems to share more similarities with the Chinese discourse, insofar as it recognises that inequalities in wealth and a lack of prospects directly fuel political crises. However, the Chinese definition of development is limited to a socio-economic understanding of the term; the need for political reform is not part of its official preoccupations. In Central Asia, China's "harmonious society" policy provides unfailing support for corrupt and authoritarian regimes, going against its own development-security narrative.

Russia, China and the EU therefore have divergences in the prioritisation of their interests in Central Asia, as well as in their conceptions of the link between security and development.

	Russia	China	EU
Long-term interest	High	High	Low
Focus on security	High	Medium	Medium
Focus on development	Low	High	High

#### 4.2. *The EU and Russia on security and development*

On questions of security, Russia shows greater potential for cooperation with the EU than China. Moscow is interested in cooperation and the Kremlin has indicated time and again their dissatisfaction with being marginalised from European security issues – for example, Medvedev's proposal for a new security architecture for the whole of the continent – and has tabled suggestions for cooperation to be undertaken between the CSTO and NATO, for instance in anti-drug operations in Afghanistan. Moreover, the EU and Russia already share a history with the CSDP mission in Chad (European Union Force Chad/CAR). In the coming years, Russian policy will require the growing involvement of other external actors in Central Asia. The security management costs for the region are high and Moscow no longer has the means to go it alone. Its non-intervention during the Osh events in June 2010 confirmed Russia's reluctance for direct military involvement.

The fight against drug trafficking has been at the heart of Moscow's security concerns ever since the director of the Federal Agency against narco-traffic, Viktor Ivanov, made it his warhorse. The traffic that reaches Europe by and large passes through Russia and then the Baltic area, and so any combat strategies need to extend from the Afghan-Central Asian region to Europe's eastern border. During a conference at the European Parliament Viktor Ivanov proposed that the EU establish a joint agency to combat drug production and trafficking in Afghanistan.<sup>48</sup> The Central Asia Regional Information and Coordination Centre (CARICC), which already includes the five states of Central Asia as well as Azerbaijan and Russia, could become a platform for the exchange of intelligence with European bodies, or indeed join together, in one form or another, with the Central Asia Border Security Initiative (CABSI). Issues that could be discussed include sharing intelligence information and joint drug-seizure operations, potentially also partial coordination between the different agencies training Central Asian border guards: CSTO, BOMCA (UNDP/EU) and the OSCE. The EU could also develop cooperation with the "anti-drug quartet" of Russia, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan. UNODC, in which Moscow is becoming more and more involved, plans, for instance, to train Central Asian and Afghan officers jointly in Moscow and Ankara.

But there are also arguments against increased cooperation with Russia. First, the high level of corruption and inefficiency of Russian law enforcement agencies in fighting drug trafficking may call into question European capabilities. Second, the Russian stance on the fight against drug-trafficking is controversial. In June 2011, the Russian Duma declared "total war" on drugs and is in the process of preparing new, stricter laws that would force addicts into treatment or jail and would treat dealers "like serial killers".<sup>49</sup> It remains to be seen whether this forceful solution is the right one, and whether the government will be capable of enforcing it and of offering addicts a real alternative. Third, Moscow remains quiet about the involvement of top Central Asian officials in drug trafficking. However, on this issue the EU is paradoxically also concerned about not harming its relations with the local governments.

Fourth, Russia's resistance to the Central Asian Counter-narcotics Initiative (CACI) launched in June 2011 by the U.S. Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs could also be problematic for Europe.<sup>50</sup> Moscow has clearly expressed its opposition to the State Department's initiative to establish a network of anti-drug centres in each country of Central Asia, which it views, as does China, as a way to maintain a concealed American paramilitary presence.<sup>51</sup> Here once again, the room for common strategies seems limited.

Other areas for cooperation with Russia can also be envisaged including education and migration. The EU does not have the capabilities to meet the demands of Central Asian students to come to Europe. However, partnerships between Russian and Central Asian universities on the one hand, and between Russian and European universities on the other, can serve to make specific Russian universities mediators between the EU and Central Asia. Central Asian students can be sent to Russia at a lower cost and can undertake better quality studies there than

<sup>48</sup> "Russia, EU need to set up joint anti-drug agency", Voice of Russia, 29 June 2011, <http://english.ruvr.ru/2011/06/29/52541692.html>.

<sup>49</sup> T. Parfitt, "Russia defies growing consensus with declaration of 'total war on drugs'", The Guardian, 8 June 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jun/08/russia-total-war-on-drugs>.

<sup>50</sup> R. Solash, "U.S. Promotes New Plan To Battle Drug Trade In Afghanistan, Central Asia", Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 19 July 2011, [http://www.rferl.org/content/us\\_promotes\\_new\\_plan\\_to\\_battle\\_drug\\_trade\\_in\\_afghanistan\\_central\\_asia\\_and\\_russia/24270127.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/us_promotes_new_plan_to_battle_drug_trade_in_afghanistan_central_asia_and_russia/24270127.html) (accessed 8 December 2011).

<sup>51</sup> R. Weitz, "Moscow, Central Asia perceive Afghan drugs as security threat", The Central Asia and Caucasus Analyst, 30 November 2011, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5674> (accessed 8 December 2011).



in their countries of origin. As far as work migration flows are concerned, Russia is simultaneously a destination and a steppingstone on the way to Europe. Management policies concerning border flows and the integration of migrants and their families present a fundamental challenge for Europe as well as for Russia. Common strategies are particularly necessary as Moscow wants visas for Schengen countries to be abolished, but without cancelling its free-circulation agreements with the majority of the CIS countries. In this area, which touches on border security but equally on larger social stakes, Russian and European approaches are probably complementary.

#### *4.3. The EU and China on security and development*

Possible cooperation with China appears more limited in the security sector, but some room for collaboration could probably be developed in the fight against drug-trafficking. China is in fact becoming increasingly vulnerable to this scourge and shows a bit more interest in coordination, for instance through CARRIC. One high-level EU official suggested one area of possible partnership, the chemical precursors required for the transformation of opium into heroin, which in part come from the chemical industries of Lanzhou, over which Beijing could increase its control.

Development aid offers more room for cooperation between China and the EU. The Chinese authorities are increasingly active in fostering rural development in Central Asia, in particular in the form of improving agricultural techniques and training agricultural technicians. EU countries have knowledge on improving glass-house production and irrigation networks, as well as on developing techniques that are more respectful of the environment, especially of water resources, and also on the revival of herding. These fields are similar to those in which the Chinese are also seeking to acquire European know-how. Even if the Chinese credit institutes give priority to a non-externalised system of financing (the key conditions for obtaining a loan is the participation of Chinese companies), some projects favouring partnerships between Chinese and European companies might be considered. Bringing Chinese funds and European technical knowledge together in development efforts in Central Asia could be pursued.

Beijing has also implemented multiple partnerships between Chinese and Central Asian universities in key sectors such as hydrocarbons (for example, it is host to hundreds of Central Asian students

at the China University of Petroleum and the Xi'an University of Oil and Gas) and agricultural training (it has partnership agreements with the Agrarian University of Almaty and that of Urumqi, as well as with Uzbekistan). Here again, joint strategies, or at least complementary ones, concerning the training of students in technical subjects might be put forward.

### *5. Room for cooperation?*

Can the “hesitant vicar”, the “reluctant soldier” and the “silent merchant” cooperate in Central Asia? Both China and Russia are “total” actors in Central Asia, not in the sense that they shape the local realities on the ground, but that they have the capacity to engage on all fronts. Europe’s own capacity is more limited. The lack of territorial contiguity and inability to concurrently influence the political, security, economic and cultural realms limit its impact. Moreover, the current European crisis drastically weakens its legitimacy abroad and signals that the EU will likely have to limit itself to more modest goals, and leave more room for manoeuvre to other regional actors. Its influence in the international arena will be constrained as long as the debt crisis persists and internal political crises remain unresolved.

This does not mean that China and Russia are without restraint. As spectacular as China’s rise in power has been over the last ten years, it may suffer partial setbacks due to domestic difficulties facing the authorities: growing social unrest; instability in Xinjiang and Tibet; the slowdown of current economic dynamics; and the Communist party’s legitimacy could be questioned if growth stumbles. All these factors may work to alter the balance in the years to come and limit China’s leverage and interest in Central Asia.

For Russia, even if territorial contiguity and cultural legacies are in its favour, its demographic decline will be an impediment to gaining any new influence. A change in the established political regime at the Kremlin might contribute to a reshaping of Russia-Central Asia relations, as well as to the development of new space for cooperation with Western countries.

How can Europe strengthen its security-development approach towards Central Asia in light of the possibilities and restrictions involved in cooperation and coordination with Russia and China?

The EU should increasingly emphasise how it is 'different' to Russia and China both as an actor and in the approach EU institutions and member states take. The lack of EU visibility in Central Asia is a fact and cannot be remedied by explaining the complexities of European structures and its relationship to member states' activities. Instead, highlighting the uniqueness of the EU as a broad and diverse actor should be used as a strength. There is no sense in portraying Europe as a uniform state actor such as China and Russia and thus attempting to compete with them for influence on their terms.

The EU is also different from other actors (except the U.S.) due to the stress it places on democratic and human rights values. Whereas the promotion of values is often seen as a burden and especially difficult to pursue due to the minimal leverage the EU has in Central Asia, it can also be considered a strength. Central Asian regimes are interested in having good links with Europe beyond the growing trade relationship. Europe and its focus on values and reform is an alternative to the more direct and substantial influence of Russia and China. Recognition of Central Asian regimes by European partners affects their stance towards Moscow and Beijing. And currently the EU is in no position to become an effective geopolitical energy and security actor in Central Asia by merely shifting its focus away from values.

Because the larger part of European interests and activities in Central Asia fall under the umbrella of the security-development nexus, especially in poor and instable states such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, it would make sense for the EU to develop a clearer narrative on how it sees the links between security and development, which is currently defining its "brand" in the region. To do so the EU needs to make tough choices on which areas to focus development funding in Central Asia in order to be more effective, have a greater impact and be more visible. The axes defined in the current Strategy are too broad and diverse to have a substantial impact given the limited financial and human means allocated to achieving these priorities. The current review process of the Strategy that is underway and expected to be concluded by June will hopefully outline what the EU plans to achieve over the coming years in the field of development aid and cooperation on security matters.

As there is little room for concrete cooperation with Russia and even less so with China, the EU could probably forge tighter cooperation and coordina-

tion with the U.S. This should go well beyond the limited OSCE and NATO activities in the region. Both western partners are well advised to streamline their approaches to the region – the EU's Strategy implementation and the U.S.'s New Silk Road plans – in order to guarantee that both powers remain relevant. This is especially important in light of the forthcoming military withdrawal from Afghanistan. The U.S.'s focus on hard security and the EU's soft security approach have the potential to be complementary, and there is room for greater coordination in their development aid strategies.

But preparations for a post-2014 Afghanistan and the need for cooperation between all the regional actors involved in Afghanistan also offers the EU a window of opportunity to establish some cooperation with Russia, the Central Asian governments, and maybe even China and other actors such as India. For this to happen Brussels will need to outline how it sees the relationship between Central Asia and Afghanistan, and how it foresees it will adapt some of its own programmes that currently focus solely on Central Asia to include Afghanistan or vice versa.

Increased cooperation is unlikely to be between the EU and NATO on the one side and the SCO and CSTO on the other. The EU has informal meetings with SCO representatives but no official cooperation or partnership, while NATO does not have official links with either and prefers to work with Russia through the NATO Russia Council. Even though the CSTO is primarily seen as a Russian outfit and the EU and NATO prefer working with its partners on a bilateral basis, the value gap between the EU and NATO and the SCO, with its emphasis on the three evils of terrorism, separatism and religious extremism, is too wide. The CSTO and SCO have little to offer in concrete terms, and in relation to Central Asia and troop withdrawal from Afghanistan it makes more sense for the EU to seek avenues of cooperation with China and Russia instead of forging institutional ties with the CSTO and SCO.

Border control and management is a field where the EU could cooperate with Russia. In the event that the EU should choose to step up border management programmes beyond BOMCA, for instance by deploying a CSDP mission or investing substantially in an OSCE role on the Tajik-Afghan border, it will need to come to some kind of arrangement with Moscow. Joint activities in combating drug-trafficking, for example by institutionalising coopera-

tion on information exchange between CARICC and CABS, would be very welcome. Higher education and the social implications of labour migration are two other possible areas where the EU and Russia could join forces in some way.

With China there is less scope for joint action in Central Asia. The EU could propose some joint initiatives on rural development, such as complementary policies for training agricultural technical professionals or combining initiatives on poverty alleviation and the development of remote regions. Cooperation with China could be based on a trade-off between European technical knowledge and Chinese funds and investments to the benefit of Central Asians. Of course the EU and European companies would need to assess on a case-by-case basis whether it is transferring knowledge to China alone with little gain for either themselves or Central Asians.

### *Concluding remarks*

None of the three external actors has a genuine desire to dominate in Central Asia. Geopolitical competition in the region seems more virtual and symbolic than real. The European Union argues for democratic reform and human rights in the Central Asian states, an approach that is rejected by both Moscow and Beijing. The EU advances in this area are perceived by Russia and China as interference in Central Asian domestic affairs or as strategies to contain their own influence. In the security realm, the EU does not offer comprehensive regional security cooperation initiatives besides ad hoc security conferences. Its strength lies in development programmes that often have soft-security components. Meanwhile Brussels prefers to work through NATO and the OSCE which can be viewed as competitors to the CSTO and the SCO. However, there are also potential areas for cooperation, for instance in the development sector, in which the different priorities of the external actors are complementary: food security and humanitarian aid for Russia; Chinese infrastructure projects; and the EU's focus on poverty reduction.

But beyond the contradictory or complementary nature of these external actors, Russia's and China's primary interest is to protect their domestic situation from any destabilisation coming from Central Asia. Their economic strategies are proactive (Russia's new integration policies, China's investments in infrastructure), but their security policies

are mostly reactive and defensive. The effectiveness and cohesion of Russian and European leverage in the region is also impeded by the diversity of actors shaping their respective policies. Their capacity to develop active plans for cooperation are therefore limited by the defensive nature of their involvement in the region, a certain level of bureaucratic inertia and the lack of a unified vision for their missions in Central Asia. It seems difficult to believe that these issues can be fundamentally altered or improved in the coming years.

Furthermore, elements not related to Central Asia per se directly influence the actions of each external actor in the region: the European debt crisis limits allocations and means, while U.S.-Russia tensions over missile-defence or over the Syrian crisis may contribute to Moscow's rejection of Western-based projects in Central Asia. Meanwhile the competition patterns between external actors are encouraged by the local governments as they enable them to enforce multi-vector strategies by pitting these actors against each other. This results in multiple uncoordinated initiatives over which they can exert a greater control. The established elites will therefore probably regard proposals for joint strategies with suspicion.

Moreover, do Europe, Russia and China want to cooperate together in the interests of the Central Asians or only to avoid patterns of competition arising amongst themselves? Concerns over competition largely arise from the energy reserves the region has to offer. None of the external actors are eager to take on direct security involvement unless its own vital territorial interests are at stake. Russia remains the *primus inter pares* in security affairs in Central Asia and prefers other parties to stay out of the region, especially the U.S., but there is little competition for the hearts and minds of Central Asians. Meanwhile there is little contact or rivalry so far between Western regional security organisations and the CSTO and SCO. This could change when NATO's withdrawal from Afghanistan takes shape.

In a region where because of energy and security interests external actors take little interest in genuine development for the sake of the people and the countries involved, and where local regimes remain wary of reform, the EU can do little in the short term. Europe should continue to focus on its own values and approaches, even if these do seem in contradiction to those of other countries, and should continue to seek positive developments on the ground.



Established in 2008 as a project seeking to monitor the implementation of the EU Strategy for Central Asia, EUCAM has grown into a knowledge hub on broader Europe-Central Asia relations. Specifically, the project aims to:

- Scrutinise European policies towards Central Asia, paying specific attention to security, development and the promotion of democratic values within the context of Central Asia's position in world politics;
- Enhance knowledge of Europe's engagement with Central Asia through top-quality research and by raising awareness among European policy-makers and civil society representatives, as well as discuss European policies among Central Asian communities;
- Expand the network of experts and institutions from European countries and Central Asian states and provide a forum to debate on European-Central Asian relations.

Currently, the broader programme is coordinated by FRIDE, in partnership with the Karelian Institute and CEPS, with the support of the Open Society Foundations and the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The main outputs of the programme are a series of policy briefs and comprehensive reports on key issues facing the Europe-Central Asia relationship.

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FRIDE is a European think tank for global action, based in Madrid, which provides fresh and innovative thinking on Europe's role on the international stage. Our mission is to inform policy and practice in order to ensure that the EU plays a more effective role in supporting multilateralism, democratic values, security and sustainable development. We seek to engage in rigorous analysis of the difficult debates on democracy and human rights, Europe and the international system, conflict and security, and development cooperation. FRIDE benefits from political independence and the diversity of views and intellectual background of its international team.



Founded in 1971, the Karelian Institute is a unit of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Business Studies of the University of Eastern Finland. It engages in basic and applied multi-disciplinary research, supports the supervision of postgraduate studies and researcher training, and participates in teaching. It focuses mainly on three thematic priorities: Borders and Russia; Ethnicity and Culture; and Regional and Rural Studies.



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