

# EUCAM WATCH

EU-CENTRAL ASIA MONITORING

## *From Central Asia into EurAsia*

Having recently spent some time in all five states of Central Asia on the EUCAM project monitoring the EU's strategy there I am persuaded that the regional dimension to this strategy needs reconsideration. The EU wishes to foster enlightened regional cooperation among the five states and allocates 30% of its budget to regional projects. The EU comes to the region with a presumption that regional cooperation leading maybe even to regional integration is a good idea. But has the regional dimension to the EU Central Asia strategy been well conceived for the 21<sup>st</sup> century when the map of Eurasia is being radically redrawn, after the 20<sup>th</sup> century when Central Asia was a region integrated into the Soviet Union, sealed off from the rest of the world?

The region has a modest population size of only 61 million people, so regional economic integration between these states does not have much potential if it is not part of a wider economic openness. There are some activities which have intrinsically a cross-border regional cooperative dimension, such as border management itself, transport corridors and above all water management. However all these three items have vital cross-border dimensions linking to neighbours external to the region, and having trans-continental dimensions. Border management concerns above all the trafficking of drugs where Central Asia is just a transit passage between Afghanistan and Europe, Russia and China. Transport corridors are essentially a trans-continental affair, with links from West China to West Europe being developed as well as North-South links down to South Asia. The water issue also, until now viewed as the quintessential Central Asia question with the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers flowing down to the Aral Sea, sees a possible South Asian hydro-electricity link option that might unlock the way for intra-Central Asian cooperation (South Asia has demand for summer electricity, which is when downstream Central Asia wants the water for agriculture).

Look at the current political priorities of the states of the region. Kazakhstan justifiably views its economic modernization ambitions as being in a different league compared to its regional neighbours, and looks West to Europe with its "Path to Europe" programme as a strategic

move to avoid excessive dependence on Russia and China. Turkmenistan, while remaining a completely closed and repressive political system, nonetheless frames its development priority in terms of opening its gas pipeline connections towards all points of the compass, North to Russia, East to China, South to Iran, and potentially East across the Caspian Sea to Europe, if the EU were to make a credible and major offer. Kyrgyzstan's economy, which is desperately poor, is now substantially dependent on a transit trade function for Chinese goods to flow through to Kazakhstan and Russia. Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are concerned to disenclave themselves to the South with transport corridors through Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan to the Gulf and Indian Ocean, and they are now inescapably affected by the Afghanistan drama, with their ethnic brothers forming the most important minorities there.

All these wider regional or trans-continental issues that involve Central Asia are also of concern to the EU, but in a much wider context than just Central Asia. In fact there is a cluster of essentially EurAsian issues here, more than just Central Asian issues, with important long-term implications for the EU's relations with Russia, China, and India, as well the short-term priority of finding some kind of political resolution of the Afghanistan imbroglio. Central Asia features necessarily in these issues, but intra-Central Asian regional cooperation is rarely of the essence. Important therefore would be a concept for Central Asia of an 'extroverted' regionalism, which disenclaves this landlocked territory and opens up different external options for each state. For both the EU and the states of the region an extroverted regionalism is more interesting than the introverted regionalism that has so far been the main idea in the EU's Central Asia strategy.

Going even wider, the EU foreign policy strategy has now to focus on the issues of the newly emerging multi-polar world, with China, India, Russia, and the EU itself as newly emerging or re-emerging major powers on the Eurasian land mass. This is the No 1 strategic challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to find ways to secure some kind of normative cooperative order across a host of economic, political and security issues, based on some mix of multilateralism and cooperative



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arrangements between the major players. However we can come back again to Central Asia, which is unique as a landlocked region sitting precisely in the middle between the big four of EurAsia - Russia to its North, China to the East, India to the South and the EU to the West. Central Asia is going to be involved in many of these issues, and centrally in the geographic sense, but obviously not with regard to the main weight of the issues.

The conclusion that seems due is that the EU should make an addition to its conception of the multiple regional dimensions of its foreign policy, which already has the Eastern Partnership, Northern Dimension, Union for the Mediterranean, Black Sea Synergy and now the Central Asia strategy. Each of these initiatives has its rationale, although some may fail to get real momentum. But what is missing now is an overarching EurAsian dimension, looking for the ways to devise major cooperative ventures for the multi-polar world, and in particular for the Eurasian landmass. This would be, *inter alia*, a constructive move towards Russia after the awkward period in which the launch of the Eastern Partnership has been seen as deepening the segmentation of the post-Soviet space in EU policies. But back to Central Asia: the introverted regionalism of the Central Asian strategy might be allocated a more modest role, with the major issues finding their place in an extroverted regionalism that could be framed within a EurAsian strategy.

*Editorial by Michael Emerson,  
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## EUCAM News

### Crossing half of the world

On 21 September, 2009 EUCAM embarked on its longest, most extensive and intensive mission to Central Asia.

It lasted 24 days during which we:

- covered more than 20,000 km (equator's length is 40,000 km)
- among which 1,750 km by car
- visited all 5 Central Asian states
- traveled through 4 time zones
- held more than 90 interviews
- collected 60 pages of records

We have seen the Nurek dam in Tajikistan, the highest in the world (315 m) and which is full of water; visited the Toktogul reservoir, which is less than full and may promise another hard winter for Kyrgyzstan; glanced at the Turkmen desert; passed the famous 'Manas' airbase near Bishkek which supports coalition troops in Afghanistan; traveled through the Tian'-Shan' mountain chain; encountered semi-nomadic families bringing their cattle down from zhailoos for winter and; contemplated the sunset over the ancient domes of Samarkand. We talked to diplomats and taxi drivers, border guards and bankers, shepherds and managers. Out of what they told us we have compiled these 'Stories of Central Asia'.

### Hydroelectric travels

*By Michael Emerson, Associate Senior Research Fellow, Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels*

Everybody concerned with Central Asia knows that water is at the heart of the region's most acute tensions between the mountain republics rich in hydroelectric potential, Tajikistan

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and Kyrgyzstan, which want to generate more power during the winter to avoid "freezing to death", and the downstream states, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, which want more water to irrigate their crops in the summer to avoid "starvation". It's as basic as that. In the worst case scenario it could come to war.

But there are potential solutions to this apparent conflict of interest. A first option is to build more dams and hydro-power plants in cascade formation, so that electricity can be generated in the winter in the upper dams with the water being held in the reservoirs of the downstream dams until the summer. A second option could be to sell electricity, transported along high voltage power lines, to South Asia in the summer, where they need it to keep cool with their air conditioning systems, and so earn good money in the upstream states while releasing water in the summer. This would keep the downstream states happy.

The theory here is so compelling that before going any further I felt it highly desirable to have a good look at these hydroelectric installations high up in the mountains of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, to get a better understanding of the basic facts. So, in the course of our mission in September and October to all five states of the region, we managed to fit in a couple of weekends to have a look; we being our Tajik-Uzbek colleague Nafisa Hasanova and myself for the trip into the highlands of Tajikistan, and our Kazakh colleague Aigerim Duimagambetova and myself for the trip into the highlands of Kyrgyzstan.

The Tajik expedition took us to the cascade of dams along the Vaksh river basin, which flows down into the Amu Darya River, marking the Tajik-Afghanistan border. There are six dams in this cascade, the biggest of which is at Nurek, which at 315 metres is the tallest dam in the world, and holds back a huge reservoir. But next upstream is the Rogun dam project, which if completed would be even taller at 350 metres, and generate up to 4,000 megawatts, equivalent to about four nuclear power stations. The Rogun dam was planned and started in Soviet times, but has been stalled in recent years because of the lack of a few billion dollars

of funding and political opposition from Uzbekistan, which claims it would rob them of water. The Russian aluminium oligarch Oleg Deripaska sought to buy the site in 2008, but his negotiations with the Tajiks broke down, and now the project moves ahead at a slow pace with only Tajik funding. The site is nonetheless impressive with several thousand employees and a hundred or so heavy trucks and pieces of earth-moving equipment working away. The valley sides are very steep and the reservoir that would be created will not displace much arable land or many people. Still, it is supposed that it will take another 15 years to complete at this pace, unless there is an international agreement permitting the necessary funding to flow faster. The Tajik government says it would welcome an international consortium of investors to do this, which would be a good idea if, for example, the World Bank and the EBRD could be involved to assure correct financial management.

We had a spot of trouble at Rogun when our car broke down. After a couple of hours of unconvincing efforts to fix the motor with pieces of wire and a hammer, we gave up and instead found an enterprising young man with an elderly Mercedes, which was happily running with over 300,000 kilometres on the clock. Another curiosity of motoring in rural Tajikistan is that the petrol stations have no pumps. At first this was rather disconcerting, but we soon observed the system in action: a plastic dustbin held a reserve of petrol, a plastic bucket was lowered into the dustbin, and a plastic funnel was found to help pour the petrol into the car, and so we went off re-fuelled, without smoking ...

At the Nurek dam, we had the problem of not having had the time to obtain a permit to visit it from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, we discovered that our enterprising driver had a cousin who worked at the dam, and he was found to join the party and help us through the checkpoints. For those concerned about the level of water in the reservoir we can report that it was completely full after recent heavy rains. Downstream from Nurek lies the Sangtuda II, which had recently been completed as an investment of the Russian RAO EES energy conglomerate.

And so on to Kyrgyzstan (via Samarkand, Tashkent, Ashkabad, Istanbul, Astana and Almaty). There the target was the giant Toktogul reservoir and the Kambarata dam projects. This was a magnificent drive, first about 100 km along a flat plain from Bishkek, bordering impressive mountains to the south. Then comes the moment to attack the mountains, and rise up to a 3500 metre pass, already covered in snow, and then down the other side into highland grassy steppe territory. This is the time of year for major seasonal movements of herds of sheep, goats, cattle and horses to move down to lower lands for the winter, driven by Kyrgyz cowboys on horseback. This is real nomadic, Mongolia-style territory. We stopped to talk to a family outside their 'yurt' (traditional nomadic tent). Slightly undermining the romantic image of the nomad, the owner stressed that this was his secondary residence, his real house was down in the valley. The steppe grasslands at this point were a corridor of flat land enclosed on all sides by snow-capped mountains rising up to 4,000 metres. Somewhere we had to find a way through.

Eventually we did find another high mountain pass, and then from the top saw the Toktogul lake down below, held up by the dam at Kara Kol. This time the reservoir was far from full, maybe about 30 metres below the high water mark. However this was apparently a substantial recovery from the nearly disastrously low levels reached in 2008. At the upstream end of Toktogul lies the site of the Karambata II dam project. This is well underway, and we heard that in November or December the engineers will dynamite

the mountain sides so as to create a huge fill of rock and earth to constitute the bulk of the dam.

This is the project that received the pledge of over a billion \$ from Moscow in mid-2009, followed a few days later by the Kyrgyz government's decision to order the US forces out of their Manas airport base near Bishkek, which is currently used for supplying the troops in Afghanistan. But then after a while there were negotiations and the US agreed to pay a much higher rent for the base, and stay. All things considered not a bad deal for the Kyrgyz budget.

There is also a Kambarata I project, further upstream from Kambarata II, but (confusingly), no. 1 is only a paper plan, whereas no. 2 is well underway. The same cascade logic is being developed here for the Narin river basin, however, which runs into the Syr Darya River, and which with the Amu Darya to the south together they have been the main supplies of water to the Aral Sea.

Unfortunately we had no time to visit the Aral Sea, except to observe it from 10,000 feet up on a flight from Ashkabad to Istanbul. The view there is that there has been some progress in filling up the Kazakh part of the sea again, but not the Uzbek part. There is a slightly encouraging story now coming out of the International Fund for the Aral Sea (IFAS), which is the international organisation of the five states mandated to work on all aspects of the regional water dossier, from the mountains of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan all the way down to the Aral Sea. The IFAS has so far been a notoriously dysfunctional body, with a nomadic existence – having to move its secretariat from one capital city to the next each three years. This January it moved to Almaty, and has a newly appointed director general, who is a highly respected man of water science and engineering. If the water problems of this region are to see any major progress, the IFAS will have to be at the heart of mediating the politico-technical agreements. We were comforted in not going to the Aral Sea upon hearing the local joke that if every researcher, consultant and international observer visiting the Aral Sea over the last twenty years had each brought with them a bucket of water the would problem would be resolved.

### *Stories from the region ...*

#### *Regionalism and a long quest for regional identity in Central Asia*

*By Iqbol Qoraboyev, PhD Student, University of Toulouse, France*

The question of ordering and 'governing the globe' in a way to meet the challenges faced by humankind is central to contemporary discussions of international relations. A vision of world order based on regions has a prominent place in this debate. Stemming from the debate on regional integration initiatives in Europe and other parts of the world since the 1950s, this vision is seen as an alternative to world order based on power polarity, and as a political vision carrying responses to globalisation challenges. For studying the "emerging regional architecture of world politics", scholars call for a comprehensive approach that should include normative and constructivist factors alongside considerations of economic or geopolitical motivations.

Central Asia is not an unexplored space for regional studies. Since the early 1990s, when its leaders announced their intention to create a Central Asian regional integration institution, outside the frameworks including Russia or China, there have been numerous studies on Central Asian regionalism. However, after a decade of political and academic discussions, the much expected Central Asian regional integration institution failed to

take-off and subsequently disappeared. This led some observers of Central Asian regionalism to conclude that there was Central Asian “regional non-cooperation pathology”. Combined with its description as “a region of almost triumphant authoritarianism”, Central Asia thus seems to be a regional space with a slim chance of becoming an integral regional cluster of global governance.

Following this conclusion, subsequent studies increasingly focused on external actors’ involvement in Central Asia’s regional space. These analyses usually turn around identifying the interests of external actors, and notably how Russia, China and the US shape their interests in their bilateral and regional policies in Central Asia. An important part of this literature is devoted to seeing how the interests of these external actors relate to each other, and what impact these relationships between the interests of external actors would have on the evolution of Central Asian region. As the dominant analytical framework is a geopolitical one based, explicitly or implicitly, on zero-sum game logic, most of the short- and middle-term scenarios present the region as an international space harbouring mostly conflict and competition potential.

Two factors usually receive less attention in these analyses. The first one stems from the increasing focus on ‘national interests’, which are deemed to be exclusive and incompatible. This leads to the eschewing of questions of normative or values-based considerations from the literature. In this interests-driven world, the inclusion of ‘rule of law’ and ‘human rights’ issues in the EU’s Central Asia strategy is met with skepticism in the region, and is seen by most as secondary and more of a decorative nature compared to European energy interests in the region. The second aspect is the lack of due attention to possible endogenous developments on Central Asian regionalism. As already noted, Central Asia is expected to be shaped mostly by outside forces. Local governments’ interests in and discourse about regionalism is mostly explained in terms of regime survival objectives. However, the world’s experience of regionalism shows that regions are constructed more from within than from without. Moreover, substantial processes of region-building take place in society in the form of normative debate and discussions concerning the values and identities that should be upheld and consolidated by regionalism initiatives.

Hence, there is a need for those involved in the regionalism debate in Central Asia to enlarge the focus beyond that of the official institutions and external actors, and pay more attention to ongoing debates in the region concerning regional identities and values. These debates should not be limited either to official institutions and regimes or to the post-Soviet period alone. Rather, they are part of a centuries-old quest for regional identity pursued by scholars and intellectuals of the region, marked by such milestones as the emergence of the Jadid movement.<sup>1</sup> Among recent debates it is worth mentioning the one between Central Asianists vs Eurasianists, or the debate on Tajikistan and regional integration in Central Asia. All these debates go beyond geopolitical factors and official circles, and focus on the nature of Central Asia as a region,

<sup>1</sup> The Jadids, which means «new» in Arabic, were Muslim reformers originally from within the Russian Empire in the late 19th century (1880s). Although their beliefs were manifold, one of their principle aims was the introduction of the “new method” of teaching in the *maktabs* (schools) of the Empire. The movement later spread to Central Asia, in particular to the cities of Bukhara and Kokand.

The presence of a book by a Jadid author in the Friedrich Ebert Foundation’s website on Central Asia (<http://www.fes.uz/>) alongside the books of contemporary authors on Central Asian is representative of the links between the current regionalism debate and the earlier debate on Central Asian evolution dating back centuries.

the question of whether or not individual countries belong to the region, and the normative values and considerations that should prevail in the region.

Thus the debate about regionalism in Central Asia is not and should not be limited to agency of external actors or the perspectives of current regimes alone. The question of regionalism encompasses wider considerations, including the perspectives of the region’s intellectuals and scholars. It is situated within the age-old quest for regional identity in Central Asia. Better coverage and understanding of this quest for identity could help introduce normative and ideational questions to the regionalism debate in Central Asia. This could lead in turn to a softening of the predominantly geopolitical approach based on the discourse of conflict of interests and balance of powers in the region.

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## Studying Europe in Central Asia: the case of Kyrgyzstan

By Maxim Ryabkov, Director, OSCE Academy, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

As the European Union sets out an ambitious agenda in its Central Asian strategy, its support for education may be used to raise awareness of Europe and help states create national cadres capable of sustaining the desired dialogue. Moreover, for the European donor community, promotion of European studies in Central Asia and Kyrgyzstan in particular can be seen as a politically neutral endeavor, which can be justified independently of the trade-offs between security and human rights.

On the other hand, Kyrgyzstan is not very hungry for knowledge about Europe, and does not identify with European images, ideas or institutions. Obstacles are considerable, given institutional inertia, the lack of cultural and ideological affinities and the poor state of higher education in the region.

A number of universities in Kyrgyzstan have already introduced European studies into their curricula. These initiatives take the form of either a European studies department or courses focusing on the European Union, together with more traditional ones on European culture and languages. While it is far too early to take stock, some preliminary impressions can already be discussed. For us it is not so important here to argue either for or against donor support for European studies in Kyrgyzstan, but to look at this initiative as a, first of all, *educational* project which requires specific organisational format.

## Kyrgyzstan and European studies: general considerations

The chief danger for any educational programme is that it fails to attract good students and give them knowledge that will translate into meaningful career opportunities. The two dangers are connected: lack of expected career opportunities will lead to failure to attract good students.

Central Asian graduates will not join the European civil service. They will not in all probability serve on the boards of European companies and universities. They will however work for international organizations, local universities, civic sectors and national administrations and in these capacities will interact with European partners, but will hardly have careers focused exclusively on Europe.

These factors are reinforced by a geographical distance, which translates into historical, cultural and other differences. European Studies in any of the Central Asian Republics will address the development of a distant region, whose institutions, culture, sociopolitical and economic practices will in the foreseeable future continue to differ radically from the Kyrgyz realities. Teaching about Europe is teaching about a very different social reality, contact with which is first cultural and educational and only later physical and professional. As Central Asia is going to be slow in adopting European models, mere knowledge of the latter without additional specialisation will hardly be in demand. This consideration appears to be important for decisions to invest in full-fledged European studies departments.

Furthermore, the graduate employment situation in Kyrgyzstan is marked by considerable confusion. While there is an oversupply of low-quality higher education, professional career paths are not yet established, and it is simply impossible for students to predict what specific skills may be required by the market when they leave school. Lack of meritocracy culminates in an unfair and ultimately inefficient distribution of positions of responsibility. All this makes school-to-work transition rather difficult.

### *Policy implications*

These considerations lead to a few policy recommendations. First of all it seems advisable to make European studies part of a curriculum, which would simultaneously foster Central Asian expertise and knowledge of European affairs. The synergy resulting from studying different regions will enhance not only the employability of the graduate, but also students' intellectual confidence in dealing with issues of their countries. Secondly, European studies could be made available to students of various departments, in order to cast the net wide and reach the best students, while minimising the risks of administrative malfunction. Thirdly, professional socialisation usually benefits from meaningful internships, possibly at European institutions.

As with all international development aid, there is a danger of moral hazard, when the recipient of assistance welcomes the aid without reciprocating with genuine involvement in the realisation of the plans of the donor. One way to avoid moral hazard is to aim at long-term relations between Central Asian and European educational establishments, conditional on satisfactory performance and aimed at creating local capacity in teaching European studies. Such long-term ties can also include joint research, conferences and contributions to regional dialogue.

Aside from degree programmes, short-term endeavours, including those addressing working professionals, can be a good testing ground as well as a useful exercise on their own. Aiming at raising the awareness of European institutions and policies among journalists, civil servants, NGO activists and local staff of international organisations, such short-term, non-degree courses

and trainings will use a flexible format with outcomes that are far easier to measure than those of degree programmes.

In closing, probably none of the formats should be excluded from consideration at this point. To continue this discussion, an in-depth comprehensive study of the experience of international efforts to reform higher education in Kyrgyzstan is in order, to allow us to benefit from the considerable experience already accumulated.

### *The growing illiteracy in Central Asia: A challenge for the EU*

*By Marlene Laruelle, Senior Research Fellow at the Central Asia & Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Programme, Institute for Security and Development Policy, Stockholm*

The Central Asian states have declared their interest in engaging in international cooperation in the higher education sector, but less so for primary and secondary education levels, which are considered to be the sole preserve of national sovereignty. The governments are particularly sensitive about the writing of national history, school curricula, and the language used for teaching, and do not desire any western interference in a highly ideological domain. Only Japan and Turkey have managed to shape some of their education programmes: Japan mainly in the reconstruction of buildings, Turkey thanks to the Turkish-Central Asian schools. Among the European countries, Germany in Tajikistan and Finland in Turkmenistan try to participate, at a very localised level, in the maintaining of the school system. But these exceptions are not sufficient to make up for the growing deficiencies.

Exact figures are difficult to obtain because the governments have blocked the dissemination of information. Officially, the Central Asian states continue to have the same literacy rates as under the Soviet regime, which is about 99 % of the population. The reality of the situation is altogether different. Figures provided by UNICEF reveal a drop of between 10% and 15% in enrolment in primary schools in over little more than a decade: the level of enrolment is reported to be 84% in Tajikistan, 88% in Uzbekistan, and in Kyrgyzstan 89%. This statistic is also contested since it is based on official figures provided by local administrations and does not take into account everyday practice, nor the number of hours actually provided.

The main problems are concentrated in the rural areas. Numerous factors prevent the primary and secondary school system from functioning: increased use of child labour, absence of transport to get to school, shortage of teachers, lack of heating during winter months, buildings that are too dangerous. Officially, the public school system is still free, but in reality parents must pay several related fees: some of these are official, such as building restoration, lunch, the purchase of textbooks and notebooks, while others depend on the level of corruption among teachers and the administration. Rural families cannot pay even a few dollars per month for these fees and so take their children out of public schooling.

Faced with a shortage of teachers, the states have reduced the weekly workloads for teachers so that they can perform two or three services a day. In rural zones, it has become common to send school-age children to school for 2-3 hours per day. During these school hours, teachers often work without a textbook, certain disciplines have disappeared owing to the lack of teachers (foreign languages, scientific subjects, etc.). Girls leaving school prematurely has become a growing phenomenon in Tajikistan, and also, but to a lesser extent, in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. For poor families, there can be no question of investing in their daughters'

education. At the higher level, technical teaching has collapsed. In Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the entry rates of youths in the technical and professional establishments of higher education have halved, in Turkmenistan they have dropped to a fifth. Only Uzbekistan, in the 2000s, has managed to regain rates similar to those of the USSR.

If this situation can be partly explained by economic reasons in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, in the two most authoritarian republics, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, increasing illiteracy must also be attributed to political will. The population pays a high cultural price for the break with the Soviet past by the change of alphabet. In all five states, the authorities have shown no great foresight in education matters for their rural population and have deliberately slashed public education spending. The private system, which is still in its infancy, enables only the upper classes to make up for these deficiencies by offering the possibility of an alternative education, either locally or abroad.

In all the Central Asian states, the medium-term consequences of the collapse of the school system have probably not yet been fully accounted for. These repercussions will weigh heavily on the future of Central Asia and will compel it to mortgage part of its future in a world in which the mastery of knowledge is one of the drivers of economic development. This situation has become especially dire, particularly considering that the Soviet regime had bequeathed an almost completely literate population, which was regarded as well-educated. There is a direct relation between the degree of female education, the possibility for women to work, issues of public health, and the rates of human development. This question is crucial since Central Asian societies are particularly young: persons under 17 years of age represent 32% of the population in Kazakhstan, and 48 % in Tajikistan.

### **Cotton 2009: children in uzbek cotton fields**

*By Alisher Ilkhamov, Research Associate, Centre of Contemporary Central Asia and the Caucasus, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*

Forced child labour is an endemic and widespread practice in Uzbekistan's cotton industry. According to some experts, between 1.5 and 2 million schoolchildren between the ages of 10-16 years are forced to pick cotton every year, a practice that has persisted since the Stalin era.

Observers claim that forced child labour is orchestrated by the state which, in turn, denies responsibility. However, ample evidence suggests these claims to be true. Uzbekistan is characterised by a highly centralised administrative system. No local government or school administration would dare to close the schools even for one day without instruction from above, whereas during the cotton harvest schools are closed for up to two months.

This is what makes the Uzbek phenomenon of child labour distinct from other poor, cotton-growing countries, where if children work in the cotton fields, it is usually at the behest of their parents. In other countries, the only way to tackle the problem of child labour is to educate parents and provide families with other options to meet their subsistence needs. In Uzbekistan, such a solution would not be sufficient, as it is not the parents requiring such education, but the state.

At the same time, it cannot be said that the state officials in Uzbekistan are not well-educated. All of them have a higher education, and some even have advanced academic degrees. President Karimov himself has a PhD in Economics. The problem lies more in the lack of political will to change.

It seems that there is no other way to achieve results but to apply international diplomatic pressure and economic leverage. This requires raising public awareness worldwide about the dire realities of life in Uzbekistan, as has been seen in an advocacy campaign initiated by Uzbek activists and some international NGOs on this issue. The campaign has even inspired some Western corporations to take action. To date, over 20 international retail, clothing and trading companies, committed to Corporate Social Responsibility and Ethical and Fair Trade, have stated their intentions to discontinue the use of cotton produced by forced child labour in their supply chain.

The government of Uzbekistan has, in turn, responded by saying that the campaign originates from its US cotton-supplying competitors. Yet, in 2008, due to international pressure, Uzbekistan was forced to ratify International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions 138 and 182 – Minimum Age for Admission to Employment and Worst Forms of Child Labour. However, in reality these international commitments have made little difference, as they have not been put into practice. For years, Uzbekistan has been a signatory to the ILO Conventions 29 on Forced Labour, and to Convention 157 on the Abolition of Forced Labour. It has passed a number of laws that ban the use of child labour, for example, “On Guarantees of the Rights of the Child,” “On Youth,” and “On the Labour Code.” On 3 November 2009, the Uzbek Supreme Assembly's Legislative Chamber (parliament's lower house) adopted a draft law «On amendments to the Uzbek Criminal Code on Administrative Responsibility.» Last year, in September, Uzbekistan ratified ILO Conventions 138 and 182 and subsequently adopted a Decree on Implementing UN Conventions on the minimum age for labour and a corresponding Action Plan on the implementation of the decree. Nevertheless, just one week after the adoption of this resolution, children were sent to the cotton fields to work for one and a half months.

The contrast between the law and the reality on the ground recalls the words of the renowned Central Asian folkloric figure and satirist Hoja Nasreddin, who said that “no matter how many times you say the word ‘halva’<sup>2</sup>, it doesn't get any sweeter in your mouth.”

## **EU and Central Asia**

### **9<sup>th</sup> EU-Uzbekistan Cooperation Council meeting: strengthening the dialogue**

This Cooperation Council between the European Union and Uzbekistan was organized on 14 September 2009 in Brussels. It was chaired by the State Secretary for Foreign Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sweden, Frank Belfrage, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan, Vladimir Norov. As mentioned in the official press release this meeting ‘reaffirmed the commitment of both parties to see their bilateral relations strengthen’. Also, the EU ‘called upon the Uzbek authorities to take further steps in improving the situation concerning human rights and fundamental freedoms in Uzbekistan’ and ‘welcomed Uzbekistan's involvement in the EU regional initiatives for Central Asia’.

Source: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/en/er/110087.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/er/110087.pdf)

### **EU-Central Asia Ministerial Meeting**

On 15 September 2009, the Swedish Presidency organized an EU–Central Asia Ministerial Conference in Brussels, with participation of Foreign Ministers of Central Asia and the EU. This

<sup>2</sup> Sweet confections in the Middle East, Central and South Asia

grand meeting followed upon the EU-Uzbekistan Cooperation Council and its agenda included regional security issues, energy, water and environment, as well as the global economic and financial crisis. In the context of the current security challenges, the important role of Central Asia in international efforts toward stabilizing Afghanistan was specially stressed. The importance of respect for human rights and rule of law for social stability and economic development was also underlined. The Ministers also discussed lessons learnt from the economic crisis as the need for promoting reforms and the importance of closer integration with the international trade system. The meeting also highlighted the need for reinforced regional cooperation on environmental issues.

Source: [http://delkaz.ec.europa.eu/joomla/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=673&Itemid=43](http://delkaz.ec.europa.eu/joomla/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=673&Itemid=43)

### *The EU sanctions against Uzbekistan lifted*

On 27 October 2009 the EU lifted the arms embargo against Uzbekistan – the last of the sanctions imposed in 2006 following the Andijan events in this country. The last sanctions only included a ban on supplying military equipment to Uzbekistan that might be used by the government to oppress any future unrest or protests. The decision by the EU was taken in an atmosphere of vociferous concerns by human rights activists who claimed that lifting of the embargo would send a wrong signal to the regime in Tashkent.

As the conclusions of the Council meeting read, ‘The Council (...) notes the positive steps taken in Uzbekistan over the last years’ and ‘with a view to encourage the Uzbek authorities to take further substantive steps to improve the rule of law and the human rights situation on the ground, and taking into account their commitments, the Council decides not to renew the remaining restrictive measures’.

Source: <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=PR/ES/09/299&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

### *11<sup>th</sup> EU-Kazakhstan Cooperation Council meeting: ploughing the field for a new PCA*

This Cooperation Council meeting between the European Union and Kazakhstan was held on 17 November 2009 in Brussels and was chaired by Swedish Secretary for Foreign Affairs Frank Belfrage and, on the Kazakh side, by Deputy Prime Minister Yerbol Orynbayev.

According to the joint statement, both sides agreed that in the past 10 years, since the conclusion of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), the cooperation between the EU and Kazakhstan has significantly increased in all areas. It was noted that the time had come to review the 1999 PCA in order to more broadly reflect ‘the full extent of the mature partnership which has developed’ and to upgrade this relationship ‘through an early updating of the present provisions or the elaboration of a new agreement’.

Source: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/111290.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/111290.pdf)

### *The first EU-Kazakhstan civil society seminar in Almaty: final report now online*

The Final report on the results of the Civil Society Seminar «Judicial System and Places of Detention: Towards the European Standards» has been released and is now available online. This seminar was organized by the European Commission in June 2009 to bring together civil society representatives from Kazakhstan, European Union Member States, Russia and Ukraine with the aim to contribute to the official EU-Kazakhstan human rights dialogue through the exchange of views among experts and delivering a set of recommendations for the 2nd round of EU talks with the

Government.

Source: [http://delkaz.ec.europa.eu/joomla/images/hr\\_dialogue/eu\\_kazakhstan\\_seminar\\_final\\_report\\_sept\\_2009\\_en.pdf](http://delkaz.ec.europa.eu/joomla/images/hr_dialogue/eu_kazakhstan_seminar_final_report_sept_2009_en.pdf)

### *3<sup>rd</sup> EU-Central Asia High Level Meeting on Water and Environment: New Working Group on Environmental Governance and Climate Change*

On 5-6 November 2009 the third EU-Central Asian High Level Meeting on Water and Environment Cooperation took place in Rome. It was organised by Italy and the European Commission, the coordinators of the environment and water pillar of the EU Strategy in Central Asia and focused on three broad topics: climate change, environmental governance and integration, and water.

It was agreed to establish a new Working Group on Environmental Governance and Climate Change coordinated by Italy with the support of the Commission with the task is to facilitate implementation of the EU Strategy on these two issues. With respect to the persisting water issue, it is planned to revitalize the existing Working Group of the EECCA-component of the EU Water Initiative, coordinated by Romania. In conclusion, a Joint Communiqué was agreed which establishes the Joint Platform for environment and water cooperation.

Joint communiqué: [http://ec.europa.eu/external\\_relations/central\\_asia/docs/conference\\_environment\\_water\\_1109\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/central_asia/docs/conference_environment_water_1109_en.pdf)

Press release: [http://www.esteri.it/MAE/approfondimenti/20091109\\_Press\\_Release\\_Rome\\_Conference\\_final.doc](http://www.esteri.it/MAE/approfondimenti/20091109_Press_Release_Rome_Conference_final.doc)

Speech of the EU Special Representative in Central Asia Pierre Morel: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/091112\\_Rome-E-W-EUSR\\_statement-PM.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/091112_Rome-E-W-EUSR_statement-PM.pdf)

## *New Publications*

EUCAM Policy Brief No. 11 - *Beyond Border Management for Central Asia Programme (BOMCA)*, George Gavrillis, December 2009: [http://www.eucentralasia.eu/fileadmin/user\\_upload/PDF/Policy\\_Briefs/PB11.pdf](http://www.eucentralasia.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF/Policy_Briefs/PB11.pdf)

EUCAM Policy Brief No. 10 - *The EU Strategy for Central Asia says ‘security’ . Does this include Security Sector Reform*, Jos Boonstra, November 2009: [http://www.eucentralasia.eu/fileadmin/user\\_upload/PDF/Policy\\_Briefs/PB10.pdf](http://www.eucentralasia.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF/Policy_Briefs/PB10.pdf)

EUCAM Working Paper No. 3 - *Russia in Central Asia: Old History, New Challenges?* Marlène Laruelle, September 2009: [http://www.eucentralasia.eu/fileadmin/user\\_upload/PDF/Working\\_Papers/WP3-EN.pdf](http://www.eucentralasia.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF/Working_Papers/WP3-EN.pdf) (also available in Russian)

EUCAM Working Paper No. 4 - *Central Asia’s growing partnership with China*, Sébastien Peyrouse, October 2009: [http://www.eucentralasia.eu/fileadmin/user\\_upload/PDF/Working\\_Papers/WP4-EN.pdf](http://www.eucentralasia.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF/Working_Papers/WP4-EN.pdf) (also available in Russian)

EUCAM Working Paper No. 5 - *The impact of the Global Economic Crisis on Central Asia and its implications on the EU engagement*, Nargis Kassenova, October 2009: [http://www.eucentralasia.eu/fileadmin/user\\_upload/PDF/Working\\_Papers/WP5-EN.pdf](http://www.eucentralasia.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF/Working_Papers/WP5-EN.pdf) (also available in Russian)

EUCAM Working Paper No. 6 - *The multiple paradoxes of the agriculture issue in Central Asia*, Sébastien Peyrouse, November 2009: [http://www.eucentralasia.eu/fileadmin/user\\_upload/PDF/Working\\_Papers/WP6-EN.pdf](http://www.eucentralasia.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF/Working_Papers/WP6-EN.pdf)

# About EUCAM

The Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE), Spain, in co-operation with the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), Belgium, has launched a joint project entitled "EU Central Asia Monitoring (EUCAM)". The (EUCAM) initiative is an 18-month research and awareness-raising exercise supported by several EU member states and civil society organisations which aims:

- to raise the profile of the EU-Central Asia Strategy;
- to strengthen debate about the EU-Central Asia relationship and the role of the Strategy in that relationship;
- to enhance accountability through the provision of high quality information and analysis;
- to promote mutual understanding by deepening the knowledge within European and Central Asian societies about EU policy in the region; and
- to develop 'critical' capacity within the EU and Central Asia through the establishment of a network that links communities concerned with the role of the EU in Central Asia.

EUCAM focuses on four priority areas in order to find a mix between the broad political ambitions of the Strategy and the narrower practical priorities of EU institutions and member state assistance programmes:

- Democracy and Human Rights
- Security and Stability
- Energy and Natural Resources
- Education and Social Relations

EUCAM will produce the following series of publications:

- A bi-monthly newsletter on EU-Central Asia relations will be produced and distributed broadly by means of an email list server using the CEPS and FRIDE networks. The newsletter contains the latest documents on EU-Central Asia relations, up-to-date information on the EU's progress in implementing the Strategy and developments in Central Asian countries.

- Policy briefs will be written by permanent and ad hoc Working Group members. The majority of the papers examine issues related to the four core themes identified above, with other papers commissioned in response to emerging areas beyond the main themes.

- Commentaries on the evolving partnership between the EU and the states of Central Asia will be commissioned reflecting specific developments in the EU-Central Asian relationship.

- A final monitoring report of the EUCAM Expert Working Group will be produced by the project rapporteurs.

This monitoring exercise is implemented by an Expert Working Group, established by FRIDE and CEPS. The group consists of experts from the Central Asian states and the members countries of the EU. In addition to expert meetings, several public seminars will be organised for a broad audience including EU representatives, national officials and legislators, the local civil society community, media and other stakeholders.

EUCAM is sponsored by the Open Society Institute (OSI) and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The project is also supported by the Czech Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and the United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

## About FRIDE

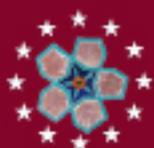
FRIDE is a think tank based in Madrid that aims to provide original and innovative thinking on Europe's role in the international arena. It strives to break new ground in its core research interests – peace and security, human rights, democracy promotion and development and humanitarian aid – and mould debate in governmental and nongovernmental bodies through rigorous analysis, rooted in the values of justice, equality and democracy.

As a prominent European think tank, FRIDE benefits from political independence, diversity of views and the intellectual background of its international staff. Since its establishment in 1999, FRIDE has organised or participated in the creation and development of various projects that reinforce not only FRIDE's commitment to debate and analysis, but also to progressive action and thinking.

## About CEPS

Founded in Brussels in 1983, the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) is among the most experienced and authoritative think tanks operating in the European Union today. CEPS serves as a leading forum for debate on EU affairs, and its most distinguishing feature lies in its strong in-house research capacity, complemented by an extensive network of partner institutes throughout the world.

CEPS aims to carry out state-of-the-art policy research leading to solutions to the challenges facing Europe today and to achieve high standards of academic excellence and maintain unqualified independence. CEPS also provides a forum for discussion among all stakeholders in the European policy process and builds collaborative networks of researchers, policy-makers and business representatives across the whole of Europe.



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