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Policy brief

Facing the Challenges of Separatism: The EU, Central Asia and the Uyghur Issue

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Introduction

During 2008, the move to grant Kosovo independence, the Russo-Georgian war and the revival of tensions in Xinjiang and Tibet moved the question of separatism once again to the top of the international agenda. In each of the three cases, the contradictory nature of issues to do with the inviolability of borders and a people's right to self-determination, which marked European history in the first half of the 20th century and were brought to the surface with the break-up of the Communist federations (the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia), were once again raised. The re-emergence of the principle of secession and the support offered to particular regions seeking independence from powerful states represents a considerable new challenge in the international system and one that could have a particular resonance in Eurasia.

Although since independence, all post-Soviet states have shared an interest in clamping down on separatist claims, this situation has suddenly changed with the Russian Duma's recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent. In Central Asia, where state-building remains difficult because of multiple domestic problems (multi-ethnic communities, large regional disparities and the population's rapid impoverishment), the question of separatism is seen as crucial and the revival of the issue of Uyghur separatism in western China – with a series of violent incidents allegedly involving Uyghur militants taking place in the summer of 2008, following the events in Georgia – has caused widespread concern. After briefly addressing the difficulties of the questions of Kosovo and Georgia for EU strategy, I will then go on to analyse the broad impact of these two cases upon the post-Soviet space in general, and Central Asia in particular, notably as they relate to the Uyghur question.

1. Kosovo and Georgia: Challenges for EU strategy?

Although a large part of the international community's recognition of Kosovo's independence, proclaimed on 17 February 2008, has been presented in the discourse as a *sui generis* case – which therefore does not establish an international precedent for other separatist movements in the world – it nonetheless seems to have opened a Pandora's box of separatist claims. In addition, although Kosovo remains in fact

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His research originally focused on the impact of the Russian/Soviet heritage in the five Central Asian republics. His main areas of expertise are political regimes in Central Asia, Islamism, and religious minorities, geopolitics, and others.

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under international tutelage, its independence will turn out to be difficult for the EU to manage. The case of Bosnia-Herzegovina does not encourage optimism. Indeed, in the latter case, efforts to promote independence have often had counter-productive effects, including fostering an irresponsibility amongst the local political elites who are opposed to the formation of a democratic system.

Against this background, the move to recognise Kosovo as an independent country was always going to have important repercussions for the territories of the post-Soviet space. When the secessionist governments of South Ossetia and Abkhazia declared independence on 26 August 2008, they explicitly referred to the Kosovo case, repeatedly invoking the 'genocide' of their population committed by the Georgian authorities. The aim in making such a claim was to invoke the same logic of legitimisation that underpinned Kosovo's claim to be recognised as independent. Even though, for the moment, Russia does not seem to want the two republics to join the Federation, a Cypriot-style post-conflict situation is emerging: these regions, whose independence almost only Moscow has recognised, risk living under Moscow's rule until such time as the global geopolitical context allows for a durable resolution of the situation. At first, Europe managed to make itself heard when Nicolas Sarkozy, who headed the rotating EU presidency at the time, helped the two parties to reach a cease-fire agreement. But the failure of the 15 October 2008 summit (the Russian and Georgian parties refused to sit at the table of negotiations) in Geneva revealed that the situation on the ground is open to further complications. Europe, again, was held hostage, since following Russia's refusal to grant the OSCE access to the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the organisation could no longer deploy its observers. As a result, EU and OSCE observer missions serve, despite themselves, as border guards for Moscow, *de facto* enforcing the regions' claims to independence.

First of all, it is worth recalling the complexity of the separatist conflicts. This stems primarily from the combination of historical elements (the Ossetians, for example, already allied with Moscow against Georgia during the Caucasian wars of the 19th century) and of contemporary political efforts to instrumentalise ethnic identities for political ends (the politicisation of ethnicity, the ethnicisation of the political). It is also the result of the global geopolitical competition between the United States and Russia and how this affects the territories of the post-communist space.

In the Kosovar case, the EU's recognition of independence seems to have blurred the message that Brussels had wanted to send to its neighbouring countries and the rest of the international community. Does conventional discourse on multi-ethnicity imply that every citizen has to learn to live with his neighbours, or that each ethnicity has the right to demand juridical recognition of its specificity at an international level? Can we really hope that a multi-ethnic, highly decentralised Kosovo will emerge which grants important rights to all the national and confessional communities populating it, when the last two decades of history in the Balkans have been witness to a powerful drive for ethnic division?

To date, the Balkans policy of the European Union has not succeeded in overcoming this fundamental contradiction: on the one hand, the Union has exulted in the withering away of national identities; and, on the other, it has supported state fragmentation in the name of the nation. On this question, the European Union has presented a divided front, since for the time being some member states, including Spain, Cyprus, Greece, Slovakia and Romania, which are all subject to various sorts of separatist risk, have refused to establish diplomatic relations with Pristina.

In the Georgian case, Brussels has had difficulties in defining the precise nature of its commitments towards the country, in particular concerning the question of NATO membership. Does the EU agree with voices in the United States calling for confrontation with Moscow through an intermediary country, or does it support the idea that it is necessary to have a neutral zone separating the two 'great' powers on the Euro-Eurasian landmass? Does the EU believe that the future well-being of Georgian citizens rests upon a strategy of radical rupture with Russia or in a negotiated solution based upon finding ways for the two sides to live with one another? On this point, the EU has been unable to present a united front in its face-off with Russia. Relations with Moscow crystallise the divergent interests of member countries, sharpening the formation of two groups: on one side, recent EU adherents and former Soviet satellites, which are more radical in their criticism of Russia (as also is the UK and Scandinavia but for different reasons); and, on the other, founding members, in particular Germany, France, Italy and Spain, which do not want to engage in a logic of confrontation with the Kremlin.

2. Is there any risk of a separatist domino-effect in the post Soviet space?

With Kosovo's proclamation of independence, the three Baltic states barely concealed their satisfaction that pro-Russian Serbia had endured a crushing defeat.[1] They did so despite the fact that Moscow, for its part, could revive the spectre of the secession of the Russian minorities in Latvia and Estonia, which represent around 40% and 25% of their respective populations. In the CIS, the Kosovar case for independence was nearly unanimously opposed: only the Armenian President Serzh Sargysan considered this precedent good insofar as it seemed to favour the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh, an enclave in Azerbaijan claimed by Armenia that came under Yerevan's control in 1994 after a bloody conflict.

The Kremlin did not hide the fact that at the time it considered the push for Kosovar independence to be a violation of Serbia's sovereignty and of the United Nations Charter. The Central Asian states maintained a low-key position, and even silence, adhering to the Kremlin's negative opinion of the matter. Moldova, anxious about the potential secession of the province of Transnistria, which has been under Russian influence since 1992, denounced the war in Georgia as a new factor of destabilisation in Europe. And governments reputed for their pro-western stances became unsettled: Ukraine refused to recognise Kosovo's independence at the time because it did not want to endanger the soldiers it had sent to join the multinational armed forces for Kosovo (KFOR) and the United Nations military police mission, while Georgia declared that it was not taking a position on Kosovo. Thus, even the pro-western rationale of the region's most loyal allies for the European Union and the United States was weakened.

The region was thrown into even greater disarray as a result of the cases of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the summer of 2008. At the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit, held in Dushanbe after the Georgian conflict at the end of August, the four Central Asian member states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) adopted the Chinese stance. They pointed out that the SCO's Charter commands support because of its commitment to the inviolability of state borders. So while the Central Asian states lent their formal support to the Russian intervention and denounced Washington's pro-Tbilisi stance, they refused to follow Moscow in recognising independence for South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

At a meeting of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation at the beginning of September, the approach of the Central Asians was similar. The countries issued positive declarations in favour of Moscow's pacifying role and criticisms of Georgia's military intervention, but maintained an awkward silence over the possibility of recognising independence. However, practical consequences did follow, confirming the fact that the Central Asian capitals have little room to manoeuvre with respect to Moscow. Thus, the Kazakhstani authorities announced that they would

[1] Talis Saule Archdeacon, "Baltics support Kosovo independence", *Baltic Times*, 20 February 2008 (http://www.baltictimes.com/news/articles/19846/).

abandon projects to construct a cereal silo in the Georgian port of Poti and an oil refinery in Batumi, doubly bad news for an already weakened Georgian economy.[2] But even if the Central Asian authorities continue to follow a multivectorial external policy, which is displeasing to Moscow, the conflicts in Georgia already seem to have weakened their autonomy vis-à-vis Russia.

The possibility of securing a peaceful resolution to the conflicts over South Ossetia and Abkhazia are not only of concern to Georgia. They could well also have an impact upon other regions of Russia, Ukraine and Moldova. By recognising the independence of the two secessionist republics, Moscow played a very dangerous game indeed, one that is potentially full of repercussions for other regions of the Russian Federation. In the first place this concerns Chechnya, but also the rest of the North Caucasus, in particular Dagestan and Ingushetia, but it also raises questions about Karelia and Kaliningrad, regions closer to Europe's borders.

In Moldova, the government is facing a new drive for independence from the Igor Smirnov-led region of Transnistria, which is demanding that its independence also be recognised. Even more seriously, the Georgian crisis has rekindled domestic political tensions in Ukraine over Russian influence in the country and the impact of the Russian-speaking minorities on its political stability – notably in the Crimean peninsula. The Prime Minister, Yulia Timoshenko, was accused by the President, Viktor Yushchenko, of having concluded a pact with Moscow and of not having condemned firmly enough Russia's intervention in Georgia. The EU's recent offer of an association agreement to Ukraine has increased tensions between Moscow and Kyiv, highlighted both by a possible return to the gas war (at the start of 2009, tariffs for gas from Russia will more than double) and by increasingly hostile debates over the Russian fleet in Sebastopol as well as the question of the Crimea.

Moreover, at the end of 2007 the Kremlin decided to start a war of nerves over the topic of secessionism. This included the sudden initiative by Moscow to found the Institute for Democracy and Cooperation, whose stated mission is to study the rights of minorities in Europe: Russians of German origin in Germany and Finland, Serbs in Kosovo, but also Basques and Catalonians in Spain, Corsicans and Bretons in France, Tyroleans in Italy, the Irish in Great Britain, immigrant minorities in Europe, etc.[3] The political utilisation of the theme of ethnic minorities for the purposes of weakening the state has thus become intensified and today it seems that Moscow sees it as a key instrument in its ideological critique of the European Union.

3. The separatist question in Central Asia and the paradoxical Uyghur case

In post-Soviet Central Asia, the risks of separatist conflict remain minimal. Only one significant autonomy movement has existed in the years since the break-up of the Soviet Union and that was the Russian autonomist movement in Kazakhstan at the beginning of the 1990s, which was led by political parties and associations of the Russian minority (which accounted for 38% of the country's population at the moment of independence and today for 30%) such as Lad and the Russian Community (*Russkaia obshchina*) and by the, sometimes confrontational, Cossack groups.[4] Several short-lived and badly organised attempts at proclaiming independence or at joining Russia were made in towns in the country's north, first at Uralsk, and then at Ust-Kamenogorsk in the Altai mountains. The risk that a serious secessionist movement would emerge remained real until around 1995, but slowly died out with the massive emigration of Kazakhstani Russians to Russia (over two million in under two decades), as well as with their depoliticisation, the policies of the authorities to undermine the movement, including coercion against activists, the scant interest that Moscow gave to their cause, and above all the country's economic improvement, which has made it possible for those who remained to find new social and economic niches and to envisage a future for themselves in Kazakhstan.[5]

Tajikistan is the second case requiring mention. Its civil war (1992-97) served to severely aggravate regional conflicts, but the aims of the various groups in the conflict were never formulated in terms of secession. The question of independence was briefly raised only in 1993 by the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO) in the Pamir mountains – an area populated by Ismailis loyal to the Aga Khan – and which was at that time in the midst of civil war. In the 1990s, several Tajik politicians and intellectuals of nationalist sensibility also mentioned their desire to "recuperate" the historically Tajik-speaking regions of Bukhara and Samarkand, which were given to Uzbekistan when the borders were drawn up in the 1920s. However, this desire has not been presented as an official claim of the Tajik state.

Lastly, at the beginning of the 1990s, leading Karakalpak intellectuals evoked the idea of secession from Uzbekistan and the possibility of joining Kazakhstan or Russia, but this identity-based claim never had much future and rapidly petered out. Today, the five states of Central Asia are unified states: only Uzbekistan and Tajikistan each have one autonomous region, Karakalpakstan and Gorno-Badakhshan respectively, but Tashkent has crushed any possibility for real autonomy for the Karakalpaks, who are socially and economically marginalised, while the Pamir elites are after local autonomy, not secession.

There are two other types of potential conflict that could arise in the region. Interstate conflicts could emerge over, for example, the question of transborder water use,[6] or over border disputes between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in the Fergana valley. Additionally, conflicts could develop from the marginalising of national minorities (the substantial Uzbek minorities in the four other neighbouring republics, the large Tajik and Kazakh population in Uzbekistan, etc.), whose home state often mistreats them, but who are largely politically unorganised, except for the Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan.

But if the Central Asian authorities are concerned that a possible domino effect may result from the independence of Kosovo and South Ossetia/Abkhazia and spread to Central Asia, it is primarily because these events are liable to re-open the Uyghur case and because the South Ossetia/Abkhazia case tarnishes Moscow's image. In fact, in recent years the adoption of policies to aid 'compatriots'[7] abroad has suddenly raised doubts about the Kremlin's intentions, about whether or not it might make use of the so-called 'Russian diaspora' of the Near Abroad to assert pressure

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[2] See M. Laruelle, "Is Kazakhstan Disengaging From Georgia?", *The Central Asia and Caucasus Analyst*, 15 October 2008. This situation, however, is only temporary. In fact, Kazakhstan has already returned to supporting the south Caucasus route (see N. Kassenova, *Kazakhstan and the South Caucasus corridor in the wake of the Georgia-Russia war*, EUCAM Policy Brief No. 4, January 2009).

[3] See the article announcing the creation of this Institute written by Valeri Tishkov, the Director of the Moscow Ethnology Institute (http:www.eawarn.ru/bin/view/Main/Newtasks).

[4] M. Laruelle and S. Peyrouse, *Les Russes du Kazakhstan. Identités nationales et nouveaux Etats dans l'espace post-soviétique*, Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose/IFEAC, 2004.

[5] S. Peyrouse, *The Russian Minority in Central Asia: Migration, Politics, and Language*, Kennan Occasional Papers No. 297, Kennan Institute, Washington, D.C., 2008 (http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/OP297.pdf).

[6] M. Fumagalli, *The 'Food-Energy-Water' Nexus in Central Asia: Regional Implications of and the International Response to the Crises in Tajikistan*, EUCAM Policy Brief No. 2, October 2008.

[7] By 'compatriots' (*sootechestvenniki*), the Kremlin conflates both expatriates, i.e. Russian citizens settled outside its borders, and all those who in one way or another claim to belong to the 'Russian world' as Russians of the Near and Far Abroad.

on refractory states. However, Russia has shown itself more willing to exert pressure over the 'Russian question' when relations with the country concerned are poor (e.g. Ukraine, the Baltic states, Moldova and Georgia), but to have little interest in the Russians settled in states with which relations are good, those of Central Asia included. To date, the Central Asian states, even Kazakhstan, have not been burdened by this question and it is highly unlikely that the Kremlin is going to give priority to ideological aims like defending its diaspora over its geopolitical and economic interest in controlling Central Asia.

In fact, the only question that really feeds Central Asian anxieties is the Uyghur issue. Beijing did score some points with Central Asian governments for remaining loyal to its principle of respecting the inviolability of borders during the Georgian conflict. At the same time, its handling of the Uyghur problem is far from having the unanimous support of the region. Indeed, Central Asian diplomatic services have effectively been forced to adopt official Chinese discourse about the 'three forces' (*san gu shili*) needing to be combated (terrorism, fundamentalism and separatism). Governments themselves have been subject to pressure from Beijing, both directly and within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. For example, authorities in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have come under pressure to close down political associations of their Uyghur diaspora. In 1995, a Friendship Declaration between Kazakhstan and the PRC evoked both countries' common struggle against separatism, with each of them undertaking not to host forces aiming to undermine the integrity of its partner. Further, the Chinese secret services are alleged to have entered Kazakh territory, with the more or less voluntary consent of the authorities, in order to track down Uyghur dissidents, and, forcibly, have them deported to China.[8]

However, although it would be wrong to speak of the existence *in principle* of a solidarity between Central Asian peoples and Uyghurs, interviews conducted with some political figures speaking off-the-record and with experts working in Central Asian think tanks reveal a rather modified view of the situation. They do not believe that the Uyghurs can achieve independence from China since never before has the region had such a large population of Han Chinese, a culture that was so Chinese-influenced, nor has it been so economically integrated into China's trade-related boom.

But many of them criticise the general marginalisation to which the Uyghurs have been subject on their ancestral territory. The development of the 'Far West', they claim, while useful for the Han Chinese populations, has been achieved at the expense of the indigenous population: the Uyghurs remain confined to working in small-growth sectors and are mostly unable to gain access to higher education. Moreover, the closure of schools that teach in the national language is perceived as proof that Beijing is engaging in a policy of forced assimilation to the Han culture.

The majority of Central Asian experts also doubt that Uyghur Islamism presents a genuine risk and criticise Beijing's repression of Islam as counter-productive. Venera Galiamova, from the Institute for Strategic Studies in Almaty, maintains that the Chinese refusal to listen to any demands for autonomy, even cultural ones, can only help radical separatism to take root. She criticises Beijing's abandonment of the rural Uyghur youth and its favouring of the urban student youth, which she claims is pushing the former group into swelling the ranks of Islamists.[9] A researcher from the same institute, Konstantin Syroezhkin, is even more critical and believes that Chinese policy is leading the Uyghurs to interpret Islam as an ideology of national liberation.[10]

Although it is less publicised than the Tibetan question, Beijing in fact regards the Uyghur case to be just as, if not more, serious. There have been recurrent brawls between Uyghurs and Hans since the 1980s, and widespread insurrections, and guerrilla acts. Violent attacks have also taken place, as for instance in 1990 in Barin (a suburb of Kashgar) and on several occasions in 1996-97, in particular in Yining, on the northern part of Xinjiang near the Kazakh border. Since this time, Beijing has increased its repression of all autonomy and nationalist (often Pan-Turkist) movements, in particular among student groups, which has contributed to promoting a more radical and more Islamicised Uyghur movement.[11] The Chinese authorities are persuaded that the 'Far West development' project for Xinjiang will accelerate modernisation and attenuate tensions by winning over the Uyghur population. However, this project is also likely to increase tensions since it is accompanied by inflows of Han colonists, the so-called 'soldier-peasants' who constitute Xinjiang's construction and production corps (*Xinjiang shengchan jianche bingtuan*). Instead of making it disappear, socio-economic stratification will therefore coincide with ethnic divisions and continue to marginalise the Uyghurs.[12]

Although it is difficult to obtain exact information about the bombings that took place at the beginning of August 2008 in the cities of Kashgar and Kuqa in Xinjiang – which Beijing attributes to the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, a claim rejected by Uyghur independence activists, but which the Chinese authorities themselves may well have instigated – the situation remains extremely tense. The central authorities have in fact clamped down harder on religion. They have almost completely ruled out any individual pilgrimages to Mecca (only those travelling with an official tour group are authorised to go, but these are very expensive, highly controlled, and in any case limited), have confiscated the passports of Uyghurs from the Kashgar region in an attempt to limit cross-border movements, especially to Pakistan, have restricted entry into mosques, which is forbidden to public officials, students and professors, and have banned numerous persons, including students, from this year's Ramadan celebration.

As with the Kosovo, South Ossetia and Abkhazia cases, multiple factors need to be taken into account to understand the Uyghur question. Similar to the separatist movement in Chechnya, the Uyghurs brandish Islam like an anti-colonial flag: although the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement is partly linked to al-Qaeda, it actually represents only one current among many involved in Uyghur pro-independence activism and the latter only a tiny minority of the population. Since 2000, China might have wanted to claim, like Moscow in the North Caucasus, that its struggle against the Uyghurs was part of the struggle against international terrorism, but this issue is far from being fundamentally religious.

Indeed, in essence the conflict is a national one, akin to a conflict of decolonisation. In addition, any desire on the part of the Chinese regime for political liberalisation is curtailed by the risk of secessionism in both Xinjiang and Tibet, which aggravates the squaring of the circle. In an authoritarian regime, no real national autonomy can be granted as such a regime cannot be democratised since it risks territorial fragmentation. The Central Asian states therefore remain concerned about the strong potential for regional destabilisation as a result of the Uyghur question: nobody desires the emergence of a Uyghur state synonymous with a 'second

[8] E.V. Savkovich, "Uigurskaia problema v ramkakh SHOS (Kazakhstan i Kitai, 1990-nachalo 2000x gg.)" [The Uyghur Problem in the Framework of the SCO (Kazakhstan and China, the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s)], *Analytica*, 11 January 2006 (www.analitika.org/article.php?story=20060111220552543).

[9] V.F. Galiamova, "Etnicheskii separatizm v Sin'tsziane: sostoianie problemy i perspektivy" [Ethnic Separatism in Xinjiang: The Nature of the Problem and Outlook], *Kazakhstan-Spektr*, No. 1, 2004, pp. 9-15.

[10] K.L. Syroezhkin, *Mify i real'nost' etnicheskogo separatizma v Kitae i bezopasnost' Tsentral'noi Azii* [Myths and Realities of Ethnic Separatism in China and Security in Central Asia], Almaty: Daik-Press, 2003, p. 299.

[11] R. Castets, *Opposition politique, nationalisme et islamisme chez les Ouigours du Xinjiang*, Etudes du CERI, CERI, Paris, No. 110, 2004.

[12] G. Bovingdon, *Autonomy in Xinjiang: Han Nationalist Imperatives and Uyghur Discontent*, East-West Center Policy Papers, No. 11, East-West Center, Washington, D.C., 2004.

Afghanistan', nor of a permanent situation of insurrection in a region of the world where Kabul and Islamabad are already on the edge of destabilisation.

Recommendations

Separatism is emerging as an important issue in Eurasia and the EU can play a positive role in addressing this issue – notably in the areas of conflict prevention, management and the development of durable solutions to existing cases. The issue of separatism cannot, however, be dealt with piecemeal, and the EU will need to adopt a logical, consistent and targeted approach to the areas facing secessionist challenges in Eurasia if the Union is to perform a genuine role in the region.

Economic actions

Create economic incentives for peace. It ought not to be forgotten that secessionist situations rely systematically on economic networks that thrive on maintaining political disorder, enabling them to accumulate wealth (cf. the South Ossetian militias). It is therefore necessary to decouple political support for secession and the economic interests of local criminal groups, which often stand in the way of the resolution to a conflict – for example, frozen conflicts have provided important venues for smuggling and trafficking activities. The EU therefore ought to promote economic cooperation based on the recognition of borders and refuse to trade with companies that are based in secessionist situations (adopting specific sanctions, refusing to allow certain products to enter the European markets, etc.).

Multilateral political and diplomatic actions

Closely monitor domestic developments in Ukraine and Moldova. These two countries ought to be viewed as key elements of EU-Russian relations. The EU should create more effective mechanisms to monitor the domestic political development of these countries and arrange joint initiatives (roundtable discussions and workshops) with their intellectual and political elite with a view to preserving the border *status quo* and avoiding any of the parties rushing headlong into endorsing division.

Pay more attention to questions of historical memory (especially on the Second World War) in order to avoid its politicisation in relation with Russia. This question divides 'western' EU member countries from the former members of the communist bloc, especially Poland and the Baltic states. The EU will indeed have a difficult time being recognised as a single actor on foreign policy issues with respect to Russia so long as it has not developed a common strategy, but this is not possible unless the emotive issues that continue to inform the relations of the former communist countries towards Moscow are resolved.

Propose the initiation of a joint EU-SCO dialogue on the issue of separatism. This would serve to promote a better understanding amongst states on these complex issues and to soften the anti-separatist, anti-terrorist line of the SCO. The dialogue should be structured to advance the debate about the best way to deal with separatist issues within a context of dialogue, negotiation and accommodation.

Bilateral diplomatic actions

Engage Russia in an ongoing process of dialogue on the separatist issue. Russia's diplomatic isolation on the questions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia ought not to be considered as a victory in itself, since it might well lead to radical decisions toward Transnistria or the Crimea that would actually be detrimental to the pursuance of dialogue with the EU. The EU should seek to engage in constructive dialogue with Moscow and avoid politicising the minority question or instrumentalising it in diplomatic relations. Nor should the EU forget that Russia itself is also concerned about the possible impact this issue may have on its own territorial integrity.

Promote a regular process of consultation (in the EU-Central Asian bilateral human rights dialogue and in the bilateral summits) with each of the Central Asian states about the question of the place of national minorities. The states of Central Asia need to build political, social and economic models that balance the interests of state-building with creating the opportunities for the protection and development of minority ethnic communities. The EU should seek to strengthen the role of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities in the region as a means to promote the peaceful integration of the region's minority and majority populations and finance projects with a specific emphasis on the integration of minorities.

Strengthen the EU position in its bilateral dialogues with China on human rights and other issues. The EU should decide more clearly what stance it wants to take on the Uyghur question, which is not a part of the EU Strategy on Central Asia. This might involve giving support to legitimate claims of cultural autonomy without promoting political division; choosing local interlocutors who are representative of public opinion and thereby challenging the notion promulgated by the Chinese that any mention of Uyghur identity is necessarily associated with Islamism; and formulating strategies with respect to Chinese political power that push it to engage in negotiations. Positive developments in Central Asia on this question would put pressure on China and would demonstrate that there is an alternative to forceful assimilation.

Related publications by the author

- Sebastien Peyrouse, *Des chrétiens entre athéisme et islam. Regards sur la question religieuse en Asie centrale soviétique et post-soviétique*, Paris, Maisonneuve & Larose, 2003.
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- Sebastien Peyrouse and Marlène Laruelle, eds., *Islam et politique en ex-urss (Russie d'Europe et Asie centrale)*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2005.
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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*
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- *Energy and Natural Resources*
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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.

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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.