

EUCAM

EU-CENTRAL ASIA MONITORING

The EU Strategy for Central Asia says 'security'. Does this include Security Sector Reform?

Jos Boonstra

Introduction

Central Asia faces a broad range of security challenges¹. Due to the region's position at the crossroads between Russia, China, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and the Caspian Sea it is confronted with a range of trans-national issues such as drug trafficking, human trafficking, organised crime and terrorism. Central Asia also encounters specific regional threats including scarcity of water resources for generating power and irrigation purposes, which is currently causing tension. On a national level the five Central Asian republics face the threat of instability due to bad governance and the harsh impact of the economic crisis.

Although the Central Asian republics established themselves as independent states with reasonably strong security forces and multi-vector foreign policies, they are largely dependent on influential external actors' cooperation on security issues. Home-grown Central Asia security cooperation mechanisms are nonexistent. NATO includes the Central Asian republics in its Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme; Russia leads the Collective

Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) whose membership consists of several former Soviet republics; China and Russia work with Central Asian republics through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Clearly Russia is the main security actor in the region. It became clear in August 2008 that Russia is willing and able to act with military means in its 'near abroad' for better or worse. This notion was strengthened in August 2009 when President Medvedev amended the Defence Law to create the possibility of deploying Russian forces abroad to defend Russian interests. In the case of conflict in Central Asia, it is highly unlikely that China, the EU and the US would act, even though the latter two have several military bases in the area focusing on the war effort in Afghanistan.

The European Union does however regard itself as a security actor and takes a keen interest in working with Central Asian states on the basis of joint security interests. In June 2007 when the EU presented the 'European Union and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership' document,² Brussels argued

² The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership (June 2007), http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/librairie/PDF/EU_CtrlAsia_EN-RU.pdf

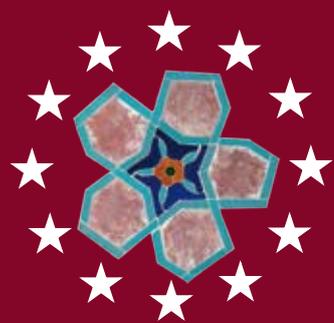
¹ A similar version of this text will also appear in a Centre for European Security Studies (CESS) Harmonie Paper, www.cess.org

About the Authors

Jos Boonstra is senior researcher at FRIDE, a European think tank based in Madrid. He also serves as Co-chair of the EUCAM Expert Working Group.

Before 2007 Boonstra worked as a Programme Manager and Head of Research at the Centre for European Security Studies (CESS) in the Netherlands. He holds

two MA degrees from the University of Groningen in the Netherlands; Contemporary History (1997) and International Relations (2000).



Policy brief



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that security and stability are its main strategic interests. Thus much of the activity from political dialogue to assistance programmes is part of the Strategy's security objective. One security aspect that is key to both national security and international and regional security cooperation is the concept of Security Sector Reform (SSR), which aims to support a locally driven reform effort of all national security-related agencies and oversight mechanisms. Although the EU policy documents concerning Central Asia do not refer to SSR, this paper will argue that some EU activities can be directly related to the holistic concept of SSR and others might contribute indirectly to reform of the security sector.

This EUCAM policy brief assesses in what aspects of Security Sector Reform the EU is engaged in with Central Asia and in what context these possible activities should be viewed. The main focus will be on direct engagement on security topics such as the EU Border Management project BOMCA. However, indirect activities such as education programmes that might be beneficial to security and stability in Central Asia will not be ignored. After an exposé on EU security interests in Central Asia, in the second paragraph attention is devoted to national and regional threats to the security of Central Asian republics and engagement of the EU. The paper concludes with a few recommendations for EU institutions and member states that could help to strengthen EU–Central Asia security cooperation including aspects of Security Sector Reform.

1. *The EU and Security in Central Asia*

The 2007 EU–Central Asia Strategy argues that the EU has an interest in security, stability, human rights and rule of law in Central Asia because of trans-regional challenges; EU enlargement and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) that brought Europe and Central Asia closer; and the region's substantial energy resources that can help to build EU energy security.³ Of the seven specific priorities outlined, number six is the most tangible direct security item: 'combating common threats and challenges'. Here the EU offers to further work with Central Asia on border management and customs in order to counter crime and the challenge of migration flows through and from the region. The Strategy called for a series of high-level visits of Central Asian leaders to Europe and visa versa. In September 2008 the French EU Presidency organised a Minister of Foreign Affairs level security Forum that focused on Afghanistan, terrorist threats and trafficking, and the Swedish Presidency followed up on this event one year later with a Ministerial Conference discussing regional security issues, water, energy and the impact of the economic crisis. Meanwhile, Solana's Special Representative Pierre Morel travels through the region with an obvious energy and security portfolio and the EU holds regular Human Rights Dialogues with all Central Asian republics.

Through the European Commission, a Regional Assistance

Strategy (2007–2013)⁴ and a more detailed Indicative Programme (2007–2011)⁵ were drafted to guide technical assistance. One third of the 750 million Euro assistance until 2013 is earmarked for regional cooperation programmes; two thirds is for bilateral programmes. The funding is thinly spread over the wide range of priorities outlined in the political Strategy and many touch on security-related issues. Only the BOMCA border management and CADAP anti-drugs trafficking programme are directly security related while several bilateral programmes that focus on the judiciary, parliament or ministries should have a positive impact on security and stability in the EU's philosophy. In that sense the regional EU Rule of Law Initiative that is coordinated by Germany and France might also have a positive bearing on Central Asian regional cooperation and security through reform of the rule of law. Still, only a little of the EU's technical assistance through the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) or the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) – the two main EU assistance instruments that apply to Central Asia – can be regarded as Security Sector Reform assistance. However, some initiatives, such as a project on human rights awareness in the Kyrgyz police forces or assistance to judicial reform in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are part and parcel of SSR,⁶ although maybe not presented directly in this way by Brussels. The EU Instrument for Stability (IfS) that would be suitable for SSR work until now barely applies to Central Asia.

Although the EU does not have a SSR strategy for Central Asia, the EU in general has become one of the foremost international donors and promoters of SSR through Commission funding and long-term projects, and EU Council-driven European Security and Defence (ESDP) missions in Afghanistan, Africa, the Balkans, South Caucasus and the Middle East. The main focus of EU SSR is on police forces, border guards and the judiciary, generally excluding reform of the military. Division of labour and coordination between the Commission and Council is however weak and ill-defined – sometimes even leading to competition of competences in implementing programmes – which is partly the result of the fact that both EU entities have their own SSR Concept.⁷ The EU sees SSR as a tool that can help reach broad objectives of the Union's external and security policies such as poverty reduction and strengthening human rights, democracy, good governance and rule of law. Finally, Brussels devotes attention to SSR in fragile states as outlined in the 2003 EU

4 European Community Regional Strategy Paper for Assistance to Central Asia for the period 2007–2013, http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/central_asia/rsp/07_13_en.pdf

5 Central Asia Indicative Programme (2007–2010), http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/central_asia/rsp/nip_07_10_en.pdf

6 Presentation by Joaquin Tasso Vilallonga, SSR Focal Point, Crisis Response and Peace Building Unit, RELEX, European Commission during the conference: SSR in Central Asia: 'Identifying national approaches, international involvement and prospects for cooperation', 24–25 September 2009, Almaty, Kazakhstan.

7 Maria Derks and Sylvie More, 'The European Union and Internal Challenges for Effectively Supporting Security Sector Reform', Clingendael Conflict Research Unit, June 2009, v.

3 Ibidem.

Security Strategy.⁸

Whereas the Commission is involved in assistance that is SSR or can be linked to reform of the security sector in Central Asia, and is expanding its presence on the ground through Commission delegations in Astana, Bishkek and Dushanbe, a cooperation office in Almaty and Europe Houses in Ashgabat and Tashkent, the Council is only represented through Special Representative Pierre Morel with few staff actually present in the region. With no ESDP missions active in a region beset by a range of security challenges, it would make sense for the Special Representative to discuss possible EU–Central Asia cooperation on SSR in his regular meetings with Central Asian political elites. Security structures in Central Asia are characterised by a lack of training and resources (the Armed Forces in particular), corruption (for example in the police forces) and absence of oversight mechanisms besides presidential power (internal security forces and intelligence come to mind). If the EU is serious about promoting stability and security in the region, and sees political dialogue as the basis of engagement, the Special Representative should at least test the waters in all five countries. It is unlikely that he would receive any interest from Turkmen and Uzbek authorities but he might find an opening for cooperation in the somewhat more liberal regimes of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

A final aspect of EU engagement in SSR in Central Asia can be related to the OSCE and NATO due to the large overlap of membership and both regional security organisations' activities in Central Asia. Cooperation between the EU and NATO is limited in Central Asia and non-existent when it comes to SSR. All five countries are members of NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP), but only Kazakhstan is actively engaged in SSR activities through the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) that it agreed with NATO and which incorporates aspects of security-related reform of armed forces and oversight mechanisms. Kazakhstan also participates in the PAP-DIB (Partnership Action Plan – Defence Institution Building) initiative in which NATO liaises with partners from Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Kazakhstan on good governance of the defence sector. NATO holds consultations with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan on defence and security sector reform, but is not directly involved through substantial cooperation or assistance programming. NATO's interest in Central Asia largely equals that of the EU – partnership, stability and security – but its activities are mostly constrained to some military cooperation and, most importantly, political dialogue and diplomatic exchanges with a view to increase access to Afghanistan for NATO's ISAF mission.

The OSCE is an interesting partner for the EU in Central Asia in terms of SSR activities. The OSCE has a presence in all five countries and has broad experience of 'doing' SSR, both

through the politico-military and human dimensions. Over 70 per cent of the OSCE budget is funded by EU member states, most of them in full support of OSCE field missions, although the OSCE centres in Central Asia only have small budgets. One way for the EU to step up support for SSR in Central Asia would be to provide so-called 'extra budgetary support' to projects that can be implemented by the OSCE; this would be advantageous since Central Asian countries themselves are members of the OSCE and thus have a stake in the defining and implementation of SSR activities. Although some Central Asian countries, particularly Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, would be unwilling to have the OSCE work on democratisation of the security sector, the other three states are more open to this. But there are also less sensitive SSR-related issues the OSCE works on in Central Asia, such as police and border guard training. And these are areas where the EU and OSCE need to carefully coordinate and cooperate since the EU also tends to focus on these areas in support of SSR. In that sense close cooperation is expected between the EU BOMCA project and the newly opened Border Management Staff Office in Dushanbe. Another option for cooperation could be education through the OSCE Academy in Bishkek and several education initiatives that the EU is undertaking in the region. Lastly, the Kazakh 2010 OSCE Chairmanship is another opportunity for the EU and OSCE to step up engagement with Central Asia, including cooperation on reforming the security sector.

2. Security threats and EU activity

Central Asia is confronted by trans-national, regional and national security threats. The main trans-national threat derives from Afghanistan in the form of drug trafficking and the risk of conflict spilling over as Taliban factions try to get a foothold in Central Asia.⁹ In Afghanistan the EU is increasingly active in support of SSR. The main programmes consist of an ESDP police mission (EUPOL) and Commission involvement in justice reform. Europe's SSR support is largely still provided by individual member states – especially those that contribute to the ISAF mission – and the EU's programmes are still in need of more funding and qualified personnel. The main link between EU SSR support to Afghanistan and Central Asia is border control, for instance through the Border Management Badakhshan (BOMBAF) that was largely EU funded, implemented by UNDP and focused on building three border crossing points on the Tajik-Afghan border while also training Afghan border guards and providing equipment. Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan share a border with Afghanistan that is over 2000 kilometres long. In Central Asia the Commission has supported the Border Management programme BOMCA¹⁰ and a Drug Action Programme

8 'A Secure Europe in a Better World. European Security Strategy', Brussels, 12 December 2003, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>

9 For more information about the EU security role in Afghanistan and Central Asia see: Nicolás de Pedro and Gabriel Reyes, 'Central Asia and the European Union Strategy for Afghanistan', EUCAM Policy Brief. Soon available at www.eucentralasia.eu

10 For more information about BOMCA see: George Gavrilis, 'BOMCA and beyond. The Geography of European Border Management Assistance in Central Asia', EUCAM Policy Brief. Soon available at

(CADAP) since 2003. These substantial Commission-funded and UNDP-implemented programmes are heralded as EU flagship projects in the region. BOMCA has focused on training Central Asian border guards, providing technical equipment and facilitating regional cooperation on border management. The main objective is to promote integrated border management that would help all agencies involved (border guards, customs services, police etc.) to work closely together but also enhance contacts between these agencies among the Central Asian countries. Regardless of its success, the challenges in border control in Central Asia and the borders with Afghanistan remain enormous. The EU would do well to step up BOMCA work through increased funding, bringing in more partners and, in a broader sense, using the BOMCA experience in other parts of the security sector such as police or disaster relief.

The most substantial regional threat facing Central Asia derives from tensions over water management. Energy-rich Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan lack sufficient water resources for irrigation of crops, while mountainous and water-rich Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan lack sufficient fossil fuel resources. Over the past few years tensions have risen between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in particular. The former plans to construct an enormous dam in the Vakhsh River which would enable the Tajiks to generate the electricity they badly need while being able to control water flows to Uzbekistan and other countries in the region. Uzbekistan fiercely resists Tajik water projects, fearing that it would not have enough water to irrigate its extensive cotton fields. Uzbekistan has already on a few occasions restricted the flow of gas to Tajikistan. Regional cooperation between the Central Asian countries has not yielded substantial results, and international organisations and important powers such as Russia, the EU and the US have been reluctant to get involved in regional disputes over water resources. With climate change having a further negative effect on available water resources, the risk of regional conflict rises, especially between Uzbekistan and its water-rich though devastatingly poor Tajik and Kyrgyz neighbours. The EU is involved in water management issues through an Initiative on Environment and Water which is aimed at donor coordination. A large water governance project is one of the key projects the EU is implementing, although unfortunately Uzbekistan is not included. Although maybe not directly SSR related, this EU engagement in good governance on topics that have a clear security bearing is crucial to the implementation of the security-oriented Strategy for the region.

Lastly, the countries of the region deal with internal instability to different extents. At first sight all five regimes seem to have a strong grip on power. However, strong presidential regimes or authoritarianism are no guarantee for staying in power as became clear in Kyrgyzstan in 2005 when President Akayev was ousted by frustrated elites in favour of current President Bakiyev. Also it is unclear whether power transitions as a

result of a leader's sudden death will always run as smoothly as in Turkmenistan following Niazov's death in December 2006. Disloyal political and business elites, the poor and disillusioned populations – an effect that might be increased by the economic crisis – as well as radical Islamic groups can all threaten the status quo in Central Asian republics. These factors provide reason enough for Central Asian leaders to have strong intelligence services that can detect potential threats in time, or internal security forces that can quell unrest if necessary. An extreme example of when such services were deployed was the situation that arose in the Uzbek city of Andjion in 2004, where hundreds of protesters were massacred. In this sense SSR, if understood by Central Asian leaders as contributing to democratic reform of security structures, is likely to be considered a threat to the regime.

Although all five Central Asian states have strong presidential regimes there are substantial differences between the leaderships, the conditions they work in, the level of freedom and the possibilities for reform. In Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan there might be interest in EU-supported small scale projects on SSR that touch on governance and even democratisation aspects. Large overhaul projects are unlikely but smaller civil society driven projects, with support through EIDHR, the Non State Actors / Local Authorities in Development programme and especially through EU national government funding, should be taken up and supported. In Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan prospects are dim for EU involvement in SSR and governance support. Nonetheless, the EU should make an effort to closely liaise with NATO, which upholds reasonably positive diplomatic and military contacts with these countries. Cooperation with the OSCE Project Coordinator in Tashkent and the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat could also yield success, for instance in the form of jointly organising modest public discussion sessions.

Radical Islam is characterised by most Central Asian governments as internal security threat number one. Until now the EU has been wary of initiating EU–Central Asia exchanges of experience in working on and with moderate Islamic groups on society-related issues, including security. In the EU–Central Asia Strategy the final priority outlined is 'Building Bridges: inter-cultural dialogue'.¹¹ In its June 2008 and summer 2009 reports the Council and Commission did not even bother to address this point.¹² Although not directly related to SSR, both moderate and radical Islam are societal forces to be reckoned with; the former to build a dialogue with, the latter, if violent, to address through security services. The EU should outline what it plans to do regarding this Strategy

11 The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership (June 2007), http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/librairie/PDF/EU_CtrlAsia_EN-RU.pdf, 26.

12 Joint Progress Report by the Council and the European Commission to the European Council on the Implementation of the EU Central Asia Strategy, 2008, <http://delkaz.ec.europa.eu/joomla/images/Strategy/joint%20progress%20report%20on%20eu%20ca%20strategy.pdf> and the EU Strategy Implementation, 2009, http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/central_asia/docs/factsheet_strategy_implementation_en.pdf

priority, with a view to helping to build stability and enhance mutual security.

3. Recommendations for the EU institutions and member states

A strong EU involvement including a unified vision in support of Security Sector Reform in Central Asia is unlikely in the foreseeable future. The political landscape in Central Asia is largely not receptive to key aspects of SSR such as democratic control of armed forces and other state security institutions through the power ministries, the parliament and civil society. Nonetheless the EU is active in aspects of SSR and there is probably room for growth of this modest role. Here are a few options EU institutions and member states might consider:

- Although the EU Strategy's underlying theme is based on security, it would be worthwhile to look into ways of feeding SSR aspects into the political dialogue between the EU and Central Asian republics. Firstly, the Special Representative Pierre Morel and his team of advisors could investigate in meetings with Central Asian leaders if there are aspects of SSR that the republics might take an interest in. EU Council advisors could for instance be helpful in Central Asia on issues such as legal advice to help reform security structures.
- The EU does not implement significant SSR programmes in Central Asian states, with BOMCA largely being coordinated by UNDP. Increased political and financial support is feasible however, for instance through the OSCE. Supporting the OSCE field offices with extra-budgetary funds for specific projects would be an ideal way for the EU to get involved in SSR through a joint effort of OSCE member states and by using OSCE 'eyes and ears' on the ground.
- The EU will need to take a broad approach to security concerns that go beyond narrowly-defined regions such as Central Asia and conflict areas such as Afghanistan and Pakistan. It will be imperative for Brussels and its EU programmes on the ground to liaise closely with each other and even integrate activities that take place in Central Asia and Afghanistan. This principally applies to the BOMCA and CADAP programmes that need to further expand on 'cross-border' international border management assistance programmes between Afghanistan and the Central Asian states.
- In most assessments BOMCA receives a positive review. The fact that all five Central Asian countries participate in this regional endeavour is already an important achievement. It would be worthwhile to use the experience to try and transfer the BOMCA model to other parts of the security sector in Central Asia. The EU could consider

applying the integrated (border management) approach to (less politically sensitive) sectors such as emergency response which also demands the involvement of a host of security services and ministries that need to work closely together in times of need.

- In Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan there might be interest in EU supported projects on SSR. The EU and its member states could increasingly look into possibilities of supporting SSR projects implemented by local and international civil society organisations, also in cooperation with the governments of the three countries.
- In Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan prospects are largely absent for a substantial EU involvement in SSR that goes beyond current work in BOMCA. Nonetheless, the EU should make an effort to closely liaise with NATO and the OSCE, also in practical terms through small awareness-raising exercises.
- With regard to Islam and society, the EU should pick up on EU Strategy priority number seven 'Building Bridges: inter-cultural dialogue', making clear what it plans to undertake in terms of helping to build stability and enhance mutual security.

Conclusion

While the EU will not be an influential player in security issues nor in assistance to SSR as it has been in the Western Balkans, or currently in Congo and Georgia, there is room for a more concerted and substantial role. In the security domain it will be crucial for the EU to link up efforts and partners in Afghanistan to those in Central Asia. The political dialogue with Central Asian republics that was intensified as a result of the appearance of the 2007 EU Strategy for the region should now bear fruit in that sense. These increased contacts and engagement could also have a positive impact on water management tensions in the region, especially between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

As far as SSR goes, the EU has little room to fund or work on genuine SSR projects with a strong good governance focus. Nonetheless, Brussels and member states should use the opportunities that are available; especially since SSR is the ideal link between the human rights, democracy, good governance and rule of law priority it has set out to pursue and the security concerns that underpin EU engagement with Central Asia.

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

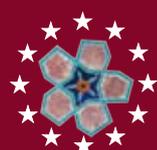
FRIDE is a think tank based in Madrid that aims to provide original and innovative thinking on Europe’s role in the international arena. It strives to break new ground in its core research interests – peace and security, human rights, democracy promotion and development and humanitarian aid – and mould 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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