

WORKING PAPER

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**A new EU-Central Asia Strategy:
Deepening relationships and
generating long-lasting impact**

A new EU-Central Asia Strategy: Deepening relationships and generating long-lasting impact

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Introduction

Over the past decade, the European Union (EU) has become an active actor in Central Asia. It has expanded its diplomatic presence, increased its development cooperation, and established cooperation mechanisms. However, so far, the EU's impact in terms of improving the security situation or helping to build democratic societies that respect human rights has been limited. It is now time to put the EU's political and development cooperation infrastructure to good use to deepen relations and start generating long-lasting impact in Central Asia.

In June 2017, the European Council agreed to renew the 2007 EU Strategy for Central Asia by the first half of 2019. As the European External Action Service (EEAS) drafts a new strategy, the Europe-Central Asia Monitoring (EUCAM) initiative wishes to contribute to this exercise by providing insights and recommendations. Rather than looking back and reviewing the current strategy and its implementation, EUCAM has looked ahead, and hereby presents some ideas on what an ideal new strategy should look like in terms of content and format.

Regarding content, a new document should:

- Be a real strategy that outlines long-term interests and objectives, and is closely linked to EU operational planning;
- Take democracy and security cooperation as a basis for engagement.

In terms of format, a new document should consist of:

- A first part outlining political and security relations, where bilateral agreements and Human Rights Dialogues mix with multilateral aspects such as the High-Level Security Dialogues;
- A second bilateral part outlining two priorities for each country that would serve as the main areas of cooperation: modern society and inclusive education programmes;
- A third regional part outlining two new broad programmes in which Central Asian countries could participate to different extents: renewable energy and connectivity.

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Recommendations

An interest-based EU approach

1. A lean, interest-based strategy

The new EU-Central Asia strategy should outline EU-Central Asian interests and serve as a guiding framework for EU engagement with the region. The strategy should be ready to exploit new opportunities, be flexible enough to be able to deal with major new developments and, at the same time, be sufficiently concrete to help meet its long-term interests. In essence, it should strike a balance between a concrete bilateral focus and a modest and flexible regional approach.

2. Being strategic in 'doing the right things' and tactical in 'doing things right'

There should be more coherence between the political strategy and the work of the European Commission, particularly DEVCO planning, but also in terms of education, trade, energy, transport, security, and human rights. The strategy should outline what the EU will do ('doing the right things') and serve as a basis for tactical European Commission planning and documents ('doing things right').

3. Encouraging EU member states' involvement

EU member states' involvement in the formulation of the new strategy should be encouraged, as their role in initiating and coordinating the implementation of the current strategy has helped cement European engagement with Central Asia both at home and in the region. However, to arrive at a coherent document, member states' specific proposals should be matched by additional national funding.

4. Highlighting civil society and research

The strategy should explicitly call for European and Central Asian civil societies' participation in its implementation. As part of this effort, the EU should both facilitate and help fund the establishment of a Central Asia-Europe think tank, which should be based in the region but have ties with European think tanks, and that could offer economic, security, and other types of analysis from a locally-informed perspective.

Part I. The political framework

5. A democracy pillar

The new strategy should be underpinned by democratic principles and universal values, including human rights, good governance, and the rule of law. This is in the EU's interest, as democracies tend to be more stable and reliable trading and security partners. It is also in Central Asia's interests, as democracies are able to provide better opportunities for citizens. This must be a home-grown process, which the EU could support through rule of law and good governance projects.

6. A security pillar

It is time to give more body to the annual High-Level Security Dialogues, by developing a concrete agenda at a ministerial level that would lead to tangible projects that could

be managed at a lower level. The topics should be of shared interest, such as preventing violent extremism or border control.

Part II. Modern societies and inclusive education

7. A modern society programme

The new strategy should set the foundations for the development of bilateral, tailor-made cooperation programmes focused on the many challenges faced by Central Asian societies, such as migration, rural-urban dynamics, or how to spur local economic activity. Programmes should be underpinned by the rule of law, anti-corruption measures and good governance, and include an active role for civil society actors.

8. An inclusive education programme

If the EU is to really promote Central Asia's development, have a long-lasting impact and gain visibility, it should invest in education. The EU should both increase its engagement and broaden its approach in this area, by investing in national education programmes. Programmes should encompass the entire spectrum, from basic, to secondary, and tertiary education, as well as vocational training. In terms of higher education, the EU should boost cooperation and exchanges among Central Asian and European universities, including through the integration of 'European' studies at Central Asian universities or by facilitating the opening of campuses of European universities in Central Asia. In terms of vocational training, the EU could facilitate on-the-job learning and internships in Europe for Central Asian students.

Part III. Renewable energy and connectivity

9. A renewable energy programme

The current strategy has not had a meaningful impact on energy matters. Energy ties between Europe and Kazakhstan are strong regardless of the current strategy, while energy relations between Europe and Turkmenistan have not advanced. The new Central Asia strategy should focus on matters of importance to all five Central Asian states, such as renewable energy, waste management, recycling, and water management. The programme should help Central Asian countries to diversify their energy sources as well as their economies.

10. A connectivity programme

The new EU strategy should include a connectivity programme for Central Asia that relates to the new EU Strategy on Connecting Europe and Asia. Its emphasis should be on connecting Central Asian societies to Europe instead of viewing the region as a transit zone, an approach that has so far brought only few benefits to Central Asia. An EU-Central Asia connectivity programme should include rule of law development to help these countries make the most of the influx of foreign investment through the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI); regional trade development for local border communities; and border management assistance to facilitate trade among Central Asian neighbours.

An interest-based EU approach

What sort of document?

The new EU-Central Asia strategy should be shorter than the current document and more to the point. It should outline EU and Central Asian interests and indicate key objectives. It should be a guiding framework for EU engagement with Central Asia, but be careful not to become a wish list of everything the EU hopes to do or wants to be involved in.

The new strategy should avoid highlighting what is important today but might not be so tomorrow. Issues that have been pertinent over the past decade – energy security, potential spill-over of radicalism from Afghanistan or countering Russia in Central Asia – are probably less valid now. Similarly, Uzbekistan’s reform process or the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, which are now in vogue, might lose prominence in the future. The strategy should be ready to exploit new opportunities and be flexible enough to deal with major new developments.

At the same time, the new document should have clear links with other relevant EU documents, especially the 2016 Global Strategy; the 2015-19 Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (to be updated in 2020); and the October 2018 EU Strategy on Connecting Europe and Asia.

European interests

The EU’s interests in Central Asia should be the strategy’s main driver. In a survey to around 20 EUCAM staff and contributors, six broad EU interests in Central Asia emerged. Security and democracy were considered the two most important issues, which should form the main pillars of EU engagement with Central Asia. Society and education came in third and fourth place, respectively, and should be the focus of tailor-made national programmes with each one of the five Central Asian countries. Energy and the economy came in fifth and sixth place, respectively, and should be dealt with in a regional format and, as such, should be the main elements of EU regional cooperation efforts. It is worth highlighting that while several respondents identified fossil energy security as a key EU interest, the authors of this paper argue for a regional renewable energy focus. EU geo-political interests such as countering Russia and China were barely mentioned.

Issue	Number of references
1. Security, including anti-terrorism and border control	12
2. Democracy and human rights	11
3. Societies and development cooperation	9
4. Education and training	8
5. Energy	7
6. Economic development and trade	7
7. Countering Russia and China	2
8. Cultural and people-to-people exchanges	1

Central Asian interests

While the new strategy will be an EU document, it must consider Central Asian interests in Europe if cooperation is to flourish. According to the survey's results, EU and Central Asian interests diverge. Consulted experts opined that Central Asian countries are interested in three main aspects. First, legitimisation and recognition of their young countries, often led by 'old governments'. This wish is part of the political relationship between the EU and Central Asia, and gives the EU some leverage to promote democracy and human rights. Second, increased investment and trade, which is in both parties' interest and also gives the EU some leverage. Third, Central Asian states seek broader support for their modernisation through social, economic, and political reform. It is especially in these areas that there needs to be some programmatic fine-tuning. Most respondents also expect Central Asia to be less interested in EU cooperation on security or energy. This would indicate that Central Asia would be much more open to bilateral ties with Europe than to regional cooperation initiatives.

Issue	Number of references
1. Trade and investment	12
2. Legitimisation and prestige / alternative to Russia and China	8
3. Education and training	7
4. Know-how and modernisation	6
5. Societies and development cooperation	6
6. Political reform and good governance	4
7. Security and regional cooperation	2
8. Energy diversification and water management	2

Strategy and tactics

The new EU strategy should lay down the EU's objectives in Central Asia for the next decade, while also relating more directly to EU operational policies. In this sense, there should be more coherence between the political strategy and the work of the European Commission, particularly DEVCO planning, but also in terms of education, trade, energy, transport, security, and human rights. The strategy should outline what the EU will do ('doing the right things') and serve as a basis for tactical European Commission planning and documents ('doing things right'). Now that there are concrete plans to develop a new funding instrument – the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (ND-ICI) – it is important that DEVCO plans for Central Asia are developed in line with the new political strategy.

Importance of EU member states' involvement

The majority of European member states do not have an active interest in Central Asia. They are happy to maintain healthy trade relations with Kazakhstan, while leaving most of the other policy fields to EU institutions. That said, several member states have assumed their responsibility in helping to implement the current strategy alongside their bilateral engagement with Central Asia. Member state participation in regional initiatives has helped cement European engagement with Central Asia both at home and in the region.

However, at this stage of policy formulation, there is a risk that member states might push to include their own individual priorities or pet projects in the new strategy. If not managed properly, this could result in a fruitless ‘Christmas tree document’. While member state engagement should be encouraged, national interests should be in line with the strategy’s main priorities, and specific national interests or projects should be matched by additional national funding.

With whom to work?

EU institutions and member states need to outline what other parties in addition to Central Asian governments they wish to include. First, the strategy should explicitly call for both European and Central Asian civil society involvement, ranging from universities to human rights defenders.

Second, the strategy should involve institutional partners. Despite having lost some relevance, the OSCE, of which all EU and Central Asian states are members, is still considered a meeting place, and its human, security and economic dimensions coincide with the main fields of EU-Central Asia cooperation. Similarly, NATO, despite being less present in Central Asia following its departure from Afghanistan, is still an official partner of the EU, and Central Asian countries participate in the Partnership for Peace. The EU should remain reserved towards the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), as they are mostly instruments of Beijing and Moscow and Central Asian members wish to avoid using these organisations for their relations with the EU.

A third group would be European non-EU members: Norway and Switzerland, and possibly the United Kingdom (UK). These countries have policies toward Central Asia, sometimes similar in size to those of the bigger EU member states. Norway is active in the energy field, Switzerland in water management and development cooperation, and the UK has embassies in all five Central Asian states and is a relevant actor in higher education – its Westminster University has a campus in Uzbekistan, and the UK hosts many Central Asian students.



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Building research capacity and cooperation

The EU should increase its support for research. The current occasional work of some European and Central Asian think tanks, a short-term Horizon 2020 project on EU-Central Asia relations or academic networking, and the work of EUCAM do not suffice. There is a clear need for more knowledge on Central Asian societies, especially in relation to security issues and complex economic realities on the ground. Meanwhile, Central Asia barely has think tanks that can help inform local and international policy-makers. The authors propose that the EU invests in establishing and funding a Central Asia-Europe think tank, which should be based in the region while having institutional links with European think tanks, in order to develop research that can inform policy-makers while, at the same time, strengthen ties between Central Asian and European researchers.

Part I. The political framework

The first part of a new EU strategy for Central Asia should define EU and Central Asian interests and outline the strategy's two main pillars – democracy and security. It should present the basic political framework, which is partly bilateral and partly regional.

Realistic bilateral agreements

The EU currently has Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCA) with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. With Turkmenistan, it has an interim trade agreement, given that the European Parliament and some member states have not ratified a PCA. With Kazakhstan, the EU has concluded an Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA). In 2017, the EU launched EPCA talks with Kyrgyzstan and in July 2018, the EEAS received a mandate from member states to launch similar negotiations with Uzbekistan.

It is still unclear what the real benefits of such enhanced agreements are beyond increased recognition by the EU. So far, the EU-Kazakhstan EPCA has not substantially impacted EU-Kazakh trade relations or reform efforts. The EPCAs could be considered as updates to the PCAs, offering increased EU recognition but with little practical implications. As there is no guarantee that Uzbekistan will continue its current reform path, the EU should first build a more practical relationship with the country through actual cooperation before pinning itself down to a new document. In this sense, the EU should avoid reporting success by the number of new agreements concluded. In this confusing field of granting new types of agreements or withholding old ones, it is important to have a basic strategy document that could bring Central Asian countries and the EU together in a joint setting.

Cooperation arrangements

It is still important to hold annual ministerial meetings between the EU and Central Asia, as they help put Central Asia on Brussels' policy map and show Central Asian leaderships that the EU is serious about the relationship. The role of the EU Special Representative is also essential as 'the face' of the EU vis-à-vis Central Asia, as well as in EU circles to use knowledge gathered from Central Asia for Brussels' agenda. The European Parliament has also contributed through the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Parliamentary Delegation for

Relations with Central Asia.

Some have argued for an EU-Central Asia civil society forum similar to the Eastern Partnership (EaP). However, the authors argue that the time is not ripe yet to organise this on a similar scale. There is too big a risk of European NGOs paying too little attention and Central Asian state-initiated and funded NGOs paying too much attention. For now, it seems that cooperation between European and Central Asian civil society will be mostly 'bilateral', revolving around national issues.

A democracy pillar

The new strategy should be underpinned by democratic principles and universal values like human rights, good governance, and the rule of law. The approach must be more horizontal and be applied from two main standpoints. First, the EU's interest: democratically-functioning societies are more stable trading and security partners (or more 'resilient' in the words of the EU Global Strategy). Second, while 'democracy' might have a negative reputation among many Central Asians, it should be presented as a pre-condition to lead a secure life with opportunities. This must be a home-grown process (like we are witnessing in Uzbekistan to some extent), which the EU could support through rule of law and good governance projects.



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Human rights as part of democracy

Human rights need to be more closely linked to rule of law and governance, and thus democracy. The annual Human Rights Dialogues with each of the Central Asian partners need to be highlighted in the strategy as a main engagement instrument. Issues discussed during these dialogues should be consistently followed-up in other high-level political meetings. Where possible, the dialogues should reserve a larger role for civil society beyond the current engagement. Ideally, the dialogues would evolve into meetings that are less confrontational, but without being 'tick-off-the-box' gatherings either.

The authors propose that the dialogues focus on three interrelated matters. First, a continued focus on individual human rights cases of grave concern; second, on the reform of the judiciary and national human rights related institutions to make them more independent, accessible and accountable; and third, implementation of international commitments, including rulings and opinions of United Nations bodies and the Venice Commission.

A security pillar

The second pillar of the new strategy should be security and the main forum to address this should be the annual High-Level Security Dialogues. Despite some initial setbacks due to limited interest from Central Asia, these dialogues are now held annually either in Europe or in Central Asia.

Central Asian interest could be boosted by occasional senior EU member state participation. Moreover, it is time to give more body to the annual High-Level Security Dialogues, by developing a concrete agenda at a ministerial level that could lead to tangible projects that would be managed at a lower level. The topics should be of shared interest. One of the 'hottest' topics is preventing violent extremism. Terrorist attacks in Europe by Central Asians as well as the threat of attacks in Central Asia (and recently an attack on Americans and Europeans in Tajikistan) are of great concern to both regions. A coordinated response should include increased intelligence cooperation but, at the same time, seek to avoid supporting security apparatuses that are used for repression. That said, a practical relationship on preventing violent extremism, including via international organisations such as the United Nations or the OSCE, remains important.

Work on border control (BOMCA) needs to be re-thought. One could argue that the integrated border management approach has failed. A new approach could focus more on trade facilitation, but without ignoring security assistance where deemed useful. The EU will need to make sure that anti-corruption and good governance principles are applied. Afghanistan should be welcome to participate, although it might prove difficult to tie the country to several aspects of a concrete working agenda.

Part II. Modern societies and inclusive education

On a bilateral level, the EU should focus on 'modern societies' and 'inclusive education'. It should develop action plans with Central Asian partners and dedicate the majority of its funding to these two issues. Modern society projects should be implemented by local authorities and civil society organisations, while educational projects should be taken up by local authorities and universities, schools and NGOs. All projects should be based on good governance principles, including anti-corruption measures.

People on the move

The EU should continue to do what it is already doing through development cooperation, but better articulate the challenges faced by Central Asian societies. The EU is already focusing on rural development (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan), rule of law (Kyrgyzstan), healthcare (Tajikistan) and education (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan). Modern society programmes should bring these issues together. They should also pay attention to the consequences of labour migration in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, for example, by helping returned migrants and women who are left behind by their migrant husbands.

While the EU's current focus on rural development is clearly linked to curtailing migration and mitigating its consequences, nowadays urban issues are just as urgent, given the rural to urban migration in Central Asian countries, which is leading to deficits in housing, health-care, infrastructure (electricity, clean water, etc.) and employment opportunities. The EU could, for instance, develop initiatives that help bind European and Central Asian cities together in city twinning, and help citizens and authorities to interact on urban planning. This rural-urban dynamic and the impact of labour migration on societies are making national modern society programmes all the more urgent.

It's indeed the economy...

National modern society programmes should also focus on spurring local trade and business. Local initiatives and small businesses are often restrained or burdened by troublesome bureaucracy or rampant corruption.

The EU could try to counter this by encouraging governments interested in European investments. The EU could offer technical advice on how to diversify Central Asian economies or on building less corrupt and more efficient tax systems. In addition, the EU could also work directly with businesses and civil society on the ground through the Central Asia Invest programme, which should be part of new modern society programming. Work in supporting Small and Medium Sized (SME) businesses and Business Intermediary Organisations (BIOs) such as chambers of commerce or tourist associations is valuable and should be continued. Civil society, including those organisations close to the region's governments, should be encouraged with EU funding to create jobs and business opportunities.

Education as a long-term investment

The EU's involvement and approach to education should be radically expanded. If the EU is to really promote Central Asia's development, have a long-lasting impact and gain visibility, and avoid 'losing' Central Asia to Russia or China, it should invest in education. First, education is the basis to almost all other issues the EU wishes to approach in Central Asia. For democratisation to progress, the new generation needs to have a good education that will enable it to work in government or civil society. To advance on economic diversification or society modernisation, a well-educated population is a must. Second, education is an area where the EU can stand out from Russia and China, and make a difference in Central Asia.

The authors propose that national inclusive education programmes be implemented in parallel with the above-mentioned modern society programmes. The EEAS and DEVCO could lead through EU delegations, with input from the Erasmus programme of DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. A tailor-made bilateral approach to programme development is needed, as opposed to the current EU regional Education Initiative for Central Asia. Substantial member state involvement in the programmes is essential, especially from Germany, which is already a destination for many Central Asian students.

Higher education

Higher education in Central Asia suffers from many problems: poor quality, low wages, corruption, and brain-drain. An EU regional higher education programme should consist of additional efforts with Erasmus while, at the same time, coordinate EU member state



programmes. Ideally, the EU would boost the number of Erasmus scholarships and make possible dual degrees between European and Central Asian universities.

The EU could also become a higher education player on the ground. Balancing social sciences (which receive little attention in Central Asia) with natural sciences that are important to modernise Central Asian countries' infrastructures should be considered. The EU could support educational facilities that have proven successful such as the OSCE Academy and work with Central Asian universities to open 'European' studies departments to help familiarise Central Asian students with Europe as a partner and potential development model. Lastly, the EU could encourage more European universities to open campuses in Central Asia, such as Torino and Westminster have done in Uzbekistan.

Inclusive education

EU national education programmes for Central Asia should provide more support to basic and secondary education, and vocational training. In most Central Asian countries, basic education systems are on the verge of collapse as teachers are underpaid and schools are in poor condition. Basic education is also being affected by the rural-urban migration, which is making it difficult to sustain schools in villages or have sufficient capacity in cities.

Secondary education faces similar problems, with the added risk of the still partially-functioning Soviet system splitting up in poor quality education and private or religious-based education, creating rifts in societies.

Whereas basic and secondary education is more of a long-term investment, vocational training is a mid-term fix to urgent shortfalls in societies. In the field of vocational training, the EU has many options. One idea would be to facilitate the establishment of interested European companies in Central Asia and combining job creation with training and potential internships in Europe. Another idea would be to provide vocational training in the construction sector for returning migrants. Training (and sharing the European experience) would be valuable for a wide range of actors, from public servants to civil society organisations to start-ups.

Part III. Renewable energy and connectivity

One of the EU's strengths is the possibility of sharing its story of integration and cooperation. But many countries would opt for enjoying good bilateral ties with the EU rather than being tied to externally-driven regional cooperation. Thus, the EU should only invest in regional cooperation if there is a genuine interest from Central Asia. This means that topics need to be right and the cooperation flexible in terms of process and participation. Two types of regional cooperation frameworks could meet the criteria: a renewable energy initiative, including water management; and a 'connectivity' programme that is concretely linked to rule of law, trade, and borders.

Is energy a priority?

The current strategy has not had a meaningful impact on energy matters. Energy ties between Europe and Kazakhstan are strong regardless of the current strategy. So far, energy relations between Europe and Turkmenistan have not advanced (the EU has not yet opened a delegation in Ashgabat, which points to the EU's lack of interest). Also, links between European and Central Asian companies are well-established, regardless of the EU strategy.

Even though an August 2018 agreement on the delimitation of the Caspian Sea has improved prospects for bringing Turkmen and perhaps even Kazakh gas to Europe, such developments are unlikely to materialise over the coming decades for two main reasons. First, Turkmen gas would need to be transported through several 'risky' countries such as Azerbaijan or Turkey, and these countries might diverge on transit issues. Second, demand for gas in Europe has been declining, while energy diversification is becoming more important and gas is increasingly imported as LNG. The new EU strategy should focus on helping partners to diversify their economies away from fossil energy dependence, in terms of both exports and consumption.

A renewable energy focus

The new Central Asia strategy should focus on matters of importance to all five Central Asian states. The EU itself is slowly moving away from fossil energy, while renewable energy sources are increasingly important in EU energy policies. Geographically, Central Asia is an ideal region for generating solar, wind and hydroelectric energy, but there are also obstacles. There might be limited political will among Central Asian leaderships, as Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan remain almost completely dependent on fossil energy and Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan largely depend on hydroelectric power. Central Asian countries are also likely to worry that renewable energy might lead to decreasing energy exports and rising energy prices for local consumption. On the positive side, Central Asian states are aware that energy diversification lies at the heart of the much-needed economic diversification. Moreover, they are keen to attract European energy investments and know-how.

A regional programme could discuss basic cooperation on renewable energy and raise awareness in order to update and change Central Asian policies. The EU could also encourage European companies to invest in renewable energy in Central Asia and create synergies with other partners such as Japan and South Korea. Countries that are keen to commit to



actual reform could work in bilateral renewable energy projects, as well as on energy efficiency, waste management, and recycling.

A water component

The EU has experience in Central Asia's water management problématique. It is one of the few external actors involved in this crucial matter to the region's security. The EU could play a broker role between countries should they welcome such EU involvement. In this sense, the current set-up of the EU Water and Environment Initiative with a platform organised by a consortium of institutions should be evaluated and become part of a broader renewable energy programme. The new strategy should indicate that the EU is ready to help solve water disputes and facilitate regional water management integration, but it must also acknowledge that water management is, first and foremost, a national issue that needs to be dealt with through countering water waste, building new infrastructure and educating those working in this sector.

A connectivity programme, but what should it connect?

In a narrow sense, connectivity relates to trade and transit. In a broader sense, it also includes digital connections, people-to-people contacts, education, NGO activity and so on.

The authors propose a new 'connectivity programme' that emphasises rule of law, trade and borders. Such a regional programme should relate to the EU Strategy on Connecting Europe and Asia. It should focus on connecting Europe to Central Asia in terms of trade, investment, societies and education, instead of on connecting Europe to China and viewing Central Asia as a transit route. A rule of law component (based on lessons learnt from the current regional EU Rule of Law initiative) could help Central Asian states make better use of the influx of foreign investment, mostly through the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. The programme could bring together a series of projects (BOMCA amongst them), and give Central Asian countries the opportunity to choose in which projects they wish to participate. These projects should be open to Mongolia and Afghanistan.

We all want more trade

The EU-Central Asia connectivity programme should emphasise trade development. The EU is well-positioned in this area; it is seen as a trusted partner from whom Central Asia hopes to receive more investments.

First, the EU could promote an increasingly rules-based investment regime. A way to start could be to establish a regional Chamber of Commerce that would offer know-how and advice, while also organising trade fairs and business fora. Its core task would be to help countries streamline investment rules, while actively bringing investors and local parties together. It would also help Central Asian countries cooperate and shield themselves from Chinese investments and infrastructural projects that do not bring concrete benefits to Central Asian economies.

Second, there is a need for research capacity to apply lessons learnt from other regions and to better understand the investment and trade options in such a complex region as Central Asia. Here the Central Asia-Europe think tank proposal could play a role.

Borders that facilitate connectivity

BOMCA should carry on with a 10th phase and be featured in the new strategy. It should be part of a regional security component (a project linked to the High-Level Security Dialogues), but, foremost, of a connectivity programme given its potential trade facilitation role. Whereas BOMCA as a programme has been generally well received, its message of Integrated Border Management has not. After 15 years of projects and cooperation, corruption, trade impediments and drug trafficking persist: Political will among Central Asia's political elites is clearly lacking.

On a political and security level, BOMCA could continue to bring countries together to discuss how to adapt their diverse approaches to border control to foment better cooperation. But BOMCA's focus should be to help Central Asian borders facilitate trade – both international



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‘Silk Road’ transit and local small cross-border trade. The latter is essential as the development of border communities closely relates to the two national programmes on societies and education proposed here.

Ideally, BOMCA would focus on the borders between Central Asian countries where there are few donors and increased opportunities for progress, instead of Central Asian borders with Afghanistan where there are more donors involved and where Central Asian states themselves can make use of previously delivered equipment and training. The OSCE would remain a natural partner on border control in Central Asia, while member states’ broad participation in the programme’s coordination should be applauded and continued.

Concluding overview

To sum up, the following schedule could be a basis for a new EU strategy for Central Asia:

EU-CA Strategy 2019	Component 1	Component 2
<i>Part I Mixed national-regional</i>	Democracy pillar <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated Human Rights Dialogues that include practical reform-oriented follow-up 	Security pillar <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A High-Level Security Dialogues’ agenda with an operational structure for joint projects
<i>Part II National focus</i>	Modern society programmes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Migration Rural-urban dynamics Local trade 	Inclusive education programmes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher education Basic and secondary education Vocational Training
<i>Part III Regional focus</i>	Renewable energy programme <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Renewable energy Waste management and recycling Water management 	Connectivity programme <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional and international trade Rule of Law Borders



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Established in 2008 by FRIDE as a project seeking to monitor the implementation of the EU Strategy for Central Asia, EUCAM has grown into a knowledge hub on broader Europe-Central Asia relations. As part of CESS, EUCAM will continue to raise the profile of European-Central Asian relations in general, and more specifically to:

- Critically, though constructively, scrutinize European policies towards Central Asia;
- Enhance knowledge of European engagement with Central Asia through top-quality research;
- Raise awareness on the importance of Central Asia and Europe's engagement, as well as discuss European policies among Central Asian communities;
- Expand the network of experts and institutions from Europe and Central Asia and provide a forum for debate.



CESS

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