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## The Implementation of the European Strategy for a New Partnership with Central Asia: an Overview

The strategy for a new partnership between the European Union and Central Asia for the 2007-2013 period represents the new political approach developed by the European Commission as regards relations with Central Asia, because for the first time the achievement of general political aims has been closely linked to the realization and development of a potential change process in the region. By means of this strategy – launched in June 2007 during the German presidency of the European Commission – the European Union aims to deepen political and economic cooperation with the Central Asian republics and to enhance its geopolitical influence in the region.

The adoption of this new form of partnership was motivated by several factors. Firstly, the need to strengthen the European political presence in the region owing to many geopolitical and security issues; secondly, persistent Afghan instability which threatens to destabilize the whole Central Asian region; thirdly, the enlargement of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) to Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia in 2004, which required the development of a political strategy with the closely linked Central Asian

republics; fourthly, the serious threat that a combination of growing authoritarianism of Central Asian presidents and the lack of economic, social and political reforms could spread political instability; finally, the necessity to diversify European energy supplies – in order to reduce dependence on energy imports from Russia – by targeting Central Asian energy resources for the realization of new alternative pipelines (e.g. the Nabucco project).

The strategy sets out a broad range of general objectives and priorities, to be mainly achieved through strong political co-operation identifying the common areas of interest: the EU and the five Central Asian republics share “the common goal of achieving stability and prosperity” and the partnership must be based on “the development and consolidation of stable, just and open societies, adhering to international norms”. At the same time, the EU is promoting its interests in the region through this strategy: “the EU has a strong interest in a peaceful, democratic and economically prosperous Central Asia”, which implies that the achievement of this goal of stability and prosperity in Central Asia requires a common engagement to handle shared security challenges such as migration, the fight

N. 155 - SETTEMBRE 2009

### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the achievements and the results obtained by the European Union after two years of implementation of the strategy for a new partnership with Central Asia. Launched in 2007, this strategy represents a new EU approach to a strategically and geopolitically important region. In spite of some indisputable progress in political relationships between the EU and the five Central Asian republics and in the energy sphere, little progress has been registered in the human rights field and in the democratisation process.

As a potential geopolitical player in the region, at present the EU privileges a *realpolitik* approach in its relations with the Central Asian republics, as this European strategy appears to be focused on securing access to the region's energy supplies and ensuring that the states of Central Asia assist western countries involved in the conflict in Afghanistan. However, China and Russia's strong influence over the Central Asian republics seriously jeopardizes the achievement of these European geopolitical goals.

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against organised crime and international terrorism, and human and drugs trafficking. The EU has been called to intervene through various aid programmes to prevent the causes of instability, such as poor governance, lack of rule of law, poverty and the violation of human rights<sup>1</sup>.

Moreover, the EU's dependence on external energy resources is highlighted in the strategy, and cooperation with Central Asian energy suppliers could enhance European energy security as well as strengthen the Central Asian energy markets.

Compared to the previous strategy and assistance programme for the region, the new EU approach to Central Asia shows three important differences: an envisaged intensification of political ties, through regular dialogue with top officials on a variety of topics; the doubling of the assistance budget, and a strong focus on bilateral relations.

As regards economic assistance, Central Asia receives a total of 750 million euro under the European Union's Development Cooperation Instrument for the 2007-13 period, while the Regional Strategy Paper for assistance to Central Asia has focused on intervening in three priority areas: 1) Central Asia regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations (for which 30-35% of the total budget has been allocated)<sup>2</sup>; 2) Reducing

poverty and increasing living standards (40-45% of the total budget); 3) Promoting good governance and economic reform (20-25% of the total budget)<sup>3</sup>.

The previous 2002-2006 assistance programme was criticised for its excessive emphasis on a regional approach that proved largely ineffective in the Central Asia scenario. In the new strategy the EU aims to balance the bilateral and regional approach, "according to the differing needs of every country and to the performance of each country"<sup>4</sup>; the regional approach has been maintained for issues such as migration and border management, water management and the fight against organised crime and drugs trafficking – which require regional solutions – while more tailored policies and cooperation programmes have been developed in order to deal with issues that can be solved better on a bilateral basis (such as the human rights field, education, youth and energy)<sup>5</sup>.

In June 2008, the Council and the European Commission released the Joint Progress

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migration management, the fight against international crime, and customs, education, scientific and people-to-people activities.

<sup>3</sup> European Commission, *Regional Strategy Paper for Assistance to Central Asia for the period 2007-2013*, 2007, p. 3, [http://ec.europa.eu/external\\_relations/central\\_asia/rsp/07\\_13\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/central_asia/rsp/07_13_en.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Council of the European Union, *The European Union and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership*, cit., p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. N. KASSENOVA, *A View from the Region*, in N.J. MELVIN (ed.), *Engaging Central Asia, the European Union's new strategy in the heart of Eurasia*, Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels, 2008, pp. 122-124.

Report on the implementation of the EU Central Asia Strategy, related to the goals achieved after one year of strategy implementation. This report underlines the establishment of "a new quality of cooperation" between the EU and Central Asia and lists the following as European successes: the commitment of all five Central Asian republics to a structured human rights dialogue, the strengthening of the political dialogue through regular high-level political contacts and various meetings, the deepening of energy cooperation with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, and better implementation of the BOMCA and CADAP programmes<sup>6</sup>.

However, beyond these successes some shortcomings in strategy implementation are mentioned in the conclusion of the Report, such as little progress in the promotion of human rights and in the democratisation and reform process, thus strengthening concerns that the EU is privileging a *realpolitik* approach in its relations with the Central Asian republics<sup>7</sup>. The European policy is focused on securing access to the region's energy supplies and on ensuring that the states of Central Asia assist western

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<sup>6</sup> The Central Asia Drug Action Program (CADAP) and the Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA) are considered the EU's most successful programmes in the region. These programmes are focused on the improvement of Central Asian border management, in order to prevent terrorist activities and drug, human and weapons traffic and to enhance regional cooperation.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. C. GRAUBNER, *EU Strategy on Central Asia: Realpolitik After All*, in «Central Asia Caucasus Institute Analyst», 14 May 2008, [www.cacianalyst.org](http://www.cacianalyst.org).

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<sup>1</sup> Council of the European Union, *The European Union and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership*, European Communities, October 2007, pp. 5-7, [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/EU\\_CtrIA\\_sia\\_EN-RU.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/EU_CtrIA_sia_EN-RU.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> This includes as focal priorities: networks, environment, border and

countries involved in the conflict in Afghanistan: the achievement of these goals legitimates the presence of the EU as a geopolitical player in the region, and its involvement in strategic competition with China and Russia<sup>8</sup>.

Although the 2008 Progress Report established a regular progress review on the implementation of the strategy, the EU did not publish an official assessment of the strategy results in 2009. The state-of-the-art in each republic on the strategy for a new partnership with Central Asia, two years on from its implementation, is described below.

### Kazakhstan

The EU considers Kazakhstan to be the most reliable partner in Central Asia. Since its independence, strong bilateral economic and political relations have been built, and in 1995 Kazakhstan and the European Union signed the Partnership Cooperation Agreement which was the legal framework on which to develop bilateral relations. The EU has progressively become Kazakhstan's main trade partner, accounting for an almost 40% share of its total external trade.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. J. BOONSTRA - N. MELVIN, *The EU strategy for Central Asia @ year one*, EUCAM, EU-Central Asia monitoring, CEPS Policy Brief, 1, October 2008, pp. 3-4; European Commission External Relations, *Joint Progress Report by the Council and the European Commission to the European Council on the implementation of the EU Central Asia Strategy*, 24 June 2008, [http://ec.europa.eu/external\\_relations/central\\_asia/docs/p\\_rgress\\_report\\_0608\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/central_asia/docs/p_rgress_report_0608_en.pdf).

Kazakhstan's exports to the EU are heavily dominated by oil and gas, which accounted for more than 80% of its total exports in 2007<sup>9</sup>.

In the energy field, the huge Kazakh oil and gas reserves are crucially important in the European strategy of diversification of supplies and in the creation of alternative pipelines in which Kazakhstan should play an important role. Energy cooperation between Kazakhstan and the EU has been enhanced with the 2006 Memorandum of Understanding on energy cooperation and with the Kazakh agreement to transport oil through the west-oriented Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. Implementation of the Kazakhstan Caspian Transport System (KCTS) to transport hydrocarbons to European markets will be a strategic goal in the coming years<sup>10</sup>. According to the plan, the KCST will initially transport 25 million tonnes of oil annually, to be increased to 38 million tonnes which should fill the energy pipelines backed by the EU, such as the BTC and the planned Odessa-Brody-Gdansk and Constanta-Trieste pipelines<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> European Commission, *Kazakhstan. Bilateral trade relations*, [http://ec.europa.eu/trade/issues/bilateral/countries/kazakhstan/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/trade/issues/bilateral/countries/kazakhstan/index_en.htm).

<sup>10</sup> The launch of the system is planned to coincide with the start of production at the Kashagan field in 2010-2011; until a solution to the legal status of the Caspian Sea is found, oil will be shipped by barge and tanker from the Kazakh port of Aktau to the Azeri port of Baku.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. A. COHEN, *Kazakhstan: The Road to Independence*, Silk Road Paper, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, Washington-Nacka, 2008, pp. 145-146, [www.silkroadstudies.org](http://www.silkroadstudies.org).

Despite the emerging importance of Kazakhstan, the strategy document does not recognise its role or grant Kazakhstan a particular place in European Union relations, whereas the country has expressed interest in a much closer relationship.

In August 2008, the Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev endorsed a project called "Path to Europe 2009-11", with the main goal of developing a strategic partnership with the EU and the European member countries in order to "promote economic cooperation, the attraction of technologies and managerial experience, the improvement of our laws, and the development of our own agenda and strategic priorities for the OSCE chairmanship"<sup>12</sup>.

Both the EU and Kazakhstan are interested in the intensification of political dialogue (one of the programme's aims is to organise at least five official visits per year at European heads of state and governments level), building transport corridors, energy cooperation and expanded trade, but at present the EU does not consider the potential inclusion of Kazakhstan within the framework of the ENP or the new Eastern Partnership, without offering membership obviously but considering Kazakhstan as strategically important as the three Caucasian republics.

This limited political vision of the EU could weaken existing relations between the two sides and Europe's opportunity to influence the political development of Kazakhstan positively. Although Kazakhstan has obtained the 2010 OSCE

<sup>12</sup> *State Programme, Kazakhstan "The Path to Europe 2009-2011"*, Astana 2008 [http://www.eucentralasia.eu/files/path\\_to\\_Europe.pdf](http://www.eucentralasia.eu/files/path_to_Europe.pdf).

chairmanship, Nazarbayev is not committing himself in terms of promised reforms in order to adhere to the international standards promoted by the OSCE<sup>13</sup>.

In recent months, two events have evidenced and confirmed the EU's difficulties with its relations with Kazakhstan. In July, the EU criticised the Kazakh adoption of the Law on Information and Communication Networks, as it represents a violation of Kazakhstan's OSCE commitments to implement a programme of democratic reforms<sup>14</sup>. In May 2009, during the Prague summit attended by the countries of the so-called southern corridor, the EU failed to convince Kazakhstan (and also Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) to sign an agreement committing itself to the realisation of the Trans Caspian Gas Pipeline (TCGP). After the summit, Kazakhstan agreed to participate in the Moscow-led gas pipeline project – which could divert potential supplies away from Nabucco – that is

expected to carry 10 billion cubic metres (bcm) of Kazakh gas<sup>15</sup>, so EU-Kazakh cooperation seems to be weakening in the energy sphere also, thus orienting Kazakhstan towards Russian and Chinese proposals<sup>16</sup>.

### Turkmenistan

The presidential succession and the shift of external policy effected by the new Turkmen president Berdymukhammedov have represented a major opportunity for the EU to develop strong political and economic ties with this energy-rich Central Asian republic. Berdymukhammedov's goal is to overcome the negative effects of 16 years of international isolationist policy and "permanent neutrality" under the government of the previous president Nyazov – characterized by totalitarian control in the political, economic and social fields and by systematic violation of human rights and civil liberties – and to open a new phase in international relations, based on increasing engagement and deeper cooperation with foreign countries.

Under the framework of the Strategy for a new partnership, the EU has strengthened its

relations with Turkmenistan; close political dialogue has been established through regular meetings and high-level summits involving top European and Turkmen officials in order to enhance cooperation between the two sides. The EU has supported the reforms proposed by the new Turkmen president and expressed its willingness to assist the country in agriculture, justice and administration. As a precondition for strong cooperation and full trade relations the EU has requested genuine commitment to the adoption of economic and social reforms, the democratisation process, and above all concrete improvement in Turkmenistan's human rights record, as the country is still considered the "worst of the worst" in the human rights protection and freedom field<sup>17</sup>.

In spite of Turkmenistan's increasing involvement in the international scenario and the moderate reforms adopted in the social and education fields, after over 3 years of Berdymukhammedov's rule little progress can be seen in human rights, freedom of the press, and the political system, which still fails to recognise the opposition political parties' legal status<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> The constitutional reforms adopted in 2007 legitimised Nazarbayev as president for life, while the Kazakh political system is dominated by the *Nur Otan* Presidential Party, and the activities of independent journalists, political opposition parties and NGOs are subject to restrictions and limitations. Cf. S. PEYROUSE, *Logiques et acteurs du présidentialisme au Kazakhstan. La «famille», les technocrates et les oligarques*, in «Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest», 39, 2, 2008, pp. 150-159.

<sup>14</sup> Swedish Presidency of the European Union, *EU Statement on Internet legislation in Kazakhstan*, OSCE Permanent Council No. 769, Vienna, 16 July 2009, [http://www.eu2009.se/polopoly\\_fs/1.9630/m/enu/standard/file/OSCE\\_EU%20Statement%20on%20Internet%20legislation%20in%20Kazakhstan.pdf](http://www.eu2009.se/polopoly_fs/1.9630/m/enu/standard/file/OSCE_EU%20Statement%20on%20Internet%20legislation%20in%20Kazakhstan.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> *Kazakhstan Commits To Russian-Led Europe Gas Link*, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 13 May 2009, [http://www.rferl.org/content/Kazakhstan\\_Commits\\_To\\_RussianLed\\_Europe\\_Gas\\_Link/1731061.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/Kazakhstan_Commits_To_RussianLed_Europe_Gas_Link/1731061.html).

<sup>16</sup> China is enhancing its presence in the Kazakh energy field, through completion of the Sino-Kazakh oil pipelines (linking the Kazakh Caspian field to the Chinese border) and the Sino-Turkmen gas pipeline, which will also transport Kazakh gas towards Chinese markets.

<sup>17</sup> Freedom House, *Worst of the worst. The world's most repressive societies 2009*, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/WoW09/WOW%202009.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. S. HORÁK - J. SÌR, *Dismantling totalitarianism? Turkmenistan under Berdymukhammedow*, Silk Road Paper, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, Washington-Nacka, March 2009, pp. 64-65; Amnesty International, *Turkmenistan: No effective human rights reform*, Amnesty International Report, EUR 61/004/2008, 23 June 2008.

Considering the huge Turkmen gas reserves and the new president's political will to diversify energy exports, enhancement of energy cooperation is the real goal of the European strategy for Turkmenistan, to carry Turkmen gas through the TCGP east-west corridor, lessen dependency on energy imports from Russia and foster energy security through diversification of sources and suppliers<sup>19</sup>.

In April 2008 in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan and the EU signed a Memorandum of Understanding on energy cooperation, committing Turkmenistan to sell 10 bcm of gas per year to European markets, and envisaging Turkmenistan's future participation in the implementation of the TCGP and the realisation of the Nabucco project, expected to be in operation around 2014 and to carry about 31 bcm per year to European markets. However, this deal did not point the way to transport gas supplies; moreover, the lack of a legal solution on the status of the Caspian Sea sets back creation of the so called "missing link" – i.e. the underwater pipeline linking the port of Turkmenbashi with the Azeri port of Baku – which is to be connected to the South Caucasus Pipeline (or the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline), even

<sup>19</sup> These reserves were previously estimated at 2.7 – 6 trillion cubic metres (tcm), but such estimates should be necessarily revised after the first independent audit of Turkmen gas reserves (worked out by the British GCA in 2008), which concluded that the South Yolotan-Osman and Yashlar fields in the south east of the country contained between 4 and 14 tcm. Cf. B. PANNIER, *Independent audit shows Turkmen gas field "world-class"*, in «Eurasia Insight», 19 October 2008, [www.eurasianet.org](http://www.eurasianet.org).

though the transport of Turkmen gas by ship could be a temporary solution.

However, it should be emphasised that at present Russia buys 90% of Turkmen gas production and that the Sino-Turkmen gas pipeline will be in operation in 2010, transporting 30-40 bcm of Turkmen gas per year towards Chinese markets; unless gas production is increased in the coming years, Turkmenistan will not be able to enhance the Nabucco project.

Another element showing the improvement of EU-Turkmenistan relations is the likely ratification of the Interim Trade Agreement with this Central Asian republic, so far blocked by the European Parliament because of concerns over Turkmenistan's failure in the human rights arena<sup>20</sup>, even if no major improvement has been seen in human rights and democracy in Turkmenistan<sup>21</sup>.

### Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

The geopolitical relevance of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan appears limited as they do not

<sup>20</sup> However, the European Parliament requires as a condition a significant improvement in the human rights area, such as free access of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the release of all political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, the abolition of movement restrictions which prevent Turkmen citizens from travelling abroad and the possibility for NGOs and human rights organizations to operate in the country.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. M. DENISON, *The EU and Central Asia: commercialising the energy relationship*, EUCAM Working Paper, 2, July 2009, pp. 7-9.

have hydrocarbon energy resources to exploit and their geographical morphology is not suitable for being crossed by energy pipelines, however this situation could offer the EU better prospects for implementing democratic values and human rights promotion.

Considering the extreme poverty of these two Central Asian republics, the EU has allocated the largest slice of economic assistance to Tajikistan (66 million euro) and Kyrgyzstan (55 million euro), recognizing that their economic weakness could affect regional stability<sup>22</sup>. The EU has planned to focus its strategy on the implementation of the second priority (reduction of poverty and improvement of living standards) and the third priority (promotion of good governance and economic reform).

Tajikistan's poverty and political weakness have characterized this country as a failed state; the winter 2007-08 energy crisis highlighted its serious problems, pushing the EU to intervene in order to provide economic support to President Rahmon. Besides, Tajik stability is of crucial importance from the security perspective owing to the "porous" border with Afghanistan and the necessity to fight drug trafficking and international terrorism<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> European Commission, *Central Asia Indicative Programme (2007-2010)*, DG External Relations E/3, 2006, pp. 3-4, [http://ec.europa.eu/external\\_relations/central\\_asia/sp/nip\\_07\\_10\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/central_asia/sp/nip_07_10_en.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> The European Commission's Delegation to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, *President of Tajikistan Rahmon pays official visit to Belgium*, [http://delkaz.ec.europa.eu/joomla/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=523&Itemid=43](http://delkaz.ec.europa.eu/joomla/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=523&Itemid=43).

Regarding Kyrgyzstan, the hopes for democratic commitment of the political leadership which emerged after the “tulip revolution” have already been frustrated because of President Bakiyev’s increasingly authoritarian management of power. Despite Kyrgyz involvement in a human rights dialogue with the EU in support of mass media and press development, considerable worsening of freedom of the press has been noted, with growing censorship and strict control over the media exercised by the political authorities<sup>24</sup>.

One of the EU’s major challenges as regards Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan should be addressed via a focus on strong support to develop their water-energy sector and hydroelectric power stations in order to strengthen their energy independence. These projects have been strongly opposed by Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, which fear change in the current water regime and a reduction of the water supply for their agricultural lands and cotton plantations.

### Uzbekistan

Considering the repressive regime which exists in Uzbekistan and Karimov’s authoritarian management of power, it is particularly difficult for the EU to achieve the democratisation, human rights protection and promotion of reforms goals in the Uzbek scenario.

The relations between Uzbekistan and the EU worsened after the

Uzbek army’s violent repression of the Andijan uprising and President Karimov’s subsequent refusal to allow an independent international commission to investigate the Andijan events. As a consequence, the EU Commission adopted sanctions against Uzbekistan and suspended the PCA in 2005, but later on geopolitical interests linked to energy and stability issues began to prevail and a political division emerged in the EU. Some countries (such as Germany and France) have claimed the ineffectiveness of the sanctions and pushed for them to be softened, as well as for the development of a close dialogue with Uzbekistan; other countries (such as the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and the United Kingdom) want to maintain the sanctions until the Uzbek government shows a real will to improve the human rights situation<sup>25</sup>. This approach towards a more involving dialogue has prevailed, and in November 2007 sanctions started to be eased; now only the arms embargo remains effective. However, since the EU extended the suspension, the Uzbek government has taken few steps to demonstrate genuine commitment to human rights issues, and above all the internal scenario has worsened dramatically since the Andijan events. Besides, this moderate engagement to improve the internal situation does not represent systemic reforms, and most of them remain theoretical<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> International Crisis Group, *Uzbekistan: Europe’s sanctions matter*, in «Asia Briefing», 5, 54, Bishkek/Brussels, 6 November 2006, pp. 1-3.

<sup>26</sup> After the softening of the sanctions, some limited progress has been registered in Uzbekistan in the field of human rights – with the release of

It is evident that renewal of the EU-Uzbekistan dialogue and the political rapprochement are based on geopolitical aims for both sides; the Central Asian country is seeking diversification in its external policy in order to balance the increasing influence of Russia and China and to pursue an independent external policy better, whereas the EU is convinced that without Uzbekistan it will not be possible to fully implement its Central Asian strategy because of its closeness to Afghanistan, the potential wide market able to absorb European exports, and its geographical position – in the “heart of Central Asia” – as it shares borders with all four other Central Asian republics<sup>27</sup>. This decision was also influenced by prevailing German interests in external policy e.g. the German military presence in the Uzbek Termez airbase and Germany’s

imprisoned human rights activists – and with the introduction of judicial and legislative reforms such as the abolition of the death penalty and the ratification of two international Conventions of the International Labour Organisation. The adoption of these moderate reforms and the participation in numerous conferences and seminars on human rights, democracy, the rule of law and civil society, could apparently show the Uzbek will to engage itself in a democratisation process. For the EU, such engagement represents progress in the field of rule of law and human rights protection, which have justified the renewal of the dialogue.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. S. ISMAILOV - B. JARABIK, *The EU and Uzbekistan: short-term interests versus long-term engagement*, in «EUCAM», EU-Central Asia Monitoring, 8, July 2009, pp. 1-4; Cf. M. HALL, *The EU and Uzbekistan: where to go from here?*, in N.J. MELVIN (ed.), *Engaging Central Asia, the European Union’s new strategy in the heart of Eurasia*, Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels 2008, pp. 68-69, 72-73.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. G. TORALIEVA, *The EU’s approach to the development of mass media in Central Asia*, EUCAM Policy Brief, 6, June 2009, pp. 1-4.

strong political support of the launch of a new partnership strategy for Central Asia.

While limited energy resources jeopardize Uzbekistan's inclusion in the European diversification of supplies strategy, on the other hand Uzbekistan's strategic geographic location is important for ensuring security and stability in the region, above all due to the NATO operations in Afghanistan; after the eviction of the United States from the K2 military airbase in 2005, in May 2009 Karimov gave the NATO coalition the possibility to use the Navoi airbase in order to transport non-lethal supplies destined for NATO forces in Afghanistan<sup>28</sup>. This political decision of Karimov has great strategic importance, as it could represent his will to re-engage Uzbekistan in strong cooperation with the West in order to achieve future stabilisation of the Afghan scenario, from which the entire Central Asian region could benefit.

## Conclusion

The results of full implementation of the partnership strategy with Central Asia must be evaluated in the long term. Two years after the adoption of this strategy, the EU is now obliged to develop a coherent policy in the region quickly, above all by means of a genuine balance between energy and security goals, the promotion of democratic values and the protection of human rights.

Moreover, the EU must implement a *modus operandi* to

regulate cooperation with Russia and China as regards the achievement of regional stability, security and energy supply goals.

Considering the consolidated Sino-Russian influence in the political, economic and military sphere and their geographical closeness to the Central Asia republics, the EU should avoid a policy conflicting with them in regional competition, and should instead opt for increasing cooperation in order to achieve the shared aims. In fact, an aggressive European policy in the region could permanently jeopardize the EU's geopolitical ambition and ratify failure of the partnership strategy, due to the impossibility to pursue cooperation with Central Asian republics which are strongly influenced by the two major regional powers. Besides, European energy security would be threatened by the interruption of energy supplies, or – more realistically considering Russian economic interests – by a substantial rise in the prices of gas and oil sold in the European markets.

Strong cooperation with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization could represent part of this geopolitical cooperation approach, strengthening multilateral relations and creating a forum for political dialogue, as the EU and the SCO have common interests such as ensuring Central Asian political security and territorial stability, and fighting international terrorism, in order to improve economic relations and cooperation at the regional and international levels.

In the energy field, on the one hand the EU could exploit the will of Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan to diversify their energy exports towards the European market, in order to

reduce Chinese and Russian influence. On the other hand, the long time period required to build new pipelines and the need for huge investments could push the Central Asian republics to consider continuing to sell resources to Russia or to China, which is investing a lot of money in the realisation of new export pipelines, as it is more economically profitable in the short run. While the EU expects to invest 700 million euro over 7 years, China is investing over 11 billion dollars solely to build the Sino-Turkmen pipeline planned to transport 40 bcm of gas towards Chinese markets annually.

Finally, if strengthening energy cooperation is to be considered one of the main results obtained with the European strategy, in addition to the energy agreements signed by Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan with Russia and China, recent events show that the full commitment of Central Asian energy suppliers to the European diversification strategy is still far from having been reached; during the Prague summit on 11 May 2009, the EU failed to convince Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to sign an agreement confirming their political, technical and financial support to the construction of the so-called southern energy corridor, thus weakening the European energy security strategy based on Central Asian resources<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. D. TYNAN, *Uzbekistan: Karimov gives Washington the air base it needs for Afghan operations*, in «Eurasia Insight», 11 May 2009, [www.eurasianet.org](http://www.eurasianet.org).

<sup>29</sup> Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, *EU Welcomes Central Asia Presence at Energy Summit*, 12 May 2009, [http://www.rferl.org/content/EU\\_Respects\\_Three\\_Countries\\_Refusal\\_To\\_Sign\\_Energy\\_Summit\\_Declaration/1683874.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/EU_Respects_Three_Countries_Refusal_To_Sign_Energy_Summit_Declaration/1683874.html).

In the coming years the EU must develop a cooperative approach with Russia and China to handle Central Asian issues, in order to better achieve some of its important goals and thus avoid losing strategic influence in the region.

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