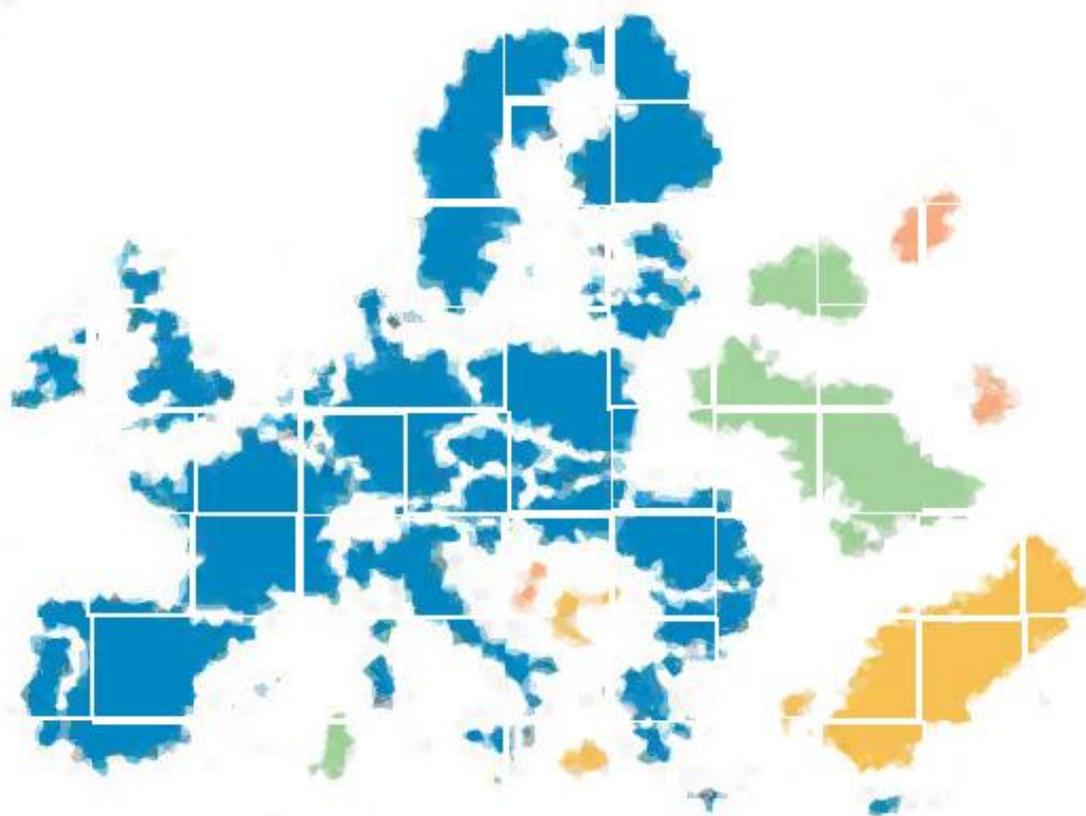


EU Frontiers

Student Paper Series

EU-Kazakhstani Relations: Pragmatism After All?

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Volume III

Center for EU Enlargement Studies
CEU  ENS

June 2015

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Executive summary

This policy brief examines the dynamics of the bilateral relationship between the European Union and Kazakhstan. In recent years, the EU strategy on Central Asia has become more concentrated with Kazakhstan gaining a wider prominence in the EU foreign policy agenda. Yet the partnership between the two actors is still marked by numerous hurdles. Through the assessment of EU policy towards the region, focusing specifically on the dominant fields of cooperation, that is energy and trade, security and defence, this paper, on the one hand, stresses the beneficial nature of the relationship between the two actors. On the other hand, it points to certain shortcomings of existing practices that still undermine an enhanced partnership. Both the Kazakhstani leadership and the EU seem to be guided predominantly by the pragmatic interests towards each other, preventing a successful cooperation especially in the field of democracy and human rights. Furthermore, the EU seems to have so far failed to consider the geopolitical realities of the region which in a long run might thwart EU's attempts to increase engagement with Kazakhstan. In light of this, this policy brief provides recommendation to the EU for the improvement and deepening of the existing ties.

EU-Kazakhstani relations: pragmatism after all?

Introduction

The years of neglect have passed. In the changing geopolitical context, the once distant region of Central Asia, for the most part ignored by the Western powers, has finally acquired its importance on the European Union's (EU) foreign policy agenda. Kazakhstan that has emerged as the driving country in post-Soviet Central Asia is often cited by the European policy-makers as one of the most promising partners for cooperation.

Over the past decade, while growing economic and political ties have brought EU-Kazakhstani relations to a completely new level, certain hurdles that hinder the development of an enhanced partnership between the two actors still exist. This paper reviews and evaluates the dynamics of the bilateral relationship between Kazakhstan and the EU in detail, putting the spotlight to the shortcomings of existing practices and offering recommendations to foster positive incentives for deeper cooperation.

Overview of EU policy towards Kazakhstan

For the greater part of the 1990s Kazakhstan, along with other Central Asian countries, remained largely off the EU foreign policy radar. During that period the EU was deeply engaged with far more urgent priorities, such as German reunification, the disintegration of Yugoslavia, developing new relations with Russia and, above all, preparing the first round of the Eastern European enlargement. Being preoccupied with managing a complex agenda, the EU lacked the necessary resources and interest in getting involved with the peripheral actor of Central Asia.¹ This indifference further translated into poorly articulated and clumsily implemented EU policies vis-à-vis Kazakhstan, with the economic and political partnership remaining marginal up until the end of the 20th century.

However, changes in Europe's external environment brought about a reassessment of the EU's foreign policy approach towards Central Asian region as a whole. This new engagement was largely determined by the growing strategic relevance of Central Asia. First of all, increasing demands and the need for diversification of oil and gas imports forced the EU to turn its attention to Central Asia's vast supply of energy resources. To date, out of the five Central Asian states, Kazakhstan has by far the largest energy potential and scores in the global top ten oil reserves and in the top fifteen for gas.²

¹ A. Warkotsch (ed.), *The European Union and Central Asia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), p. 4.

² *Ibid.*

Furthermore, the war in neighbouring Afghanistan in the post-9/11 era dramatically increased Central Asia's strategic importance. For one it provided crucial assistance in hosting Western military bases. In addition, troubled local political systems and struggling economies, which bear high potential for radicalisation of the population, have encouraged a thorough reassessment of the EU's strategic posture towards the region.

The 2004 Eastern enlargement has also drawn more attention to the new periphery, with the European Union ceasing to consider Central Asia as a remote area. Ethnic grievances, state repressions, poverty and the porosity of the Central Asian borders (with a special reference to issues of drug trafficking and terrorism) came to be seen in Brussels as an indirect threat to the security of the EU.³ In light of such concerns on the one hand, and the elaboration of multifaceted security interests on the other, the EU and the five regional actors have embarked upon establishing complementary security relations. In this context, Central Asia's southern states—Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan—became an integral part of EU-sponsored initiatives aimed at increasing region's border security. Kazakhstan, and to a lesser extent Turkmenistan, have emerged as preferred EU's partners in the energy sector.

The gradual appearance of Central Asia on the EU's political agenda prompted ratification of a key agreement between the European Union and Kazakhstan. The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), finalised alongside similar documents with other post-Soviet states, represented an important development in EU-Kazakhstani relations, and signalled the EU's growing intention to upgrade its role in the region. The accords that came into force since 1999 have a ten-year tenure and provide a legal framework for economic cooperation, including issues such as trade, business, investment and legislative and financial cooperation.⁴ In addition, under the PCA parties grant each other the most-favoured-nation status,⁵ which entails favourable conditions for transit, payment methods, customs duties and charges on imports and exports. Such conditions are essential for Astana, as almost half of country's exports goes to the EU.

While economic cooperation is the central part of the PCA, the scope of the agreement stretches to the domains of justice, freedom, security and human rights. On the whole, both parties have regarded the implementation of the

³ R. Lewington, "The Challenge of Managing Central Asia's New Borders", *Asian Affairs*, 41: 2 (2010).

⁴ Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States and the Republic of Kazakhstan, EUR-Lex, (28 July 1999): [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=%40CELEX:21999A0728\(02\):EN:HTML](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=%40CELEX:21999A0728(02):EN:HTML), accessed November 27, 2014.

⁵ Council of the European Union (1995) "Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities and the Republic of Kazakhstan": http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/028a0010.htm, accessed November 27, 2014.

PCA in the past decade as successful. Moreover, the legal framework has been further extended to a signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in the field of Energy (2006)⁶ and a Memorandum of Understanding in the field of Transport Networks development (2009).⁷ Both documents later proved to be not only important developments with regards to energy and transport development, but also a demonstration of the parties' perception of the core issues in their bilateral relationship. However, in light of emerging challenges, such as growing religious radicalism, international crime and trafficking, fight against terrorism and climate change, the 2009 Cooperation Council concluded the need to review the 1999 PCA, update the present provisions and elaborate on a new agreement.

Negotiation talks between the European External Action Service (EEAS) and Kazakhstan for an enhanced PCA initiated first in 2011, while demonstrated some initial progress, have been stalled up until recently. For most of the time, the discussions seemed to be deadlocked largely due to mounting disagreements on Kazakhstan's political reform with regards to Rule of Law and Human rights record. In addition, Kazakhstan's delayed accession to the World Trade Organisation appeared to be yet another stumbling block. During the latest meeting in October 2014 between ex-President of the European Commission Barroso and President Nazarbayev some major agreements were finally reached and the negotiation round was successfully concluded.⁸

Another important step towards enhanced EU-Kazakhstani cooperation was the adoption of the "Strategy for a New Partnership with Central Asia",⁹ at the end of the German Presidency, in June 2007. This is the first-ever EU strategy towards Central Asian region that marks a new era and a breakthrough in the relations between European and Central Asian countries. This document attempts to go beyond the assistance programme, and instead sets out to define European interests in the region and to find prospective areas for cooperation. According to official EU documents, the key goals and objectives of the "Strategy for a New Partnership with Central Asia" are as follows¹⁰:

⁶ Document available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/energy_transport/international/regional/caucasus_central_asia/memorandum/doc/mou_kazakhstan_en.pdf, accessed November 27, 2014

⁷ Available at:

http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/kazakhstan/documents/eu_kazakhstan/memorandum_field_transport_en.pdf, accessed November 27, 2014.

⁸ European Commission "Statement by President Barroso", Press Release Database (Brussels October 9, 2014): http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-14-675_en.htm, accessed November 27, 2014.

⁹ Council of the European Union "The European Union and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership" (2007): http://eeas.europa.eu/central_asia/docs/2010_strategy_eu_centralasia_en.pdf, accessed November 27, 2014.

¹⁰ Ibid.

- to establish a regular regional political dialogue at the Foreign Minister level;
- to launch a "European Education Initiative" and support Central Asia countries in the development of an "e-silk-highway";
- to launch an "EU Rule of Law Initiative";
- to establish a regular, result-oriented "Human Rights Dialogue" with each of the Central Asian states;
- to conduct a regular energy dialogue.

Among those, development, good governance promotion and energy security were identified as the core of the EU policy focus in Central Asia. Broadly speaking, up until today the introduction of the 2007 strategy had a very mixed impact on EU-Kazakhstani cooperation, involving both continuity and change in their relationship.

Cooperation in the security and defence field

"Combating common threats and challenges" can be regarded as one of the priorities defined by the EU strategy to Central Asia. In light of formidable set of security challenges, such as the threat of violent extremism, smuggling of illegal narcotics and potential instability rife with a possibility of major conflict, the region presents an ever growing importance to the European Union. In its attempt to meet these security threats the EU, however, does not engage with specific issues featuring specific Central Asian countries. Instead, the EU security assistance programmes are regarded to be closely tied to the regionalist approach.¹¹

The EU considers Central Asian security challenges common to all five states. Such a generalisation, however, is rather problematic. While Central Asian states may indeed share a similar understanding of security threats, that understanding often substantially differs from definitions accepted within the EU. For example, the EU identifies cross-border trafficking of narcotics and persons as one of the major problems in the region. In contrast, Central Asian governments tend to be more cautious in classifying drug trafficking as the most pressing security challenge.¹² Instead, the major security issues are often related to ethnic conflict, territorial disputes and border tensions among Central Asian states.¹³ In addition to different perception of security challenges, political pluralism, promoted by the EU, and Western calls for application of international standards are frequently perceived as an attempt to interfere in the Kazakhstan's internal affairs to

¹¹ K. Czerniecka and J. Heathershaw " Security Assistance and Border Management"(2011), p.4: https://www.academia.edu/7562745/Security_assistance_and_border_management, accessed November 27, 2014.

¹² N. J. Jackson "International Organisations, Security Dichotomies and the Trafficking of Persons and Narcotics in Post-Soviet Central Asia: A Critique of Securitisation Framework", *Security Dialogue* 34 (2006): 299-317, 305.

¹³ P. Yakovleva, "Security challenges in Central Asia: The role of regional institutions in regional security", IEP: International Conference on "Prospect of EU-Central Asia Relations" in Almaty, Kazakhstan (September 25, 2014), available at: <http://iep-berlin.de/en/international-conference-on-prospects-of-eu-central-asia-relations-in-almaty-kazakhstan/>, accessed on September 28, 2015.

destabilise the country. Thus, something what the EU considers a desirable outcome, might be perceived as a security challenge among the Central Asian regimes. Such a disjunction often provokes resentment among post-Soviet Central Asian states and reinforces images of the EU as a hypocritical actor.¹⁴

Yet, despite the differences in the models of security culture, the interests of Kazakhstan and the EU do intersect in their cooperation in the border management as well as fighting against the trafficking of narcotics, weapons and radioactive materials that are often smuggled from Afghanistan to both Kazakhstani and European markets. In this field, Kazakhstan remains one of the most reliable and committed regional partners to the EU. To date, out of all security assistance approaches implemented in the region the Border management (BOMCA) project is considered to be the most comprehensive intervention in border management and a flagship of EU regional programme in Central Asia.¹⁵ Launched first in 2003 BOMCA has evolved from simple assessment and training activities through strengthening of infrastructure capacities to institutional development aiming to limit cross-border drug trafficking as well as to facilitate legitimate trade and transit.¹⁶

In Kazakhstan, which shares borders with China, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, enhanced border security is one of the priority issues. With substantial EU resources and Kazakhstan's involvement, some significant accomplishments can be noted: in the past years, Kazakhstan has signed delimitation treaties with China, Turkmenistan and Russia respectively; the border infrastructure is under development; and border guards are relatively well-trained and well-equipped in comparison to other countries in Central Asia.¹⁷ Furthermore, BOMCA has sponsored a number of large infrastructure projects across the region, having the most success on the Kazakh-Kyrgyz Al Jol border crossing near Bishkek.¹⁸ With the help of BOMCA initiative Kazakh and Kyrgyz authorities are now able to perform joint passport and vehicle checks, which greatly expedites traffic.

While the BOMCA programme could be generally regarded successful, especially concerning the achievement of the significant technical improvements on Central Asian borders, the broader impact of the EU assistance in the field of security has been less straightforward. In fact,

¹⁴ N. J. Jackson, "International Organisations, Security Dichotomies and the Trafficking of Persons and Narcotics in Post-Soviet Central Asia".

¹⁵ A. Matveeva, EU stakes in Central Asia, (Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2008): <http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/cp091.pdf>, p. 88.

¹⁶ Das BOMCA-Programm, available at: <http://www.bomca.eu/>, accessed on September 28, 2015.

¹⁷ UNDP in Kazakhstan "Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA) Phase 8": <http://www.kz.undp.org/content/kazakhstan/ru/home/operations/projects/archive/democratic-governance/border-management-programme-in-central-asia--bomca--phase-8.html/>, accessed November 27, 2014.

¹⁸ G. Gavrilis, "Beyond the Border Management Programme for Central Asia (BOMCA)", EUCAM 11 (November 2009), p. 4.

insufficient efforts have been invested by the EU into tackling instability, which still remains a looming threat in Central Asian states. Complex domestic issues (like poverty, inequality, weak governance and corruption), multiple ethno-territorial issues as well as regional tensions over scarcity of resources could all potentially cause problems with a spillover effect for the neighbouring countries and thus require heightened attention of the EU.¹⁹

Energy Cooperation and Trade

Energy cooperation has been once dubbed by Kazakhstan's Prime Minister, Karim Massimov, as the "core" of relations between his country and the EU.²⁰ Indeed, the EU and Kazakhstan have become important partners over the past decade with an ever growing mutual interest in this area. By the end of 2006, the EU has become Kazakhstan's leading trade partner, and 53 percent of Kazakhstan's foreign direct investment (FDI) originated in the EU.²¹ Energy trade emerged as the key issue within the EU-Kazakhstani relationship, with six percent of the EU's crude oil and 16 percent of its uranium imports coming from Kazakhstan.²² Overall, only last year the EU-Kazakhstan trade turnover amounted to 53.4 billion USD.²³

With the current standoff in Ukraine and intensifying negative attitudes towards Moscow as an unreliable gas supplier the EU is seeking deeper cooperation with energy rich Kazakhstan. Based on a new agreement confirmed during the 8th round of negotiations between Kazakhstan and EU on a new enhanced PCA, Kazakhstan has further extended its energy partnership with the energy hungry EU.²⁴ The terms of agreement however are yet to be finalised. The benefits from extended trade are not one sided and energy cooperation with the EU provides Kazakhstan with access to lucrative and reliable European markets. Consequently, this will play a crucial role in strengthening Kazakhstan's own energy diversification and independence from Russia that still imposes excessive rates of transit despite country's participation in the Customs Union.

While EU access to Kazakhstani oil and uranium is stable, with a good prospect for further development, the question as to whether the EU will manage to secure Kazakhstani gas through the Southern Corridor project remains unclear. The freezing of negotiations on South Stream with Russia earlier this year increased the need to diversify supply and decrease the

¹⁹ D. Kimmage, "Security Challenges in Central Asia: Implications for the EU's Engagement Strategy", CEPS 139 (July 2007).

²⁰ N. Kassenova, "Promises and hurdles in EU-Kazakhstan energy cooperation", EUCAM 20, November 2011.

²¹ Zakon.kz "Evrosoyuz nameren rasshiryat sotrudnichestvo s Kazakhstanom-Gensek Soveta ES", October 14, 2007: <http://www.zakon.kz/60956-evrosoyuz-nameren-rasshirjat.html>, accessed November 27, 2014.

²² Kassenova, "Promises and hurdles".

²³ A. Satubaldina "Kazakhstan and EU negotiate new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement", Tengrinews (July 21, 2014): http://en.tengrinews.kz/politics_sub/Kazakhstan-and-EU-negotiate-new-Partnership-and-Cooperation-Agreement-254598/, accessed November 27, 2014.

²⁴ European Commission "Statement by President Barroso".

dependence on Russia-dominated gas transportation system. In this way, the Southern Gas Corridor project is of increased importance for the EU, as it intends to bring the Caspian Sea's vast reserves of gas and oil to the European markets through transit corridors across Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. So far, however, Brussels has been unable to secure the agreement of Astana to participate in Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline (TCGP), which is interlocked with the Southern Corridor and thus disables the possibility of the project becoming a reality.

Despite Astana's hesitant position mutual interest in the field of energy cooperation remains solid and stable, with both partners understanding the importance of each other for future economic development.

Human rights, democratisation and good governance

The EU 2007 Strategy for Central Asia has an ambitious agenda. On the one hand, it is pursuing its economic and security goals. On the other hand, the EU is interested in promoting democracy, good governance and improving the human rights record in the region. However, due to a gap between values and interest convergence it is rather difficult to find a consensus among EU policy makers when dealing with Central Asia. The perception that the EU is increasingly acting as a single actor in its foreign policy is, therefore, rather incipient. In fact, pragmatic interests of single EU member states often trump the human rights agenda of the Union as whole. For example, despite continued evidence of torture and blatant human rights abuses in Uzbekistan, Germany, by signing a \$3bn investment deal with Uzbek state companies in March 2015, placed its economic interests ahead of any meaningful EU-level action that would pressure the country to respect human rights.²⁵

Additional problem arises through the fact that the EU does not seem to possess enough leverage with Central Asian governments, in contrast to the EU direct neighbours seeking membership in the Union. Thus, lacking the necessary "sticks and carrots" the EU is forced to balance out between its liberal goals of promoting democracy and the pursuit of pragmatic interest in securing access to vast energy reserves. The question of how to appropriately engage and not to "lose" the region without turning a blind eye on local authoritarian regimes has become the key dilemma among the EU member states.²⁶

The Kazakhstani regime understands the EU weakness due to its balancing between its priorities and often uses it for legitimising its own actions domestically. For example, despite scandals around the detention of Mukhatar Ablyazov, one of the main opponents of Nazarbayev in the run up

²⁵ J. Dalhuisen, "Willfully blind to Uzbekistan", Aljazeera (May 12, 2015), available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/05/uzbekistan-forgotten-massacre-150512051446529.html>, accessed on September 28, 2015.

²⁶ N. Kassenova, "The New EU Strategy towards Central Asia: A View from the Region", CEPS 148, (January 2008): 3.

to the last elections, France and Italy have nevertheless intensified economic cooperation with Kazakhstan. Such an act not only cast a shadow on the image of the EU as a protector of democratic values and human rights, but has been widely used by Nazarbayev to inform domestic audience about official EU support for his leadership.²⁷

Although several new initiatives were introduced, such as structured human rights dialogues (HRDs) complemented by yearly civil society seminars, the EU-Kazakhstani HRD initiative has seen only limited success. For the most part, the dialogues tend to exclude particularly controversial issues from their agenda: the issue of labour rights and the authorities' crackdown on the strikes of the oil workers in Zhanaozen (southwest Kazakhstan) in December 2011 was left on the margins of the meeting held in Brussels later that year. Furthermore, Kazakhstani NGO appeals to the EU regarding human rights violations and major crackdowns on free media had rather limited impact of the EU's policies towards the Kazakhstani government. This in itself has a very frustrating effect on human rights activists and opposition politicians in Kazakhstan, leaving them with the impression that for the EU "Central Asia is [only] about oil and gas".²⁸

The geopolitical dimension

The EU's projects and increased engagement run the risk of being thwarted by the geopolitical realities of the region. In its quest for deepening relations with Kazakhstan the EU competes with two actors – China and Russia – who have a strong capacity to influence developments in the region, but also to a lesser extent with the U.S., whose power began to wane with the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. In comparison to Brussels that views reforms as a necessary precondition for economic and political reward, neither Moscow nor Beijing ask Kazakhstani politicians to liberalise in return for their support. Thus, while Russian and Chinese officials focus solely on business deals or security cooperation, EU's cooperation often comes with certain conditions.²⁹

It is important to keep in mind that Russia is still viewed as the traditional patron and the most prominent external actor in the region that has an array of tools to maintain its influence: from security guarantees, through cheap arms to economic investments.³⁰ Overall, both Kazakhstan and Russia acknowledge the mutually beneficial nature of relations between the two, referring to it as a "strategic partnership".³¹ Kazakhstan understand that cooperation with Russia is vital to its national security and further economic

²⁷ S. Peyrouse "How does Central Asia view the EU?", EUCAM 18 (June 2014): 7.

²⁸ F. Najbullah "Energy or Values? EU's Central Asia Dilemma Discussed At Polish Forum", RFERL (September 10, 2009): http://www.rferl.org/content/Europe_Central_Asia_Dilemma_Discussed_At_Polish_Forum/1819860.html, accessed November 27, 2014.

²⁹ L. Anceschi "The Tyranny of Pragmatism": 5.

³⁰ Kassenova "The New EU Strategy": 3.

³¹ F. Kukeyeva, "Developments And Trends in the Russian-Kazakh Strategic Partnership", Russian Analytical Digest 87, pp. 4-7 (2010).

development, as well as Russia is aware of Kazakhstan's significance as its partner in the region. The nature of their close bilateral cooperation is enhanced further by several factors: Russia is Kazakhstan's immediate neighbour, with the two sharing the longest land border in the world; Russia being a buyer and transit country for Kazakhstan's rich reserves of natural resources; the presence of a significant Russian community on the Kazakhstan's territory; and Russia's strong institutional and cultural connection with both the elites and people of Kazakhstan. On top of that, in order to safeguard its economic influence in the region Russia has initiated a number of economic vehicles, including the Customs Union, the Eurasian Economic Community, CIS Free Trade Zone, and most recently the Eurasian Economic Union.

At the same time, however, Moscow's role and importance is not all too cemented. Given the persistent concerns among the Central Asian elites about the Russia's "big brother" complex (inherited from the Soviet times) the Kazakhstani government finds it necessary to hold on to its multi-vector policy and seek cooperation with other partners.³²

In recent years, China is quickly becoming the most significant player and a lucrative alternative to other actors in the region. In 2011 the Financial Times, for example, characterised China's drastic expansion of its investment in oil and a range of other areas in Kazakhstan as "Central Asia's gradual shift from Moscow [...] towards Beijing".³³ Yet, while it is able and willing to contribute to the security and economic development of Kazakhstan, cooperation with China is often seen as problematic by Central Asian political experts.³⁴ To date, Chinese economic expansion is accompanied by growing fears in Kazakhstan of the "slow infiltration of the region" that could in the long run threaten local Kazakhstani identity.³⁵

Therefore, at this point, the EU does have a potential to enhance its political and economic cooperation with Kazakhstan, as it offers an important alternative to the overwhelming influence of China and Russia. However, if it is truly determined to achieve progress, it has to take into account traditional Russian control and the new Chinese involvement in Kazakhstan. So far, however, the 2007 EU strategy has failed to consider the geopolitical context, with Russia and China being completely excluded from the agenda.

Conclusion

Overall, the strategic partnership between the EU and Kazakhstan demonstrates a multifaceted and mutually beneficial relationship in various fields. Both partners have mutual interest in the field of energy cooperation, seeing it essential for future economic development. In addition, there is

³² Kassenova, "The New EU Strategy": 4.

³³ L. Hook & I. Gorst, "Kazakhstan embraces Chinese investment", Financial Times (February 22, 2011), available at: <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/8c25e008-3e5e-11e0-9e8f-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3n8OzEvPb>, accessed on September 28, 2015.

³⁴ Regnum "Kitaiskaia ekspansiia v Sredniuu Aziiu: igra na operezhieniie ili nastupleniie? Mneniie ekspertov", (August 5, 2007), available at: <http://www.regnum.ru/news/866290.html>, accessed on September 28,

³⁵ Kassenova "The New EU Strategy": 3.

growing cooperation in combating common threats that pose challenges to both Kazakhstan's and EU's stability.

At the same time however in dealing with resource-rich Kazakhstan the Union seems to shy away from its agenda of promoting democracy and human rights. For the most part of the EU-Kazakhstani relationship the human dimension seems to be left on the margins, mainly due to the gap between the EU's aspiration of pluralism and Kazakhstan's resistance to what it considers as interference into its internal affairs. The limited impact that EU policies had so far on the behaviour of the Kazakhstani government lead to conclusion that the relationship is being largely held hostage by the pragmatic considerations of both partners. To dilute the essentially pragmatic nature of the EU-Kazakhstani relationship the EU must review its strategy and previous agreements with the country.

Recommendations for the EU

1. The EU should conduct a top-quality research to enhance knowledge of EU's engagement in Central Asia and to formulate a valid EU policy towards the region that would match both the EU objectives and local needs and demands. This could also prove beneficial to develop strategies facilitating democratic reforms in Central Asian states.
2. Given a poor record of approaches concentrated on engaging Central Asia as a region, the EU should focus more on bilateral cooperation, targeting specific issues in specific Central Asia's countries. At the same time, a regional approach should be promoted when it comes to terrorism and trafficking of narcotics, persons and weapons.
3. A more strategic approach towards democracy and human rights promotion needs to be developed. Growing trade flows between Europe and Kazakhstan along with the need for Western technologies and investments give the EU some leverage to bring democratic values to the negotiating table.
4. If the EU is seeking to become a strategic actor in Kazakhstan, it is of great importance to clarify its own interests and to take into consideration the interests of other external actors present in the region. In cases where these interests overlap, projects should be conducted in cooperation to avoid major clashes.
5. Finally, the EU should also seek to cooperate with Russia in developing a common framework for building a transport corridor in order to bring Caspian resources to European markets.

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Published:

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