

# Analysing Collaborative Efforts Between Central Asian Countries and the European Union

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**Abstract:** The article describes in detail the unique place and role of the European Union in the ongoing cooperation to ensure regional security in Central Asia. The format of multilateral cooperation with international organizations is reflected as an important direction of foreign political activity for Central Asian countries. The main directions of the measures defined in the strategy of the European Union in Central Asia are covered in detail.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Central Asia is a complex area of threats to regional security and stability and an important geopolitical space that affects the current world perspective. "...In today's interconnected world, the only way to get out of the vortex of dangerous problems is constructive dialogue and multilateral cooperation based on taking into account and respecting the interests of each party...". From this point of view, in order to ensure regional security, it is increasingly necessary to find a common way to eliminate threats and risks within the framework of the interdependence system in Central Asia, and the development of a common action strategy aimed at eliminating factors that threaten the stable development of the region is becoming an urgent task.

Multilateral foreign policy, which is actively used in different regions of the world, plays an important role in the formation of the regional security complex system. The format of multilateral cooperation with international organizations is an important direction of foreign political activity for Central Asian countries. Such cooperation will focus on unifying efforts to combat threats and risks that negatively impact sustainable development and stability in Central Asia.

At the same time, each country in the region ensures its security by relying on the national security system and cooperation with international organizations. On the other hand, on the agenda of Central Asia, there is the question of creating an

association or organization in which all the countries of the region can become members on security issues.

Central Asia is interesting to foreign countries due to the presence of a large amount of natural resources in the region. For example, natural gas reserves in the region make up 13.2% of CIS gas reserves and 4% of world gas reserves. Oil reserves in the region make up 3.5% of the world's total oil reserves. Therefore, establishing control over fuel and energy resources and their transportation routes allows for control of the situation in the entire region. Experts of the US private intelligence and analysis company "Stratfor" say that "whoever acquires the energy resources of Central Asia will ultimately control this region". According to F. Starr, the importance of Central Asia is that it is the only region in the world surrounded by nuclear states such as India, China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran and Turkey.

According to Yu. Morozov, the regional security system has not yet been formed in Central Asia. Currently, it is multi-level and contradictory. Stability is maintained due to military-political agreements signed by the US and NATO with the countries of the region (which do not always trust each other). On the other hand, Russia is developing partnership relations with Central Asian countries within the framework of the CIS, EAEU, and SCO, and with some of them within the framework of the CSTO.

At the same time, the Central Asian countries are strengthening strategic cooperation with all their main partners in foreign policy. According to experts, strategic partnership is the organizational structure of

cooperation between countries for the implementation of joint measures.

The desire of the Central Asian countries for regional cooperation has a specific aspect, which is related to geographical, historical, ethno-cultural, political and socio-economic basis and conditions. Realizing the nature of threats and risks, the countries of the region are drawing up their strategies based on the objective situation; and they are creating the regional security system based on the principles of mutual trust, reasonable approach, and transparency.

Cooperation at the European level is different and has a specific goal in Central Asia. Some experts believe that the EU and the USA are working together on the issue of security in Central Asia from the same point of view, and in some cases, this issue is studied within the framework of a “transatlantic partnership”. Both parties are committed to holding annual meetings, discussing projects and organizing mutual consultations. In addition, the Central Asia policy implemented by the EU in the region through the global format (the EU-UN format for Central Asia and Afghanistan) also causes the opinion that the EU does not have its own foreign policy direction for Central Asia.

However, the development of regionalization taking place in Central Asia in recent years, taking into account the European factor, and the strengthening of the influence of globalization serves as a basis for believing that the EU has its own direction in relation to regional security, which can be implemented without the participation of the United States. This is confirmed by the following.

First of all, since the independence of the Central Asian countries, the EU has started to implement its Central Asian policy by implementing programs and projects aimed at helping the countries of the region in their reforms in the economy, transport, democratic changes and other areas. During this period, all the programs developed by the EU were implemented with the CIS in mind, because the European countries did not consider Central Asia as a separate structural element of international relations.

In addition, this situation was caused by the Russian factor. Russia, despite the creation of new independent states in 1991, still maintained a leadership position in the environment of the former Union. This factor was the main obstacle to the development of a common policy for the Central Asian region. Therefore, many programs and projects are intended for bilateral cooperation, and multilateral ones are directed to specific goals (strengthening borders and cooperation in the fight against

international terrorism, preventing the illegal distribution of narcotics, etc.).

The first clear, comprehensive and multilateral policy of the European Union on Central Asia began in 2007 with the adoption of the EU strategy in Central Asia. The measures defined in this strategy were implemented until 2013. The EU, as an independent participant, has firmly established itself in Central Asia by taking the measures set out in the strategy, that is, conducting permanent political dialogues with the countries of the region, as well as implementing projects in the fields of education, energy, law and priority of human rights.

Secondly, in the regional security issues of Central Asia, Afghanistan was considered an integral part of the interdependence complex of the EU's regional policy. The factor of Afghanistan is always taken into account in the implementation of measures related to the countries of Central Asia, but its geographical location cannot be the basis for the EU to fully include it in the Central Asian region. In this regard, the conceptual views and ideas of the European Union are implemented in the frameworks of “EU-Afghanistan” and “EU-Central Asia-Afghanistan”. For example, in October 2017, the EU adopted a strategy for Afghanistan 2017-2020. Despite the fact that this strategy is aimed at strengthening the social and economic spheres and taking measures to ensure stability in Afghanistan, ensuring regional security is defined as a priority of the EU policy. This situation shows that the EU has not yet realized that Afghanistan is of the greatest importance in the perfect security complex. Bilateral relations are carried out within the framework of the “EU-Afghanistan” approach, in particular, in 2017, the parties signed the “Agreement on Cooperation, Partnership and Development”, in which priority is mainly focused on the areas of economic cooperation, fight against corruption and cooperation in the field of migration.

Thirdly, the EU and the Central Asian countries jointly created a space for dialogue in the field of security. In this case, dialogues are conducted in a bilateral framework and through multilateral mechanisms, without the direct participation of the United States and other forces in world politics. This policy is implemented in several formats - regional diplomacy, conference diplomacy, with individual countries and with the participation of Afghanistan.

The European Union uses regional diplomacy in organizations and institutions within its system. They implement projects to combat threats and risks in Central Asia (for example, border management in the

region, projects related to the transport sector, and projects to combat radiation).

In the framework of conference diplomacy, international and intersectoral forums are held with the participation of heads of ministries and departments of Central Asian and EU countries, for example, a meeting of the “EU-Central Asia” ministerial conference. An example of this is the meeting of the foreign ministers of these countries to discuss and develop measures to resolve issues in the field of regional security.

Bilateral security relations are being implemented within individual countries. For example, a meeting of the “Uzbekistan-EU” cooperation council is held every year.

Within the framework of the format with the participation of Afghanistan, programs are implemented with the participation of all countries in the region, as well as the EU and Afghanistan. For example, high-level talks on political and security issues are held between the EU and Central Asian countries with the participation of Afghanistan every year.

On September 19, 2018, a joint appeal of the European Commission to the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, the European Socio-Economic Commission, the Committee of the Regions and the European Investment Bank entitled “European and Asian relations - building alliances as an implementation of the EU strategy” was published. According to the document, EU cooperation with Asia is of global importance. In 2016, the EU exported €618 billion worth of goods to Asia, which is 35% of the EU’s total exports. At the same time, the value of the import of goods is 774 billion euros, which means 45% of the total import of the EU. Asia, like Europe, needs investment to sustain economic growth. The annual trade volume between Europe and Asia is estimated at 1.5 trillion euros. It is noteworthy that the share of Eurasia in the world GDP is about 60 per cent.

The success of the EU’s strategy to expand European and Asian cooperation depends on the ability of the participating countries to establish and implement trade flows between the continents. Therefore, the Central Asian countries show great interest in this initiative. They are ready to explore the possibilities of working together on this basis.

For example, Kazakhstan’s strategic approach is to take maximum advantage of the country’s geographical location and coordinate its national infrastructure development programs with those of neighbouring countries and powerful partners. Therefore, the development of the Trans-Caspian

international transport network passing through China, Kazakhstan, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and then Turkey and European countries is one of the main directions of work in this regard.

Also, the railway line “Baku-Tbilisi-Kars” is one of the largest infrastructure objects. 1 billion dollars were spent on the construction of this railway line, which was launched in October 2017. According to information, it takes 18 days to deliver a container from Shanghai to London. However, it takes 45 days to ship by normal sea route (Mirziyoyev- European Union and Afghanistan sign Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development dated 2017, February 18).

## 2 CONCLUSIONS

Thus, the multi-directional foreign policy of the EU in Central Asia and Afghanistan is implemented independently of other powerful countries. Also, the UN, NATO, OSCE organizations, the USA, Russia, China and other major countries are directly involved in the implementation of some directions of this policy.

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