



2015/2220(INI)

3.12.2015

OPINION

of the Committee on Development

for the Committee on Foreign Affairs

on the implementation and review of the EU-Central Asia Strategy
(2015/2220(INI))

Rapporteur: György Schöpflin

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Development calls on the Committee on Foreign Affairs, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

1. Stresses that the Central Asia Strategy of 2007 needs to be reviewed to address new realities and EU commitments to fundamental values; recalls the importance of the principle of policy coherence for development; calls for the EU and its Member States to ensure that none of the EU's policies, especially those on trade and investment, undermine the human rights of people in Central Asia and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); recalls that the Central Asia region is defined by its climate, geography, arid soil and landlocked position, as well as by Soviet domination and former Soviet administrative structures, which have metamorphosed into oligarchical bureaucracies connected to factions and families; points out that the EU is playing a relatively muted role in the Central Asia region and that, despite the low volumes of trade, it is an important trading partner of each of the countries in the area;
2. Stresses the importance of the Central Asia region for the EU in terms of economic potential, energy diversification and geostrategic and security interests;
3. Notes the common characteristics resulting from more ancient history, including that of the Silk Routes, the colonisation by Turkic tribes and the reception of Islam; notes also that the five countries in the region are at differing stages in their development: Kazakhstan is emerging as a key player in the region, with which the EU's relations are progressing steadily; Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are much poorer, but relatively open, with a degree of civil society involvement; and the EU's relationship with Uzbekistan is also growing, but Turkmenistan remains the most closed country in the region, with no effective independent civil society;
4. Points to the fact that there is also considerable diversity in the region, not least in endowments of natural resources such as fossil fuels and arable land, and – partly as a consequence of this – in the countries' current levels of human and economic development; stresses the importance of taking into account, on the one hand, the cultural differences within the region and, on the other hand, the interdependency among the countries;
5. Points out that there are traditional ties of cooperation among the Central Asian states, and calls for the strengthening of these networks of regional cooperation;
6. Calls for coordination of EU development policies with Member States' activities in the region; calls for close development policy cooperation with the United States within the framework of our sustainable development partnership; calls for cooperation also with China and Russia in developing the Central Asia region;
7. Calls for close EU cooperation with UN funds and agencies and with the World Bank;
8. Notes the weaknesses of the political systems of Central Asian countries and the lack of popular participation in politics; draws attention to the growing inequalities among their peoples, despite the huge reserves of natural resources; notes that the civil war in

Tajikistan in the 1990s, insufficient commitment to human development and little readiness to engage in regional cooperation have slowed down – and in some cases even reversed – economic and social transformation; notes the problematic dependency of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and, to a lesser extent, Uzbekistan on remittances from migrant workers in Russia, Kazakhstan and Europe; also notes the rapidly growing economic dependence on China and other emerging economies;

9. Stresses that Central Asian countries are facing external shocks such as the economic slowdown in Russia and China, ongoing geopolitical tensions and the conflict in Ukraine; emphasises, further, that dropping commodity prices are having an impact on the oil-exporting countries of the region; notes that, against this backdrop, the region's growth rate in the years since 2014 is expected to be roughly half the average growth rate of the previous decade;
10. Stresses that, despite rapid economic growth in recent years, the region faces high poverty rates, high income inequality and declining life expectancy, especially in rural areas, where 80-90 % of the population lives; stresses that the process of privatisation during the economic transition has, to a large extent, left mountainous regions behind; emphasises that women in those regions are particularly affected, as many men migrate to cities in search of employment, leaving women with the entire burden of farm and family work;
11. Emphasises that it is vital, for sustainable economic development in the region, to deepen regional integration, increase intraregional trade, focus on transport networks and logistical services, and improve the business climate and the legislative and regulatory framework, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises;
12. Stresses the importance of the EU seizing the opportunity of development cooperation in order to promote respect for human rights and achieve the SDGs, so as to raise levels of trade and investment in all countries in the region and to strengthen the role and involvement of the social partners in civil society;
13. Emphasises that Central Asia is a region exposed to a variety of natural hazards, and that, it being one of the world's most seismically active zones, earthquakes remain the predominant threat, while climate change poses an ecological challenge; emphasises the need to train and prepare the populations of the region to manage emergencies associated with disasters caused by climate change, which is creating major threats, while major seismic events could well occur in south-eastern Central Asia; emphasises that climate change is creating major threats which may increase inequalities and force people to migrate;
14. Recognises the many difficulties in the region posed not least by the pervasive link between business and politics, corruption, the determination of the Uzbek and Turkmen Governments tightly to control political activities, poor redistribution of wealth and resources, poor performance on labour standards and the poor relations between some countries, which are hindering progress in regional cooperation, and would like to see the development of local conflict resolution mechanisms, in particular with a view to ensuring that the population has access to water resources in the region and guaranteeing universal and free access for all; takes the view that the EU, in its development programmes, must also promote the implementation of the circular economy, sustainable agriculture and public management of water resources; calls for EU assistance efforts and funding

allocation to be better adapted to these conditions;

15. Recalls the many cases of infectious tuberculosis in the Central Asia region; underlines the importance of continuity in the roll-out of tuberculosis treatment in emerging countries that no longer receive bilateral EU aid, in view of the development of drug resistance in some strains of tuberculosis;
16. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to launch a coordinated joint approach with China, Russia and India to combating drugs trafficking, aimed at pinpointing its underlying causes, and measures by which it can be prevented;
17. Notes that there is great potential for improving energy efficiency and developing renewable energy sources, and that there is a very strong case for enhancing cooperation in these areas, since the EU has developed considerable policy expertise and a strong sustainable energy industry, and for widening cooperation in the region in order to ensure greater transparency in government revenues from energy sources and to strengthen the role of civil society;
18. Points out that building a strategic, modern and interoperable road and railway infrastructure along the Silk Road route is a key interest for China, the EU and Russia, and that the successful integration of this region through modern and reliable infrastructure would offer a major opportunity not just for greater regional economic integration but also to promote mobility of persons and multicultural exchange, in turn producing a better environment for advancing the rule of law and democracy;
19. Highlights the importance of a coherent and consistent EU approach to the region in order to avoid any overlapping or the sending of mixed and confusing signals; calls, in a context of widespread authoritarianism, for increased EU contacts with, and support for, civil society organisations in order to promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law as a basis for development;
20. Stresses the importance of quality education as a basic means of building sustainable democratic societies and preventing violent extremism; urges the EU to consider this a priority in view of the strong youth presence in Central Asia;
21. Considers the strong prevalence of monocultures, such as cotton growing, to be highly problematic, and urges the EU to focus on rural development and sustainable farming in its development programmes;
22. Considers that the continued sectoral budget support in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan must be accompanied by more stringent criteria, including a strong reform agenda and anti-corruption measures;
23. Highlights the potential of increased cooperation with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan with regard to EU energy security; emphasises, however, that energy agreements and dialogues must include strong human rights elements; calls on the EU to conduct full feasibility studies of energy projects aimed at expanding the Southern Gas Corridor, including environmental and social impact assessments;
24. Calls for the EU to extend its Disaster Risk Reduction programmes in Central Asia, a

region regularly hit by natural disasters;

25. Calls for the EU, in its development programmes for the region, to emphasise environmentally sustainable development; underlines the important role that the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) can play in the region in promoting environmentally sound extraction and processing of natural resources, and invites the EU to promote compliance within the region; also highlights the challenges posed by sustainable water management, which are likely to be exacerbated by climate change;
26. Recommends, once again, that the Border Management in Central Asia programme and the Central Asia Drug Action Programme be brought under the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace rather than the Development Cooperation Instrument;
27. Is concerned about regular occurrences of forced child labour in the region; urges the EU to promote compliance by all Central Asian states with international commitments, in particular those entered into under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Minimum Age Convention and the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour;
28. Urges the launch of an EU initiative to support the pursuit of SDGs and effectively ensure human rights, internationally agreed social and environmental standards and the dignity of peoples in the region;
29. Underlines the need for a EU-Central Asia strategy that is not based on geostrategic interests but is designed to develop a participative and democratic society characterised by freedom of association for trade unions and by an active civil society, and to boost gender equality and the empowerment of women, especially in rural areas; calls, in addition, for the EU-Central Asia strategy to be implemented and monitored in line with the SDGs and in accordance with the wishes of the countries' populations.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

Date adopted	1.12.2015
Result of final vote	+ : 19 - : 0 0 : 2
Members present for the final vote	Beatriz Becerra Basterrechea, Doru-Claudian Frunzulică, Heidi Hautala, Maria Heubuch, Teresa Jiménez-Becerril Barrio, Stelios Kouloglou, Arne Lietz, Linda McAvan, Norbert Neuser, Maurice Ponga, Cristian Dan Preda, Lola Sánchez Caldentey, Elly Schlein, György Schöpflin, Pedro Silva Pereira, Davor Ivo Stier, Bogdan Brunon Wenta, Rainer Wieland
Substitutes under Rule 200(2) present for the final vote	Pál Csáky, José Inácio Faria, Inmaculada Rodríguez-Piñero Fernández