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# **DRAFT REPORT**

on the EU strategy on Central Asia  
(2023/2106(INI))

Committee on Foreign Affairs

Rapporteur: Karsten Lucke

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## **EXPLANATORY STATEMENT**

Central Asia is a strategically important region for the European Union. The EU's engagement in the region is based on the strategy on Central Asia, adopted in 2019, which focuses on promoting resilience, prosperity and regional cooperation.

Since the adoption of the strategy, the region has been affected by significant external factors, such as Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and the global ambitions of China, as well as internal instability, notably the violent unrest in Kazakhstan in January 2022, violent crackdown following protests in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast of Tajikistan in November 2021 and May 2022 and in the Republic of Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan in July 2022 and repeated clashes on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border.

The report aims to address the opportunities and challenges for closer EU-Central Asia cooperation in the context of global and regional geopolitical shifts.

## MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

### on the EU strategy on Central Asia (2023/2106(INI))

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the joint communication by the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 15 May 2019 entitled ‘The EU and Central Asia: New opportunities for a stronger partnership’ (JOIN(2019)0009),
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 17 June 2019 on the New Strategy on Central Asia,
- having regard to the joint communication by the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 19 September 2018 entitled ‘Connecting Europe and Asia – Building blocks for an EU Strategy’ (JOIN(2018)0031),
- having regard to the joint communication by the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 1 December 2021 entitled ‘The Global Gateway’ (JOIN(2021)0030),
- having regard to the outcomes of the 18th EU-Central Asia Foreign Ministers’ meeting, held on 17 November 2022 in Samarkand, which focused on finding solutions to common challenges,
- having regard to the joint press communiqué by the heads of state of Central Asia and the President of the European Council, issued following the second regional high-level meeting held in Cholpon-Ata on 2 June 2023,
- having regard to the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Kazakhstan, of the other part<sup>1</sup>,
- having regard to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement establishing a partnership between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Kyrgyz Republic, of the other part<sup>2</sup>,
- having regard to the Commission proposal of 13 June 2022 for a Council decision on the conclusion, on behalf of the European Union, of the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Union, of the one part, and the Kyrgyz Republic, of the other part (COM(2022)0277 final),
- having regard to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement establishing a partnership

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<sup>1</sup> [OJ L 29, 4.2.2016, p. 3.](#)

<sup>2</sup> [OJ L 196, 28.7.1999, p. 48.](#)

between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Tajikistan, of the other part<sup>3</sup>,

- having regard to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement establishing a partnership between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Uzbekistan, of the other part<sup>4</sup>,
  - having regard to the outcomes of the EU-Central Asia Connectivity Conference, held on 18 November 2022, the second EU-Central Asia Economic Forum, held from 18 to 19 May 2023, the fourth EU-Central Asia Civil Society Forum, held on 10 March 2023, and the seventh EU-Central Asia High-Level Conference on Environment and Water Resources, held from 23 to 24 February 2023,
  - having regard to the EU-funded study entitled ‘Sustainable transport connections between Europe and Central Asia’, conducted by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and published on 30 June 2023,
  - having regard to the Memorandum of Understanding between the EU and Kazakhstan on a strategic partnership in the field of raw materials, batteries and renewable hydrogen, signed on 7 November 2022,
  - having regard to the outcomes of the human rights dialogues with the Central Asian states,
  - having regard to its previous resolutions on Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan,
  - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A9-0000/2023),
- A. whereas since the adoption of the EU strategy on Central Asia in 2019, the region has been affected by significant external factors, such as Russia’s illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, and China’s global ambitions, as well as by internal instability, particularly the violent unrest in Kazakhstan in January 2022, violent crackdowns following protests in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast of Tajikistan in November 2021 and May 2022 and in the Republic of Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan, in July 2022, and repeated clashes on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border;
- B. whereas Central Asia is a region of strategic interest to the EU in terms of security, connectivity, energy and resource diversification, conflict resolution and the defence of the multilateral rules-based international order;
- C. whereas Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (EPCAs) are new-generation agreements that are the cornerstone of the EU’s engagement with Central Asia;

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<sup>3</sup> [OJ L 350, 29.12.2009, p. 3.](#)

<sup>4</sup> [OJ L 229, 31.8.1999, p. 3.](#)

- D. whereas the first EU-Central Asian leaders' meeting took place in Astana on 27 October 2022, followed by a second such meeting in Cholpon-Ata on 2 June 2023; whereas a leaders' summit is planned for 2024; whereas these meetings represent further institutionalisation of EU-Central Asian relations and complement the work of existing regional dialogues and platforms;

### ***EU engagement with Central Asia***

1. Underlines that the EU and Central Asia are facing profound global and regional geopolitical shifts, which provide significant impetus for them to engage in stronger mutually beneficial cooperation; encourages the EU to intensify its engagement with Central Asia, given the geostrategic importance of the region; welcomes the increased high-level contact between the EU and Central Asia, in particular the meetings between the Central Asian heads of state and the President of the European Council, and the work of the EU Special Representative for Central Asia; welcomes the intention to adopt a joint EU-Central Asia roadmap to advance dialogue and cooperation in specific areas; encourages the EU to continue promoting political and economic reforms that strengthen the rule of law, democracy, good governance and respect for human rights;
2. Notes that Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has weakened its standing in the region and has encouraged Central Asia to pursue cooperation with other actors, and that these actors have stepped up their cooperation with Central Asia; underlines that the EU should use this window of opportunity to foster mutually beneficial cooperation;
3. Recognises that Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and its implications present both challenges and opportunities for the Central Asian states, which have traditionally maintained close relations with Russia; expresses deep concern about Central Asian states' circumvention of EU sanctions against Russia, which are intended to stop the war in Ukraine; calls on the authorities of the Central Asian states, particularly Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, to cooperate closely with the EU, in particular its Sanctions Envoy;
4. Reiterates the key role of EPCAs as the framework for cooperation with the Central Asian states; notes with concern that the EPCA with Kyrgyzstan, negotiations on which were concluded in 2019, remains unsigned; calls on the Council and the Commission to resolve the outstanding issues and to sign the EPCAs with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan without further delay in order for Parliament to exercise its prerogatives regarding the ratification of these agreements; stresses that failure to sign such agreements after the conclusion of negotiations calls into question the EU's credibility as a global actor;

### ***Regional cooperation***

5. Underlines the great potential of mutually beneficial cooperation on sustainable development, connectivity, energy, critical raw materials and security, with Central Asia being a key region for connectivity between East and West; stresses that in order to make the Global Gateway a success, the EU must back up its ambitious plans with deeds and mobilise funds; underlines the importance of developing the Trans-Caspian Corridor as an alternative connection between Asia and Europe and of working on attracting investment and eliminating the bottlenecks identified in the study conducted

by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development;

6. Notes the Central Asian states' long-standing close relations with Afghanistan and their evolving pragmatic engagement with the Taliban, which they nevertheless do not recognise, since the takeover in 2021; underlines that the Central Asian states play a key role in ensuring stability in Afghanistan through the provision of humanitarian aid, electricity, trade opportunities and joint connectivity projects; encourages the EU Special Envoy for Afghanistan to continue cooperating closely with counterparts in the Central Asian states as part of the EU-Central Asia dialogue on Afghanistan; recognises that Central Asia is a crucial area for containing religious extremism, terrorism and drug trafficking networks and faces increased migratory pressure due to the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan;
7. Highlights the EU's role as an important donor of aid to the region; underlines the importance of taking a united approach as Team Europe, as this makes it possible to create synergies and maximise the impact of the action taken and showcases the benefits of multilateral cooperation; stresses the need to ensure the visibility of EU assistance and investment;
8. Notes that climate change, a growing population and economic needs are putting increasing strain on water resources in Central Asia; stresses the need for closer regional cooperation on this matter between upstream and downstream countries in order to prevent conflicts over the distribution and use of water resources; welcomes regional platforms, such as the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea, which encourage dialogue and cooperation between Central Asian states; recalls that the EU-Central Asia environmental dialogue was established in order to support the stabilisation of the Aral Sea and foster better management of water resources;

### ***Democracy and human rights***

9. Urges the Central Asian states to adhere to their democracy and human rights obligations, noting that this is also in line with the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements and the Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus; underlines the importance of maintaining regular human rights dialogues with the Central Asian states, as these dialogues are an instrument to promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and a forum to raise issues of concern; calls on the EU delegations and the Member States' representations in Central Asia to continue playing an active role in monitoring the situation on the ground, working with human rights defenders and reacting to human rights violations and politically-motivated persecution, including by attending trials and visiting political prisoners;
10. Underlines the fundamental democratic shortcomings in Central Asia, which still persist, and highlights the important role that civil society can play in supporting reforms and good governance in the region; regrets the restrictive approach taken in legislative initiatives on non-governmental organisations and the media, which reduce the space for civil society activities; notes that the Central Asian states have young and dynamic populations that should be given opportunities to get meaningfully involved in shaping their countries' future; welcomes the activities of the EU-Central Asia Civil Society Forum and calls on the EU to enhance its support to civil society;

11. Notes the need to boost Central Asia's resilience against disinformation by promoting independent media and content in local languages, increasing media literacy and organising targeted courses for local journalists; is concerned about the increasing number of arrests of journalists and bloggers and about threats to close independent media outlets; insists that respect for the rights of journalists, independent bloggers and human rights defenders must be ensured, that they must be guaranteed protection against harassment, pressure and threats and that any attacks against them must be investigated;
12. Is concerned that gender-based violence, discrimination and harassment of minorities and LGBTIQ people are still widespread in Central Asia and urges the Central Asian governments to prevent these human rights violations through appropriate laws and measures;
13. Underlines that the EU should capitalise on its positive image in Central Asia by engaging in more cultural and public diplomacy; advocates fostering people-to-people contact and mobility, offering opportunities in education and science through the Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 programmes and increasing tourism;
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14. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and to the presidents, governments and parliaments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.