An EU Strategy for Central Asia

P6_TA(2008)0059

European Parliament resolution of 20 February 2008 on an EU Strategy for Central Asia
(2007/2102(INI))

(2009/C 184 E/08)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to its previous resolutions on Central Asia, in particular those of 26 October 2006 on Uzbekistan (1), of 16 March 2006 on Kazakhstan (2) and of 12 May 2005 on the situation in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia (3),

— having regard to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) concluded between the EU and Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, all in force since 1999, to the Interim Agreement on Trade and Trade-Related Matters between the European Community and the European Atomic Energy Community, of the one part, and the Republic of Tajikistan, of the other part (4), signed on 11 October 2004, to the PCA between the EU and Turkmenistan, which has not yet been ratified, and to the Commission’s proposal for an Interim Agreement on Trade and Trade-Related Matters between the EU and Turkmenistan,

— having regard to the human rights clauses in those agreements,

— having regard to the EU’s commitment to promote the achievement of the UN’s Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to the European Consensus on Development (5),

— having regard to the adoption by the European Council on 21/22 June 2007 of an EU Strategy for a new Partnership with Central Asia,

— having regard to the European Council Action Plan (2007-2013) for an Energy Policy for Europe, adopted on 8/9 March 2007, and to the energy cooperation between the EU, the littoral states of the Black and Caspian Seas and their neighbours,

— having regard to its resolution of 26 September 2007 on towards a European foreign policy on energy (6),

— having regard to the Baku Initiative for the development of energy cooperation and transport between the EU and the countries of the Black Sea and Caspian region,

— having regard to the Memoranda of Understanding concluded with Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan in the context of developing a foreign policy at the service of Europe’s energy interests,

— having regard to relevant Council Conclusions, including the conclusions on Uzbekistan of 23-24 May, 13 June, 18 July and 3 October 2005, 13 November 2006 and 5 March, 14-15 May and 15-16 October 2007, and to the conclusions on Central Asia of 23-24 April 2007,

— having regard to the sanctions imposed on Uzbekistan by the EU following the Andijan massacre, in Council Regulation (EC) No 1859/2005 of 14 November 2005 imposing certain restrictive measures in respect of Uzbekistan (1), which have been consecutively extended (2), and to the partial lifting and conditional suspension for a period of six months of visa sanctions in May and October 2007 respectively,

— having regard to the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights, launched in 2003 with the aim of promoting human rights and supporting penal reform, democracy, good governance, media freedom, the rule of law, security structures (police/armed forces) and conflict prevention,

— having regard to the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) (3),

— having regard to the Foreign Ministerial Troika meeting with the countries of Central Asia, held in Berlin on 30 June 2007 in the presence of EU Special Representative, Pierre Morel, and the Portuguese Prime Minister, José Sócrates,

— having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,

— having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the opinions of the Committee on Development and the Committee on International Trade (A6-0503/2007),

A. whereas the five countries referred to collectively as Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) lie at a key intersection between Europe and Asia and whereas, historically and traditionally, they have represented an important meeting and transit point between the two continents,

B. whereas the EU insists on the need for, and has a clear interest in seeing progress towards, greater stability and rising levels of economic, democratic and human development and human security throughout Central Asia and must always uphold its commitment to mainstream human rights in all agreements with third states and to promote democracy through coherent policies and the use of the means best suited for those purposes; whereas this will safeguard its credibility and ultimately contribute to making it an increasingly efficient player vis-à-vis the region, as well as beyond,

C. whereas there is a global interest in stability in Central Asia since serious and prolonged instability in one of the five countries could have disastrous consequences for the entire region and could also affect the EU and its Member States in many ways,

D. mindful of the risks involved in being dependent on imports from unstable regions and suppliers and of the need to establish reliable, accessible and viable energy channels,

E. whereas the EU has an interest in security and stability and in respect for human rights and the rule of law in the states of Central Asia, since strategic, political and economic developments and the growing trans-regional challenges in Central Asia also have a direct or indirect impact on the interests of the European Union; whereas the states of Central Asia can contribute, with their significant energy resources and by their efforts towards diversification among trading partners and supply routes, to meeting the European Union’s need for energy security and energy supply,

F. whereas there is, on the one hand, a strong case for cooperation among the countries of the region but, on the other hand, a strong resistance to such ideas and efforts, not least from the Government of the centrally situated — and by far most populous — state of Uzbekistan,


G. whereas isolationism tends to stem from an anxiety to maintain internal control — extreme examples of which can be seen in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan — and whereas such anxiety is a given in regimes which show little interest in seeking popular consent on which to base their rule,

H. whereas the five Central Asian republics are Official Development Assistance recipients, which means that EU assistance to those countries is regarded as development assistance,

I. whereas it follows from the EU's security and other interests, as well as from its values and support for the MDGs, that the hardship and lack of opportunities faced by many people in this region, parts of which are affected by poverty, the threats to human security partly linked to the security problems of neighbouring countries such as Afghanistan and the risks of destabilisation and conflict must be placed at the very core of the EU’s approach to Central Asia,

J. whereas the primary objective of EU development cooperation is the eradication of poverty in the context of sustainable development, including in the pursuit of the MDGs,

K. whereas EU assistance to the region has largely taken the form of technical assistance implemented through the Tacis programme, and whereas assessments of Tacis's effectiveness have shown mixed results,

L. whereas, according to Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the right to health is a human right, and whereas universal access to healthcare is essential for achieving the MDGs; whereas health conditions have deteriorated in all Central Asian republics following the break-up of the Soviet Union and health systems are in crisis; whereas the potential spill-over effects of epidemics such as HIV/AIDS and drug-resistant tuberculosis present a long-term threat to the EU; whereas the avian flu crisis has demonstrated the capacity of infectious diseases to travel rapidly across Europe; whereas the social consequences of the health crisis in the various countries threaten their overall stability and development prospects, and have implications for European security,

M. whereas energy and water are key issues for human security and inter-state relations within the region, particularly in relation to Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and whereas poverty reduction remains crucial to reducing social instability,

N. whereas the EU has an interest in importing more oil and gas from Central Asia, preferably through new transportation routes, and in establishing a clear and transparent framework for the production and transportation of energy, and whereas the countries that are relevant in this context are Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan,

O. whereas the Central Asian countries are, to varying degrees, endowed with oil, gas, mineral or hydro-power resources; whereas the exploitation of such resources should significantly facilitate economic and social development; and whereas, under the wrong conditions, unwelcome side-effects such as serious environmental degradation, reduced competitiveness of other economic sectors, massive wealth inequalities and increased political and social tensions may arise and might even outweigh the positive effects (the so-called ‘natural resources curse’),

P. whereas on 10 October 2007 representatives from Ukraine, Poland, Azerbaijan and Georgia met in Lithuania to discuss a new oil transport network designed to bring crude oil from the Caspian Sea via Baku and Odessa to the Polish port of Gdansk,

Q. whereas Russia and China tried to increase their spheres of influence in Central Asia through the establishment of the Shanghai Five in 1996, which brought together China, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan in a forum for managing cross-border issues and which in 2001 became the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), which today is the largest regional organisation in Central Asia and now includes Uzbekistan as a full member and Pakistan, India, Iran and Mongolia as observers,
R. whereas a number of disparate countries have had, historically or more recently, vested interests in the region; whereas not all Member States have embassies in the region and whereas there is often a lack of coordination with regard to the region between Member States,

S. whereas the departure of United States personnel and material from the Karshi-Khanabad (K2) air base in Uzbekistan on 21 November 2005 reduced United States military facilities in Central Asia to one base in Manas, near the Kyrgyz capital of Bishkek,

T. whereas political, economic, social and other conditions differ widely among, and in some cases also within, the Central Asian states and whereas this makes it absolutely essential for the EU to differentiate its policies accordingly,

U. whereas the countries of Central Asia are very new states, and whereas their state-building and political and economic transition efforts have led them in different directions and have prompted them to distance themselves unequally far from the earlier Soviet system; whereas addressing governance issues remains of key importance, in the case of a number of states for the sake of stability and security, and in the case of all the states for political, social and economic development,

V. whereas EU concerns include the need to stem the flow of drug trafficking from or through Central Asia, the fight against organised crime, including human trafficking, and preventing a growth in terrorism; whereas in some cases the 'fight against terrorism' is used as a cover for repressive actions against those who criticise the government, human rights defenders, religious movements and ordinary businesspeople; whereas there is reason to believe that such persons have also been targeted in the framework of Uzbekistan's security cooperation with neighbours; whereas it is recognised that there is a migration of child labour that demands new forms of international and social partnership involving all parties interested in a comprehensive resolution of the problem,

W. whereas the human rights situation is different in the various Central Asian republics and, overall, falls far below the standards laid down by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and whereas Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan in particular systematically violate fundamental rights and lack any democratic and pluralistic progress,

X. whereas the Central Asian republics have yet to conduct an election — presidential or parliamentary — judged wholly free and fair by the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR),

Y. whereas all five Central Asian states are OSCE member states and, within its framework, have taken on extensive commitments regarding fundamental freedoms, democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law; whereas respect for those commitments varies among the states,

Z. whereas Kazakhstan compares favourably with most other states in the region; whereas its most recent parliamentary elections, held on 18 August 2007, show that, despite some improvements, it is not yet fully respecting its commitments or complying with OSCE and other international standards for democratic elections,

AA. whereas civil society is particularly active in most Central Asian countries through a network of local NGOs and associations that need to be protected and valued as the expression of the willingness of citizens to be part of the democratisation and social process of their countries,

AB. whereas political, economic and social improvements can effectively be achieved in the region through the establishment of a genuinely independent judiciary and a real fight against rampant corruption,
AC. whereas the principles on which the EU is based include the defence of fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression and the protection of human rights activists,

AD. whereas examples of massive repression, corruption and exploitation, and the denial of people's fundamental rights and opportunities to improve their lives, together with the absence of accepted channels for expressing grievances and participating in political processes, heighten the risks that extremism and terrorism will grow,

AE. whereas most of the Central Asian countries suffer from human rights violations, from the lack of an appropriate judicial system, from restrictions imposed on opposition parties and independent civil society bodies, and from lack of media freedom,

AF. whereas the EU imposed sanctions on Uzbekistan after the Andijan massacre in May 2005, but the Uzbek government keeps blocking an independent international investigation into the events and continues its repressive policies, including its persecution of human rights defenders; whereas in October 2007 the Council nevertheless decided to suspend for a period of six months a visa ban on eight persons directly responsible for the indiscriminate use of force in Andijan; whereas the Council through this suspension seeks to stimulate the Uzbek authorities into changing their policies and whereas the ban will be automatically re-activated in April/May 2008 unless a set of criteria adopted as part of the Council decision is met,

AG. whereas there is considerable interest in cooperation with the EU in the region in the fields of science, healthcare and education, and whereas such cooperation can contribute to intensifying civil society contacts and spreading European values of democracy, the rule of law and human rights,

AH. whereas in varying respects both Mongolia and Afghanistan share certain common features with the five principal states of Central Asia but are not focused on in the Council's strategy paper and are themselves covered by different EU instruments,

AI. whereas the proximity of the region to Afghanistan has made certain countries valued partners in the fight against terrorism; whereas EU Member States have also used airports or airspace in the region; whereas at the same time EU action to promote human rights in Central Asia in general and in certain countries in particular has been disappointingly weak,

AJ. whereas Central Asia is the transit route for as much as 30% of Afghan heroin, largely for Russian markets, which leads to drug-traffic-related organised crime and corruption, as well as to addiction and related health and social problems, with major implications for regional stability,

AK. whereas Mongolia shares a background similar to that of the Central Asian republics, having historical, cultural and economic characteristics and environmental and energy policies that must be considered in a consistent way in the framework of the EU strategy for Central Asia,

1. Welcomes the EU's increased focus on Central Asia, of which the adoption of the Central Asia strategy is a clear expression; notes, however, the slowness of implementation of the projects for the five countries of the region;

2. Is convinced that, while the values which the EU must promote always remain the same, the EU's interests, as well as prevailing conditions and opportunities in the five countries, differ widely;

3. Calls for the definition of clear objectives and priorities for the EU's relations with each of the five countries, drawing on the general analysis of the region and the general catalogue of EU policy objectives contained in the EU strategy adopted;
4. Stresses the importance of the EU's promotion of fair and sustainable economic development in the region, and of its support for local initiatives for economic development, for reforms in the business regulatory framework and for the eradication of poverty in the context of sustainable development; stresses, with regard to the challenge posed by terrorism, that enhancing cooperation on security is important, but that any approach to combating radicalisation and extremism that does not balance security needs with human rights and good governance is self-defeating; welcomes the strengthening of political dialogue with the Central Asian countries; calls on the Council and the Commission further to promote good governance, human rights, democracy and education, including consideration of engagement with all types of religious communities; and calls on both the Council and the Commission to ensure that human rights issues should carry equal weight with the EU's robust approach to energy, security and trade;

5. Is convinced that certain issues can only be dealt with effectively by means of regional approaches leading to regional solutions (e.g. counter-terrorism, the eradication of human trafficking, counter-narcotics, water management) which require enhanced regional cooperation; urges the EU institutions, therefore, to provide technical help where needed, especially in spreading know-how and acting as mediator in encouraging dialogue between the Central Asian countries; points out, however, that the countries of Central Asia have differing levels of development and major political, economic and cultural differences; in this context, welcomes the fact that the Commission and the Council are seeking to adopt country-specific as well as regional approaches in planning future partnership and cooperation;

6. Calls for the differentiation in the EU’s policy regarding its approach to the countries of the region to be based in particular on the human rights situation in each country, their government’s respect for OSCE commitments, their development needs and their government’s commitments to improving the welfare of citizens, their current and potential importance to the EU as partners in trade, cooperation on energy and in other areas, and dialogue on international issues, and the prospects for success of EU actions, including various forms of assistance;

7. Stresses the importance of cross-border cooperation, especially in understanding that this will make joint efforts to combat the trafficking of human beings and drugs more efficient; urges the EU institutions, therefore, to provide technical help where it is needed, especially in spreading know-how and acting as mediator in encouraging dialogue between the Central Asian countries;

8. Stresses the need for consistency of EU policy in Central Asia, and therefore recalls that the Strategy must be consistent with the European Consensus on Development; also stresses that all assistance delivered under the DCI needs to comply with its overarching objectives, i.e. poverty eradication and achievement of the MDGs;

9. Notes that poverty eradication is described as the main priority of European Community bilateral assistance for the period 2007-2013 in the Annex to the Strategy; calls on the Commission to provide regular and detailed information to Parliament on the way in which bilateral and regional assistance will relate to individual MDGs and on the budget planned for the health and basic education sectors;

10. Stresses that reforms of social sectors, health, food security, the fight against corruption and a focus on sustainable and fair economic development are crucial to ensuring long-term stability, security and prosperity in Central Asian countries; is of the opinion, therefore, that the process of assessing needs at the national and regional levels provides a clear opportunity for the EU to gain visibility and credibility in an open dialogue with all stakeholders, including civil society, parliaments and local authorities;

11. Believes that membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO) represents an important achievement for the economic stability of the region, but that this goal can be achieved only by respecting international standards for foreign investment and by having an independent judiciary;

12. Calls on the Commission and the Council to implement all appropriate measures to encourage deeper integration of Central Asia into the world trade and economic system, in particular through WTO accession for the four countries in the region which are not yet members;
13. Considers it essential for the economic development of the countries in the region that they substantially reform their banking and insurance systems, establish an efficient micro-credit system, improve the regulation and supervision of banking activities, privatise state banks and create national financial markets that are truly competitive and open to foreign banks;

14. Urges the Council to authorise the European Investment Bank (EIB) to extend its credit support to Central Asia, in cooperation with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), which is already active in the region;

15. Urges the Commission to mobilise, in coherent fashion, all the instruments at its disposal, from political dialogue and Community policies (especially those concerning trade, development, competition, research and the environment) to subsidies and loans, including those granted by the EIB, the EBRD and other international financial institutions, with a view to accelerating the realisation of these projects;

16. Encourages the States in the region to provide better protection for foreign direct investment;

17. Calls on the Commission and the Council to take all possible measures to make it easier for the countries of Central Asia to use the EU's Generalized System of Preferences, and to foster the development of intra-regional trade;

18. Calls on the Commission and the Council to supply the states in the region with qualified economic and administrative technical assistance, in order to strengthen local public structures, establish a more efficient and diversified economic base and improve the penetration of local products into foreign markets, and into the EU in particular;

19. Considers the strategy to be insufficiently ambitious with regard to bilateral cooperation on human rights, the rule of law, good governance and democratisation;

20. Considers that, when assessing the human rights situation, the EU should pay special attention to the existence — or absence — of a credible commitment on the part of the government concerned to improving that situation, focusing on demonstrable progress, the climate for human rights defenders and the level of cooperation with UN special rapporteurs and mechanisms, as well as with other relevant international players;

21. In this regard, calls on the Council and the Commission to maintain a consistent and united front on human rights issues and, with a view to making democracy, good governance, the rule of law and human rights an integral part of the Central Asia strategy, to set clear benchmarks, indicators and targets in these areas, in consultation with the Central Asian partner countries, as has been done in the other fields; calls on the Council and the Commission to pay particular attention to the release of political prisoners and to the independence of the media;

22. Condemns the persecution of human rights defenders in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan; calls on the Council and the Commission to make every effort to protect their activities and physical integrity, and calls on the relevant governments to immediately release all human rights defenders imprisoned or compulsorily detained in psychiatric hospitals for political reasons;

23. Emphasises that EU contacts with security structures or EU support for security cooperation involving highly repressive states should be minimised, and that any such contacts should always be conducted transparently;

24. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to offer special assistance for reform and improvement of the judiciary in the region, in order to enable it to work with greater independence and effectiveness, including in the fight against corruption;

25. Calls on the Council and the Commission to cooperate closely with Central Asian countries in the implementation of educational reforms and to encourage those countries to detach a citizen's civil and social rights from property ownership by reforming the housing registration system (whereby an individual receives a housing registration stamp in his or her passport when becoming a citizen);
26. Takes the view that developing and supporting a genuine civil society is a prerequisite for any progress; deplores the difficult situation of NGOs in some Central Asian states, whose activities are continuously hampered by governments; stresses that the EU must continue to support civil society, both through financial assistance and by ensuring visibility (via fora and consultation), which would help to build up a participatory democracy; is of the opinion that the EU should regard civil society as a partner in contributing to sustainable societies, social stability and the promotion of the EU’s values and standards;

27. Notes that the EU policy towards Central Asia should be based on in-depth debates and exchanges with all stakeholders; therefore calls on the EU to engage in an inclusive political dialogue, involving parliaments, civil society and local authorities in the implementation and monitoring of the strategy and the programmes;

28. Draws attention to the widespread abuse of women in a number of regions throughout Central Asia (examples of this being forced marriages, trafficking for sexual exploitation, rape, etc.), and calls on the governments of the countries of Central Asia to implement the existing laws to protect the rights of women, and on the Commission to include relevant actions in assistance programmes;

29. Calls on Central Asian governments to strengthen existing laws on women’s rights and to improve their implementation of these laws; urges the Commission to continue to support human rights and democracy projects relating to the specific role of women; urges the EU to support the full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and to use it as a benchmark for deeper cooperation; underlines that the plight of women is deteriorating in many parts of Central Asia due to unequal access to education, health and employment, and stresses that MDG 3 of promoting gender equality and empowering women should become a priority to be mainstreamed in the EU’s related activities;

30. Welcomes the support for the implementation of the International Labour Organization’s norms and conventions for decent work, and stresses that these standards must play an integral role in economic cooperation, investment and trade relations; notes that child labour is still a cause for grave concern, especially in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and stresses the need to support the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;

31. Emphasises the widespread use of child labour in several Central Asian states, especially in the cotton harvesting, tobacco cultivation, coal mining and handicrafts sectors, and calls on the respective governments to implement more effectively existing measures to combat this, to draw up a consistent national policy on child labour and fully to support and take part in projects for the elimination of child labour launched by international organisations and NGOs; urges the Commission to set up a special programme within the framework of the DCI in relation to this matter;

32. Urges the Commission to develop active cooperation on migration leading to real and participatory dialogue in which the root causes of migration are addressed through specific local economic development programmes, tackling, for example, the lack of economic prospects in rural areas so as to mitigate the consequent increases in urban poverty;

33. Urges the Council and the Commission to make full use of their experience and best practice in promoting human rights protection for migrants, especially for asylum seekers and refugees; condemns the forced extradition of asylum seekers, and in particular Uzbek refugees, by the governments of Central Asian countries, and calls on the Council and the Commission to cooperate with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) in defending and supporting political refugees;

34. Draws attention to the fact that a large number of Uighurs have been extradited from Central Asia to China at China’s request, reflecting growing pressure by China on governments in the region, and notes that refugees are at risk of serious human rights violations;
35. Considers that, given the strong increase in infectious diseases such as HIV in the region, health and public sector health reform should be a key priority for the donor community, including the Commission;

36. Strongly encourages EU support for education and training, thereby offering greater possibilities for Central Asian students to study in the EU, and for exchanges with students from EU universities;

37. Highlights the geopolitical situation of Central Asia and the growing interest of economic and political powers, such as Russia, the United States, China and Turkey, in the region; considers, therefore, that close cooperation with those countries in respect of Central Asia is very important where interests coincide without conflicting with human rights concerns; urges the Council and the Commission to find ways to improve the coordination of the individual actions and policies of EU Member States in the region, as well as between the EU and other interested states; stresses, in this regard, the key role of Turkey as an EU candidate country in Central Asia, and calls on the Council and the Commission to make the most of Turkey's historical, economic and cultural relations with certain countries in the region, fully involving that EU candidate country in the development and implementation of the strategy;

38. Emphasises the importance of further developing inter-regional cooperation, in particular with the countries of the Black Sea region;

39. Regrets the fact that, in the Council’s strategy on Central Asia, Mongolia is not included among the countries referred to collectively as Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan), especially in view of the substantial progress made by Mongolia in establishing a state based on democracy, human rights and the rule of law in the region; calls on the Council and the Commission to seek a resolution at EU level and to prepare a statement about Mongolia's development;

40. Urges the Council and Commission to ensure that all sectors of society in each country are integrated in the political dialogue and partnership with the EU, and to involve a broader range of actors in its policy, particularly parliaments and civil society;

41. Welcomes the appointment of an EU Special Representative for Central Asia, Pierre Morel, and calls on the Council to strengthen his mandate and better to define his role, including by contributing to improved coordination of Member States' policies in the region;

42. Urges the Commission to proceed without further delay to set up full delegations in all Central Asian countries where the circumstances so permit, as a full presence on the ground is a precondition for effective EU action; notes plans to set up a full delegation in Bishkek and Dushanbe in 2008, which will significantly increase the EU's visibility in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and should lead to a strengthening of cooperation;

43. Welcomes the Council’s decision to review the progress made in implementing the strategy in June 2008 and at least every two years thereafter; takes the view that this review will be the occasion to link the Central Asia strategy more closely to the European Neighbourhood Policy;

Kazakhstan

44. Notes that Kazakhstan is a key ally and strategic partner in the fight against international terrorism, drug trafficking and religious extremism; recognises Kazakhstan's tradition of racial and religious harmony in a country which is home to more than 100 different ethnic groups and 45 different religions; calls on the Council and the Commission to prioritise support for the Government of Kazakhstan as well as its civil society with a view to consolidating the rule of law and to the further promotion of democratic elections in the future;

45. Stresses Kazakhstan's importance for the EU's trade in energy, as its main trading partner in Central Asia; recalls the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding focused on promoting cooperation with the EU with a view to developing safe energy and industrial cooperation; notes — recalling that Kazakhstan has the world's third largest uranium reserves — that this memorandum has been supplemented by an agreement on energy cooperation and a declaration on the peaceful use of nuclear energy by Euratom and the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan;
46. Welcomes Kazakhstan’s interest in strengthening cooperation with the European Union, and recognises the mutual importance of strengthened political and economic relations between the EU and Kazakhstan; considers that the EU should continue its approach of positive engagement towards Kazakhstan but emphasises that the development of EU-Kazakhstan relations cannot be disconnected from Kazakhstan’s efforts to honour its international and OSCE obligations in the field of human rights, fundamental freedoms and democracy;

47. Stresses that the last parliamentary elections, held on 18 August 2007, failed, despite some improvements, to meet OSCE and other international standards; expresses its concern that all the seats in the parliament were taken by the ruling, pro-presidential party, which could lead to monopolisation of power on the part of President Nursultan Nazarbayev and his supporters; calls upon the Kazakh Government to abolish all disproportionate restrictions on the registration of new political parties, for example the unrealistic number of members (50,000) necessary to form a political party;

48. Supports the decision to let Kazakhstan assume the Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2010, made possible by Kazakhstan’s pledges to defend the current mandate of the ODIHR and to democratise and liberalise the political system in Kazakhstan; in the latter connection, notes the pledges to ease the registration requirements both for political parties and for media outlets and to amend the Law on Elections, all of which should be done in 2008, as well as the pledges to amend the Media Law in a way which reflects OSCE recommendations and to reduce criminal liability for defamation; welcomes the close link that Kazakhstan itself makes between these issues and its future Chairmanship of the OSCE and looks forward to the timely and convincing translation of the reform pledges into concrete measures; strongly encourages Kazakhstan to grasp this opportunity to take a decisive step towards a fully democratic system and thereby to prepare for a truly successful OSCE Chairmanship;

49. Urges the government to move more determinedly towards a democratic institutional system, recalling the continuous progress that has been made since Kazakhstan declared independence in 1991;

50. Underlines the absence of any real freedom of the press, and expresses concern about presidential control of the major media and the prosecution of opposition journalists; furthermore, expresses concern over the new draft media law which would render journalists liable for disseminating disparaging information and strengthen the criminalisation of defamation and insulting the dignity of others, and under which suit may be brought against any journalist for publishing information concerning a public figure’s private life; notes that the existing laws provide sufficient protection against unethical journalists;

51. Welcomes the signing by Kazakhstan of the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UN Convention against Torture), and calls for its speedy ratification and implementation;

52. Takes the view that all efforts should be made to consolidate and support the fragile democratic institutions in Kyrgyzstan; believes that this country has the potential to become an example for all the other Central Asian states in the areas of democracy, human rights and the rule of law; calls on the Council and the Commission to step up assistance to this country so as to help to ensure that it undertakes and successfully implements the promised reforms;

53. Strongly supports Kyrgyzstan’s progress in press and media freedom as well as the efforts of politicians and civil society to enact constitutional reform; calls upon the Kyrgyz Government to ensure the safety of the country’s journalists, to complete the promised media and anti-corruption reforms and to make greater progress in political and budgetary decentralisation;

54. Expresses its concern that the new draft of the Constitution, voted on in the referendum of 21 October 2007, could significantly alter the balance of power; expresses its concern that the Kyrgyz authorities did not engage in a wide-ranging public debate, involving all sections of Kyrgyz society, on this delicate matter; urges the Kyrgyz authorities to safeguard the appropriate checks and balances;
55. Regrets that the pre-term parliamentary elections held on 16 December 2007 failed to meet a number of OSCE commitments; stresses that, according the OSCE, the elections, overall, represented a missed opportunity and a step backward compared to the 2005 elections, and fell short of public expectations for further consolidation of the election process; expresses its concern, in particular, at the double-threshold mechanism that kept out of the new parliament the strongest opposition party, thus giving President Bakiyev's party an overwhelming majority; calls on the Kyrgyz authorities, in this regard, to take the necessary measures in order to restore a fully-fledged political pluralism; deplores the crackdown and the arrest by the police of NGO and human rights activists who were peacefully demonstrating against the shortcomings of the election process;

**Tajikistan**

56. Having welcomed the positive development of a multi-party and power-sharing system in Tajikistan after the civil war ended in 1997, notes that Tajikistan has been living in a state of precarious stability since then, with a President who, although apparently enjoying genuine popular support, has systematically repressed all opposition and imposed strict controls on the print media and broadcasting; regrets the absence of any genuine civil society in the country, which will undermine future democratic development, and stresses the need for further significant reform and respect for human rights; in this field, calls for the adoption of all necessary measures to respect the UN Convention against Torture, in particular by bringing to justice officials responsible for degrading treatment or ill-treatment, and also calls for the abolition of the death penalty;

57. Expresses concern over the new draft religious law that will, if adopted, include restrictive provisions concerning the legal status of religious communities, especially as regards the gaining of legal status by non-Muslim communities; notes that several provisions of this law violate Tajikistan's Constitution and international norms that Tajikistan has signed; also expresses concern that mosque leaders will be subject to religious tests in Tajikistan and calls upon the Tajik government to respect the beliefs and existence of religious minorities;

58. Notes that Tajikistan, which lacks natural resources such as oil and gas, is one of the 20 poorest countries in the world, and that there are very serious concerns about the level of exploitation there, as well as in Uzbekistan, of women and children in pursuit of what is effectively a cotton monoculture;

59. Encourages those Member States which have yet to ratify the PCA with Tajikistan to do so as soon as possible, as unnecessary delays could send discouraging and unhelpful signals to Tajikistan; will, itself, aim to give its approval to the PCA in the near future;

60. Draws attention to the existence of unexploded cluster bombs in Tajikistan, urges that funding for their clearance be increased, and stresses the need for an international treaty banning cluster bombs; draws attention also to the existence of minefields on the borders with Afghanistan and Uzbekistan; calls on the Uzbek authorities to cooperate fully in the identification of those minefields and on the Commission to support the necessary de-mining programmes;

61. Given Tajikistan's role as a transit country for drugs from neighbouring Afghanistan, encourages the EU to further strengthen its support for measures to counter these activities in Tajikistan, without undermining cross-border trade, which is vital for the economic development of the border regions;

**Turkmenistan**

62. Notes as a positive, albeit still very limited, sign of change in Turkmenistan the ambition of the new President, Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, to carry out major reforms of the education system; believes that the EU is right in responding to Turkmenistan's receptiveness to cooperation in this field;

63. Welcomes the decision of President Berdymukhammedov to grant amnesty to eleven political prisoners sentenced to long terms of imprisonment for their opposition to the policies of the late President Saparmurat Niyazov; encourages the taking of further steps towards the release of all political prisoners in the country;
64. Stresses, however, that Turkmenistan must make progress in key areas in order for the EU to be able to move ahead with the Interim Agreement, inter alia by allowing the International Committee of the Red Cross free and unfettered access, by unconditionally releasing all political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, by abolishing all government impediments to travel, and by allowing all NGOs and human rights bodies to operate freely in the country;

65. Draws attention to the urgent need for improvement as regards the dire human rights situation, especially in view of the grave position of small, unregistered religious communities and their leaders and other minorities, and insists that any further development in EU-Turkmenistan relations, including the possible conclusion of the Interim Agreement on Trade and Trade-Related Matters, as well as, later, the fully-fledged PCA, must be closely linked to clear evidence that a process of significant improvement in this area is under way, as well as genuine signs that it will continue;

66. Expresses its deep concern at the recent outbreak in Turkmenistan of an epidemic of an influenza-like disease which is very probably linked to cotton cultivation and harvesting; calls on the Commission, within the DCI framework, to offer assistance to the Turkmen Ministry of Health in order to investigate the nature of the illness and its causes and find the most effective remedies; urges the Commission to assist the Central Asia countries so as to reduce the use of pesticides in the cultivation of cotton and introduce environmentally friendly techniques;

Uzbekistan

67. Confirms its support for the sanctions against Uzbekistan imposed by the EU after the Andijan massacre; regrets the very limited progress made in relation to the set criteria for assessing the general development of the human rights situation; notes the Council's decision of 15 October 2007 to extend the arms embargo for another 12 months and conditionally suspend the visa restrictions for an initial period of 6 months (Common Position 2007/734/CFSP); urgently calls on the Uzbek authorities to take advantage of this window of opportunity in order to take concrete steps to improve the human rights situation, honour the country's commitments to international obligations in this area and satisfy the conditions set by the EU;

68. Supports the establishment of a human rights dialogue between the EU and Uzbekistan; notes the great difficulties which this involves, and stresses that expectations should be kept at a realistic level; rejects every tendency to use the mere existence of this dialogue as an excuse for lifting sanctions and for portraying human rights issues as now being properly dealt with; reaffirms that it is only results that count, and underlines that the Uzbek commitment to ensure justice and accountability for the Andijan massacre is an essential element in any further cooperation with the EU;

69. Urges the Commission to lay down concrete obligations and establish more efficient monitoring mechanisms in addition to the human rights clause and EU sanctions in order to achieve a real improvement in the human rights situation in Uzbekistan;

70. Welcomes, as a positive step towards reform of the criminal justice system in Uzbekistan, the approval by the Uzbek Parliament of the laws on the abolition of the death penalty and the authorisation of courts to issue arrest warrants; calls for a comprehensive overhaul of the criminal justice system that would effectively promote the implementation of these reforms;

71. Deplores the fact that the presidential elections held on 23 December 2007 failed once again to meet many OSCE commitments for democratic elections and that, according to the ODIHR, the poll took place in a strictly controlled political environment, leaving no room for real opposition; takes note of the presidential amnesty issued on 2 January 2008 pardoning over 500 convicts and reducing the prison sentence of another 900 prisoners, and regrets that only very few political prisoners have benefited from this amnesty;
Addressing State fragility

72. Urges the EU to honour its commitment to improve its response to difficult partnerships and fragile states and to support the prevention of state fragility through governance reforms, the rule of law, anti-corruption measures and the building of viable state institutions in order to help those states fulfil a range of basic functions and meet the needs of their citizens, which include education, health and all basic services;

73. Notes that the EU has committed itself to support disaster prevention and preparedness in countries vulnerable to natural disasters, climate change, environmental degradation and external economic shocks; therefore, considering the present situation in Central Asian countries, stresses that these commitments need to be fully taken into account in the EU strategy;

Environment

74. Notes that large parts of the region are rich in natural resources which have, however, been industrially exploited and processed for decades in the past, resulting in severe environmental pollution, degraded land and dramatic shrinkages of rivers and lakes such as the Aral Sea; welcomes the fact that Kazakhstan has, since it declared its sovereignty in 1990, prohibited nuclear testing on its territory, but draws attention to the need for concerted action to deal with the problem of poorly maintained radioactive waste storage sites in the region;

75. Notes that a large part of the region uses a high number of water sources for irrigation in agriculture, but not in a sophisticated way, and that this creates huge problems for rivers, lakes (such as the Aral Sea) and further development, not only in the agriculture sector; recommends, therefore, the implementation of new techniques and methods in order to improve water management in the agriculture sector, for example by better stemming of irrigation canals;

76. Welcomes the impressive efforts being made by Kyrgyzstan in the field of environmental protection, particularly the numerous bilateral cooperation projects it is involved in, which are bringing considerable benefits to Kyrgyzstan;

77. Supports the proposal to establish in Bishkek a so-called ‘Water and Energy Academy’ for all the Central Asia countries with the aim of achieving proper sustainable water use and the generation of hydropower, improving transmission technology, protecting biodiversity and improving agriculture and irrigation techniques;

78. Notes that Tajikistan’s only abundant raw material is water, and that, as environmentally friendly hydroelectric power projects require sizeable capital investment, increased foreign investment would help Tajikistan to diversify its economy away from its cotton monoculture, with its associated environmental, health and child labour costs, bringing greater economic, welfare and environmental benefits; calls on the government of Tajikistan to work to strengthen its legislative and fiscal framework and its public administration, and to remedy its lack of basic infrastructure, as well as to tackle endemic levels of corruption, in order to encourage investment in the country;

79. Encourages open and efficient dialogue with all the countries of Central Asia in the field of the environment and efficient use of resources, and calls for its practical realisation;

Energy

80. Believes that the EU must speak with one voice on energy policy, in view of the presence in the region of projects of major interest to Europe in terms of energy supply;

81. Considers that cooperation on the EU’s external energy policy is of the greatest importance in the context of its Central Asia strategy; supports, therefore, efforts by the European Union to boost gas and oil imports from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan and to diversify transit routes; calls for active EU energy cooperation with the region, especially with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and, if possible, Uzbekistan, in order to address energy problems of particular importance to their huge human and economic development needs, difficult inter-state relations and precarious security of supply;
82. Believes that further strengthened cooperation between Central Asia and the Black Sea region in the fields of energy and transportation is essential for the accomplishment of the abovementioned goals of the EU; takes the view that this should include investing in the development of alternative energy sources, energy efficiency and energy saving, and new infrastructures in the energy sector with modernisation of the existing ones; recognises the important role of Kazakhstan as a strong economic actor in Central Asia, where the EU is the number one trading partner, and where Kazakhstan pursues a strategy of advanced social, economic and political modernisation;

83. Considers that the EU should encourage responsible and sustainable use of the region’s natural resources, including through promoting revenue transparency via support for state participation and the participation of NGOs in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, where relevant;

84. Asks that special attention be given to projects connecting oil and gas fields and the distribution system of Central Asia to pipelines connecting with the European Union, including to future projects such as the Nabucco pipeline;

* *

85. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the EU Special Representative for Central Asia, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the OSCE and the presidents, governments and parliaments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.