

FOSTERING RESILIENCE IN CENTRAL ASIA: THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract. The study of EU policy towards Central Asia is important for understanding the nature of the integration project itself. The programs implemented by the European Union in Central Asia is very important in terms of developing its potential in the international arena, the ability to turn its «normative power» and economic power into political influence. Central Asian countries' cooperation with the EU in its development has passed through several phases. The current period seeks to consolidate and expand the EU's position in Central Asia. The EU as a reliable partner has a strong interest in seeing Central Asia as a stable, rules-based and connected area. According to the new 2019 Strategy, the goal of the EU is foster resilience through knowledge-sharing (training, monitoring, mentoring and advising) and financial aid. Resilience is a main message in this strategy. The EU policy is aimed at transforming Central Asian states in accordance with its own vision and interests. The EU connects this ultimate goal with the democratic and economic development of Central Asia and this indicates that normative component of the EU foreign policy is still crucial one. Such approach implemented within the framework of various formats does not always achieve its goal and faces resistance from national elites.

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ОРТАЛЫҚ АЗИЯДА ТҰРАҚТЫЛЫҚТЫ НЫҒАЙТУ: ЕУРОПАЛЫҚ ОДАҚТЫҢ РӨЛІ

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Андатпа. ЕО-ның Орталық Азияға қатысты саясатын зерделеу интеграциялық жобаның мәнін түсіну үшін маңызды. Еуропалық Одақтың Орталық Азия елдеріне қатысты жүзеге асырып жатқан бағдарламалары оның халықаралық аренадағы әлеуетін дамыту, «нормативтік күші» мен экономикалық қуатын саяси ықпалға айналдыру мүмкіндігі тұрғысынан қызығушылық тудырады. Орталық Азия елдерінің ЕО-мен ынтымақтастығы өзінің дамуында бірнеше кезеңдерден өтті. Қазіргі уақытта ЕО-ның Орталық Азиядағы ұстанымдарын нығайтуға және кеңейтуге бағытталған. Еуроодақ Орталық Азияның ережелер мен өзара тәуелділікке негізделген тұрақтылық аймағына айналдыруда сенімді әріптес ретінде болуға тырысуда. 2019 жылғы жаңа Стратегияға сәйкес, Еуроодақтың басты мақсаты аймақ мемлекеттерінің икемділігін нығайтуда олармен білім алмасумен (оқыту, мониторинг, тәлімгерлік және кеңес беру) және қаржылық көмек берумен айқындалады. Тұрақтылық – бұл стратегияның басты идеясы болып табылады. ЕО саясаты Орталық Азия мемлекеттерін өзінің көзқарасы мен мүдделеріне сәйкес өзгертуге бағытталған. ЕО бұл түпкілікті мақсатты Орталық Азияның демократиялық және экономикалық дамуымен байланыстырады және бұл ЕО сыртқы саясатының нормативтік құрауышы әлі де шешуші рөл атқаратынын айқындайды. Түрлі форматтар аясында жүзеге асырылатын мұндай көзқарас әрқашан өз мақсатына жете бермейді және ұлттық элитаның қарсылығына тап болуда.

Түйін сөздер: Орталық Азия, Еуропалық Одақ, тұрақтылық, нормативтік күш, стратегия, демократия.

ПОВЫШЕНИЕ УСТОЙЧИВОСТИ В ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ: РОЛЬ ЕВРОПЕЙСКОГО СОЮЗА

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Аннотация. Изучение политики ЕС в отношении Центральной Азии важно для понимания сущности самого интеграционного проекта. Программы, реализуемые Европейским союзом в отношении стран Центральной Азии, представляют интерес с точки зрения развития его потенциала на международной арене, способности превратить свою «нормативную силу» и экономическую мощь в политическое влияние. Сотрудничество стран Центральной Азии с ЕС в своем развитии прошло несколько этапов. Текущий период направлен на

укрепление и расширение позиций ЕС в Центральной Азии. ЕС позиционирует себя как надежного партнера, проявляя серьезную заинтересованность в превращении Центральной Азии в зону стабильности, основанную на правилах и взаимосвязанности. Согласно новой Стратегии 2019 года, целью ЕС является повышение устойчивости посредством обмена знаниями (обучение, мониторинг, наставничество и консультирование) и финансовой помощи. Устойчивость является основным посылом этой стратегии. Политика ЕС направлена на преобразование государств Центральной Азии в соответствии со своим видением и интересами. ЕС связывает эту конечную цель с демократическим и экономическим развитием Центральной Азии, и это указывает на то, что нормативная составляющая внешней политики ЕС по-прежнему остается решающей. Такой подход, реализуемый в рамках различных форматов, не всегда достигает своей цели и встречает сопротивление национальных элит.

***Ключевые слова:** Центральная Азия, Европейский союз, устойчивость, нормативная власть, стратегия, демократия.*

Basic provisions

According to its global foreign and defense policy strategy, one of the strategic goals of the European Union (EU) is to ensure its decisive role in international relations. Accordingly, the study of its foreign policy, as well as the main contradictions that arise when interacting with non-European countries, is especially promising, since this directly affects the possibility of the European Union becoming a global actor in world politics. The importance of the Central Asian region in international relations is growing. This is primarily due to its exceptional geographical position, which can be used to create a trade corridor between Europe and Asia.

Introduction

The societies in the Central Asia and for EU-Central Asia relations are witnessing turbulent and transformative times. In the background of the global pandemic, conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and the increased assertiveness China leave the EU appearing as a powerless, geopolitically inactive actor. These changing realities demand a critical

reflection on the limits and potential of EU-Central Asia relations. In 2019, the EU launched new Strategy for Central Asia to pursue concrete efforts towards improving the relations with the five post-soviet republics. One of its stated objectives is to assist the region develop as a «more resilient, prosperous and closely interconnected economic and political space».[1] Boosting resilience has lately become popular in the EU's foreign policy. The resilience concept was previously outlined by the European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) in June 2016 and intended to deal effectively with the changes and challenges taking place at the international level. The rise of resilience at the EU level coincided with a shift from the normative ambitions of the European Security Strategy (2003) to the more pragmatic foreign policy advocated by the Global Strategy (2016).

The purpose of this article is to determine whether the recent “resilience turn” in EU foreign policy is the adequate response to current challenges in the region, and how we could understand the practical application of this new policy concept. For the EU, supporting

resilience means strengthening “the capacity of societies, communities and individuals to manage opportunities and risks in a peaceful and stable manner, and to build, maintain or restore livelihoods in the face of major pressures.” [2] Thus, while having a stronger focus on local stakeholders, resilience is also closely aligned with managing global and local risks, and recovering from conflicts and crises. However, there is considerable uncertainty concerning this concept, and views vary from resilience being a trendy word to being another ambitious effort to make the EU’s regional approach more effective.

Description of materials and methods

This study required to consider the works of domestic and foreign authors devoted to general theoretical problems of EU’s foreign policy issues and specifics of EU relations with Central Asian states. In the study, such methods as comparative analysis and historical method are used to solve the goals and objectives set by the authors. Comparative analysis is used to compare the main priorities goals of the EU policy towards Central Asia since 1990s, while historical method enabled to analyze the evolution of the European Union's policy in Central Asia, the main contradictions and dilemmas that determined the effectiveness of its activities.

Results

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine impacts regional affairs in Eurasia, including European Union - Central Asia relations. This conflict and its political and economic consequences would enable the European Union and Central Asia to develop closer partnerships, especially

in energy sector. Visits of several high-ranking EU officials, including European Council President Charles Michel can be interpreted as an indicator of this goal of the EU. One of the main purposes of these contacts is developing energy-focused economic collaborations and expanding existing and developing new international transport corridors between Europe and Central Asia to facilitate global production and supply chains. And it's becoming increasingly clear that Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries will not squander the opportunity to fuel a new trend in its relations with European partners. This trend would benefit both sides. However, being a very ambitious actor, the EU’s impact is limited and mainly manifested by promotion a resilient government and society through its normative power and developmental aids. Such factors as lagging decision-making process of the EU and its structures on initiatives regarding Central Asia and Central Asia’s geographical remoteness, presence of normative influence of other actors like China and Russia are not conducive to fostering EU’s region-driven approach in building resilience in Central Asia.

The EU is criticized for its persistent efforts to export European solutions in the Central Asian reality. The political elites of the Central Asian countries perceive EU normative politics as a threat to stability, which in fact impede positive fruitful relationship. China and Russia use other narratives that are perceived positively by Central Asians due to their like-mindedness.

Discussion

From the beginning of the 1990s, the EU has gradually begun to build its interaction with Central Asian states by

identifying the most important areas for itself. The priorities and tasks of the EU in the region have been outlined the report «EU's relations with the newly independent states of Central Asia», issued in 1995. This document provided backbone on pursuing a common policy towards Central Asian countries.[3] The legal basis for cooperation was laid down in 1995-1996 with the signing of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements with all Central Asian countries.

During the first years of cooperation, the main EU interests in the region focused on ensuring the stable development of the regional states and their transition to a just and democratic political system, energy cooperation and infrastructure projects.

In practice, «Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States» (TACIS) was the main tool to ensure the socio-economic development of the Central Asian states. Economic growth, as well as reducing poverty and unemployment were absolute prerequisites for regional states' stabilization of the region which have faced various obstructions that times.

In 1996, the Interstate Oil and Gas Transportation to Europe (INOGATE) program was launched to ensure the EU interests in energy sector. The main purpose was the cooperation in the development of infrastructure for sharing energy resources. Infrastructure projects were implemented with the help of the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA) program, the key task of which was to create transport hubs for a stable exchange of goods and services between the EU and other project participants. The renewal of the transport system of the region was a necessary condition for the integration of the Central Asian republics into the global economy.

At that time, these abovementioned programs were the only tools of cooperation in which Central Asian states were included. At the same time, no special programs for the region were developed in the 1990s since the region was not a priority for the EU and it was confirmed by smaller amounts of assistance compared to other countries of the post-Soviet space.

As the operation of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan had launched, the EU issued strategy document on policy in Central Asia where special emphasis was placed on the importance of assistance in ensuring security and stability in the region. The EU created two programs for the exchange of experience in the field of border control and countering drug trafficking: the «Border Management Program in Central Asia» (BOMCA) and the «Central Asia Drug Action Program» (CADAP). Meanwhile, during this period value-based initiatives are also actively promoted.

In addition to ensuring stable development, TACIS program offered assistance in building democratic political systems and market economy. The normative aspect of the EU foreign policy met a level of resistance. These shortcomings were catalysts for the dilemma of foreign policy choice, which was reinforced due to the characteristics of the region and its environment. Andijan uprisings of 2005 were one of the main stumbling blocks. The EU issued an unequivocal condemnation of the Uzbek government's position by appealing to respect human rights. [4] The EU sanctions had rather a symbolic effect and negatively affected on bilateral relations.

In 2007, the EU strengthened its level of regional political approach by adopting

first long-term strategy where energy cooperation has become one of the key interests. In the 2000s, EU's increased attention to the concept of energy security was associated with energy resources supplies as a tool of pressure in interstate relations. It was reinforced by the implementation such projects like the Nabucco gas pipeline and the Trans-Caspian oil pipeline.

In the face of the persisting threats of cross-border crime, terrorism and drug trafficking across the Central Asia, cooperation in security sector was continued. In this area, the BOMCA and CADAP programs remained the main instruments of EU policy. These EU «soft security» initiatives were characterized by a lack of integrity and no specific goals had been set, which was also a hallmark of EU foreign policy in general. [5]

The EU has consistently tried to consolidate its own vision of key areas of cooperation through the implementation of real initiatives. This period is characterized by the consolidation of the pragmatic component of the policy, the EU quite clearly defined its own interests in the region, offering specific solutions to existing problems in the form of various programs. The EU's impact has enhanced, the results were seen in the numbers of programs for the Central Asian region and the frequency of meetings, visits and dialogues. All this indicated about growing influence of the EU.

The EU's value-based approach has retained its priority in the Strategy-2007. The EU initiated the launch of annual dialogues on human rights with the leaders of the countries. However, the effectiveness of these dialogues, as well as the overall EU policy in the field of human rights protection in Central Asia, remained at a low level due to the lack of

specific goals, generic and vague agenda, while specific problems and violations were rarely discussed. [6] The EU does not always take into account all divergences that exist among Central Asian countries in resolving regional issues therefore a number of their programs are poorly implemented.

The EU was unable to develop a unified approach to the region that would link all policy areas into an integrated system. Experts described this problem through criticism of the tactical nature of the 2007 strategy that was not a kind of consolidated model for building interaction with the region. [7] Moreover, the value-based component did not have any real effect. European experts agreed that the key problems of bilateral relations were perceived by various EU bodies differently, preferring to exclude human rights violations from the agenda. Having developed specific interests in the 2007 strategic document, the EU failed to balance them with the priorities of its own normative policy. [8]

Many Kazakhstani experts were unanimous in reiterating that in recent years there has been a noticeable decline in the EU activity in the region. «The EU is more focused on its own internal problems. The EU is in the process of improving instruments of cooperation, including regional ones». [9]

The EU lags behind other actors as Russia and China. Russia and China continued to increase their influence by developing projects for multilateral cooperation with the Central Asian states, which was perceived by the latter as a format of interaction corresponding to their interests. The Central Asian states have also adopted some legislative practices from these external actors that indicated a convergence of governance

models.

Consequently, the EU policy passed through regional countries' reluctance since the EU tried to connect interests with the ideas about security and political development, which in fact led to non attractiveness of its values. Accordingly, the EU tried to strengthen normative component of own foreign policy that wasn't effective in Central Asia due to their political systems and impact of regional actors.

The strategy has been amended and improved four times to increase its effectiveness. A major drawback of the 2007 strategy was its comprehensiveness with lack of effective tools and low interest of the Central Asian countries. At least the Central Asian countries have already gained experience in multilateral cooperation with the EU.

An overview of the new EU Strategy for Central Asia

The new EU Strategy for Central Asia was approved in 2019 at the meeting of the Council of Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the EU. EU's intention to take relations with Central Asian countries to a new level has been stated.

The process of updating the EU Strategy in Central Asia had started in 2015, when the new conclusions of the EU Council on a strategy for Central Asia were issued. The necessity to adopt a new Strategy was justified by the emerging new geopolitical realities, as well as the growing demands and opportunities for enhancing cooperation. For the EU, transport infrastructure projects have always been an important part of the cooperation. According to this document, such projects would facilitate integration of the region into the world economy and accelerate aggregate welfare gains. [10]

This policy direction was later raised

again in the document «Connecting Europe and Asia - Building blocks for an EU Strategy» issued in 2018. The growing interdependence of Europe and Asia, which is manifested in the strengthening economic and political ties encouraged to adopt this document. In order to ensure further cooperation, it was found necessary to develop interconnectedness between the two continents, which would assist expand employment opportunities and increase economic growth. The strategy mentioned Central Asian states as one of the key beneficiaries of connectivity. It is also very important that document underscores «sustainability» as a central variable in the development of infrastructure that ensures connectivity of the two continents. [11]

The abovementioned goals implemented through the projects in the field of assistance in building infrastructure, in deregulating customs regimes, and stimulating intraregional trade. In general, 51 million euros were allocated to projects in this area until 2020. [12] Accordingly, the focus in the energy sector has shifted to ensuring sustainable consumption of energy resources and the creation of a region-wide energy infrastructure. The new concept of energy cooperation appeared in the new EU strategy of 2019, in which the rational use of energy resources was a way to solve economic problems and improve the overall resilience of the region to external and internal shocks.

A similar approach was developed in the 2016 EU global strategy. The strategy introduces the concept of «resilience» which embrace stable and economically developed states in neighboring regions. [2] The promotion of state and societal resilience in its proximity is caused by rational considerations, since instability could negatively impact on EU's interests,

while a resilient state is a secure state, and security is crucial for prosperity and democracy. Consequently, investing in neighboring states surrounding Europe could prevent possible risks and enable to address challenges. According to 2019 Strategy for Central Asia, one of the three stated priorities in the region was ‘partnering for resilience’. The Partnership for Resilience implies that “the EU will partner with Central Asian countries in anticipating and addressing the challenges affecting their socio-economic goals and security and enhancing their ability to embrace reform and modernization”. [1] These measures encompass such areas like democracy promotion, border management and environmental protection, including the distribution of water resources and management of energy sources.

The 2019 Global strategy does link resilience to democracy: “A resilient society featuring democracy, trust in institutions, and sustainable development lies at the heart of a resilient state” [1]. It was reiterated in 2019 strategy for Central Asia as well. The main aim of EU is to assist states build their resilience through knowledge-sharing (training, monitoring, mentoring and advising) and financial aid. In general, the EU could serve as a mentor to build resilient and responsive states. This requires enhancement of human rights and constructive state-society relations.

The enhancing resilience was soon put into practice. Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA), the Central Asia Covid-19 Crisis Response Programme (CACCR) became the main programs in this area and these instruments focused on cooperation not only with governmental structures, but also involved representatives of grassroots organizations to this dialogue.

However, in terms of resilience support, it is highly improbable that it would have a real impact because of EU’s limited capacity in Central Asia. Such factors as lagging decision-making process of the EU and its structures on initiatives regarding Central Asia and Central Asia’s geographical remoteness, presence of normative influence of other actors like China and Russia are not conducive to fostering EU’s region-driven approach in building resilience in Central Asia.

The EU and Central Asian geopolitical situation

The EU strategy faces competing visions from both China and Russia. There is a noticeable strengthening of the Chinese influence, which is associated with the expansion of its economic involvement in the region. This trend was initiated by the Chinese President Xi Jinping through the implementation of the One Belt, One Road strategy. The goal of this ambitious project was to create a trade corridor between Europe and Asia, which involves the involvement of \$1 trillion in investment.[13]

Central Asia is one of the core elements for the development of this strategy, which is reflected in the Chinese infrastructure projects financed in the region. [14] However, China’s development assistance programs are somewhat different from the initiatives proposed by EU countries. Non-interference, respect for sovereignty, joint development and mutual benefit are the main principles for offering aid, while Western countries are insisting on the importance of human rights and democracy standards in their aid programs. [15] Chinese investment is presented as a tool to weaken the EU’s normative influence, because it suggests the Central Asian countries an alternative that are more attractive when European aid

continues to insist on certain conditions. The leaders of the Central Asian states are inclined to rather positively perceive the Chinese economic assistance due to the absence of any conditions imposing certain values.

In addition, European investments do not have a significant impact due to the existence of special conditions in Central Asian states, which include inefficient management structures. [16] Consequently, the internal characteristics of the Central Asian republics also play a crucial role in weakening the mechanisms of EU normative policy.

Russia also has a significant influence on the Central Asian states especially in security sector. Russia is a member of several organizations that also include the Central Asian states. Among them are the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the SCO. Russia has certain advantage over the EU since it has channels for constant dialogue and cooperation in the field of security while latter one relies mainly on individual consultations with state representatives.

The potential of Russia's influence in the region is diverse, and its involvement in cooperation with the Central Asian republics is deeper than that of the EU. The relative similarity of political development models and the similarity of security concepts provide Russia with a certain advantage over the EU, which insists on promoting its values in interaction with the states of Central Asia.

Thus, the central element of this stage in the development of EU policy is the gradual shift of focus towards resilience as a necessary condition for the stability of the political and economic systems of the region. This trend is complemented by the emergence of the strategy

"Connecting Europe and Asia - building blocks of the EU strategy", which notes the need for increased investment in sustainable infrastructure development in Central Asia. There is also a certain decline in the importance of projects in the field of energy security, along with delays in the implementation of EU initiatives in this area.

In the 2019 Strategy, Central Asia was no longer considered solely as a source of energy, the region began to be perceived as a transit area for trade flows. The region's new role as a transit area is also associated with the growing importance of external actors.

In fact, in the EU's view, Central Asia is increasingly important transit region and the development of transport infrastructure there could bring benefits, including to its trade relations with China. The security of the region and trade relations between the Central Asian states are connected with Russia's stance, because due to its traditional influence and various projects of interstate cooperation, it plays an extremely important role in these areas. It is also impossible to exclude Afghan factor, which was also identified as a constant source of threats to the region.

The realization that the region was becoming an object of increased competition between great powers also forced the EU representatives to transform their approach to the Central Asian countries and highlight those areas of cooperation in which the EU had obvious advantages. The reorientation towards interaction with external actors is also linked to the broader objectives of the EU foreign policy that implies interconnectivity of Europe and Asia.

Conclusion

Generally, it can be pointed out that

the EU's stance towards Central Asian region is evolving. Resilience building is a key pillar in the 2019 EU Strategy. The resilience construction in Central Asia is mainly implemented through multilateral platforms as well as provide humanitarian aid.

The EU has focused its attention on projects in the field of transport infrastructure, which also influenced the growth of the importance of external actors.

The EU is facing one of the greatest

challenges ever as current conflict between Russia and Ukraine and the reallocation in its budget is affecting the resilience-building efforts in Central Asia.

Nevertheless, the EU remains one of the most important geopolitical and geo-economic actors that determine the future and security of Central Asia and the EU must finally act as a serious security power. Europe should act more confidently demonstrate more realism in the area of democracy.

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