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**NEW EUROPEAN UNION STRATEGY FOR CENTRAL ASIA:  
CHALLENGES, EXPERIENCE AND PROSPECTS****F. O. Kobilov**

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**Abstract.** The article examines the New Strategy of the European Union for Central Asia, further prospects and problems of its implementation. Examines rethinking past failures and implementing a new strategy, effectively using the lessons learned in the future, and examines the main goals and contribution of the European Union to ensuring sustainability, prosperity and strengthening regional cooperation in the countries of Central Asia.

**Keywords:** European Union; Central Asia; regional cooperation; partnership for resilience.

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**Introduction**

The New Strategy of the European Union for Central Asia reviewed in-depth understanding of the outcomes of the twelve-year experience, critically re-evaluated all nuances, conceived lessons learned from past (Dzhuraev E. & Muratalieva N., 2020), and was borne in mind specific characteristics of Central Asian countries. It has a stake in the significant role of a close partnership in the different issues with the Central Asian countries in a regional framework. Enhanced cooperation between two regions on common issues is more effective and beneficial than cooperation between one regional organization and a state or relations between two states. The presence of common regional challenges and threats in the region and the importance of regional approaches to their solution increase the relevance of this policy. Common issues demand common efforts and constructive dialogue at the intergovernmental level. Henceforth, it promotes cooperation between Central Asian countries that demands institutional coordination and constructive dialogue to solve such creeping threats as climate change, water issues, terrorism, and drug traffic.

**Energy and water issues**

The specific initiative outlined in the 2019 Strategy is to use innovative funding and combining to farther promote green financing in renewable energy and energy efficiency (Ohle, 2019). The European Union's long-standing experience in these fields could be the best guide for Central Asian countries. Renewable energy production using solar, water and hydroelectric potentials of the region might transform into low-carbon economies, increasing the energy efficiency and promoting further energy reforms. The EU's experience and advice on taking appropriate measures for promoting these initiatives will strengthen the energy resilience of the Central Asian countries, allowing meeting the environmental objectives and providing new business opportunities.

The European Union's agenda is the issue of the transboundary water resources and transnational rivers, considering them as an object for closer regional collaboration. However, the EU is borne in mind the fact that the water resources could be both a stumbling block and stepping-stone for regional cooperation in Central Asia due to the previous disagreement. Recent military tension in Kyrgyz-Tajik borders on the water

issue with about 40 deaths emphasizes the importance of managing and finding solutions to this dispute at the interstate and inter-institutional level and preventing further escalation of the water conflict. Also, the EU supports the initiatives of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea as well as the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (Council conclusions, 2019, p. 3) on saving the Aral Sea. Today this environmental catastrophe is not a problem of only one or two countries but it is the problem of the whole region with a negative effect on the climate and ecosystem of the region. Considering these consequences, the EU is ready to cooperate and work together in solving and addressing this regional challenge that might lead to political, economical and environmental tension.

#### **Border Control**

The regional security strongly depends on border control. Notwithstanding, the strong border control for security issues must not affect in intra-regional trade, mobility of citizens, services and goods, tourism and other important issues directed overall economic development of Central Asia. The border control and management in Central Asia should create necessary conditions and promote regional trade, fighting against illegal human trafficking, goods and drugs, and controlling migration flows. Here, the EU mechanism of the regional movement should be learned and analyzed deeply for further using in Central Asia being in the mind a specific feature of the region. For instance, the countries border control posts might use a unique regional database system in controlling citizens' mobility from one state to another. And it should be adopted for foreigners coming from other regions. This demands close cooperation of the Consulates of countries of the region. Transportation of goods in the region and via one country's territory to Europe and other regions is another important issue.

Consequently, close cooperation with a big market such as the EU and more integrated regional trade and favourable investment

climate will pave the way for integration into the global market. It is crucially important for Central Asian countries to benefit from the opportunity provided by the EU in the framework of the New Strategy. The most important task is here is to create better labour conditions, improve the quality of the goods which can respond to European and world standards, to stimulate exports of the goods to Europe and other regions, and further diversification of economies. Joining Uzbekistan EU's GSP+ arrangement is major step for promotion further economic benefit with the removal of tariffs for products [5].

#### **Transport links**

Based on a famous quote that the transport infrastructures are the veins of the economy, the implementation of the previous plan is impossible without appropriate and modern infrastructure and transport links with the region. The remoteness of the Central Asia from the main seaways is the primary challenge that limits the overall competitive capacity of the region. Countries' united efforts as one region for developing transportation links with the EU could address this challenge. This geographic dilemma causes challenges in the promotion of international relations due to the dependence on transportation via neighbouring countries' territories and infrastructure.

Thus, for resilient and sustainable connection between the EU and Central Asia, three criteria should be met: firstly, the improvement of transport links within every country; secondly, within Central Asian countries themselves, and finally, the connection with the EU and globally. The EU will provide technical assistance and promote sustainable infrastructure improvement with any help in constructing the transport system and guarantee interconnected work. Without a doubt, the current transport infrastructure in the region allows organizing the projects but it will not provide speedy and smooth transit of goods and comfortable networking.

**Perspectives and challenges**

The emerging new world order, distribution of powers in world politics, and changing priorities of foreign policies in Central Asian countries provide both the future perspectives and challenges for the European Union. The specific geostrategic and geopolitical position of Central Asia is explained by the existence of the interests of regional powers that make the region a crossroads of conflicts and the interests of great powers. Russia due to common past possesses significant impact and political interests, while China due to its closeness has great economic interests, and the United States is an active political and economic player in the region as well. The presence of other regional actors provides two ways of development for the EU to prop up its Strategy: the first, the EU might choose the collaboration with other external actors in the implementation of its energy policy, or, the second option is considering them as the competitors and promoting own vision. Consequently, the European Union, taking account of the predisposition, should try to cooperate with these powers rather than compete with them. Effective using existing opportunities and close collaboration with other regional powers, learning from their experiences, not repeating their failures and fulfilling the pauses of them could promote the European Unions' interests in the region.

However, countries of the Central Asia are predisposed to non-dominance of the one power in the region. For instance, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan declared their interest in balanced "multi-vector" foreign policy that provides interest-based relation with all states and organizations. The EU in the new Strategy paid attention to such fields in mutual partnership with the region that might enhance cooperation due to the omitting of these fields by other regions. For instance, Russia mainly focused on political and security issues in the cooperation, while China provides economic and trade interests, and the US interests demonstrated a slight decrease

switching from Central Asia to the Middle East and Eastern Asian region.

From the first days of the cooperation, the EU is eager to accelerate and to prop up the regional integrational process in every issue in Central Asia. The EU could offer its globally recognized successful model of regional integration (Dzhuraev, E., & Muratalieva, N. 2020, 8 p.) providing the necessary information about using regional mechanisms effectively for strengthening political and economic integration in the region. However, the EU should be borne in mind the fact that despite common history and geopolitical circumstances, all five Central Asian countries are individual and have specific features and own national interests, own foreign political views. Thus, in the implementation of the New Strategy, the EU should provide policy based on these nuances, considering Central Asia as one region in the international system, but as five individual states in bilateral relations. This Strategy promotes a more strengthened interest-oriented preferably than values-oriented policy, considering the interests and priorities of Central Asian countries taken regionally and individually.

The stumbling block for bilateral cooperation and challenges in the launching New Strategy could be the method of building relations of the European Union. As we discussed, the EU provides more values-oriented rather than the interests oriented foreign policy. The true and constituency of the relations based on the existence of strong mutual interests. Thus, the EU should determine what is important in bilateral relations and regional cooperation between Central Asian countries. The New Strategy made consequential amendments taking account of these specific moments, providing a more balanced policy between values and interests of the EU.

**Conclusion**

The changing structure of the world order, shifting the foreign policy of Central Asian countries from one direction toward

"multi-vector" policy, and the changes occurred systemic and institutional framework of the EU promoted reconsidering previous Strategy and external policy of the Union.

To sum up, the new foreign policy strategy of the European Union towards the Central Asian countries should take into account, first, the importance of mutual interests in bilateral and regional cooperation without obligating claims based on European values; secondly, the specifics of the region and its geopolitical position on the world map; thirdly, the new policy and the promotion of European values should not run counter to the national interests and long-standing political and social traditions of the Central Asian countries; fourth, the European Union must cooperate on regional issues with other regional powers, not compete with them, and building partnership that offers what other

external actors do not offer with far-reaching political and economic impact.

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