

EU Strategy for Central Asia

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drawn up by Cem **ÖZDEMİR** (Greens/EFA, DE) on an EU Strategy for Central Asia. It recalls the key position of the 5 countries in this region (Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) situated between Europe and Asia, and their importance in terms of energy and trade.

While, overall, Members welcome the greater attention paid by the EU to Central Asia, they regret the sluggish implementation of projects. Parliament is convinced that, while the values promoted by the EU remain the same, the EU's interests, as well as prevailing conditions and opportunities in the five countries, differ widely. It calls for the definition of clear priorities for the EU's relations with each of the five countries. It stresses the importance of sustainable economic development in the region, and the eradication of poverty as the main objective. With regard to the challenge posed by terrorism, Parliament states 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. It 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.

Parliament 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). It urges the EU institutions, therefore, to provide technical help where needed. It 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.

Members are in favour of the following measures to promote the economic and democratic development of these countries:

- reform of social sectors, health and food security;
- reform of banking and insurance systems, and the establishment of a micro-credit system;
- provide better protection for foreign direct investment;
- make it easier for the countries of Central Asia to use the Generalised System of Preferences;
- strengthen local public structures, and establish a more diversified economic base;
- strengthen the cooperation of these countries on human rights and the rule of law;
- set benchmarks in the area of human rights;
- reform of the judiciary and the fight against corruption;
- strengthening civil society;

-the fight against child labour (especially in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, where children are exploited in the cotton harvesting, tobacco cultivation and coal mining sectors);

-the fight against the root causes of migration and the initiation of dialogue on this issue;

-the fight against the spread of HIV and avian flu.

In addition, Members highlight 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. Close cooperation with these countries is very important where interests coincide, but without conflicting with human rights concerns. In this regard, they emphasise the **key role of Turkey as an EU candidate country** in Central Asia, and call on the Council to make the most of Turkey's historical, economic and cultural relations with certain countries in the region, to promote the implementation of the strategy.

Members regret that the Council's strategy on Central Asia does not include Mongolia, especially in view of the progress made by Mongolia in establishing a state based on democracy, human rights and the rule of law. It calls on the Council and the Commission to seek a resolution at EU level and to prepare a statement about Mongolia's development.

Parliament considers each of the countries concerned, focusing on the following points:

Kazakhstan: Parliament stresses Kazakhstan's importance for the EU's trade in energy, as its main trading partner in Central Asia. Trade and energy links should be strengthened with this country, which has the world's third largest uranium reserves. The EU should continue its approach of positive engagement towards Kazakhstan but 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.

Kyrgyzstan: Parliament takes the view that all efforts should be made to consolidate the fragile democratic institutions in the areas of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. It 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.

Tajikistan: Members note that Tajikistan has been living in a state of precarious stability since 1997, with a President who systematically represses all opposition. They call for the adoption of all necessary measures to respect the International Convention against Torture and express concern over the new draft religious law. They recall that this country is one of the 20 poorest countries in the world and call on those Member States which have yet to ratify the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Tajikistan to do so as soon as possible, as unnecessary delays could send discouraging and unhelpful signals to Tajikistan. Parliament will, itself, aim to give its approval to the PCA in the near future.

Turkmenistan: Members note as a positive, albeit still very limited, sign of change in Turkmenistan the ambition of the new President, Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov, to carry out major reforms of the education system. It believes that the EU is right in responding to Turkmenistan's receptiveness to cooperation in this field. It welcomes the decision to grant amnesty to eleven political prisoners. Parliament draws attention to the urgent need for improvement as regards the dire human rights situation, especially in view of the grave position of small religious communities, and insists that any further development in EU-Turkmenistan relations, 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.

Uzbekistan: Members confirm their full support for the sanctions imposed by the EU on Uzbekistan, following the Andijan massacre. They regret the very limited progress made in relation to human rights, in this country, and note the Council's decision of 15 October 2007 to extend the arms embargo for another

12 months. To move forward, they support the establishment of a human rights dialogue and stress the need for tangible results to promote all future cooperation with this country.

Energy: Members recall, above all, the need for the EU to speak with one voice on energy policy. They support efforts by the EU to boost gas and oil imports from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan and to diversify energy transit routes. It is also necessary to strengthen cooperation between Central Asia and the Black Sea region in the fields of energy and transportation, and to encourage responsible and sustainable use of the region's natural resources, bearing in mind that the environment and respect for the local ecosystem are as important as the issue of energy.