State of implementation of the EU strategy for Central Asia

2011/2008(INI) - 04/10/2011

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report drafted by Nicole KIIL-NIELSEN (Greens/EFA, FR) on the state of implementation of the EU Strategy for Central Asia.

The report states that Central Asia holds significant importance for the European Union in terms of trade potential and energetic security. Stressing that some Central Asian states took first steps in a long process of democratisation, Members underline the strong political and economic interest of the EU in strengthening its bi- and multilateral relations with Central Asian countries in all areas of cooperation.

EU commitment: Members underline the strong political and economic interest of the EU in strengthening its bi- and multilateral relations with Central Asian countries in all areas of cooperation, such as stability, security and sustainable development of the region, trade and economic relations, energy and transport links, reinforcement of dialogue on universal values such as democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, and common challenges and threats, including border management and combating drug and human trafficking.

The report points out that the EU Strategy for Central Asia identifies **seven priorities** but provides only a **low level of resources**. It notes that the EU assistance funds are too limited to allow the EU to have an impact in all policy areas. This is why the EU is urged to develop a collective vision and to **define and articulate its priorities better**.

Members consider that the EU needs to maintain a high level of engagement in Central Asia, tailoring its strategies to the progress of the states in the region. They underline the fact that the level and nature of the EU's engagement must be differentiated and conditional, depending on measurable progress in the fields of democratisation, human rights, good governance, sustainable socio-economic development, the rule of law and the fight against corruption, offering its assistance where needed to help foster this progress, following lines similar to the principles of the EU’s neighbourhood policy (i.e. ‘more for more’). They beli eve that the future EU-Central Asia strategy should learn lessons from the reform of the European Neighbourhood policy, in terms of differentiation, people-to-people contact and paying increased attention to democracy and human rights, and should also take into account the broader geopolitical context.

Overall, the approach advocated by the Members as part of the revision of the EU strategy for Central Asia should focus on the following issues:

- the unbalanced nature of some of the Central Asian economies, which are over-reliant on natural resources, and considers that diversification is a major goal for the medium and long term in the region;
- the regional approach should be streamlined via relationships with China and Russia;
- support for the opening of fully fledged EU delegations in all the countries of Central Asia as a means of increasing the presence and visibility of the EU in the region and long-term cooperation and engagement with all sectors of society and of fostering progress towards better understanding and the emergence of the rule of law and respect for human rights;
- the effects of deep-seated corruption and insufficient administrative expertise on the effectiveness of its aid notably Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which have the greatest needs in this respect;
- greater transparency in the allocation of EU and Member States' development cooperation funding and its recipients and for EU delegations and Member States' embassies to support genuinely

independent non-governmental partners so as to help them play an effective role in the development and consolidation of civil society;
- the importance of freely operating opposition parties in the region and urges the governments of all the countries of Central Asia to guarantee political freedom
- public sector reform in the countries of Central Asia through adequate technical and financial assistance in order to achieve stable, reformed and modernised administrative structures in all the countries concerned.

Members approve the holding of regular regional EU-Central Asia summits and interparliamentary meetings with the Central Asian countries. They stress the importance of the **European Parliament's more active engagement in monitoring negotiations** on partnership agreements with the Central Asian countries and in the implementation of the existing ones.

Members focus on the main strategic themes as follows:

Democratisation, human rights and rule of law: stating that the overall situation in the fields of human rights and the rule of law remains worrying, Members call for a strengthening of the human rights dialogues in order to make them more effective and result-oriented. They call in this regard for broad involvement of the European Parliament in monitoring these dialogues. The report condemns any use of torture and severe restriction of the media and of freedom of expression, assembly and association.

Members regard the Rule of Law Initiative as a key component of cooperation with the states of Central Asia, and approve of the exemplary interaction between the EU and its Member States in implementing assistance projects. They **stress that proper implementation of the Initiative must be one of the key criteria in allocating aid and budgetary support**.

Education, children and people-to-people exchange: Members call for a continuation of efforts to modernise the public education sector, including business education, and to make it free and accessible, and for an intensification of the Education Initiative, particularly international academic exchanges of students and teachers. Increased EU support is called for in particular for youth initiatives in the region, particularly for those that may **reduce growing radicalisation** and promote tolerance among young people in these countries. Members call on the EU to continue supporting people-to-people contacts and exchange programmes in science, business and education. Members underline its continued concern over the situation of children, in particular the prevalence of forced child labour in different forms and degrees.

Economic integration and sustainable development: Members reaffirm their support for the economic diversification of the countries of Central Asia, the development of a sustainable energy sector and improved transportation links connecting Caspian resources to the European market. Measures need to be taken to **combat corruption and nepotism**, which is crucial to attracting foreign investments, fostering innovation and stimulating true private entrepreneurship. SMEs should be accorded higher priority.

On another level, Members call for the relaxation of visa requirements for people travelling from Central Asia on business and higher education, while promoting international labour, environmental and corporate social responsibility standards. They support firmer integration in the world economy of the Central Asian countries, in particular through international cooperation with, and accession to, the WTO. The Commission is called upon to design differentiated trade strategies for each of the five Central Asia countries, according to their specific needs, and to foster intra-regional integration.

Energy, water and the environment: Members regard it as being of the utmost importance that energy cooperation projects include long-term supply agreements, enshrining the principles of environmental sustainability and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). They stress the **importance of energy in relations with Central Asian countries**, given that it constitutes a major source of revenue for the states and a potential source of energy security for the EU. They call on the EEAS and the

Commission to continue supporting energy projects and fostering communication towards important goals such as the trans-Caspian route. Members welcome the signing of memoranda of understanding with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan that provide for the purchasing of gas, as well as the steps taken in the development of the Southern Corridor, notably in the form of the Nabucco Project. They re-emphasise the need to promote greater transparency in relation to income from natural resources and urge the EU to **back Turkmen membership of the EITI**.

The report notes with concern the adverse effect in Central Asia of the global financial crisis and the increasing levels of poverty. It is of the opinion that ensuring coherent and comprehensive reinvestment of the national revenues from natural resources is crucial to sustainable development and achieving wide-ranging social and economic development.

Members stress that **water issues in the region remain one of the main sources of tension and potential conflict** and underline the importance of a regional approach in order to protect and properly manage shared water resources. In particular, the report notes that hydroelectric energy and water resource projects in the upstream states Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have led to increased regional tensions with Central Asian downstream countries. It urges the EU, in a context of regional water scarcity, to step up its assistance in the field of water management within the ambit of the EU Environment and Water Initiative and to explore, as a way to address energy scarcity in upstream states, further options for solar and wind energy, which could help rural communities on a small scale. Members consider that its expertise in managing transnational water resources and its existing involvement in bilateral cooperation with a view to integrated national water management plans and multilateral cooperation in the regional Water Governance project and the International Fund for the Aral Sea create an opportunity for the EU to profile itself as a mediator and facilitator in the sharing of water resources between upstream and downstream states (including Northern Afghanistan). Members call for the establishment of a **sustainable cooperative order for water governance** in the region.

Security/border management: Members welcome the current implementation of the Central Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone by the five Central Asian Republics. They reaffirm their support for actions aimed at fostering **regional cooperation** as a major way to address the many cross-border security, resource management, ethnic, environmental and development problems, as well as the fight against terrorism and violent religious extremism within the states concerned.

The report stresses that **regional security is in the interests both of the EU and of the other actors in the area**, namely the Russian Federation, China and the United States, which are all concerned about growing instability and radicalisation in the region as well as porous frontiers with Afghanistan and the resulting drug-trafficking. It underlines the fact that **including Afghanistan structurally in sectoral cooperation**, especially regarding security/border management, human security and water management is crucial to guaranteeing stability and security in the region. Members call for an **intensification of cross-border cooperation with Afghanistan**, and stress the need for coherence between the EU's approach to Afghanistan and the Central Asia Strategy, in particular in relation to transport, energy, trade, and development actions and programmes.

Members call on the EU to focus its assistance on combating drug and human trafficking, issues which are among the main sources of instability in Central Asia that can be targeted by EU efforts. They stress the need for the OSCE and UN missions to operate freely in the territories of the countries concerned, because these organisations are crucial to the provision of the much necessary assistance in **security-sector reform**.

Lastly, the report lists a number of important urgent issues and suggestions to improve and reform the political and economic framework of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.