EU strategy on Central Asia

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Karsten LUCKE (S&D, DE) on the EU strategy on Central Asia.

Since the adoption of the EU strategy on Central Asia in 2019, the region has been affected by significant external factors, such as Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and China's increasingly assertive foreign policy.

EU engagement with Central Asia

Members underlined that the EU and Central Asia are facing profound global and regional geopolitical shifts and challenges, which provide significant impetus for them to work towards long-term, structured and mutually beneficial cooperation in matters of common interest. They strongly encouraged the EU to intensify its engagement with Central Asia, given the geostrategic importance of the region, and to promote a strategic partnership with these countries by expanding cooperation at political and economic level. The report encouraged the EU to continue promoting political and economic reforms that strengthen the rule of law, democracy, good governance and respect for human rights. Members noted that Parliament is ready to promote parliamentary cooperation with Central Asia. They also considered that a **review** of the EU-Central Asia strategy is necessary in order to update it in the light of the geopolitical events that have taken place in recent years.

Regional cooperation

The report underlined the great potential of mutually beneficial cooperation on sustainable development, connectivity, energy, critical raw materials and security, with Central Asia being a key region for connectivity between East and West. The Commission is called on to investigate the possibility of the European Investment Bank's support for investments in infrastructure development in Central Asian states, especially in the Middle Corridor.

Members are concerned with the creation of dependency on Russia as a result of the signing of the natural gas deal between Gazprom and Uzbekistan through Kazakhstan.

Noting the increasing strain on water resources in Central Asia, the report stressed the need for closer regional cooperation on this matter between upstream and downstream countries in order to prevent conflicts over the distribution and use of water resources.

The report underlined the importance of the delimitation and demarcation of disputed border areas between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to prevent further military clashes between the two countries and welcomed the steps taken by both sides in this regard.

Democracy and human rights

Members insisted that respect for human rights and compliance with international obligations are important for the EU's relations with Central Asia. They urged the Central Asian states to adhere to their democracy and human rights obligations. They are also concerned about the lack of accountability for serious human rights violations on a large scale, including the employment of harsh measures by authorities to end mass protests.

Moreover, the report noted the need to boost Central Asia's resilience against disinformation by promoting independent media and content in local languages, increasing media literacy and organising targeted courses for local journalists. It stressed the need to strengthen media independence and pluralism and freedom of expression in Central Asia in line with the highest democratic standards.