

EU Strategy for Central Asia

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By adopting the own initiative report by Mr. Cem **ÖZDEMİR** (Greens/EFA, DE) on an EU Strategy for Central Asia, the Committee on Foreign Affairs 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 the projects. Recognising the different objectives for each of the countries concerned, drawing on the general analysis of the region, they stress the importance of fair and sustainable economic development in the region, and the eradication of poverty as the main objective to ensure the sustainable emergence of this region.

Faced with the threat of terrorism, they recall the importance of cooperation in terms of security, but also the fight against radicalisation and extremism. This involves the promotion of good governance, human rights and democracy, as well as the strengthening of dialogue with all types of religious communities. In this context, Members call on the Council and the Commission to put the defence of human rights at the heart of cooperation, to the same extent as energy, security and trade.

Members, also in favour of a regional vision on certain issues (counter-terrorism, the eradication of human trafficking, counter-narcotics and water management) through EU technical assistance, consider it necessary to promote an individually tailored approach to cooperation, in order to take into account differences in culture and development in these countries.

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

- reform of social sectors, health and food security;
- membership of the World Trade Organisation (WTO);
- reform of banking and insurance systems, and the establishment of an efficient 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 efficient and diversified economic base;
- strengthen the cooperation of these countries on human rights, the rule of law, good governance and democratisation;
- set benchmarks in the area of human rights and the fight against all types of persecution of human rights defenders in these countries;
- 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, however, that the Council's strategy on Central Asia does not include Mongolia, especially in view of the substantial progress made by Mongolia in terms of democracy.

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

- **Kazakhstan:** in this country, priority should be given to the strengthening of civil society, with a view to promoting free and democratic elections. Trade and energy links should be strengthened with this country, which has the world's third largest uranium reserves. MEPs also await further progress on freedom of the press;
- **Kyrgyz Republic:** Members welcome the progress made by this country in terms of democracy. However, they are concerned about the new Kyrgyz Constitution, which could significantly alter the balance of power in the future;
- **Tajikistan:** Members note the positive development of Tajikistan, even though it is in a state of precarious stability, 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 (PCA) with Tajikistan to do so as soon as possible;
- **Turkmenistan:** Members regret the lack of progress made by this country in terms of respecting individual liberties. In particular, they regret the fact that several political prisoners remain imprisoned, despite the fact that the new President (Mr. Berdymukhammedov) recently decided to grant amnesty to 11 of them. Faced with the particularly disastrous situation in terms of human rights, MEPs insist that any further development in EU-Turkmenistan relations (including the possible conclusion of the PCA) must be closely linked to clear evidence of progress in democracy;
- **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 European Union to boost gas and oil imports from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan and to diversify energy transit routes. It is also necessary to further 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 of the local ecosystem are as important as the issue of energy.