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THE EU PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN CENTRAL ASIA

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Table of Contents

Abstract	4
Introduction	5
Methodological and theoretical framework	8
1. EU as a global actor	9
1.1 Main EU instruments for human rights promotion	10
1.2 Human rights in EU external policy.....	16
2. EU in Central Asia	19
2.1 Evolution of relationships between EU and Central Asia	19
2.2 Overview of socio-economic and human rights situation of Central Asian countries	21
2.3 The three levels of EU's influence to Central Asian countries	27
2.4 The EU in Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership	30
2.5 EU's development assistance towards Central Asia	33
3. Cases of EU promotion of Human Rights in Central Asia	37
3.1 The EU role in promotion of Human Rights in Central Asia	37
3.2 The European Parliament's concern about human rights situation in Kazakhstan	43
3.3 Factors that impede the development of relations between CA and EU	46
3.4 Low EU impact	48
Conclusion	51
Bibliography	53

Abstract

Central Asian countries became part of international community after the fall of the Soviet Union. European Union is one of international actors building presence in Central Asia. This research paper explores the main aspects of EU promotion of human rights in Central Asia. It aims to analyze the EU's self-conception through discourse as an external actor, the instruments and strategies applied to promote human rights by the EU, factors that impede the development of relations between Central Asia and EU that lead to a low impact of the EU's assistance, and the reception of its action in Central Asia. It investigates some specific cases where human rights have been violated in Kazakhstan and where the EU has been involved. The research paper concludes that despite the contribution of EU to regional security, spread of democracy and observance of human rights in Central Asia, all these efforts will become futile if nothing is changed on the intraregional level which includes better domestic governance of Central Asian states, commitment to democracy and lower corruption. EU can be considered as a deterrent for Central Asian governments against violation of democratic principles and human rights.

Introduction

This research paper will examine the issue of Central Asia and global governance, and more specifically, the EU promotion of Human Rights in Central Asia. Globalization can be described as a process of integration between different people, companies, organizations, societies, institutions throughout the world, whereas global governance is understood as a combination of purposeful arrangements, policies and norms to address challenges of globalization and interdependence. Our world has certainly become globalized. At the same time, globalization brings together various conflicts, instability, human sufferings as well as high levels of strategic uncertainty. The norms, principles, and regulations, as well as organizations and institutions accepted by the global community, were hoped to regulate all the foreign issues that concerned a particular state.¹ One of such international organizations is the European Union which is a political and economic union between 27 European countries. The first and primary goal of establishing this Union was to stop frequent wars between neighboring countries. The European Union is based on the Rule of Law and is also governed by the principle of representative democracy.² Thus, such institutions like the EU, UN or non-governmental organizations have established a wide range of tools and instruments to tackle evolving dangers. The topic of Human Rights is of extreme importance and relevance nowadays. Taking into account that the most of studies in this field have been focused on the most important and strategic partners of the EU such as China, the United States, Russia, India, Africa, or the Pacific regions, there is no widespread awareness about EU action on behalf of human rights in Central Asia. Thus, this research paper will examine the influence of European Union in Central Asia.

In a rapidly changing world, different geopolitical risks, ecological disasters and climate change, as well as the shift to the digital age, pose undeniable bottlenecks to human rights and democracy. EU is an

¹ Creutz K. (2017). Alternative ways of global governance. Informal institutions and the role of small states. *The Finnish Institute of International Affairs*, 3.

² Current role of the European Union as a global actor. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.canterbury.ac.uk/social-and-applied-sciences/psychology-politics-and-sociology/cefeus/jean-monnet/jean-monnet-blogs/current-role-of-the-european-union-as-a-global-actor.aspx>

active promoter of human rights and democracy in the world. It protected a great number of human rights defenders around the world, observed elections in more than 60 countries, included human rights in trade agreements, using various instruments, strategies and mechanisms like HR conditionality in the EU's international agreements, providing political asylum, etc. But in the context of today's world, those values are under attack as never before.

We make an assumption that the success of the European Union and implementation of their projects and initiatives in Central Asian countries depend on its ability to make contributions in terms of development assistance, mutually beneficial cooperation and providing human rights protection in the region. The paper will study specific cases of EU activity in the region and evaluate the effectiveness of these attempts undertaken in the Central Asian region.

The aim of this thesis research is to evaluate the EU's engagement in designing and implementing its programs and initiatives and analyze it through 3 main analytical categories: (1) The EU's self-conception through discourse as an external actor; (2) the instruments and strategies applied, and (3) the reception of its action in Central Asia.

As the main focus of this research paper is on the EU protection and promotion of Human Rights, it will refer to different scholarly sources, articles of European and Central Asian authors, as well as to official documents.

The **research question** is as follows: can the European Union be considered as an effective and legitimate partner in terms of human rights promotion in Central Asia?

Popular academic sources database ResearchGate contains only 12 number of publications on the topic of EU promotion of human rights in Central Asia in particular. Nevertheless, there was an attempt to develop this topic and propose some new points of view, so the **novelty** is to investigate some aspects of EU efforts to promote human rights taking specific cases with the EU involvement in Kazakhstan as an

example. Thus, making an evaluation of the cases considered and developing the arguments based on concrete facts is one of the main objectives of this thesis paper.

The 1st chapter of the research will cover the issues of EU external policy as a whole, describing the frameworks and concepts of EU as a global actor.

The 2nd chapter will be devoted to the evolution of relationships between EU and Central Asia, the EU's partnership strategy and influence in Central Asia, as well as factors that may impede the development of relations between these two regions.

The 3rd chapter will focus on EU in Central Asia from the aspect of human rights with the consideration, evaluation and assessment of specific cases which are connected with the involvement of EU in Central Asian issues.

Methodological and theoretical framework

There are two main streams of human rights policy and action within the European Union. One is to protect the fundamental human rights in European Union zone, and the other is to promote human rights worldwide. In this research paper we will discuss the promotion of human rights towards Central Asian countries by European Union. Firstly, let us define the concept of promotion of human rights in case of EU. To promote human rights worldwide, the EU is funding the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights. Its budget for the periods from 2014 to 2020 amounted to 1.3 milliard euros. There are four main areas in promotion of respect for human rights and democracy:

1. Strengthening the democracy by maintaining correct governance, an appropriate judicial system, political pluralism as well as free media.
2. Abolishing of the death penalty
3. Addressing the torture problems through preventive measures (e.g. training police officers) and punitive measures (setting up international and criminal courts)
4. Fight against racism and racial discrimination

Besides these core areas, the EU also cooperates with other human rights organizations like the United Nations, the International Red Cross, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The study will analyze specific cases of EU attempts to promote human rights in Central Asian region and the effectiveness of these efforts. Concerning the methodological framework of the research, it is based on the qualitative approach where we analyze official documents including EU strategies for Central Asia, EU bodies declarations and statements on Central Asia, as well as works of major authors who have been covering dynamics of EU involvement in Central Asia. It is mostly concerned with the subjective experiences and situations using meaning oriented methodology. Thereafter, we make our own assumptions and conclusions based on unique cases and generated theory of existing objective data.

1. EU as a global actor.

International relations is a process that always has some elements of externality. External issues cannot be solved relying simply on enthusiasm, and not coincidentally, after the second world war, the world structure was based on globally recognized norms, encouraging countries to become members of international organizations. As of this post-war period, formal international institutions played a vital role in regulating various kinds of international affairs on a global arena.³ Since 1990s, the EU has included HR conditionality clauses in its agreements and other international trade and cooperation agreements.⁴ In the event that other party violates human rights or democratic principles, the appropriate measures will be taken, including suspension of the agreement.

In order for globalization to be effectively governed, it is of high importance to establish the system of formal and informal international institutions that would be responsible for one specific area. All of them should have comprehensive and mutually beneficial cooperation to develop a dialogue with civil society.⁵ The European Union was created to provide political and economic integration, peace and security among neighboring European countries and later on, one of its goals was to enhance foreign policy helping and assisting others in their struggle for democratic, stable, predictable and prosperous societies.⁶

The approach of Europe to act as a source of norms and values shapes the world. In some cases this approach involves creating and proposing a model of cooperation, while on the other hand European Union uses its normative power to set global standards for human rights and democracy.⁷

³ Creutz K. (2017). Alternative ways of global governance. Informal institutions and the role of small states. *The Finnish Institute of International Affairs*, 3.

⁴ Meissner, K. L., & McKenzie, L. (2019). The paradox of human rights conditionality in EU trade policy: when strategic interests drive policy outcomes. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 26(9), 1273-1291.

⁵ Creutz K. (2017). Alternative ways of global governance. Informal institutions and the role of small states. *The Finnish Institute of International Affairs*, 3.

⁶ An official website of the European Union. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/eu-in-brief_en

⁷ Björkdahl, A., Chaban, N. Leslie, J. & Masselot, A. (eds.), *Importing EU norms? Conceptual Framework and Empirical Findings*, Springer, 2015

Given the fact that the EU is a multi-level and semi-supranational entity involving 27 Member States with versatile foreign policies, the European Union seeks to play a greater role and act as one of the major global actors in the global community.⁸ The EU is now at an important turning point. On the one hand, it can be seen from its foreign policy that the EU is increasingly involved in various international issues. On the other hand, the question is whether the foreign policy of the EU is effective in terms of its actorness in a global community: one can see very slow and insignificant internal reforms, the ongoing sovereign debt crisis in the Eurozone, and a less favorable external environment.⁹

1.1 Main EU instruments for human rights promotion

European Union (EU) based in 1993 from the moment when Maastricht Treaty came into force has made a colossal work of democratization, cooperation in the world up to these days.¹⁰ The EU has 27 member states in Europe, 140 delegations throughout the world, 977 bilateral agreements and 284 multilateral treaties with 207 countries, the EU supported 120 million people with humanitarian aid worldwide.¹¹ EU has the main aspects that it holds in their policy, either internal or foreign policy: human dignity, freedom (freedom of movement, speech, assembly, religion, expression, etc.), democracy (every EU citizen has the rights to become a candidate and vote to the European Parliament), equality (everyone are equal before the law), rule of law (every rule and every action of EU is written in the treaties), human rights (fundamental rights that everyone deserves).

Foreign policy of EU and diplomatic relations are regulated by common international values: human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law.¹²

⁸ The European Union - what it is and what it does? (January, 2020). Retrieved from <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/com/eu-what-it-is/en/>

⁹ Niemann, A. and Bretherthon, C. (eds.), *European Union external policy at the crossroads: the challenge of actorness and effectiveness*, Special Issue, *International Relations*, Vol. 27, No. 3., 2013, pp. 260-400.

¹⁰ Retrieved from https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/eu-in-brief_en

¹¹ Retrieved from <http://ec.europa.eu/world/agreements/viewClauseCollection.do>

¹² Retrieved from https://europa.eu/european-union/topics/foreign-security-policy_en

In 2009, when the Lisbon Treaty was signed, new diplomatic agency had been created and called the European External Action Services (EEAS) which would be responsible for the external relations of the EU, and the position of High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.¹³

Even though European Union is supranational union, foreign relations largely have intergovernmental character where each of 27 states control their own international relations.

The EU cooperates nearly with all states and has the main tools that are used in the foreign policy making.¹⁴

EU and Human Rights

The promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms has always been one of the major and significant issues in the EU's foreign policy.¹⁵ In this regard, the EU actively develops its stance in terms of human rights promotion through various kinds of instruments and strategic frameworks.

The EU Council confirmed its commitment to promote and protect human rights and to support democracy worldwide highlighted in the newly adopted Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy for the period 2015-2019. Relying on the Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy and the previous Action Plan, the European Union has made significant progress in human rights and democracy promotion. Guidelines on key human rights issues have been elaborated, the work effectiveness of human rights and democracy has been improved by the EU, helping to successfully promote its Action Plan at the multilateral level, and enhancing the promotion of HR in the EU's foreign policy actions.¹⁶

¹³ The High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy /The European External Action Service, 2009

¹⁴ Craig, P. (2010). The Lisbon Treaty: law, politics, and treaty reform. Oxford University Press.

¹⁵ The official website of the European Council. Protection and promotion of human rights. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/human-rights/>

¹⁶ EU action plan on human rights and democracy 2015-2019.

Human rights have always been on the top of the EU relations with the third countries, including its strategic partners.¹⁷ Drawing upon universal norms, the EU's HR policy is designed specifically for the circumstances of each country, through the development of each country's human rights strategies. The EU has always aspired to engage constructively with third countries; thus, the EU will continue to extend its human rights dialogues with partner countries and will aim to make sure that these dialogues lead to results.

The main instruments undertaken by the European Union in human rights promotion involve establishing cooperation and partnership agreements with third countries. Thus, the intensification of economic, political, and cultural ties between the EU and Kazakhstan should be jointly committed to such global values, as democracy, the rule of law, good governance and respect for human rights. Thus, it is highly important that every CA country in general and every citizen in particular would adhere to the rule of law principles, having democratic values, independent judicial system, and transparency.

Looking back at history, to the Old Silk Road times, it can be understood that Central Asia has a great strategic importance in terms of economic exchange and the development of civilizations. Undoubtedly, the region will also play a big role in the coming years. Nevertheless, Central Asia remains one of the least studied parts of the world from the EU's point of view.

The Partnership Instrument

Partnership Instrument (PI) helps the EU to meet its interests and overcome international issues by cooperation with different states.¹⁸ Under the PI, EU makes investments in the global challenges such as climate change, energy security, migration, environmental protection which are in the EU's agenda. These measures lead to concrete steps to resolve the issues.

It is one of the several instruments included in the EU's budget for 2014-2020 as a means of financing the Union's external action.

¹⁷ EU annual report on human rights and democracy in the world 2018.

¹⁸ Bache, I. (2010). Partnership as an EU policy instrument: a political history. *West European Politics*, 33(1), 58-74.

Economic diplomacy of the EU is one of the ways to facilitate the access to third-country markets by encouraging trade, investment and business for possible cooperation with European companies.¹⁹

EU Delegations

The Delegations play a significant role in promoting EU values representing the EU and its citizens around the world and building the international relations and trust. The Delegation is responsible for all kind of commitment representing the EU and the country's relationship in political, economic, trade, human rights spheres. Furthermore, they send reports regarding the situation in the country development and make efforts to create projects and distribute grants to a different kind of programs.²⁰

Human Rights Guidelines

The EU has clarified 11 sets of guidelines, that helps to prioritize the main areas and aspects for foreign policy. The guidelines are renewed on a regular basis and acts as a signal for EU actors around the world to have a practical tool to be used when adopting EU human rights aspects locally.

There several guidelines that were adopted by the Council, here some of them:

- EU Human Rights Guidelines on Freedom of Expression Online and Offline (2014)
- EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief (2013)
- Guidelines to EU Policy towards third countries on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment - an update of the guidelines (2012)
- EU Guidelines on promoting compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL) (2009)
- EU guidelines on human rights dialogues with third countries – update (2008)
- Ensuring protection – EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders (2008).²¹

Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategies

Before preparing these strategies EU Delegations and Member States' missions implement data analysis of the human rights situation in the given country. Consequently, they calculate key strategic aspects for

¹⁹ Strategic communications (2017). The Partnership Instrument

²⁰ Strategic communications (2019). About the European External Action Service (EEAS)

²¹ EU annual report on human rights and democracy in the world, 2018

EU plans on human rights and democracy, short and long term goals, and what concrete actions have been taken to address human rights and democracy. For 2016-2020 125 country strategies were fully renewed. The rule of law is the key priority, as well as women's rights, democracy, the rights of the child and civil society. These strategies and their annual implementation reports play a vital role in the improving the situation with human rights in the country and stimulates political dialogues.

Another tool that is used by EU is **the human rights clause** or EU Conditionality that it has been embedded into EU bilateral agreements, and works as an act that can be used unilaterally in case one party violates the given conditions. The EU's aim is to add the clause in the political agreements which leads to including free trade agreements.²² For more than 20 years now, since 1995, the EU has been including and using human rights conditionality clauses systematically in its trade agreements as an instrument of foreign policy.²³ The objective of HR conditionality clauses is to spread human rights and democracy in the world. However, there are some questions that arise here: does the instrument work? Are HR better protected due to the use of HR clauses by the EU? It is rather difficult to answer these questions. Making research of this topic, it could be noticed that this instrument has a positive effect because the issue of human rights is put forward for discussion among states, which can be seen as an important step.

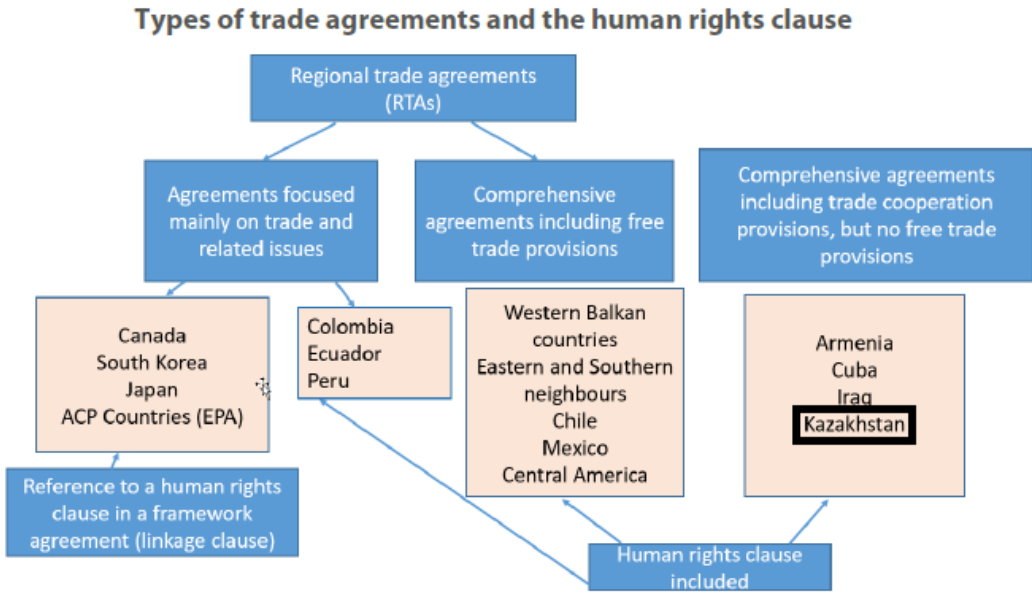
However, the EU's use of HR clause is often criticized because of the selectivity of their use. Not all the EU's external agreements contain an HR clause because the EU was unable to persuade certain countries to accept the clause. Those countries are China and Iran with which the EU doesn't have any agreements containing an HR clause. Overall, the idea of demanding greater respect for human rights and democratic principles in return for commercial advantages is a good idea, however, it seems to be unrealistic to set a goal of protecting human rights over a number of other foreign policy interests.²⁴ By

²² Human rights in EU trade agreements (retrieved from [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/637975/EPRS_BRI\(2019\)637975_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/637975/EPRS_BRI(2019)637975_EN.pdf))

²³ Bartels, L. (2005) *Human Rights Conditionality in the EU's International Agreements*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

²⁴ Engelbrekt, A. B., Mårtensson, M., Oxelheim, L., & Persson, T. (Eds.). (2015). *The EU's role in fighting global imbalances*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

affirming the states' commitment to human rights, the clause opens the way to constructive political dialogue and cooperation in terms of HR and democracy. Thus, the aim of this instrument is to establish incentives for human rights protection and promotion, which is the EU's foreign policy approach²⁵, nevertheless, although the European Parliament positions itself as an advocate of including such non-commercial objectives as promotion of political and human rights in its agreements, in fact, it rarely insists on them in negotiations.²⁶



Data source: EPRS.

Figure-1

Human rights dialogue is a key tool promoting human rights and considering main aspects bilaterally. It covers very many important topics torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the death penalty, freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression online and offline, the rights of persons with disabilities, gender equality and women’s rights and the rights of the child, fundamental rights and principles at work. There are meetings with civil society to get recommendations and seminars are held on the framework of these instrument.

²⁵ Engelbrekt, A. B., Mårtensson, M., Oxelheim, L., & Persson, T. (Eds.). (2015). The EU’s role in fighting global imbalances. Edward Elgar Publishing.

²⁶ Meissner, K. L., & McKenzie, L. (2019). The paradox of human rights conditionality in EU trade policy: when strategic interests drive policy outcomes. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 26(9), 1273-1291.

The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) is a program that finances and supports civil society that fights for democracy and human rights worldwide. During the 2018 The EIDHR funded more than 1200 projects in over 100 countries. The EIDHR spots sensitive issues and difficult situations, cooperating directly with isolated and marginalized civil society organizations. The EIDHR takes a democracy as a key goals and implements election observation missions. In 2018 over EUR 100 million were financed on new projects and programs.

Funding by the EIDHR can be received by most legal entities with the exception of the direct funding of political parties. Depending on the specific objectives of each action/call for proposal the entities eligible for funding are:

- civil society organizations;
- independent political foundations;
- public- and private-sector non-profit organizations;
- national, regional and international parliamentary bodies (where the proposed measure cannot be financed under a related Community external assistance instrument);
- international and regional inter-governmental organizations;
- natural persons (where their help is necessary for achieving the aims of the EIDHR)
- countries (except EU and industrialized countries).²⁷

1.2 Human rights in EU external policy

The role of the EU within the international scene is based on the key aspects of promotion of Human Rights and democracy. The EU has political and trade relations with its strategic partners such as the United States, Japan, Canada, Russia, India and China. It also maintains the development and

²⁷ Retrieved from <https://eu.boell.org/en/european-instrument-democracy-human-rights>

cooperation with countries in the Mediterranean, the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe, central Asia and also the western Balkans.²⁸

The EU human rights external policy in cooperation with a very diverse range of actors is summarized in the table here below.²⁹

<p>1. United Nations</p>	<p>The United Nations that has the status of the foremost important international organizations, performs a leading role in introducing the recent human rights standards. An example of such a crucial human rights treaty is the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol which the EU signed and approved in March 2017.</p>
<p>2. African Union</p>	<p>Continental African integration is the main priority for the strategic partnership between the African Union and the European Union. A recent good example can be Africa-Europe Alliance that was launched in 2018 in order to build up the economic and trade relations through sustainable investment and job creation.</p>
<p>3. America</p>	<p>Diplomatic relationship between the EU and the United States date back to 1953. EU-US relations are among the most significant bilateral kinship in the world. The EU and the USA are the largest economic and military powers around the globe which monopolizes the world trade as well as takes a leading part in international political arena.</p>
<p>4. Asia</p>	<p>Asian human rights protection systems progressed slowly in comparison with</p>

²⁸ Tuula T. (2019). Fact Sheets on the European Union.

²⁹ Mayrhofer, M. (ed.) (2015) [Report on the global human rights protection governance system](#), European Union.

	<p>African, American or European counterparts and also two regional organizations that undertook such efforts, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Association of South Asian Regional Cooperation, count mostly on soft law instruments. The formation of a particular corporate mechanism for human rights is stable, at its infancy in this region. The EU contains a long-lasting relationship with both regional organizations, basically as trading partners, as well as at the political level. The consideration of human rights standards is getting to be progressively vital in this context.</p>
<p>5. Non-governmental organizations</p>	<p>The EU also actively collaborates with non-governmental organizations that play a decisive role at all levels such as international, regional and national. They give data to international and national institutions, devote to the development of agendas and human rights policies, monitor implementation and play a major role in promoting awareness. In regards to the EU, they are a vital partner at all levels: within the EU, where they can share with the deficiencies in legislation or implementation and, accordingly, assist in improving the policies in multilateral forums, where they regularly provide valuable experience in specific countries or thematic areas, and also at the local level in third countries, where EU representatives often collaborate with NGOs to enhance special programs or projects.</p>

As far as the external relations policies of EU are concerned, it includes the CFSP (Common Foreign and Security Policy) and CSDP (Common Security and Defense Policy). The idea that cooperation between countries can enhance their collective response to common challenges, it represents the EU as a global actor. As for the liberal theorists, they believe that the EU has far greater influence in policy

areas such as trade, climate change and development in comparison with the security and defense. It may conclude that EU does not arrange the hard power as an important aspect.³⁰

2. EU in Central Asia

2.1 Evolution of relationships between EU and Central Asia

The European Union is more likely to be considered as a “latecomer” in Central Asia.³¹ So why did the EU policy makers strengthen the focus on Central Asian region? Until now, Russia, the USA and China have been the most active and influential players in Central Asia. However, nowadays Central Asia is becoming more and more important for the European Union.

In accordance with Alexander Warkotsch’s opinion on why EU has the interest to cooperate with Central Asian region, first and foremost, the underlying reason is economic cooperation as three of the five Central Asian states have significant energy reserves. Kazakhstan is included into top-10 countries in the world on oil reserves, and into top-15 countries on gas reserves. There are also large reserves of gas in Turkmenistan. Uzbekistan is one of the major gas producers as well³².

According to the statistics, the overall EU trade with Central Asia increased by almost 160 percent from 2000 to 2010³³ and the role of Europe is relevant in the field of investment. The most of the trade relation are centered in Kazakhstan in comparison with the other Central Asian countries. Therefore, EU plays an important role as a trading partner for Central Asia. However, the same cannot be said in reverse. The imports of EU majorly outweighed the exports and in 2013 Kazakhstan ranked twenty sixth among EU’s trading partners.³⁴

³⁰ Fiott, D. (2013). The Common Security and Defence Policy and IR Theory. *e_International Relations*, 20.

³¹ Petersen, A., & Barysch, K. (2011). *Russia, China and the geopolitics of energy in Central Asia*. Centre for European Reform.

³² Ganguli, M. S. (2014). *Strategising Energy: An Asian Perspective: An Asian Perspective*. KW Publishers Pvt Ltd.

³³ European Parliament 2011, 24

³⁴ European Commission 2014, 2

In other words, the Central Asian soil contains other reserves that can be found very attractive to European economies. Namely, Kazakhstan has all the mineral resources contained in the periodic system. Especially, the uranium has been of Europe's interest since Kazakhstan became the world's leading uranium producer by going beyond Canada in 2013.³⁵ All in all, hydrocarbon and mineral reserves in Central Asia attract consumers of raw materials around the world, including European ones. Second, the region's strategic importance rapidly increased with the War on Terror in neighboring Afghanistan: assistance of Central Asian region is extremely important in terms of overflight rights and maintaining Western military bases for logistics.³⁶ The USA and NATO, who strongly depend on Central Asian states and their overflying and transportation facilities, try to develop an important strategic corridor in the region – to deliver military cargo into Afghanistan and back, as well as shipment of oil and gas to Europe. All of this has brought about the opportunities for the evolution of relationships between European Union and Central Asia.

Thus, the dimension of cooperation between EU and Central Asia is multifaceted. As it was mentioned above, the first interest is connected with economy – enhancing Central Asia as an energy supplier to the EU, promoting trade in the region, improving the investment capacity and private sector. Secondly, according to the interview of Sebastien Peyrouse, a research professor at George Washington University's Central Asia Program, on the EU's New Central Asia Strategy, security is also one of the key incentives for cooperation with Central Asia. It involves border management, migration, fighting against terrorism and extremism, environment issues and climate change which affect the community not only on the regional level, but globally.³⁷ Security concerns are even more significant on Europe's agenda for Central Asia. Here, security is meant in comprehensive and constructivist terms: security is connected with many diverse aspects and actors that cannot be scaled down to military security. So, it

³⁵ World Nuclear Association 2014

³⁶ Alexander Warkotsch (2010). *The European Union and Central Asia – Routledge Advances in Central Asian Studies*, p. 4

³⁷ What are Europe's main interest in Central Asia and how does the EU plan to pursue them. (2019, July 16). Retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2019/07/sebastien-peyrouse-on-the-eus-new-central-asia-strategy/>

includes different security spheres such as “regional security” and “human security”³⁸. The former one is linked to the interrelationship between domestic and global security, the latter refers to the concepts of “freedom from fear” e.g. the protection against violent conflicts and “freedom from want” e.g. the right to adequate living standards through food security, health care etc. The European Security Strategy focuses on the regional dimension of conflict and argues that problems are rarely resolved within a single country or without regional support.

Hence, building cooperation with five Central Asian countries generated great interest from the EU Member States since 2000s. According to EU view, during that period the EU played a vital role to endorse independence of Central Asian countries that became its partners. During the Diplomatic Herald of Kazakhstan the ambassador Peter Burian who is EU special representative for Central Asia, told about the positive impacts of the partnership which implied the assistance in building new socio-economic systems; creating a legislative basis and development programs as well as strategies for sustainable development. As a result, the cooperation helped in overcoming a number of major problems wherein staying balanced.³⁹

2.2 Overview of socio-economic and human rights situation of Central Asian countries

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is the largest economy in Central Asia (Kazakhstan's GDP is 60% of the total GDP of Central Asia). Despite the fact that all resources were distributed to high-ranking officials, resources managed to trickle down to the population, as a result, the poverty rate fell from 40% in the late 1990s to about 2.6% in 2016 of the population below the poverty line.⁴⁰ It was economic growth that helped legitimize the regime, although economic development was encouraged and any political activity of the population was severely suppressed. The OSCE monitoring mission has not yet accredited any

³⁸ Buzan, B. (1991). New patterns of global security in the twenty-first century. *International affairs*, 67(3), 431-451.

³⁹ Retrieved from <https://astanatimes.com/2019/09/european-union-and-central-asia-new-partnership-in-action/>

⁴⁰ See CIA, The World Factbook, CIA, Washington, D.C. (retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/kz.html>).

elections as free and independent; freedom of speech and freedom of peaceful assembly remained restricted, and the media remained pro-government, although some independent media have emerged. The policy of the system of government could be interpreted as economic reform is more important than democratization, for an apolitical and entrepreneurial population, this was a great line of government. The abundance of money in the system and its relative openness allowed for the appearance of a certain pluralism in the political space. Business elite supported opposition parties, their election campaigns, and newspapers for various reasons. As a rule, excessive political ambitions are punished, which is typical for authoritarian systems. The crisis in 2007 marked the beginning of an increase in social tension, as it undermined the main sectors of the developing economy of Kazakhstan. To solve these problems, the government decided to create a national oil fund and invest money in the development of the economy. About 14% of GDP was allocated to various sectors such as construction, agriculture, and banking.⁴¹ A lot of efforts were spent to attract foreign investment, which resulted in 10 billion Chinese investments for infrastructure development and energy projects.⁴² Despite the actions taken, the number of unemployed and public discontent increased, leading to strikes.⁴³ The crisis became a kind of lever for the emergence of opportunities for the opposition, but also an obstacle, as many businessmen who supported the opposition suffered, which led them to more unfavorable circumstances. The government took all measures to keep control in its hands, making the situation worse with the "anti-corruption campaign", which was one of the levers of influence on the business community that supports the opposition. The selectivity of the arrests, which did not deprive anyone of attention, a kind of "cleaning", sowed fear among the political and economic elite and forced them to comply with the rules. As a result, the political space is under the strictest control, and any disobedience to the system leads to serious consequences.

Kyrgyzstan

⁴¹ See Nursultan Nazarbayev's speech at the 21st Foreign Investors' Council Plenary Session, 12 June 2009.

⁴² Kassenova, N. (2009). The impact of the global economic crisis on Central Asia and its implications for the EU engagement. EUCAP Working Paper No. 5, 21 October 2009.

⁴³ An overview of the strikes that took place in 2009 (retrieved from https://rus.azattyq.org/a/Miting_protesta_v_Astane/1816587.html).

In the early 1990s Kyrgyzstan was the most democratic country in Central Asia. However, some time later, by the time of the Tulip revolution in 2005, Kyrgyzstan was a country with a soft authoritarianism that allowed most freedoms. From the point of view of state administration, Kyrgyzstan remained quite dysfunctional and after the appointment of Kurmanbek Bakiyev as President, the level of democracy in the country deteriorated, power was increasingly accumulated in the hands of the President and his entourage, and freedoms became less. The new regime was new in that stronger coercive devices and means were devised to prevent another Tulip revolution.

Kyrgyzstan does not have huge natural resources, unlike Kazakhstan, so when enriching the elites, the trickle-down effect of resources did not work, as a result, in 2004 about 40% of the population lived below the poverty line, and in 2015, 32.1% of the population lived below the poverty line.⁴⁴

The economic crisis has worsened the already bad situation in the country. Public services, health, education, sanitation etc, have deteriorated and were difficult to access. Since many Kyrgyzstanis go to work in Russia or Kazakhstan, as a result of the crisis, remittances have decreased by 40-50%, which accounts for a third of GDP.⁴⁵ Thousands of migrants returned to the country, which increased the unemployment rate. The energy sector was going through a difficult period, and already impoverished people were constantly faced with power outages.

Despite the unstable situation in the country and poor governance in 2009, the opposition is not able to take over all the power, as it is fragmented and weak and does not inspire confidence in the population.

Kyrgyzstan does not have rich resources to mitigate the effects of the crisis, so the only solution is to obtain grants and loans from external actors. Although it is possible to get a certain amount of investment, this cannot replace the lack of an anti-crisis strategy. Kyrgyzstan is becoming a state that

⁴⁴ See CIA, The World Factbook, CIA, Washington, D.C. 2015 (retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/kg.html>).

⁴⁵ See the article “Kyrgyzstan: Industrial Output Plunges”, Eurasianet.org, 05.07.2009 (retrieved from <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/news/articles/eav050709.shtml>).

is unable to meet the basic needs of its people and is vulnerable to internal and external security impact.⁴⁶

Tajikistan

Of all the post-Soviet Central Asian countries, Tajikistan was the poorest and most dependent on Soviet funding. As a result of the civil war in 1992-97, the country's economy left much to be desired, and the population suffered. The coalition government, which was created after the civil war, was one-third composed of representatives of the United Tajik opposition, but despite this, all power was eventually gathered at President Emomali Rahmon, and the opposition, which consequently turned into a prop.

Tajikistan is still the poorest country in Central Asia. The population below the poverty line is 31.5% in 2016.⁴⁷ Infrastructure is low, and public services are limited or non-existent. A remote mountainous country bordering an unsettled Afghanistan, corruption and a low level of professionalism in the government make it worse. Before the crisis, many families in Tajikistan remained afloat thanks to earnings in Russia or Kazakhstan, accounting for 50% of the country's GDP, 1.5 million Tajik labor migrants. In the first quarter of 2009, amounts of money officially transferred through banks fell by 33%.⁴⁸ Migrants who were forced to return to the country only worsened the situation with unemployment. Many industries were affected by the crisis, and export revenue declined by 50%, mainly due to falling prices for cotton and aluminum - Tajikistan's two main export products. Salaries and pensions were paid late, and food prices increased. The unemployment rate also increased.⁴⁹ In order to improve the situation, the government turned to external sources, so the US doubled economic

⁴⁶ The Brookings Institution report by S. Rice and S. Patrick, Index of State Weakness in the Developing World (Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 2008) (retrieved from http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2008/~//media/Files/rc/reports/2008/02_weak_states_index/02_weak_states_index.pdf).

⁴⁷ See CIA, The World Factbook, CIA, Washington, D.C. 2016 (retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/ti.html>)

⁴⁸ See the article "IMF expects remittances to Tajikistan to decrease through the whole year", *Asia-Plus*, 13.05.2009 (retrieved from <http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/49/51293.html>).

⁴⁹ See "Asia Times": Crisis increases the number of poor in Tajikistan [Krisis uvelichivayet kolichestvo bednykh v Tadjikistane], 07.08.2009 (retrieved from <http://www.paruskg.info/?p=13313>).

assistance to \$ 46.5 million, and China invested \$ 1 billion in infrastructure projects.⁵⁰ While this assistance may alleviate the situation in the country, it does not solve the problem of mismanagement of the country. Resentment grew among the population, but since the active part of the population is abroad and the fear of another civil war may explain the apolitical nature of the population. A more serious threat to the country's well-being may be various Islamist movements, so the authorities are taking repressive measures against these entities. However, the weak administration of the country, corruption might be the reason for the failure of the state.⁵¹

Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan has been a closed state since independence thanks to the first President Saparmurat Niyazov. The regime, under the first President, was based around the severe form of personality cult and could not stand any form of political opposition. Due to energy resources the government had all capabilities to provide people with goods, but it accompanied with ideological brainwashing that created a basis for legitimacy. The arrival of the next President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov was due to the death of his predecessor in December 2006. The new and current President launched a process of normalizing the situation, which led to the opening of the external world. However, the cult of personality is still present, only a milder version of the cult of Niyazov's personality. The regime of government remains extremely authoritarian. High representatives were under control by occasional reprisals, reshuffles of public administration. The nation of the country is tightly controlled, and any political activity is severely suppressed. The crisis has not spared Turkmenistan, despite its isolation, the fall in prices for the main export commodity – natural gas, sharply aggravated the situation in the country.⁵² All this has led to disillusionment among the population and an even greater gap between rich and poor. However, as long as there is gas in the country, the government has sufficient resources

⁵⁰ See S. Olimova, Tajikistan, Report for the Central Asia Observatory, May–June 2009 (retrieved from http://www.casaasia.es/oac/uploads/tajikistan_jul09.pdf).

⁵¹ Kassenova, N. (2009). The impact of the global economic crisis on Central Asia and its implications for the EU engagement. EUCAP Working Paper No. 5, 21 October 2009.

⁵² See S. Mitas, “Turkmenistan’s Economic Bubble”, Business Week, 10.02.2009 (http://www.businessweek.com/globalbiz/content/feb2009/gb20090210_156547.htm).

to continue its authoritarian regime, no matter how corrupt and ineffective it may be. Society has been so tightly controlled for so long that its emancipation will require considerable time and effort. Despite all its riches, there is no basis for the country's sustainable growth.⁵³

Uzbekistan

After gaining its independence, when Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan liberalized their economies and Turkmenistan maintained a command economy, Uzbekistan chose the path in the middle. Uzbekistan was guided by East Asian models of development, not entirely indulging market demands, although this system was highly appreciated, it failed in the form of corruption and low level of entrepreneurship. The political development of the country was also stopped. The President Islam Karimov was building the country that was based on fear and frequent reprisals. Uzbekistan has become a police country, bigoted of any form of political opposition or pluralism of opinion (freedom of expression, Assembly or Association is severely restricted).

The Central feature of the regime is its suppression of any criticism of its policies and a complacent approach reminiscent of Soviet times.

After the death of the first President Islam Karimov and the election of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev situation in the country has improved regarding foreign investments and business sector. To compare, in the past Uzbek authorities did not give an opportunity to develop foreign companies and US accusing them in violation of Uzbek laws and always seized their assets.⁵⁴

In conclusion, economic difficulties occasionally lead to increased authoritarian regimes. In Central Asia, this trend can be seen in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In Kazakhstan, this is balanced by the intentions to look presentable in front of the international community. In Uzbekistan even the situation has improved and moved towards human rights, democracy within last years but it still remains

⁵³ Kassenova, N. (2009). The impact of the global economic crisis on Central Asia and its implications for the EU engagement. EUCAP Working Paper No. 5, 21 October 2009.

⁵⁴ See CIA, The World Factbook, CIA, Washington, D.C. (retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/uz.html>)

authoritarian. As Turkmenistan has a reputation of the most authoritarian state in Central Asia, the restrictions on society are already so tough that there is no need to increase the pressure.⁵⁵

2.3 The three levels of EU's influence to Central Asian countries

Should we consider the EU as a “power” or not? According to the analyses of Berenskoetter,⁵⁶ there are three dimensions of power in order to categorize conceptions of power in IR theory. The first two dimensions refer to classical understanding of power, namely “winning conflicts” and “limiting alternatives”. Whereas the third dimension which is “shaping normality” that means “influence” is the most applicable for the EU in the international scene. Both power and influence practice the same phenomenon, however the term “influence” is more suitable characterization of EU's interaction logic in the context of Central Asia than the term “power”. As it rises the questions *“How does the EU exert influence in such a challenging geopolitical context in which its norms are contested and in which it risks being marginalized by other actors?”* To be more precise, the question whether the EU is examined as a significant and legitimate partner in Central Asia. There are 3 main analytical categories: (1) The EU's self-conception through discourse as an external actor; (2) the instruments and strategies applied, and (3) the reception of its action in Central Asia⁵⁷

Concerning the first category, it tells us how EU deals with and perceives the world. Here, the EU tries to portray its own functioning, values and principles as unique as well as normal for others. In other words, EU is seeking to establish a discourse of European exceptionalism through two mechanisms of “normalization” and “othering”. Therefore, EU's foreign policy regarding Central Asia would construct its external identity.

⁵⁵ Kassenova, N. (2009). The impact of the global economic crisis on Central Asia and its implications for the EU engagement. EUCAP Working Paper No. 5, 21 October 2009.

⁵⁶ Berenskoetter, F., & Williams, M. J. (Eds.). (2007). *Power in world politics*. Routledge.

⁵⁷ Spaiser, O. A. (2018). *The European Union's Influence in Central Asia: Geopolitical Challenges and Responses*. Lexington Books.

As for the second category, namely EU's instruments are informed by two main principles such as normativity and regionalism. The former one refers to the tendency of EU to place particular emphasis on norms in its foreign policy. According to Manner's seminal article "Normative Power Europe(NPE)⁵⁸: A Contradiction in Terms" has become the main point of reference in the NPE literature. He stated that the EU focuses on promoting the globalization of its norms by forming the concept of "normal" in the international arena. *Norms* can be described as "collective expectations about proper behavior for a given identity".⁵⁹ Or the "right" behavior of EU to exercise influence in its external relations. And as we know, the EU is devoted to the promotion of human rights, good governance, rule of law, and democracy. As regards to the second major principle of the EU's instruments, regionalism includes external promotion of the idea and mechanism of regional cooperation; the export of the EU's model of regional integration; and the EU's preference for interregional relations in its foreign relations.

Considering the factors of the EU's influence abroad, it does not only depend on its discourse or instruments but also on the reception of European external action in target countries. So that they do not take in the policies of the EU since their social and historical context is important to the effect of these policies. The reception is the result of the interchange between two factors that is "perception" of the EU and its policies and "responses" that associated states have to EU policies. These two indicators help us to assess the EU's possible influence.

The "Far Neighbourhood" approach

Concerning the political geography of Europe, Central Asia is considered to be a compound area between Europe and Asia, within the post-Soviet area along with the borders of Far East and South Asia. Therefore, the EU interprets this conceptual hesitancy into a political approach that makes Central Asia far and close simultaneously. Otherwise speaking, according to the scholar Kavalski, it is a policy

⁵⁸ Manners, I. (2002). Normative power Europe: a contradiction in terms?. *JCMS: Journal of common market studies*, 40(2), 235-258.

⁵⁹ Jepperson, Wendt, and Katzenstein, 1996, 54

of "Far Neighborhood." Kavalski examines that Central Asia has been moderately eliminated both from the EU's post-Soviet policies, for instance the Eastern Partnership, and from "Asian" initiatives. It seems to him "that Central Asia emerges as a ghost in the vacuum left between the network of these relationships."⁶⁰ Also, he claims that Central Asia is like a missing link to complete its relations to Asia. Or it is like a significant element of a broader European approach to the former communist world. Therefore, the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent states) countries test the EU's capacity to act in global arena. One of the main assets of the EU in the region, of course, is its "historical innocence". Unlike the Arab world or sub-Saharan Africa, where current relations are tainted by post-colonialist logic, EU member states do not carry any charged historical baggage in the region. In most cases, they did not have any historical ties at all, and Central Asia literally appeared on their map only after the collapse of the USSR in 1991. This historical absence has helped both the EU to find common policies for the region, and Central Asian states are taking another member.⁶¹

Even with the most dynamic EU strategy in Central Asia (2007), it remains small in comparison with the Eastern Partnership aimed at Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and the three states of the South Caucasus. The Eastern Partnership focuses to complement the Northern Dimension and the Union behind Mediterranean by holding an institutionalized forum to consider the visa agreements, free trade, as well as strategic partnership agreements with the EU's eastern neighbors, whereas maintaining the disputing issues of setting up the European Union. Despite the fact that Kazakhstan's entry into the Eastern Partnership was discussed and debated informally, especially in 2010, when the country presided over the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe), Central Asia is not a part of it, and the EU's regulatory impact on the region remain limited.⁶²

⁶⁰ Kavalski, E. (2012). *Central Asia and the rise of normative powers: Contextualizing the security governance of the European Union, China, and India*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.

⁶¹ Kavalski, E., & Cho, Y. C. (2018). The European Union in Central Eurasia: still searching for strategy. *Asia Europe Journal*, 16(1), 51-63.

⁶² Laruelle, M., & Peyrouse, S. (2013). *Globalizing Central Asia: Geopolitics and the challenges of economic development*. ME Sharpe.

The EU does not arrange itself in the global arena as a serious security entity, and its security aid is mostly linked to other institutions. Reliable security is tend to be the NATO that has its own strategy for engaging with Central Asian countries through Partnership for Peace programs and, for Kazakhstan, a specific Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP)⁶³. For instance, other member states, particularly Germany as well as France, have their own bilateral programs (assistance for the training of police and dog training brigades, etc.), whereas soft security is mostly controlled by the OSCE, to be more precise, for training the border guards program. Due to many European actors and the fact that the EU's security mechanisms are too limited and dispersed to be effective, there is no European "great story" about security in Central Asia that could compete with the security of Russia, China or the United States. Furthermore, related security issues are split into different programs, even though, back to 2006, the creation of the EU Special Representative for Central Asia, directly linked to the Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, provided a helping hand to create a more centralized dynamic that ensures the visibility of the agenda in security areas, although partly due to the value agenda.

2.4 The EU in Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership

The main instruments undertaken by the European Union in human rights promotion involve establishing cooperation and partnership agreements with third countries. Thus, the intensification of economic, political, and cultural ties between the EU and Central Asian region should be jointly committed to such global values, as democracy, the rule of law, good governance and respect for human rights. Thus, it is highly important that every CA country in general and every citizen in particular would adhere to the rule of law principles, having democratic values, independent judicial system, and transparency.

Looking back at history, to the Old Silk Road times, it can be understood that Central Asia has a great strategic importance in terms of economic exchange and the development of civilizations. Undoubtedly,

⁶³ Melvin, N. J., & Boonstra, J. (2008). *The EU Strategy for Central Asia Year One*. Universitäts-und Landesbibliothek Sachsen-Anhalt.

the region will also play a big role in the coming years. Nevertheless, Central Asia remains one of the least studied parts of the world from the EU's point of view.

In June 2007, the European Union (EU) adopted *The EU in Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership*, highlighting the growing importance of Central Asia to the EU. This strategic document was developed to build relationships with the Central Asian region. It pays attention to the issues of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, defining common goals and ways of cooperation with these countries. Central Asia is offered to cooperate with the EU in the following areas and plans to share its experience and expertise:

- 1) developing stable societies, providing security and stability;
- 2) bilateral and regional cooperation on such issues as human rights, economic diversification, energy and other sectoral issues, including youth and education
- 3) adhering to international norms;
- 4) good governance, the rule of law;
- 5) democratization.

The strategy also aimed to tackle some common regional challenges such as organized crime, human, drugs and arms trafficking, terrorism and non-proliferation issues, inter-cultural dialogue, energy, environmental protection, water and border management, migration, and transport infrastructure. In this respect, the EU was about to cooperate with international financial institutions, multilateral and regional organizations.⁶⁴ In addition to cooperation on trade, energy and security, education and intercultural dialogue were stressed as priority areas in the 2007 EU Strategy for Central Asia.

The EU can also help to bring about positive changes to the Central Asian region due to its wide experience and lessons learnt from the political and economic transformation of Central and Eastern Europe.

⁶⁴ The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership, 10113/07 of 31 May 2007.

To foster cooperation, a number of specific policy initiatives in the framework of the Strategy were outlined. It includes a ‘Rule of Law Initiative’, under which the EU provides training for Central Asian lawyers and their expertise on the legal system reforms, as well as human rights, energy and political dialogue with the Central Asian states and different initiatives on European education development.⁶⁵

Thus, this EU Strategy for Central Asia should have been acted as an overall framework for the EU policies in Central Asian region. However, after more than 10 years, in 2019, the EU has recently released an updated strategy for Central Asia. As far as Central Asia’s partners are concerned, there are certainly three main players in the region that prevail among others – it is Russia, China and the US. Although the EU may not be the prevailing actor in the CA region due to their remoteness, it has much to offer Central Asia in terms of mutually beneficial cooperation. Nevertheless, the 2007 *The EU in Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership* has been criticized by some people who assumed that strategy was just a collection of intentions and too broad notions and approaches with no actions taken.

In this regard, a New updated strategy ‘The EU and Central Asia: New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership’ was adopted in May 2019. The question is: will this strategy change the way the relationships between the European Union and Central Asia are going to evolve and develop?

It goes without saying that all the key points for cooperation that were described and included in the 2007 Strategy, are still relevant and promising. Many changes have taken place since that period both on global and regional level. For example, with the shift of power, Uzbekistan has undergone significant changes in their foreign policy and domestic reforms that opened the door to more regional cooperation and to closer engagement with European Union. Thus, Uzbekistan's new openness to regional cooperation is likely to benefit trade, etc.

Thus, although the goals underlined in the strategy are mostly the same, there are some positive and more accurate points that can contribute to more productive cooperation. Instead of formulating the updated strategy in too general way, there is a highly important change that is centered around the differentiation between each country situations in particular. It also proposes such new ways of

⁶⁵ Martin Russell (2019). The EU’s New Central Asia Strategy. *EPRS European Parliamentary Research Service*

cooperation between the regions as digital economy which is a highly significant and relevant sector in the current situation in the world, and the European Union can certainly make a contribution to its development in Central Asia due to its experience and advanced technologies. The other key issues were included in the previous strategy, but there is a hope that the new ones will not be criticized anymore and go beyond the intention to be implemented step by step.

2.5 EU's development assistance towards Central Asia

The EU is one of the first sponsors to support Central Asian countries since the first days of their independence. The first EU representation, the European Commission, in Central Asia was opened in Almaty in 1994. The delegation provided EU's technical and financial assistance in Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan through the above-mentioned countries with the financial instrument "Technical assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States" (hereinafter referred to as TACIS). In addition, since 1993 European Commission has already been providing humanitarian aid to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan through the European Community Humanitarian Office in Central Asia (ECHO) that is located in Dushanbe. The goal of TACIS was to guide post-Soviet countries that gained their independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 towards a market economy, democratization, and the rule of law. In the 1990s, TACIS aimed to strengthen the good governance, economic development, and reduce poverty.⁶⁶ Afterwards the range of humanitarian aid instruments has been broadened and financing local NGOs and mass media happened through European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), although it did not bring significant projects until the 2000s. The EU has also developed regional and cross-border programs, including Central Asia Drugs Action Programme (CADAP) in 2001 and the Border Management Program for Central Asia (BOMCA) in 2003.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ European Commission. (2002). Central Asia Strategy Paper for 2002 2006 and TACIS Central Asia Indicative Programme 2002 2004.

⁶⁷ Bossuyt, F. (2018). The EU's and China's development assistance towards Central Asia: low versus contested impact. *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 59(5-6), 606-631.

From 1991 to 2002, the EU provided about 944 million euros of humanitarian aid, although the EU became the largest donor in the first decade after the independence of the Central Asian countries, it was not the strongest development actor, especially in comparison with the UN, the US, and other Asian and Muslim development agencies.⁶⁸ According to assessments of the impact of the EU's assistance programs, the lack of development was the breadth of programs and objectives, and the low technical and administrative capacity in Central Asian countries, which affected the long-term and effective implementation of projects.⁶⁹ Central Asian countries have suffered from other non-transition issues that TACIS does not have sufficient resources to address, that is why the EU is redirecting its attention to reducing poverty in the region, especially in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. In the mid-2000s, the financial assistance instrument for the countries of the region was reviewed and since 2007, assistance has been provided through an instrument designed for developing countries, i.e. Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI).

The amount and types of EU aid are closely correlated with the attitude of the five governments to foreign participation and their development pathways, as well as with the country's economic growth. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are the poorest countries in the region, with correspondingly high levels of aid from the EU. Turkmenistan, as the most closed country in the region, received the least assistance, although after the death of President Niyazov in 2006, the country's foreign aid policy changed and created new opportunities for interaction with the EU.⁷⁰ But despite this, the regime remains so tough, and not ready to promote EU reforms.⁷¹ Uzbekistan has a closer relationship with the EU than Turkmenistan, but despite this, the EU still faces obstacles to providing adequate assistance to this state, but since the death of President Karimov in 2016, it led to more assistance from the EU.

⁶⁸ Bossuyt, F. (2010). The EU's Emerging Relations with Central Asia: A Test Case for EU Foreign Policy. *The EU and Global Governance-A Handbook*, 294-303.

⁶⁹ European Commission. (2002). *Central Asia Strategy Paper for 2002 2006 and TACIS Central Asia Indicative Programme 2002 2004*.

⁷⁰ Bossuyt, F. (2010). The EU's Emerging Relations with Central Asia: A Test Case for EU Foreign Policy. *The EU and Global Governance-A Handbook*, 294-303.

⁷¹ Peyrouse, S., Boonstra, J. & Laruelle, M. (2012). Security and development in Central Asia. The EU compared to China and Russia. *EUCAM Working Paper No. 11*.

Kazakhstan has the highest GDP in the region and no longer needs to development assistance, that's why EU assistance was concentrated on the capacity building rather than decreasing poverty level.⁷² Kazakhstan no longer receives assistance through DCI under the multi-annual programming cycle, i.e. 2014-2020, the country receives assistance through bilateral cooperation between the EU and Kazakhstan, the Partnership Instrument. However, regional DCI assistance programs for Central Asia also send funding to the country, as do thematic programs as EIDHR.

Great efforts have been made by the EU in the region not only to balance the influence of the region's neighboring giants, Russia and China, but also to avoid Central Asia being monopolized by the aforementioned giants, as this reduces the chances of obtaining direct access to the region's energy resources, as well as reduces the chances of Central Asian countries achieving true democracy and political pluralism.

For the period 2007-2013, the DCI was based on two areas, namely reducing poverty and increasing living standards; economic reforms and strong governance. To achieve the goal of reducing poverty and increasing living standards, two solutions were developed: (1) community and rural development; and (2) support for the administrative and institutional capacity improvements of States to effectively implement strategies consistent with key national goals. As for strong governance and economic reforms, it was implemented through support for civil service and administrative reforms, as well as market reforms.⁷³

Aiming to improve good governance in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, third of DCI assistance was sent through sectoral budget support. In Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, the situation is somewhat different, the EU does not provide budget support, as it believes that the countries are not ready to promote reforms, and funding will only strengthen the authoritarian regime.⁷⁴ EU instruments aimed at

⁷² Bossuyt, F. (2015). Engaging with Central Asia: China compared to the European Union. In China, the European Union and the Developing World. Edward Elgar Publishing.

⁷³ European Commission (2002). Central Asia Strategy Paper for 2002 2006 and TACIS Central Asia Indicative Programme 2002 2004.

⁷⁴ Peyrouse, S., Boonstra, J. & Laruelle, M. (2012). Security and development in Central Asia. The EU compared to China and Russia. *EUCAM Working Paper No. 11*.

democratizing and support for civil society, such as the EIDHR and the NSA-LA, are more involved in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and very little in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

For the period 2014-2020, the EU increased its aid budget to one billion euros for external assistance to the region through DCI.⁷⁵ Contributions from other EU financial instruments, EIDHR, European financial institutions, as well as EU member States' contributions resulted the increase in the funding. 360 million euros were allocated for regional assistance, which is about a third of the total funding. Kyrgyzstan allocated 184 million euros and Tajikistan 251 million euros, Uzbekistan 168 million euros, Turkmenistan 36.5 million euros respectively, Kazakhstan no longer gets assistance through DCI.⁷⁶

Each time the EU seeks to make its bilateral assistance more effective-with the individual national needs of countries, so in 2014-2020 Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan received assistance in three priority areas while Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan in only in one area. Three priority areas of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are: education and rural development; rule of law and health, and rural development for Uzbekistan; and education for Turkmenistan.⁷⁷

Over the past 20 years of providing assistance to Central Asia, the EU has followed a broader trend towards external assistance. European Union's approach towards Central Asia was more effective after creating the European Consensus on Development which set out the main goals and approach to development assistance. Main goal within the framework of the consensus is the reduction of poverty through the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (and since 2015 – the Sustainable Development Goals). Furthermore, according to the EU consensus, freedom of speech, freedom of association, democracy, equality of gender, human rights, rule of law are main EU values that are

⁷⁵ Peyrouse, S., Boonstra, J. & Laruelle, M. (2012). Security and development in Central Asia. The EU compared to China and Russia. *EUCAM Working Paper No. 11*.

⁷⁶ EEAS. (2014). New Impulse for the Relations between Europe and Central Asia, Statement by Gerhard Sabathil on behalf of the EEAS at the 'Prospects for EU Central Asia relations' conference, Almaty.

⁷⁷ EEAS. (2014). New Impulse for the Relations between Europe and Central Asia, Statement by Gerhard Sabathil on behalf of the EEAS at the 'Prospects for EU Central Asia relations' conference, Almaty.

always mentioned when cooperating with other states. In 2011, the Agenda for Change was adopted, another EU instrument contributing to the EU's development aid in the external policy. According to the paper the EU should promote human rights, democracy, good governance by making a contribution to the sustainable development of the states that are receiving aid.⁷⁸

3. Cases of EU promotion of Human Rights in Central Asia

3.1 The EP role in promotion of Human Rights in Central Asia

There are a number of significant resolutions that have been adopted by the EP towards the situation of Human Rights in Central Asia. Despite the fact that Parliament maintained EU's Central Asia Strategy, it still raised different concerns on human rights issues.⁷⁹ In March 2019, Parliament stated its concern about the human rights cases under political and socio-economic sides in Kazakhstan.⁸⁰ It stimulates Kazakhstan to respect human rights by stopping human rights abuses as well as all forms of political repression following the principles of Articles 1,4,5 and 235 of the EPCA. (Fact Sheets on the EU, 2020, p. 5).

Concerning Tajikistan, Parliament identified corruption, health and education as the fields that should be improved after consenting the PCA (Partnership and Cooperation Agreement) in 2009. By means of PCA, EU works to promote democratic and economic development of a country. (Fact Sheets on the EU, 2020, p. 3). Later, in a 2016 resolution, EP pointed out deterioration of human rights, particularly prisoners of conscience.⁸¹ However, due to the poor human right records in Turkmenistan, EP has not yet allowed the entry into PCA. The same applies to Uzbekistan regarding the removal of child labour use during annual cotton harvest under the relation with the ILO (International Labour Organization).

⁷⁸ European Commission. (2011). Increasing the impact of EU Development Policy: an Agenda for Change

⁷⁹ Implementation and review of the EU-Central Asia Strategy, *European Parliament resolution*. (2016, April 13). Retrieved from https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2016-0121_EN.html

⁸⁰ Human rights situation in Kazakhstan, *European Parliament resolution*. (2019, March 14). Retrieved from https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2019-0203_EN.html

⁸¹ Fact Sheets on the European Union. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/home>

Therefore, in March 2019, EP outlined all the recommendation to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan that should be considered prior to proposing to be consented.

Contribution to Central Asia through EIDHR

Within European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) Country Based Support Scheme (CBSS) for the period of 2018-2019 1800000 EUR were allocated for Kyrgyzstan, 1500000 EUR for Tajikistan, 600000 EUR for Kazakhstan and 800000 EUR for Uzbekistan.⁸²

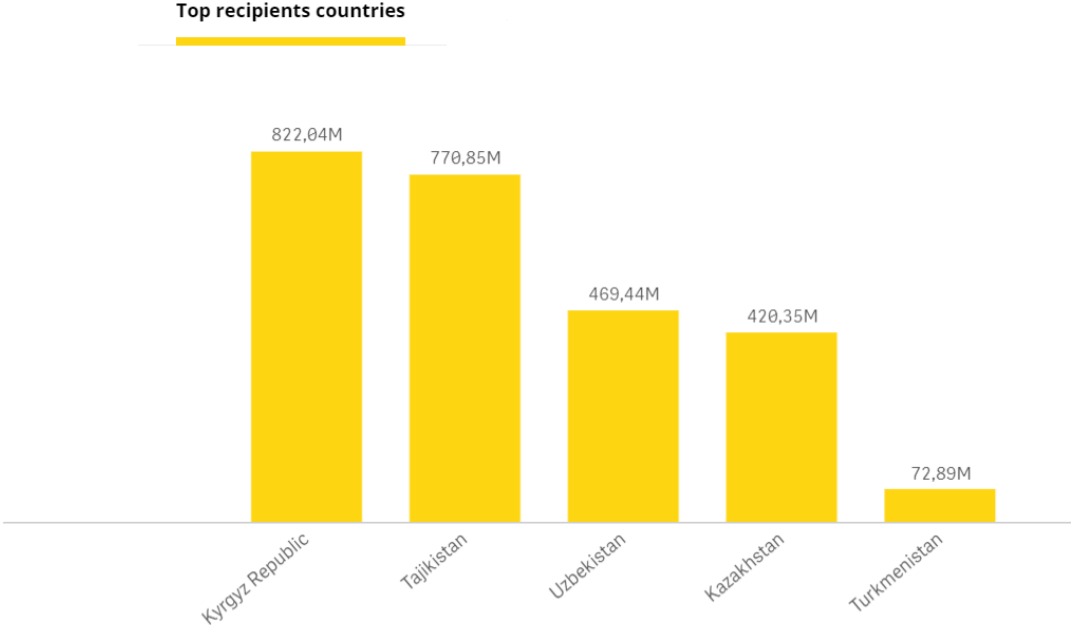


Figure -2

The funding that was received by Central Asian countries from 2007-2020 (Source: European Commission. EU aid explorer. Recipients.)

⁸²European Commission. Calls for Proposals and Tenders. Retrieved from <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/europeaid/online-services/index.cfm?do=publi.welcome&nbPubliList=15&orderBy=upd&orderByad=Desc&searchtype=QS>

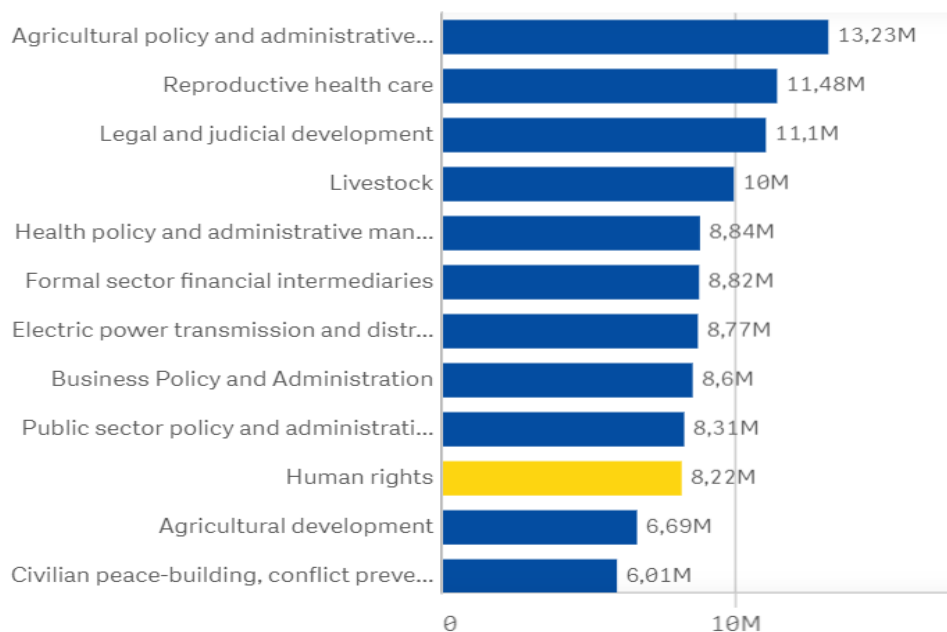


Figure -3

Sectors of the funding for the period of 2018-2020 (Source: European Commission. EU aid explorer. Recipients.)

Table 2. The projects of Central Asia that received funding from EIDHR 2018-2020 (Source: European Commission. EU aid explorer. Recipients.)⁸³

Project	Commitments (EUR)	Disbursements (EUR)
Totals	3 104 009	8 218 939
AAP 2020 - EIDHR Country Based Support Scheme (SCR.DEC.041342.01.1)	0	145 638
AAP 2019 - EIDHR Country-Based Support Scheme (SCR.DEC.041337.02.1)	0	319 920
AAP 2018 - Support Measures (SCR.DEC.041033.04.2)	0	20 774
AAP 2018 - CBSS 2018 (SCR.DEC.041027.03.2)	0	1 070 859

⁸³ Retrieved from https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/content/explore/recipients_en

2017 Country Based Support Schemes (CBSS) (SCR.DEC.038674.01.5)	0	18 050
Human Rights, Democracy, and the Rule of Law in Kyrgyzstan(2018004315)	0	32 216
Supporting Open Futures in Kyrgyzstan(2018004177)	282 547	240 198
Supporting Human Rights, Democracy and the Rules based International System in Kyrgyzstan(2018004136)	203 433	173 164
F.a: Capacity building of women of disabilities(2018181205)	12 500	24 323
Central Asia on the Move - Phase 2(2018003934)	0	573 514
Supporting Human Rights, Democracy and the Rules based International System in Uzbekistan(2018004168)	398 807	363 521
Accord cadre SOSI 2017-2021(2018000827)	109 973	109 973
Human Rights, Democracy, and the Rule of Law in Uzbekistan(2018004342)	0	30 684
Supporting Open Futures in Uzbekistan(2018004182)	591 870	557 780
Supporting Open Futures in Kazakhstan(2018004176)	455 963	308 655
AST-SUMMER SCHOOL ON BUSINESS HR(2018000505)	80 121	75 600
AST-JUDICIAL SYSTEM OF KAZAKHSTAN(2018000523)	87 957	78 120
AST-NATIONAL CONTACT POINT IN KAZAKHSTAN(2018000291)	31 069	29 604
AST-PROMOTING FORB IN KAZAKHSTAN(2018000335)	88 000	50 000
AST-CAPSTONE PROJECTS IN KAZAKHSTAN(2018000340)	198 061	64 512
Supporting Human Rights, Democracy and the Rules based International System in Kazakhstan(2018004134)	0	25 949
AST-HR-2018 UMBRELLA SMALL(2018000024)	30 330	30 330
Human Rights, Democracy, and the Rule of Law in	0	0

Kazakhstan(2018004314)		
Supporting Open Futures in Tajikistan(2018004180)	158 226	99 788
National Congress for people with disabilities in Tajikistan(2018008259)	17 650	17 650
Transnational partnerships for the promotion and advancement of human rights in Tajikistan(2017000012)	0	5 000
F.a: PROMOTING THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILDREN THROUGH LIVELIHOOD AND MOTHER AND CHILD HEALTH(2007070225)	52 428	9 762
School of Independent Life - Employment and economic sustainability of women with disabilities(2018180391)	4 264	3 000
F.a: Promotion of human rights of PWDs and status of women with disabilities(2018181181)	188 000	33 601
Empowering civil society organizations to participate in policy making and social delivery(2018008070)	45 000	45 000
Supporting Human Rights, Democracy and the Rules based International System in Turkmenistan(2018004165)	67 811	67 811
2017 Human Rights Defenders Facility - Supporting Network of Universities - Supporting key international actors (UN OHCHR and ICC) (SCR.DEC.038676.01.1)	0	137 317
2017 Country Based Support Schemes (CBSS) (SCR.DEC.038674.01.3)	0	579 586
Support to preventing further ethnic conflicts in Kyrgyzstan (SCR.DEC.040788.01.1)	0	900 000
AST CAPSTONE PROJECT IN ATYRAU(2017000177)	0	7 404
F.a: Promoting a modern understanding of disability among people	0	491

with visual impairment in the city of Kanibadam(2017170380)		
F.a: Promoting Human Rights of Children with Disabilities of Rasht Region(2017170381)	0	362
2016 Country Based Support Schemes (CBSS) (SCR.DEC.038669.01.1)	0	1 024 271
AST NEW HR DEFENDERS(2016000285)	0	19 080
Human Rights Defenders Facility - Supporting Network of Universities - Supporting key international actors (UN and ILO) (SCR.DEC.038064.01.1)	0	68 847
SUPPORT MEASURES 2015 - ANNUAL ACTION PROGRAMME 2015 MIGRATION AND ASYLUM (SCR.DEC.038490.01.1)	0	5 524
Country Based Support Schemes (CBSS) (SCR.DEC.038058.02.2)	0	669 721
EIDHR 2014 ANNUAL ACTION PLAN - CALLS FOR PROPOSALS (SCR.DEC.037396.02.1)	0	109 356
EIDHR 2013 AAP - CBSS (Country Based Support Schemes) (SCR.DEC.024556.01.1)	0	22 482
DCI 2012: Promotion of the respect of Rule of Law in Kyrgyzstan with particular emphasis on Transparency and Accountability (SCR.DEC.023178.01.1)	0	49 503

3.2 The European Parliament's concern about human rights situation in Kazakhstan

The whole situation with human rights in Kazakhstan remains weak over recent years. Kazakhstan ranks number 143 out of 167 on the World Democracy Index⁸⁴, therefore, the country is described as

⁸⁴ The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index. Retrieved from https://www.eiu.com/public/topical_report.aspx?campaignid=democracyindex2019

having an authoritarian regime. Especially, major concerns refers to the restrictions to freedom of expression and opinion, freedom of association and peaceful assembly. Likewise, the freedom of religion or belief is also contested by new legislative environments, human rights defenders⁸⁵. Whereas there are some positive improvements, these are mostly followed by applying resolutions and actions that break some fundamental laws of freedoms. Attempts to decrease the prisoners, to address the torture problems and improve the overall conditions in jails continued throughout the year, but still lack of independent control of custody facilities is still the norm. The judicial reform undertaken by the authorities has improved a number of elements in the judicial system, namely, in the criminal justice where efforts were made to humanize the criminal code. The insufficient number of an independent judiciary keeps diminishing the institutions of the State.⁸⁶

The following table will focus on EU activity in Kazakhstan from the aspect of human rights with the consideration, evaluation and assessment of specific cases, identifying the degree of EU involvement in Central Asian issues. In accordance with the World Democracy Index, Kazakhstan ranks 143 out of 167⁸⁷, thus the country is defined as an authoritarian regime as a result of which certain problems regarding human rights may arise.

Name of case	Explanation	EU involvement
Case of Ardak Ashim and Natalia Ulasik	In March 2018, the Shymkent-based activist, Ardak Ashim was charged with “inciting discord” for her critical social media posts, and was put her into court-sanctioned psychiatric detention.	The EU welcomes the decision to release Ardak Ashim from the psychiatric clinic; condemns such a brutal measure as punitive psychiatry and calls for the withdrawal of

⁸⁵ Petersen, M. J.& Marshall, K. (2019). The International promotion of freedom of religion or belief.

⁸⁶ EU annual report on human rights and democracy in the world 2018, country updates

⁸⁷ European Parliament resolution of 14 March 2019 on the human rights situation in Kazakhstan (2019/2610(RSP)), p.4

	Natalya Ulasik is a blogger, civic activist that had been forced to compulsory treatment in 2016.	compulsory outpatient psychiatric treatment against A.Ashim and N.Ulasik Result: in May 2018, a court ruled to excuse A.Ashim from criminal liability and freed her ⁸⁸ .
Case of Mukhtar Dzhakishev, Maks Bokayev (174 Art.), Iskander Yerimbetov (193 Art.), Aron Atabek (241 Art.), Sanat Bukenov (419 Art.), Makhambet Abzhan (190 Art.), and Saken Tulbayev (174 Art.), Larissa Kharkova	Larissa Kharkova- a trade union leader	The EU called for the full rehabilitation and immediate release of all activists and political prisoners currently in jail, as well as for the lifting of the restrictions placed on the movements of others; The EU urges the government of Kazakhstan to end the crackdown on independent trade unions; (European Parliament resolution, 2019, p. 4).
Activists, journalists and other critical individuals currently detained under Articles 174 and 274 of the Criminal Code of RK	174 article of the Criminal Code: Vladimir Kozlov, Talgat Ayan, Ardak Ashim, Maks Bokayev, Saken Tulbayev;	The EU urges the government of Kazakhstan to amend Article 174 of the Criminal Code on ‘inciting social, national, clan, racial, class, or religious discord’ by narrowing it to prevent arbitrary prosecutions that violate human rights norms and to

⁸⁸ European Parliament resolution of 14 March 2019 on the human rights situation in Kazakhstan (2019/2610(RSP)).

		<p>ensure that it does not unlawfully restrict freedom of expression⁸⁹, as well as Article 274 of the Criminal Code, which broadly prohibits ‘spreading information that is known to be false’, and to release the activists imprisoned on these articles. (European Parliament resolution, 2019, p. 4).</p>
<p>Case of opposition movement Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DCK) , Ablyazov case</p>	<p>13 March 2018 the authorities banned the peaceful opposition movement Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DCK) and more than 500 persons showing different forms of support for DCK.</p> <p>Almat Zhumagulov and the poet Kenzhebek Abishev have become victims of the Kazakhstan authorities’ fight against DCK and have been sentenced respectively to 8 and 7 years’ imprisonment;</p> <p>Ablovas Dzhumayev was sentenced to three years in jail and Aset Abishev to four for criticising the</p>	<p>The decision to ban the DCK violates Kazakhstan’s basic international obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and articles 1, 4 and 5 of the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement concluded between Kazakhstan and the EU. By their actions, the Kazakhstani authorities are grossly violating the freedom of assembly and association, the freedom of expression, the freedom of the media and the dissemination</p>

⁸⁹ Amnesty International THINK BEFORE YOU POST CLOSING DOWN SOCIAL MEDIA SPACE IN KAZAKHSTAN

	<p>authorities online and supporting DCK;</p>	<p>of information, as well as the right not to be arbitrarily detained or imprisoned. (European Parliament resolution, 2019, p. 3).</p>
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Thus, EU encourages Kazakhstan to carefully follow its international obligations respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms; calls on the Kazakhstan authorities to put an end to human rights abuses and all forms of political repression, in accordance with the principles of Articles 1, 4, 5 and 235 of the EPCA⁹⁰.

3.3 Factors that impede the development of relations between CA and EU

As the projects related to the development of relations between the Central Asian region and the European Union are ambitious, it can be seen that the implementation of this Strategy is a long-term process that needs much time and patience to be done effectively.

There are some factors that impede the development of the EU–Central Asian partnership. In accordance with Alexander Warkotsch, the first reason for such obstacles is the fact that the region is distinguished by (semi-)authoritarian regimes. Presidents of Central Asian countries mostly have broader powers and often rule by decree, neglecting parliaments and courts. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OSCE) polling station reports point out that almost all elections have been neither free nor fair and the appearance of independent mass media has been hindered.⁹¹ In short, these countries are mostly not committed to the principles of democracy.

Another factor that can be an obstacle to the evolution of relationships between the European Union and Central Asia is strategic uncertainty. It is a well-known fact that the EU competes with Russia and

⁹⁰ European Parliament resolution of 14 March 2019 on the human rights situation in Kazakhstan (2019/2610(RSP)), p.4

⁹¹ Warkotsch, A. (Ed.). (2010). The European Union and Central Asia (Vol. 2). Routledge.

China. It is not quite simple to figure out the relations within this triangle. Due to Putin's authoritarianism and Russia's aggressive actions in Ukraine, Kazakhstan's proposal to promote EU-EAEU-China dialogue in Central Asia looks quite unrealistic.⁹²

As far as China is concerned, it should be noted that despite all the differences, EU and Chinese approaches to regional integration should complement each other rather than compete. The EU's capability to invest financially into Central Asian region is quite limited in comparison with China, but it has a great experience and competence in many other areas, for example, in the free movement of people, goods and services promotion or in implementation of different educational exchange programs. Hypothetically, EU and China should coordinate their mutual efforts as far as feasible; this is the aim of an EU-China Connectivity Platform launched in 2015. Inter alia, the platform will do so through a forthcoming study on rail corridors between China and Europe, identifying challenges and looking at coordinated solutions to provide sustainable development.⁹³

This paper supposes that the efforts undertaken by the European Union in terms of Central Asia have ambiguous results due to an uncoordinated policy towards Central Asia. Although EU's influence in Central Asia is widely confirmed and is of great importance in terms of its cultural and educational programs, Russia, nevertheless, remains the major foreign actor in Central Asia. The reasons for such Russia's dominance in the CA region is not only the historical and cultural ties between countries, but also Russia's institutional and economic efforts, as well as Putin's intentions to strengthen its presence in Central Asia at law and policy level. However, Russia's future regional leadership should not be taken for granted, as all Central Asian states have been looking at Moscow's cultural engagement with increased scepticism.⁹⁴

Firstly, despite the EU's interest to cooperate with Central Asia, this region is not their first and foremost strategic partner and, consequently, it allocates only limited human, material and financial

⁹² The EU's New Central Asia Strategy Martin Russell EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service, p.4

⁹³ The EU's New Central Asia Strategy Martin Russell EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service, p.11

⁹⁴ Assessing the Effectiveness of the EU's and Russia's Cultural Diplomacy towards Central Asia Domenico Valenza and Elke Boers United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS)

resources to its programs there. Secondly, Russia, having the prevailing strategic and social influence, providing workplaces for several million Central Asian labor migrants every year, and China that makes significant economic investments to the region, play leading roles and have a much stronger influence in Central Asia than other actors. Russia, in particular, gained a far better reputation than the EU, which, despite its importance as a trading partner, has been largely underestimated due to the local perception that the EU's contribution and involvement in the region is rather insignificant and ineffective, as well as the EU's insistence on promoting human rights and democratization is locally rejected.⁹⁵

3.4 Low EU Impact

During the last decades of EU assistance towards Central Asia plenty of improvements have been done in the influenced areas such as development of rural areas, education, support of SME, sustainable development and environmental protection. But in general due to a long term effect of most of the EU assistance, reduced poverty level and economy development opportunities seems limited. The most improvements occurred where the most assistance was done as a result in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and less in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan due to their external policy.⁹⁶

EU assistance programs resulted in some developments in local level, for example competitiveness of SME's participants that take part in the EU SME support program has been grown in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and farmers that earn some profit of these small EU programs in South Kyrgyzstan gained higher yields from their irrigated lands. The most tangible outcome is the involvement of civil society in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan. Civil society executes two roles: the first one is to give recommendations to the EU at the stage of the formulating the program. The second one associated with the assistance itself. Local NGOs and other local organizations can

⁹⁵ Catherine Putz. (2019). Sebastien Peyrouse on the EU's New Central Asia Strategy. Retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2019/07/sebastien-peyrouse-on-the-eus-new-central-asia-strategy/>

⁹⁶ Bossuyt, F. (2018). The EU's and China's development assistance towards Central Asia: low versus contested impact. *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 59(5-6), 606-631.

participate at EU tenders and win the funding for implementing some projects. Furthermore, support program for civil society is a part of democracy promotion agenda of EU.

However, in a broader way EU assistance does not result tangible outcomes and has low impact.⁹⁷⁹⁸

There are several factors influencing low impact in the region: EU related issues as well as local factors. Despite the fact that EU was the most generous donor in the region since 2000 but the volume of funding regarding the region is still limited. Moreover, until 2013 assistance towards Central Asia had dispersed character which means too many spheres of influence but little funding that led to a low impact.⁹⁹

In addition, EU's aid delivery suffers from delays in the implementation. Most of the factors causing delays are opaque bureaucratic procedures in the region's administrations, difficulties in finding suitable fundable activities and the complicated procedural and legal requirements of the EU's aid delivery.¹⁰⁰

The implementation period differs among the Central Asian countries, the process goes slower in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan than in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. One of the reasons for long-term processes is not having the same priorities as EU has. For example, poverty reduction is not admitted as key priority feature to develop.

The largest part of the EU assistance is received by Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan due to their constant need for funding, these two countries are more flexible to the EU's agenda in the region and show their willingness to cooperate with the EU to implement the reforms. However, the EU's aid delivery assets in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, namely budget support faced obstacles, in part due to the

⁹⁷ Particip. (2016). Evaluation of EU regional level support to Central Asia (2007 2014), final report

⁹⁸ Peyrouse, S., Boonstra, J., & Laruelle, M. (2012). Security and development approaches to Central Asia. The EU compared to China and Russia. EUCAM Working Paper, (11)

⁹⁹ Peyrouse, S., Boonstra, J., & Laruelle, M. (2012). Security and development approaches to Central Asia. The EU compared to China and Russia. EUCAM Working Paper, (11)

¹⁰⁰ European Court of Auditors 2013, 27

corruption and the hierarchical governance and high staff turnover in the administrations of both countries.¹⁰¹¹⁰²

In sum, EU' s assistance towards Central Asia has an extremely low impact despite all the expectations, because of the local limited environment, concerning low grade governance and weak institutions' structures, pervasive corruption and governments' uncooperative position. Moreover, the funding resources are constrained and dispersed across too many areas of influence to have satisfactory results. One more difficulty is obstacle that occurs during the procedure and delivery of the EU's aid due to inflexible legal conditions.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Boonstra, J., & Hale, J. (2010). EU Assistance to Central Asia: Back to the Drawing Board?

¹⁰² Bossuyt, F. (2010). *The EU's Transnational Power Over Central Asia: Developing and Applying a Structurally Integrative Framework to the Study of the EU's Power Over Central Asia* (Doctoral dissertation, PhD dissertation, Aston University, Birmingham, 299)

¹⁰³ Bossuyt, F. (2018). The EU's and China's development assistance towards Central Asia: low versus contested impact. *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 59(5-6), 606-631.

Conclusion

The Master Thesis investigated the involvement and contribution of the EU in terms of human rights promotion in the Central Asian region. The topic of Human Rights is of extreme importance and relevance nowadays, and due to the fact that CA countries are mainly governed by the weak democracy having the features of authoritarian regimes, all this pose undeniable bottlenecks to human rights and democracy in CA because democracy is also the best insurance that governments will not commit injustice and even genocide against their own citizens.

Thus, in the 1st chapter of this research we focused on the EU's external policy as a whole, studying the main documentary frameworks and instruments of the EU as a global actor.

The 2nd chapter covered the topic of the relationships evolution between EU and Central Asia, the EU's strategy for a new partnership in Central Asia, as well as factors that may hinder the development of relations between these two regions.

The 3rd chapter was based on the practical part where particular cases with the concrete EU actions and activity in the region have been studied, and the effectiveness of these efforts undertaken by the European Union has been assessed.

Thus, answering the research question that has been put forward, it can be concluded that EU can be considered as rather effective and legitimate partner and actor in Central Asia, because it undertakes a lot of steps and utilizes many instruments for promoting the rights and freedoms of civil society, although it is not their direct area of responsibility. However, in spite of the fact that there are other actors and powers like Russian and China, for example, which try to dominate in the region, the EU is also actively involved, not only in economic, political, cultural and educational issues, but also making significant contributions to the issue of human rights promotion. This involvement and commitment can be clearly seen while studying the cases of EU's involvement in Central Asia, where European Union urged the Kazakhstani government to release certain activists and to amend or abolish the Articles of

laws considered to be inhumane and wrongly formulated.

Therefore, despite the contribution of EU to regional security, spread of democracy and observance of HR in Central Asia, all these efforts will become futile if nothing is changed on the intraregional level which includes better domestic governance of Central Asian states, commitment to democracy and lower corruption.

Nevertheless, the EU can be considered as a deterrent for CA governments against violation of democratic principles and human rights, and therefore, the EU influence on Central Asia should not be underestimated.

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