



# EU-CENTRAL ASIA RELATIONS

The European Union's engagement with the region has significantly expanded since the early 1990s, building upon Central Asia's geographical location and tradition of **bringing Europe and Asia together**. Both regions share strong common interests in **prosperity, connectivity, energy and security**.

As part of global efforts to build back better following the COVID-19 pandemic, and to help mitigate the socio-economic impact of the new geopolitical context, the EU is supporting the countries of Central Asia in their efforts to:

- modernise
- boost investment
- digitalise
- facilitate trade within and beyond the region and to diversify their transport routes

The EU is committed to establish a **strong, ambitious, and forward-looking framework for cooperation between the European Union and Central Asia** to deliver sustainable connectivity within and between our regions. Improved, sustainable, safe and secure transport connections can play a powerful role in supporting economic diversification and green growth, which supports the shared goal of a prosperous Central Asia.

In an **increasingly complex geopolitical context**, Central Asians are aiming to **diversify their options** and are looking at a stronger EU presence as **a factor of balance in the regional equation and a committed partner for reform and modernisation**.

## NEW CHALLENGES, NEW OPPORTUNITIES, NEW APPROACHES

In June 2019, the EU adopted a **new Strategy on Central Asia**, which outlines the strategic interests in the region and proposes to forge a stronger and nonexclusive partnership with Central Asian states so that the region develops as **a more resilient, prosperous, and closely interconnected economic and political space**.

- business climate
- judicial system and security services
- labour conditions
- administrative accountability and efficiency
- human rights and good governance in general

## THE STRATEGY OUTLINES THREE PRIORITY STRANDS FOR EU ENGAGEMENT

### INVESTING IN REGIONAL COOPERATION

- Moving towards common rules and a more integrated regional market
- Tackling common challenges such as environmental degradation and terrorism
- Stepping up cooperation with Central Asian partners to promote peace in Afghanistan

### PARTNERING FOR RESILIENCE

- Strengthening Central Asian countries so they can overcome internal & external challenges
- Supporting the delivery of successful reforms
- Closer cooperation on promoting human rights and the rule of law
- Turning environmental challenges into opportunities
- Sharing know-how on renewable energy and energy efficiency

### PARTNERING FOR PROSPERITY

- Developing a competitive private sector and promoting an open investment environment
- Fostering research and innovation with a focus on skills development for youth
- Promoting sustainable, comprehensive and rules based connectivity
- Supporting economic modernisation
- Leading supporter of the accession of Central Asian states to the World Trade Organization

The new EU Strategy also provides guidance for the preparation of **EU aid programming** for the period 2021-2027.

The negotiation of new-generation **Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (EPCAs)** with Central Asian countries has also provided a strong vehicle to forge a **more modern and diversified partnership** beyond a "trade and aid" agenda and to promote cooperation and regulatory convergence in new areas which are relevant to the reform processes underway in the region.

## THE EUROPEAN UNION AS A PARTNER FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The European Union's development priorities in Central Asia, in line with its commitment to implementing the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, aim at meeting the increasing needs from growing and young populations and at **providing economic opportunities**.

The EU's development priorities are focused in a region lacking economic diversification, facing significant environmental challenges, and in which the levels of intraregional trade and investment flows remain sub-optimal.

Assistance provided by the European Commission combined with assistance provided by EU Member States individually makes the **European Union the number one provider of development assistance in the region**. European Commission assistance to Central Asia reached €1.1 billion for the period 2014-2020. To better tailor the development programmes to each country's specificities, such as their existing level of development and an assessment of needs, the European Union employs a **differentiated approach** to its assistance, with a focus on the poorest and the most fragile countries.

Regional programmes aim at supporting a broad-based process of dialogue and collaboration between the five Central Asian countries. Regional cooperation is important for



The rational use of natural resources is a key factor for the development and political stability of the region. Addressing the needs of a rapidly growing young population through the provision of **jobs and better education** and research opportunities is also key.

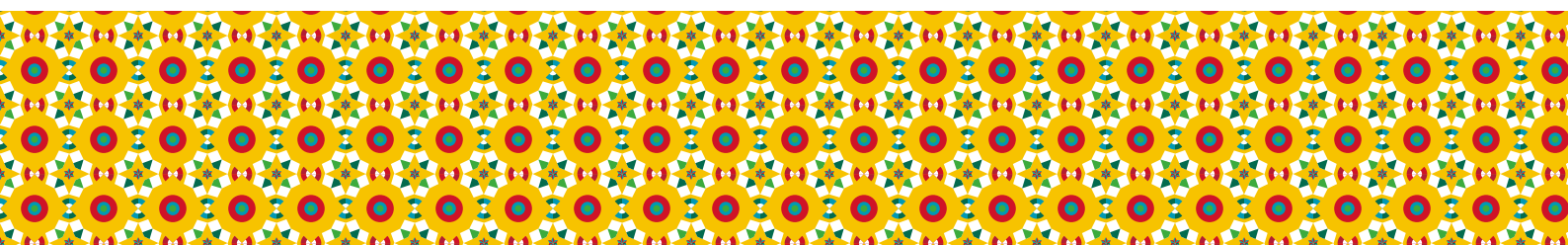
Given Central Asia's vulnerability to **natural disasters and the effects of climate change**, regional programmes also support the countries' capacities to prepare for and respond to these risks, building on the results of earlier disaster preparedness programmes.



The EU is also supporting the strengthening of the rule of law and the legal capacity of the Central Asian countries and contributes to the reform of their **legal and judiciary systems**. Regional cooperation aims at **strengthening cross-border cooperation** through **integrated border management** in order to facilitate cross-border trade and to improve people's mobility, while also intensifying the fight against organised crime and trafficking (Border Management in Central Asia Programme – BOMCA). The EU also supports drug demand reduction, prevention and health aspects of drug use through the Central Asia Drug Action Programme (CADAP).

**Supporting intra-regional trade** in Central Asia and linking up the Central Asian economies with the global value chain is a priority for the EU. The EU helps Central Asian countries address key regulatory and procedural obstacles to intra and extra regional trade. The EU also promotes job creation through programmes that **catalyse the growth** of young Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises. The EU also promotes **sustainable consumption and production** patterns in the region.

With its **Investment Facility for Central Asia (IFCA)**, the EU provides grants to support financial resources from financial institutions and other public and private partners for investments, technical assistance, or risk capital operations. This encourages beneficiaries to make developmentally relevant investments, which would otherwise be financially or technically difficult to realise.



## PROMOTING THE ROLE OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY

The EU seeks to promote the role of civil society in addressing the challenges that partner countries in Central Asia are facing. Since 2019 the annual EU – Central Asia Civil Society Forum takes place and provides a platform for civil society representatives of the two regions to contribute to the development of the EU-Central Asia partnership.

The Forum gathers civil society representatives, researchers, media experts, private sector and government experts to discuss ideas, **generate new and innovative proposals and recommendations** on how civil society can further contribute and be more involved in the implementation of the EU Central Asia Strategy at the local level through programmes and at policy level.

## TEAM EUROPE INITIATIVE ON DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

This flagship project aims to develop the legal and regulatory environment for satellite communication, and establish satellite connectivity operators (SatComs) in Central Asian countries with direct connectivity to the EU. We intend to support satellite connectivity in Central Asia by building infrastructure known as 'Earth stations' with integrated Internet Exchange Points (IXPs) and Green Data Centres: landing points for the connectivity, complementing national fibre broadband development projects.

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are confirmed participants, and we are open to the inclusion of Turkmenistan.

## TEAM EUROPE INITIATIVE ON WATER, ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

This flagship project will contribute to managing water and energy resources sustainably, addressing environmental challenges, and tackling climate change in the five Central Asian countries.

To achieve its objectives, the Team Europe Initiative will focus on:

1. Improving regional cooperation and governance for sustainable development in Central Asia;
2. Increasing investment in a regionally integrated green and energy transition in Central Asia.

## DARYA PROJECT

DARYA, which stands for Dialogue and Action for Resourceful Youth in Central Asia, is a **EUR 10 million programme** implemented by ETF that will **support inclusive skills development**, relevant to labour market needs, for young women and men in the five Central Asian countries.

The two specific objectives of DARYA are:

- ◇ To foster the quality and inclusiveness of education, training and employment systems in Central Asia;
- ◇ To foster participatory and inclusive dialogue and cooperation mechanisms at national and regional level.

## SECCA

SECCA, which stands for the EU Support to Sustainable Energy Connectivity in Central Asia, is a **EUR 6.8 million programme** aiming at promoting a more sustainable energy mix in the Central Asian region in line with the EU best practices.

The programme will tackle climate change issues by optimizing energy efficiency and renewable energy development. The SECCA project has developed a detailed work plan for each country and activities will be conducted at country-specific and/or regional level.

