



EU-CENTRAL ASIA RELATIONS

Central Asia has a centuries-old tradition of **bringing Europe and Asia together**. It lies at the crossroads between the two continents and **Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan** have renewed this role for the region since attaining independence.

The European Union's engagement with the region has significantly expanded since the early 1990s. Both regions share a common goal of achieving **stability and prosperity** through peaceful means.

NEW CHALLENGES, NEW OPPORTUNITIES, NEW APPROACHES

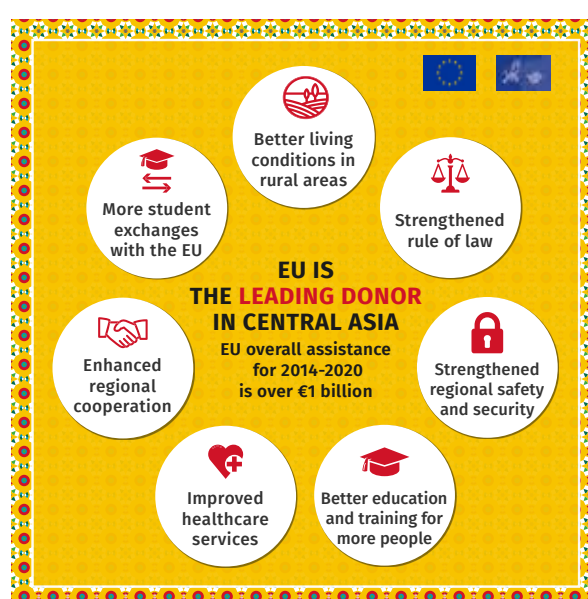
The EU Strategy for Central Asia, which was first adopted in 2007, encompasses the long-term commitment of the European Union to regional and bilateral cooperation with its Central Asian partners. The main goal of the EU Strategy is to **increase the resilience of the region** as a whole as well as the resilience of individual states. The Strategy foresees a reinforced regular **political dialogue** at ministerial level and enhanced cooperation in key initiatives: **rule of law, education, environment and water**. Specific attention is devoted to the region's **security and stability**, notably to common threats related to border management and drugs.

Ten years after the adoption of the first Central Asia Strategy, the European Union and its Member States reaffirmed (in Council Conclusions of June 2017) their commitment to develop a **strong and durable relationship**, based on joint ownership and aimed at fostering the peaceful, prosperous, sustainable and stable socio-economic development of the Central Asian region in line with the EU Global Strategy and the joint commitment to the United Nations' Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs).

A new EU Strategy on Central Asia, which will update the 2007 Strategy and bring it in line with developments in the region, is foreseen for adoption in 2019.

The new Strategy will focus on priorities in which the EU can advance its interests, respond to those of its Central Asian partners, and provide added value. The new EU Strategy should in particular emphasise the EU's commitment to promoting the sustainable development and resilience of the region; support regional cooperation in Central Asia; set out the EU's approach to the promotion of sustainable connectivity in and with the region, in line with the *EU's Strategy on Connecting Europe and Asia* adopted on 18 October 2018; and foster a closer link between the EU's policies on Central Asia and on Afghanistan. The new EU Strategy will also provide guidance for the preparation of EU aid programming for the period 2020-2027.





THE EUROPEAN UNION AS A PARTNER FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The European Union's development priorities in Central Asia, in line with its joint commitment to implementing the SDGs, aim at meeting the increasing needs from growing and young populations and at providing economic opportunities in a region lacking economic diversification, facing significant environmental challenges, and in which the levels of intra-regional 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 donor in the region**. The global envelope for EU assistance to Central Asia (through the Development Cooperation Instrument) increased to **€1 billion for the period 2014-2020**. In order 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.

The **Regional Multiannual Indicative Programme for Central Asia** allocates €454.2 million for the period 2014-2020, including €115 million for the Erasmus+ programme, to promote regional cooperation in the areas of Sustainable Development and Regional Security.

Regional programmes aim at supporting a broad-based process of dialogue and collaboration between the five Central Asian countries. **Regional cooperation** is important for **energy**, the **environment**, **water** and **socio-economic development**. 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. The EU is eager

to use regional cooperation projects to underpin the new momentum in regional cooperation in Central Asia illustrated by developments such as the Astana Summit of Central Asian leaders of March 2018 and Summit of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea of August 2018.

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 co-operation** 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-Central Asia Action Plan on Drugs (2014-2020) is the key policy reference document on **drugs-related** issues. The EU also supports drug demand reduction, prevention and health aspects of drug use through the Central Asia Drug Action Programme – CADAP.

The EU plans to step up its support to **investments, job creation, education, economic growth and private sector development** in the region. The EU's regional programmes support policy reform and stimulate regional exchanges on **competitiveness and business environment reforms**. Such reforms build the capacity of Business Intermediary Organisations that provide technical assistance to SMEs and promote better policies for them to flourish. **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**, 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.

Other EU external instruments complement EU support to the region, when appropriate. Within the Development Cooperation Instrument, the thematic programmes “Global public goods and challenges”, “Civil Society and Local Authorities”, the “European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights” and Non-State Actors and Local Authorities are particularly important. The Instrument for Nuclear Safety Cooperation provides a key contribution to environmental remediation in Central Asia. Certain measures, particularly in the area of conflict prevention and crisis management, may also be supported under the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, which aims at responding to situations of crisis or political instability, and can include preventive long-term actions to global and trans-regional threats.

EU SUPPORT FOR EDUCATION

The EU has been supporting bilateral and regional education programmes and research in Central Asia since the very beginning of mutual cooperation in 1991. Education plays an important role in bilateral partnership agreements as well as in the EU-Central Asia Strategy. At a regional

level, the EU promotes education via the EU-Central Asia Education Platform, including support to implementation of the June 2017 Astana Declaration and the Central Asia Research and Education Network.

The EU is also the biggest contributor to the Global Partnership for Education, the only global partnership for education that brings together representatives of all education stakeholder groups including partner countries, donors, international organisations, civil society groups and the private sector. GPE plays an active role in supporting education systems in Central Asia, with allocations exceeding €100 million.

In the sphere of higher education, €65.5 million was allocated for Central Asia in the **Erasmus+** 2014-2017 budget. Since 2015, 5,544 short-term placements of between 3-12 months for students and 5-60 days for staff under the **International Credit Mobility** programme have been awarded to Central Asian (3,833) and European (1,711) education staff and students since 2015. Between 2014-2018, more than 250 two-year Master-level scholarships were awarded to students from Central Asia under the **Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Degrees** programme. The **Capacity Building in Higher Education** programme focusses on curriculum development and modernisation, joint or double degrees, modern teaching and learning practices, upgrading of facilities and equipment, and improving university governance. 69 projects have so far been selected since 2014 involving Central Asian higher education institutions. The EU supports **Vocational Education and Training** in Central Asia, currently in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan and previously also in Kazakhstan, through bilateral support and via the Torino Process managed by the European Training Foundation.

FOR MORE INFORMATION :

- ◇ [Website of the European Union Delegation to Kazakhstan](#)
- ◇ [Website of the European Union Delegation to the Kyrgyz Republic](#)
- ◇ [Website of the European Union Delegation to Tajikistan](#)
- ◇ [Website of the European Union Liaison Office in Turkmenistan](#)
- ◇ [Website of the European Union Delegation to Uzbekistan](#)