

EU Strategy implementation

The EU Strategy for a New Partnership with Central Asia was adopted by the European Council on 21-22 June 2007 in recognition of the increasing importance of Central Asia for EU interests relating to security, stability, governance and energy diversification. The Strategy provides an overall framework for EU relations with Central Asia and builds on previous achievements in building relations with the countries of Central Asia, EU assistance programmes and other initiatives taken by the EU.

The EU priorities for its cooperation with the region as a whole include cooperation in the fields of human rights, rule of law, good governance and democracy; education; economic development; trade and investment; energy and transport; environmental policies; common threats and challenges; and intercultural dialogue.

Strategy implementation concerns, on the EU side, EU institutions, notably the European Commission, but also EU Member States.

The Central Asia Strategy is mainly implemented through existing instruments, including Partnership and Cooperation Agreements and Interim Agreements, the Trade and Cooperation Agreements (where these are still in force), the EC Regional Assistance Strategy Paper 2007-2013 [E[277 KB] and Indicative Programmes 2007-2010 [443 KB] operating on a bilateral as well as a regional level, as well as various thematic assistance programmes, such as, for example, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR).

Progresses in the implementation of the EU strategy for Central Asia

In June 2008 the first Joint Progress Report by the Council and the European Commission to the European Council on the implementation of the EU Central Asia Strategy was published. It noted that good progress had been made only one year after the launch of the Strategy.

Since the publication of the report, strategy implementation has intensified further. Examples include:

Increased EU engagement with Central Asia through regular high level **political dialogue** (such as the Ministerial Security Forum in Paris in September 2008 and meetings of EU and CA Foreign Ministers in Dushanbe in May 2009 and in September 2010 in Brussels);

structured **human rights dialogues** are now in place with all five Central Asian states and several rounds have already taken place with each;

Implementation of the **education initiative** is advancing, inter alia by increasing the number of scholarship exchanges and providing additional support for capacity building in education sectors, a compendium on study opportunities in the EU has published, information days about study in the EU have been held in all countries,

and the establishment of a Central Asia Research and Education Network (CAREN) is underway (establishing high speed internet connection between EU and Central Asian research institutions);

Implementation of the **rule of law initiative** was successfully launched at a Ministerial meeting in Brussels on 27 November 2008; follow-up events, including regional seminars on judicial training and penal law, were held in 2009 (meetings of EU and CA experts agreeing joint written conclusions that will feed into future cooperation programmes), and a new project, under EIDHR, has been launched to promote activities with the Venice Commission in Central Asia; EU assistance for judicial reforms is being increased; a second Ministerial meeting is under preparation.

Environmental programmes are being expanded and **National Water Policy Dialogues** have been launched in Central Asia for the first time, beginning in Kyrgyzstan in 2008, to promote water management (similar dialogues will be launched in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan in the course of 2010);

Important **new projects** have been launched and are being implemented to promote business development and Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs), i.e. the **Central Asia Invest** Programme. In addition, a project has been launched under the Instrument for Stability to **combat trafficking to and from Afghanistan**, concerning neighboring countries, including all five Central Asian countries; the project will support the establishment of a network of drug laboratories to combat drug trafficking.

The mandate of the **European Investment Bank** (EIB) mandate has been extended to Central Asia; Tajikistan has, as the first Central Asian country, concluded a framework agreement with the EIB (February 2009) and others are expected to follow shortly; EIB activities will focus on environment and energy sectors.

Energy dialogues have expanded and feasibility studies on trans-Caspian energy corridor options have been concluded and are now being discussed with partner countries. Cooperation and dialogue on renewable energy and the Kyoto Protocol has also intensified and is being supported by assistance programmes.

Cooperation in the field of **border management** and **combating drug trafficking** have strengthened further, building on the successful EU Border Management in Central Asia (BOMCA) and Central Asia Drug Action Programme (CADAP) programmes.

The process of increasing the EU presence in the region is under way: Full-fledged **EU Delegations** are in the process of being opened in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and a Delegation should in principle open in Uzbekistan as well shortly. A Europa House opened in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, in April 2007 and the EU Head of Delegation to Kazakhstan has been accredited to Turkmenistan also, awaiting the opening of an EU Delegation in Ashgabat.

The European Commission alone, not counting the programmes of EU Member States, has doubled its **assistance** to the region to 750 M€ for

the years 2007–2013 under the Development Cooperation Instrument

(DCI). This assistance is complemented by resources under thematic programmes and represents one of the leading assistance programmes in the region.

Planning the further implementation of the EU Strategy in Central Asia

Implementation of the Central Asia Strategy is well under way and it is crucial that the current pace of implementation be maintained. Additional efforts will be needed notably to boost the visibility of EU cooperation activities with the countries of Central Asia and the various initiatives launched in the context of the Central Asia Strategy.

The EU is aiming at making further substantial progress in all priority areas of the Strategy. Greater effort will be made to promote human rights and democratisation and to ensure active involvement of civil society, parliaments, local authorities and other relevant actors in the promotion of relations between the EU and Central Asian countries.

High level political dialogue will be maintained, including through regular meetings at the level of Foreign Ministers (next meeting will be held 29-30 May in Dushanbe, Tajikistan).

In the field of education, the Central Asia Research and Education Network (CAREN) will advance further. In addition, a regular political dialogue should be maintained, supported by a broad exchange between European and Central Asian educational institutions.

In the field of Rule of Law, solid cooperation has been established and implementation of cooperation projects will help addressing key areas of reforms relating to legislation and the judicial system.

Cooperation in the field of environment and water has already strengthened with the EU-CA high level meeting in Ashgabat in December 2008 which initiated EU-Central Asia enhanced regional cooperation on Environment and Water. The EU will further support a dynamic process with the aim of contributing to promote an equitable regional resource management system that takes due account of the interests of all five Central Asian countries. The EU aims at promoting responsible, efficient and economical usage of water and energy resources.

In the field of common challenges, the EU will continue playing an active role in stakeholder coordination and contribute to reaching tangible results on reducing drug trafficking and enhancing border management in Central Asia.

Finally, the EU will further develop the dialogue that has been initiated with other actors and organisations active in the region, with an aim to boost international cooperation on issues related to Central Asia, especially in the fields of border management and water management, as well as the fight against drug trafficking and cross-border crime.