The European Union’s emerging relations with Central Asia

A test case for European Union foreign policy

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Central Asia has long been outside of the European Union’s (EU) main sphere of interest, tucked away in the outskirts of Europe’s eastern periphery. This lack of interest was reflected in the relatively low level of EU engagement with 1990s post-Soviet Central Asia. Moreover, European aid provided to the five Central Asian states has been considerably lower than the means given by the EU to the other countries of the former Soviet bloc. In 2001 the Union even intended to cut down its assistance to Central Asia. Then the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 took place and the USA launched a large-scale military operation in neighbouring Afghanistan. As these events suddenly put the region in the spotlight and revealed its geostrategic importance, they provided an initial trigger for increased European interest in this peripheral zone.

This chapter explores the EU’s emerging relations with post-Soviet Central Asia, tracing the Union’s involvement with, and interests in, the five Central Asian states from their independence in 1991 until today. The chapter will demonstrate how the EU’s engagement with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan gradually rose to a new level in the last decade, culminating in the launch of an EU Strategy for Central Asia. At the same time, the chapter will argue that Europe’s increased involvement in Central Asia emerges as a test case for EU foreign policy, as the Union faces a major external policy challenge in the region to balance its strategic interests and its values-based foreign policy principles.

Early post-Soviet Central Asia: a non-priority for the EU

Following the demise of the USSR in 1991, the EU conducted a conceptual re-division of the former Soviet bloc. In practice, this implied that the EU formulated two distinct policy agendas for two very different regions. On the one hand, the Union extended the already existing assistance programmes ‘Poland and Hungary Assistance for Restructuring their Economies’ (PHARE) to those countries in Central and Eastern Europe that would join the EU in the medium-to-long term, notably Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. These states were not only geographically closer to the EU, but they were also more dependent on the EU in comparison with the other countries of the
former Soviet bloc. Moreover, the former were more inclined to comply with the conditions imposed by the EU. On the other hand, the Union created a new assistance programme for the remaining group of former Soviet states: ‘Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States’ (TACIS).\footnote{1} Both PHARE and TACIS provided technical and financial assistance to support these countries’ transition towards market economies and democracies. However, the PHARE beneficiaries received more than double the amount spent on the TACIS programme.\footnote{2} This clearly indicates that Central and Eastern Europe was much more important for the EU’s 1990s foreign policy than the other countries of the former Soviet bloc (Hughes 2007: 76–96). In addition, the EU also made a categorization within the group of TACIS beneficiaries, with Russia and Ukraine being prioritized over the others and receiving around 50% of the total TACIS budget.

As a next step in its conceptual re-division of the former Soviet bloc, the EU institutionalized the policy-oriented disconnection of Central and Eastern Europe from Russia and the other post-Soviet states. The EU concluded ‘Europe Agreements’ with the Central and Eastern European candidate member states and ‘Partnership and Cooperation Agreements’ (PCAs) with the TACIS countries. While the Europe Agreements were aimed at ‘integrating’ the partner countries into the EU, the PCAs served mostly just to strengthen the EU’s bilateral ties with the TACIS countries and to develop broad ‘co-operation’. Although this co-operation was primarily economically oriented, the PCAs also provided the basis for an institutionalized political dialogue with each of the PCA partners (Petrov 2002: 175–94).\footnote{3} The EU concluded PCAs with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in 1995, and with Uzbekistan in 1996.\footnote{4} The Union signed a PCA with Turkmenistan in 1998, but the agreement is still under ratification by the EU member states.\footnote{5} Tajikistan was the last Central Asian state to sign a PCA with the EU, notably in 2004. This delay was largely due to the civil war, which held the country hostage from 1992 to 1997.\footnote{6}

Through its conceptual re-division of the former Soviet bloc in the 1990s, the Union placed Russia and the other former Soviet states—except for the three Baltic states—in the category of ‘outsiders’. These were the states that were to constitute the EU’s eastern periphery, with which contractual relations would not go beyond the level of ‘partnership’. Central Asia was situated at the most outward point of this periphery, a distance that was reflected in the Union’s limited attention to the region. The EU considered Central Asia not only the most backward region in the former USSR, but also the least inclined to adopt European norms and values (Kassenova 2007).

**Generous but inefficient**

The EU may well have provided limited assistance to the Central Asian states in comparison with its aid to other countries of the former Soviet bloc; nevertheless, the Union has become the largest donor in Central Asia (Djalili and Kellner 2008).\footnote{7} At the same time, however, the EU’s engagement with the region has been low in terms of effectiveness and visibility. While other donors in Central Asia, such as the USA and the United Nations (UN), have also been criticized for the limited impact of their aid programmes, they did not suffer from the same lack of visibility as the EU did.

As early as 1994 the European Commission opened a delegation office in Almaty, the former capital of Kazakhstan. This delegation was charged with implementing part of the EU’s technical and financial assistance in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.\footnote{8} Later on the Commission opened regionalized offices in Bishkek and Dushanbe, which were each governed by a chargé d’affaires, but which remained largely subject to the delegation in Kazakhstan. Since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2009, the Commission delegation in Kazakhstan,
as well as the regionalized offices in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have operated as ‘EU Delegations’, each headed by an EU ambassador. Moreover, alongside a ‘Europa House’ in Tashkent, the Commission has opened a second one in Ashgabat. As liaison offices, these two ‘Europa Houses’ serve to co-ordinate the EU’s assistance programmes in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, but have no formal authority.

EU aid granted to Central Asia under TACIS was aimed mostly at economic development, poverty reduction and capacity building of government services. In addition, TACIS was used to finance a series of large-scale transnational projects in the fields of energy, transport, anti-drugs-trafficking and border management.9 In 2007 TACIS was scheduled to be replaced by the ‘Development Co-operation Instrument’ (DCI), the Commission’s new development aid instrument. However, due to several delays in the implementation of a number of projects, TACIS remained operative after 2007 until all the projects were completed. Meanwhile, the DCI gradually took over from TACIS as the main EU co-operation tool in the region. The DCI is now the EU’s principal development instrument for development projects in partner countries, excluding Russia and the countries that fall under the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). These countries are supported through the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). Nevertheless, the Commission calls upon the ENPI to finance a number of transboundary projects in Central Asia, which go beyond the borders of the region, usually involving the South Caucasus or Black Sea region. In addition, the Commission has been using a range of other instruments to assist the countries in Central Asia. Local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), for instance, are sponsored through the ‘European Instrument on Democracy and Human Rights’. Humanitarian aid is provided through the ‘European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office’, and food security through the ‘Food Security Programme’. Moreover, the five Central Asian countries have preferential access to the EU’s market under its Generalized System of Preferences.

With financial assistance since 1991 totalling around €1,370m., the EU is the largest donor in the region, closely followed by Japan and the USA. However, this cumulative amount conceals the paradox that, despite being the most generous donor in the region, the Union has been a rather invisible development actor in Central Asia, especially in comparison with the USA and the UN, as well as Asian and Islamic development agencies. Moreover, many of the EU’s assistance programmes in the region have suffered from a lack of effectiveness.10 Until recently, one of the main problems with the Union’s assistance was the heavy reliance on a regional approach, which did not sufficiently take into account the substantial differences between the five Central Asian states. The Commission has acknowledged this and other shortcomings and therefore revised its assistance approach for Central Asia. However, in referring to the realization of this revision, Brussels-based officials highlight another problem, notably the fact that the complex institutional set-up of the Union complicates a speedy transformation of the approach.11

From an invisible donor to a strategic player

In the diplomatic sphere, the EU has been even more invisible. Between 1991 and 2004 EU diplomatic activity in the region was limited to the visits of only a handful of European officials. This goes to show that, until September 2001, Central Asia hardly appeared on the radar of the EU and its member states. While the launch of the military operation in neighbouring Afghanistan in October 2001 drew some member states’ attention to the region, it nevertheless took until 2004 before the EU as a whole woke up to the fact that relations with Central Asia needed to be intensified and that the Union had to become a more visible actor in this geostrategically significant region.
The terrorist attacks on the USA of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent launch of the military campaign against the Taliban in Afghanistan revealed the geostrategic importance of Central Asia. It did not take long before the Commission made more funds available for the region and launched inter alia ‘Border Management in Central Asia’ (BOMCA). Moreover, in support of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) operations in Afghanistan, Germany and France opened military bases in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, respectively. However, it was not until its 2004 eastern enlargement that the Union as a whole started discussing the need for increased involvement in Central Asia. As the 2004 enlargement brought the Central Asian states geographically closer to the Union, the first call for intensified ties with the region should be placed against the background of the EU’s overall concern with bringing stability and prosperity to its borderland states (Kassenova 2007, 2008). As is clarified in the European Security Strategy of 2003, the latter is necessary if the Union is to safeguard its own security (Solana 2003). Nevertheless, the Central Asian republics—unlike the South Caucasian states—did not move quite close enough to the Union to be included in the EU’s ENP. Instead, the five countries are now being referred to as ‘neighbours of the EU’s neighbours’. A second—and ensuing—impetus for increased engagement with Central Asia was triggered by the Tulip revolution in Kyrgyzstan in March 2005 and the Andijan massacre in Uzbekistan in May 2005. Both events crushed European hopes of successful colourful revolutions taking place in Central Asia following such events in Ukraine and Georgia. The interethnic tensions in Kyrgyzstan in June 2010, arising in the wake of the overthrow of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev earlier in the year, only exacerbated the EU’s belief that stability in the region was frail and that genuine democracy and good governance will not emerge in Central Asia without increased external involvement. The need to become more active in the region gained further urgency because of the growing risk that the precarious situation in Afghanistan—where NATO was still struggling to contribute to peace and security—could destabilize its Central Asian neighbours. A third and final incentive for stronger ties with Central Asia emerged due to the gas conflict between Russia and Ukraine in early 2006, which revealed the need for the EU to scale back its energy dependency on Russia. The EU’s search for alternative oil and gas suppliers quickly led it to Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, which both appeared to be adequate partners for the EU’s goal of diversifying its energy resources.

With those three incentives demonstrating Central Asia’s geostrategic importance for the EU, the last few years have seen a serious effort by the Union to scale up its co-operation with the Central Asian republics and to become a more visible actor in the region. A first step in this regard was made in 2005 with the appointment of an EU Special Representative (EUSR) for Central Asia. His task is to co-ordinate the EU’s activities in the region as well as to further develop an EU policy for Central Asia in close co-operation with the Council. Moreover, in representing the EU in the region, his function is to strengthen the Union’s diplomatic ties with the Central Asian states (Quigley 2007). A second move followed in March 2007 with the establishment of the ‘EU Troika—Central Asia’, an annual meeting at foreign ministerial level between the EU and the five Central Asian republics. Finally, the EU’s desire to attain a greater presence and visibility in Central Asia culminated in the launch of a comprehensive strategy towards the region in June 2007, which the Union hoped would lead to a strategic partnership (Council of the European Union 2007). The strategy provides a framework for enhanced co-operation, building inter alia on the existing PCAs and outlining joint goals to foster closer relations in the political, economic and trade, as well as cultural and educational, spheres. The document presents both a bilateral and a regional dimension of co-operation. The regional pillar aims specifically at co-operation on transnational issues, including anti-drugs-trafficking, water management, energy and transport. The bilateral dimension, in turn, allows
for a more ‘tailor-made’ co-operation with the five republics, which specifically considers the countries’ individual needs. In order to implement the strategy, the Commission more than doubled its budget for the region, and plans to have a fully accredited delegation in each of the five countries. Additional funding comes from a number of EU member states, which have committed themselves to launching new projects under the framework of the strategy. France and Germany, for instance, are the lead co-ordinators in developing the ‘EU Rule of Law Initiative for Central Asia’, which aims at supporting reforms and sharing experiences between the EU and the Central Asian Republics in the area of legal and judicial reforms. Progress of the implementation of the strategy is discussed annually with the Central Asian foreign ministers at the EU Troïka—Central Asia. At a lower political level, the EU has established bilateral human rights dialogues with the five Central Asian republics. Yet, it is debatable how constructive a human rights dialogue with such autocratic regimes as Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan is in practice (see for instance Hall 2008: 69–73). In addition, the EU has set up a series of other formal as well as informal dialogues and meetings, including the ministerial EU-Central Asia Forum on security issues, the EU-Central Asia Environmental Dialogue, dialogue with regional organizations, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and education policy dialogues (Council of the European Union and European Commission 2008, 2010).

Uneasy balancing between interests and values

Despite the EU’s recent evolution in Central Asia from a generous but inefficient donor to a more fully-fledged and visible international actor, the Union is facing some serious challenges in implementing its Central Asia strategy. Part of the problem is the fact that the strategy comes rather late (Boonstra 2008: 72). Indeed, today’s Central Asia is very different from its 1990s environment, when Western engagement in this outer end of the former Soviet space faced limited domestic opposition as well as little competition from other external actors (Melvin 2008a: 5–6). Today, however, the Central Asian republics have experienced nearly two decades of independence, and are attracting substantial interest from a range of powerful international actors, including Russia, the People’s Republic of China, India and Iran (ibid.: 5–6). While the authoritarian regimes of Central Asia excel in paying lip service to the EU’s promotion of democracy, human rights and good governance—which are one of the seven pillars of the EU’s strategy—the Central Asian governments are signing lucrative deals with neighbouring Russia and China. As we will see below, this ‘competition’ with Russia and China, among other states, complicates the EU’s policy towards the Central Asian states, in particular the Union’s normative agenda.

Several observers have asserted that the growing external interest in Central Asia is reminiscent of the 19th-century ‘Great Game’ between the United Kingdom and Russia (see e.g. Djalili and Kellner 2006; Hatipoglu 2006; Kaushik 2007; Kavalski 2007a; Menon 2003; Swanström 2005). So far, however, the EU has distanced itself from the ‘New Great Game’ by publicly stating that it does not seek to be a ‘competitor’ alongside the likes of China, Russia, the USA, India and Iran. Instead, the EU says it wants to co-operate with the Central Asian states in a spirit of partnership and in a manner marked by transparency.15 As such, the EU (see e.g. Erler 2007) presents itself as a different kind of actor, notably a ‘civilian actor’, or at least a less aggressive actor. According to some scholars, it is precisely the pursuit of a ‘civilian’ approach towards its emerging relations with Central Asia that holds the key to the EU’s ability to make a positive contribution towards a more prosperous and stable Central Asia, especially since it is the values component that differentiates the Union’s engagement with the region from the involvement and assistance offered by Russia and China (Boonstra 2008; Cooley 2008; Efegil 2007).
Conversely, others argue that an emphasis on such areas of co-operation as democratization and good governance is not opportune in a region where local regimes are signing expedient commercial and other deals with Russia and China, which do not require them to make commitments to such ‘sensitive’ issues as democratization and human rights (Dreyer 2009; Denison 2008). Dreyer suggests that the EU should focus only on building direct energy links with the region and stepping up commercial ties to support Central Asia’s economic diversification, since these are the areas of co-operation in which the EU is most certain to achieve desirable results. This is not only because of Central Asia’s energy and commercial potential, but also because of the fact that the Union has much more leverage in external trade than in its other foreign policy areas, where competence is shared between the Community and the member states. Although the EU is Central Asia’s largest trading partner, ahead of Russia and China, trade relations are still thin and underexploited (Djalili and Kellner 2008; Dreyer 2009). Kazakhstan, for instance, which is the Union’s first trading partner in the region and the gross domestic product (GDP) of which accounts for two-thirds of Central Asia’s total GDP, takes up

Map 28.1 Map of Central Asia
only 0.7% of the EU’s total trade (Dreyer 2009; Melvin 2009: 376). In addition, the Union could help the Central Asian states diversify their economies. So far, EU trade with the region has been based mostly on the import of mineral resources, with hydrocarbons taking up more than 80% of the EU’s imports from Kazakhstan and 90% of its imports from Turkmenistan. (Dreyer 2009).

Brussels has set particular hopes on Central Asia to find alternative energy routes and thus reduce its energy dependency on Russia. Despite Russia’s relentless efforts to safeguard Gazprom’s domination of the energy sector in Central Asia, the EU has already signed a gas deal with Turkmenistan, as well as ‘Memorandums of Understanding on Energy’ with Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Nevertheless, it is still uncertain whether the energy diversification construction plans will actually be executed. Particularly uncertain is the fate of Nabucco, the planned long-distance gas pipeline that would transport gas from Central Asia across the southern Caucasus and Turkey to the Balkans and from there to Italy and other EU member states. With construction costs calculated at €4,000m.–€7,000m., the project has difficulties attracting investors, even more so since the pipeline could be environmentally hazardous (Van der Leeuw 2009).

Beyond the fact that the EU will have to overcome considerable obstacles in realizing its plan of energy diversification, the question remains as to how the EU will balance its new strategic interests and its values-based agenda of democratization and human rights promotion in a region that is considered to be one of the most authoritarian in the world.17 The difficulty in managing this balance is clearly manifested in the Union’s post-Andijan approach towards Uzbekistan. In 2005, following the regime’s brutal response to the Andijan uprising, the EU decided to impose sanctions on the Uzbekistan regime, sending out a strong signal of disapproval of the Government’s involvement in the bloodshed as well as the regime’s ensuing crackdown on civil society.18 However, from the start Germany lobbied extensively against the sanctions regime and gradually managed to rally other member states into voting in favour of a partial lifting and suspension of the punitive measures at the Union’s half-yearly sanctions reviews (Cooley 2008: 1179), up to the point where the member states agreed to lift them altogether in October 2009. Having softened its stance on Uzbekistan undermines the EU’s role as a norm-exporter and agent of political reform, especially since the Uzbekistan Government had met only few of the conditions formulated by the EU for lifting the sanctions and had shown hardly any signs of reducing its repressive rule. Germany has defended its rejection of the sanctions by arguing that co-operative engagement and constructive dialogue with Uzbekistan ‘is a far more fruitful strategy for promoting reforms than publicly lecturing Tashkent about human rights’ (Cooley 2008: 1180). Since German officials played an important part in drafting the EU Strategy for Central Asia, which was launched during the German Presidency of the Council of the EU in the first half of 2007, it is no coincidence that the strategy as a whole reflects a firm belief in the positive effects of long-term co-operative engagement with the Central Asian states.19 Germany—and other EU member states for that matter—may well have a genuine faith in such an approach; nevertheless, there rests huge controversy in the fact that Germany is the only external actor to still have a military base in Uzbekistan. Having learnt its lessons from the forced closure of the US military base in the wake of the Andijan incident, and fully conscious of the importance of the German base for the ongoing NATO military campaign in Afghanistan, the German Government has been consistently reluctant to express criticism on the Uzbekistan Government out of fear of losing its Uzbekistan military base (see e.g. Cooley 2008: 1180).

The Union’s quest for energy diversification only further complicates the EU’s balancing act between its interests and values in a region where it is competing for energy deals with other—less democracy-oriented—external actors. This ‘soft power dilemma’ (Atac 2008) appears to be
the starkest in the case of Turkmenistan, where the Union’s new energy interests risk overshadowing its commitment to the promotion of democracy and human rights (Melvin 2008b: 146). As Atac (2008) highlights, ‘soft power capability requires that many prescriptions of bitter medicine for socio-political and economic transformation be given, most of which may disturb the [Central Asian] governments and put the energy interests of the EU at risk’. Moreover, the Union’s difficulty in exerting soft power and promoting norms in this ‘challenging’ part of the former USSR can be further explained by the fact that the EU’s most effective mechanisms for encouraging institutional changes and conditional reforms are not available for its engagement with Central Asia (Cooley 2008; Kavalski 2007a: 844; Kavalski 2007b; Schimmelfennig 2007; Warkotsch 2006; Youngs 2008). As Cooley explains:

[d]espite an ambitious set of initiatives, the EU’s instruments of engagement are limited compared to those that it can wield over accession countries or even countries that can be engaged through the ENP. Without a credible and clearly articulated set of incentives to comply with the values side of the EU strategy, there is little desire within the Central Asian states to engage with Brussels seriously over issues of democratic governance and human rights.

(Conference 2008: 1182)

Conclusions: Central Asia as a test case for EU foreign policy

This chapter outlined the EU’s relations with the five Central Asian states, tracing the Union’s involvement and interests in the region from 1991 until today. It showed how the EU’s engagement with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan gradually rose to a new level in the last decade, during which the Union evolved from an invisible and inefficient donor to a more fully-fledged and strategic actor. With increased interest in Central Asia triggered mainly by a need to develop co-operation more commensurately with the region’s geostrategic and geo-economic importance, the EU’s eagerness to step up its relations with the Central Asian republics culminated in the launch of an EU Strategy for Central Asia. However, despite an ambitious set of policy initiatives in the region, the Union is facing a number of substantial challenges in implementing the Strategy. Although the EU Strategy has been welcomed by the Central Asian states as they look for alternatives to Russia’s economic and security dominance, its implementation represents ‘one of the severest tests for the EU’s approach to external relations based, as it is, on sets of complex, multilevel and multidimensional engagements built around an intermeshing of interests and values’ (Melvin 2008a: 5–6). Indeed, in a region which is not only the battleground of a new ‘Great Game’, but which is also considered as one of the most authoritarian in the world, it will be very difficult for the EU to reunite ‘hard’ goals, such as energy diversification and military base deployment, with values-based ‘soft’ goals, such as democratization and human rights promotion. This balancing exercise, or ‘soft power dilemma’, is further complicated by the fact that the EU’s most effective tools for encouraging institutional changes and conditional reforms—notably the prospect of accession or partial integration into the EU—are not available for its engagement with Central Asia. Without significant and clearly formulated incentives to comply with the values side of the Strategy, the Central Asian regimes are not very likely to commit seriously to EU demands for democratization and respect for human rights.

In sum, Central Asia constitutes a genuine test case for the EU’s ability to promote its role as a norm-exporter and agent of political reform beyond its immediate neighbourhood, and maintain and advance its international position ‘in the face of new and rising powers [such as
China and Russia] with very different views of issues of democracy and human rights and far more realist conceptions of foreign policy’ (Melvin 2008a: 5–6). There is no clear-cut answer to the question of how the EU will manage to balance its interests and values in its emerging relations with the five Central Asian states. The answer will not only depend on the EU’s ability to speak and act with one voice towards Central Asia and the Union’s regional competitors, but it will also be dependent on the dynamics of this fast-changing corner of the former USSR. If, for example, Kazakhstan effectively consolidates its pro-European discourse during its chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in 2010, and hence does not refrain from making decisions independently of Russia, then this will undoubtedly provide a welcome reinforcement of the EU’s Strategy for Central Asia, and affect the Union’s uneasy balancing act for the better.

Notes

1 The TACIS beneficiaries are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

2 In the period 1990–99 the EU spent around €10,200m. on PHARE and €4,200m. on TACIS (Hughes 2007).

3 The PCAs provide for three political dialogue structures: the ‘Cooperation Council’, which convenes once a year at ministerial level; the ‘Cooperation Committee’, which supports the Cooperation Council in implementing its agenda; and the ‘Parliamentary Cooperation Committee’, which is held between members of the European Parliament and members of the national Parliament of the partner country.

4 These three PCAs entered into force in July 1999 for an initial 10-year period and are automatically renewable from year to year thereafter. The Parties are currently in the process of reviewing the three respective agreements in view of making them more up to date with the present level of co-operation. Protocols covering additional areas of cooperation are likely to be added to the PCAs.

5 Note that an interim agreement covering the trade aspects of the co-operation long remained frozen due to EU concerns with the human rights situation in Turkmenistan. Despite only minor improvements in this regard over the last few years, the Council ratified the Interim Trade Agreement on 27 July 2009. Pending the entry into force of the interim agreement, the EU’s contractual co-operation with Turkmenistan remains based on the Trade and Cooperation Agreement concluded with the former USSR in 1989.

6 The PCA with Tajikistan entered into force on 1 January 2010 for an initial 10-year period and is automatically renewable on an annual basis thereafter.

7 Since the early 1990s Central Asia has received EU assistance of up to €1,370m., an amount that not only covers the aid provided under TACIS, but which also includes funds granted through EU humanitarian and other European aid programmes (Djalili and Kellner 2008).

8 Meanwhile, the Commission moved the head office of the Delegation to Astana, Kazakhstan’s new capital, with the remaining desks in Almaty functioning as a regional office.

9 These are ‘Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe’ (INOGATE), ‘Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia’ (TRACECA), ‘Central Asia Drug Action Programme’ (CADAP) and ‘Border Management in Central Asia’ (BOMCA), respectively.

10 For a critical overview of the EU’s assistance programmes in Central Asia, see International Crisis Group 2006.

11 Author’s interview at EuropeAid, European Commission, Brussels, February 2008.

12 The Tulip revolution, which led to the ousting of President Askar Akayev, did not bring the anticipated and hoped-for reforms and improvements to Kyrgyzstan; instead, the country was confronted with ongoing political upheaval, while the new—albeit democratically elected—President followed a course that looked increasingly similar to that of his predecessor. In turn, the Andijan massacre in Uzbekistan, which saw hundreds of peaceful protesters killed by government troops, painfully revealed how far President Islam Karimov is ready to go in consolidating his autocratic rule over the country.

13 The Slovakian Jan Kubic was the first to be appointed EUSR for Central Asia. He was succeeded by former French ambassador Pierre Morel in 2006. For more information on the position of EUSR, see Bossuyt, Orbie and Vos 2008: 108–9.
This new institutional setting is quite unique, as it is the only international forum where all five Central Asian states are formally reunited at such a high level. It should be noted that with the Lisbon Treaty having entered into force, the EU troika meetings with third countries/regions are now called Ministernal meetings.

Several scholars refute the Union’s anti-competitive discourse and assert that the EU is just as much involved in the ‘New Great Game’ as other ‘regional players with global aspirations’, such as India and China (see e.g. Kavalski 2007a: 855).

For more background information on the EU’s energy diversification attempts in Central Asia, see e.g. Feklyunina 2008.

Note that Central Asia is not the only region in which the EU is confronted with such a dilemma. For an excellent theoretical and empirical overview of the Union’s struggle with balancing its interests and values in its relations towards third countries, see Schimmelfennig 2007.

The sanctions consisted of an arms embargo, a European visa ban for 12 Uzbekistan officials suspected of involvement in the massacre, and a temporary freeze of bilateral co-operation under the PCA. For more details on the sanctions, see e.g. Hall (2008: 80).

Author’s interview at the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Berlin, October 2007.