

WHY THE EU'S NEW STRATEGY FOR CENTRAL ASIA IS NEEDED

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The implementation of the document “The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership” will be completed next year. Notwithstanding the fact that this year the European Union countries are confronted with the important task to overcome the current situation in the eurozone, to recover trust in the markets, and to avoid any new crises in the future, it is necessary to begin preparing a new systematic document of the EU.

The work ahead appears to be intensive. Since Strategy 2007 was launched in 2007, not only Europe, but also the entire region of Central Asia (CA) has changed becoming the venue for such large-scale international events as the Summit of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2010 and the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in 2011.

The European Union has made important steps in promoting cooperation with Central Asian countries. In October 2009, the EU lifted sanctions on Uzbekistan; in January 2011, the Agreement on the Establishment of a Diplomatic Representative Office in Tashkent was signed; in February 2012, a Project on Assistance to Reforming the Judicial and Legal System in Uzbekistan was launched¹. In February of the current year, the EU expressed its readiness to support the Kyrgyz Republic at a new political stage², and informed about possible projects with Turkmenistan, including those intended to contribute to the economic strategy in terms of strategic planning, private sector development, and technical regulations³.

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¹ The EU launched the Project on Assistance to Reforming the Judicial and Legal System in Uzbekistan. <http://news.olan.uz/politics/7774.html>

² Chairman of Jogorku Kenes A. Zheenbekov had a meeting with the European Parliament delegation. http://www.kenesh.kg/RU/Articles/4208-Toraga_ZHogorku_Kenesha_AZHeenbekov_vstretilsya_s_delegaciej_Evropejskogo_parlamenta_.aspxa.

³ Turkmenistan explores the EU joint projects. <http://www.trend.az/capital/business/1982936.html>

Over the past period, the Republic of Kazakhstan, one of the Central Asian countries, successfully completed the State Programme “Path to Europe” in 2011⁴, which has no any analogues in modern Eurasian history. As is known, the programme was based on the topical, for the Baltic region, issues of transit, transportation, and logistics⁵. Besides, Kazakhstan commenced negotiations on the preparation of a new RK-EU Extended Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in October last year.

It is worth mentioning the participation of a number of Central Asian countries in integration processes in the CIS space (Kazakhstan, along with Russia and Belarus, takes part in forming a Common Economic Space; the Kyrgyz Republic intends to join the Customs Union in late 2012).

Developing a new concept document of the EU, of special interest could be the proposals voiced by Central Asian countries during the meeting of the Troika EU–Central Asia at Ministers’ of Foreign Affairs level held on 28 March 2007 in Astana.

It is important to note the Kazakhstan initiatives in the area of regional integration, economic growth, democratisation, energy and security, which in June 2006 were passed to Germany chairing the EU in the first half of 2007.

The experience in preparing the preceding EU Strategy for Central Asia 2002-2006 is also useful. Thus, one could be interested in the agreements reached during the official visit of President Nursultan Nazarbayev to the European Commission (EC), which took place on 27 June 2000, concerning the development of the RK-EU common cooperation doctrine (subsequently, Prime Minister of the RK K. Tokayev and President of the EC R. Prodi exchanged views on the document concept).

As stated above, the doctrine could determine the main modes of cooperation and reflect the possibility to use Kazakhstan as a catalyst of regional interaction to ensure security in Central Asia, the development of economic cooperation and transit potential of the region, fight against organised crime, terrorism and drug trafficking, and environmental protection and water resources management. The shift of the RK-EU relationship to a new level has had a special importance within the common European foreign and defence policy,

⁴ http://www.eucentralasia.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF/other_related_publications/path_to_Europe.pdf

⁵ <http://ru.delfi.lt/abroad/global/obse-kazahstan-zajmetsya-bezopasnostyu-i-ekonomikoj.d?id=28653975>

which has already served as a platform for the implementation of the cooperation strategy of the EU with Russia and Ukraine.

Two main issues Kazakhstan intends to include in the doctrine are the following: access of Kazakhstan's goods and services to the European market (increase in quotas for export of steel products, country accession to the list of the caviar and fish product suppliers, supplies of textile and products of animal origin made in Kazakhstan) and joining the WTO.

Taking into account the efforts on forming the common foreign and defence policy taken at the November session of the meeting of EU foreign and defence ministers, Astana offered Brussels to participate as an observer in the initiative to convene the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA). Besides, counteraction against new challenges and threats to security (terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking, international crimes, and environmental issues) was considered a current concern not only for Asia, but also for the entire world community.

The interaction between Kazakhstan and the EU on providing security and assistance to the development of regional cooperation between Central Asian states within the 'Shanghai Five' (at present, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, i.e. the SCO) was viewed as a beneficial prospect.

The experts expressed solidarity with the goals of the European Economic Community (in which Kazakhstan is an active participant) and the European Union, viz., to create a common market of goods, services, labour and assets, which will form a new groundwork for mutually beneficial economic cooperation in a multilateral format.

The Kazakh side was interested in trade associations, which are to be established in Central Asia and which are similar to European economic companies underlying the EU, e.g., the European Coal and Steel Community, and Euratom, to mention but a few.

The participation of Kazakhstan in the initiative of the Eurasian Partnership within the ASEM Summit formed under the EU and the ASEAN appeared to be particularly important.

Most of these proposals were more or less voiced in further Kazakhstan initiatives.

To be objective, it should be noted that at that time, the EU was not able to 'digest' the ideas put forward by Kazakhstan.

On the one hand, as the outcomes of the first Annual Spring Meeting of the EU on 23-24 March 2001 showed, Brussels was concerned about the solution of other problems, especially the internal ones. These included ageing of population, employment creation, acceleration of economic reforms, and social model modernisation. The foreign policy agenda was devoted to developing relations with Russia, which was confirmed by the participation of President Vladimir Putin in the summit, as well as to the situation in the Balkans (Macedonia). The main issues of the EU summit in Gothenburg, Sweden (14-15 June 2001), captured the future of Europe, climate protection in the world and further development, disarmament and the problems of Macedonia and the Middle East. We had to determine the timeframe for widening the EU (in 2002, the completion of the negotiations on accession; in 2004, the participation of the candidate countries in the European elections). Another topical issue was Greece joining the Economic and Monetary Union on 1 January 2001, which at that time had a government debt at the rate of 103.9 per cent of GDP.

On the other hand, the Europeans were burdened with addressing important problems, including trade and economic interaction with Central Asian countries. For example, during the third session of the EU-Kazakhstan Cooperation Council held in Brussels on 17 July 2001, the participants discussed a range of complicated issues related to the prospects for cooperation within the Agreement on Trade in Steel Products, the adoption of the guideline of the European Commission to accede Kazakhstan to the list of caviar and fish importing countries, the harmonisation of regulatory documents of the RK on the export of products to the EU as well as the supply of livestock products manufactured in Kazakhstan.

It should be noted that in the preparation of a new EU Concept for Central Asia, it is reasonable not only to carry out an objective analysis of the implementation of relevant activities within the existing Strategy, but also to compare them to the priorities of the State Programme “Path to Europe”. In particular, at the International Conference “Kazakhstan - Europe: Results and New Horizons for Cooperation” held in Astana on 24 November 2011, Head of the EU Delegation N. Justin emphasised that

there are substantial areas of common interest between the priorities established in the EU-Central Asia Strategy for a New Partnership adopted by the European Union in 2007

and those in the State Programme of Kazakhstan adopted in 2008. The action plan of the State Programme "Path to Europe" always helped the European side with defining the areas of concrete cooperation⁶.

Today, the programme of Kazakhstan is really the only instrument, which clearly states the vision of promising cooperation between the EU and Kazakhstan as one of the Central Asian countries.

Lastly, the success of developing a new conceptual document of the EU depends to a large extent on the mood of the authors, who should as far as possible leave aside the stereotypes formed in the European circles, the roots of which are notions, such as 'our', or 'strange', as mentioned in the works of many European⁷, Baltic⁸, and Russian⁹ experts. Moreover, as some European analysts note, the changes have already influenced the European identity¹⁰. This, in turn, will help our European partners not only to remove the recurring 'concern', but also to deeper understand the essence of the processes which occur today in one of the world's geopolitically important regions, known as Central Asia.

⁶ http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/kazakhstan/documents/press_corner/20111124_1_en

⁷ Iver B. Neumann. *Uses of the Other. "The East" in European Identity Formation*. University of Minnesota Press, 1998.

⁸ Inga G. Milevich. *language of mass media: reflection of nowadays myths and ideologies*. Daugavpils University. <http://filologija.vukhf.lt/4-9/doc/Mlevich.doc>

⁹ Boiko Y.P. *The image of 'a stranger' in the European policy. The modern Europe: Diplomatic Academy of the MFA of the Russian Federation*. M.: Vostok-Zapad, 2008.

¹⁰ Lucio Caracciolo. *Europa: quella identità condivisa che manca all'Unione*. *La Repubblica* 22/12/2011.