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**Relations between Kyrgyzstan and the EU
in the context of the European Strategy (2007-2013)**

In the foreign policy of Kyrgyzstan the European direction is viewed as one of high priority. Cooperation is realized on two levels – on the level of relations with European countries and on the level of mutual relations with institutes of the EU. Until 2007 all relations were based on bilateral Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) adopted in 1999. The Agreement missed definite mechanism to realize Kyrgyz-European cooperation. [PCAs] Unfortunately, all relations were about donorship but not partnership.

In 2007, the new EU strategy in regard to Central Asia was developed.

The Strategy has defined three main spheres of long-term partnership: security, stability and development. They meet common interests of the European Union and Central Asia. In the process of consultations with authorities of five countries of the region the Strategy has defined five directions of cooperation: human rights, rule of law, governance and democratization; investment in the youth and education; promotion of economic development, trade and investment; strengthening of energy and transport connections; environmental protection and water management; fighting with common threats and challenges. Understanding specific needs of every country in Central Asia and their justified concern about preserving their sovereignty, the EU has stipulated that three quarters of projects shall be devoted to bilateral cooperation. The rest of projects are devoted to cooperation and partnership on a regional level. They require collective actions, in particular, for fighting human trafficking and illegal trade, for promotion of transport and environmental protection [The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for New Partnership, 2007].

According to F. Steinmeier, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Germany, at the beginning of XXI century the EU and Central Asia have real opportunity for development of new and comprehensive cooperation. "We are glad that by joint European efforts we have developed new view point on Central Asia, - informed the German Foreign Minister when reporting to journalists. - And this view point has found understanding among countries of the region. Today at the meeting with Ministers of Foreign Affairs from Central Asia I told that traditions of our cooperation originate from centuries ago. We do not forget the Great Silk Road. However,

history of memories is inadequate factor to respond to challenges of global world. During the meeting in March 28, in Astana, we developed together concrete projects and programmes which became the basis for strengthening of cooperation between the EU and Central Asia. First of all, it is educational sphere where we could strengthen our coordination. Besides, we want to help countries of Central Asia in modernization of state and public structures as well as in increasing economic exchange with special accent on cooperation in the sphere of energy. We agreed to organize regular dialogue on this issue to discuss about improving infrastructure for energy supplies to Europe from Central Asia via Caspian and Black Seas. We would like to identify our political relations. And, we would like to continue this successful forum which has started in Astana and meet annually" [Steinmeier, 2007]. He made strong declaration that it was success both for the European Union and Central Asia. The European Union, according to him, has opened its new chapter in cooperation with the region. For the first time, the EU has voiced political criteria and clearly defined European interests and objectives in Central Asia by telling concrete spheres for intensive cooperation. Objective of the Strategy is extensive cooperation with focus on dialogue and transparency. He indicated that level of seriousness the EU devoted to the project proves one again the fact that the Germans are viewing the EU Strategy in Central Asia as a cornerstone in the foreign policy during presidency over the European Union Council with support of wider circle of other EU member countries. He noted that the EU will double the aid provided to the cooperation with Central Asia in the period of till 2013.

He indicated that the EU supports many centuries long connections established between Europe and Central Asia via its Strategy in Central Asia. But the talk is about something more than just history. In globalization era, he noted, we share numerous challenges as terrorism and extremism, organized crime and drugs trafficking, environmental threats and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Establishing peace in Afghanistan, according to him, cannot be achieved without peace in Central Asia and proper contribution in this process by countries of Central Asia and Europe. The EU is planning close cooperate with states in Central Asia in all spheres by supporting political and economic modernization of Central Asian countries. It will be made based in common values and principles which are shared by the EU and countries of the Central Asia in membership with the UN and OSCE.

For the twenty years of cooperation a group of problems has emerged which need immediate solution for supporting positive growth of dynamic of relations between Kyrgyzstan and the EU.

1. The highest priorities identified in the Strategy are human rights, rule of law and democratization. Indeed, they fully correspond to the common European values and EU plans to expand its "space of freedom, democracy and the rule of law" for the new regions. With each

state in the region the EU intends to establish a dialogue on human rights. In the framework of political dialogue regional meetings are conducted in the format of the EU Three and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the countries of Central Asia in Ashgabat and Berlin (continuation of the so-called "Bishkek process"), exchange of visits at high level, meeting of National Coordinators for implementation of the Strategy in Brussels.

2. Investing in the future via youth and education. The EU will support the development of regional training centers and will work closely with the OSCE Academy in Bishkek. The initiative "European education" includes efforts in basic, secondary, special and higher education, as well as creation of Centers of Excellence in Central Asia. But, in recent years, policy in this direction was about reforming the old system of education and introduction of mechanisms of the Bologna process. But this is a very complex process considering almost critical condition of education in Central Asia. In order to achieve effective and successful results in this area radical educational reforms and significant financial and donor support are needed.

3. Promotion of economic development, trade and investment. The EU supports the removal of trade barriers between Central Asia and promotes membership in the WTO for three Central Asian countries that are not yet WTO members. Up to date, the only member of the WTO in Central Asian are Kyrgyzstan (1998) and Tajikistan (2013). The EU will support creation of legislative and institutional frameworks for improved business and investment climate as well as support creation of economic diversity. The development of regional infrastructure in transport, energy and trade will help make better use of economic potential of Central Asia by improving regional cooperation. While the European Union offers the most favorable system for Central Asia, but the level of trade between regions is very low. Proposed by the EU system of the most favored nation for countries of Central Asia is unlikely to change the huge trade deficit between two regions for the better as least for our region. Saturation of the European market with goods of own production and protectionist policies of the EU on imports of agricultural products, which the Central Asian region is famous for, create serious barriers for trade between regions. Investment programme for Central Asia has begun in November of 2007 and negotiations about Kazakhstan's accession to the WTO are continuing.

4. Strengthening of connections in energy and transport. An important feature of the EU Strategy in Central Asia will be promotion of "Baku Initiative". "Baku Initiative" combines contents of the "Treaty-Charter on Energy" with standards and market liberalization programs to bring together on one platform al energy producers, transit systems and final users in order to ensure more rational use of energy and greater security in transition [Baku-initiative]. This is the most priority in the list of real interests of the European Union in cooperation with Central

Asia. It is creation of channels in the future for energy supplies from Central Asia, especially the Caspian basin to European markets in order to reduce energy dependence on Russia. However, these issues are too closely linked to the geopolitical processes. And this is a problem. This affects interests of other involved countries, particularly Russia. Therefore, it will probably not let in the near future, hope for establishing constructive energy dialogue between the EU and Central Asia.

INOGATE and TRACECA are main mechanisms of influence of the European Union in the field. Ideally, the use of raw materials potential of Central Asia on the basis of the complex dynamism of the TRACECA will give local economies and major energy importers to ensure stable supply of raw materials. It will promote integration of the region into global systems of transport and information communications. However, the main part of the project is still on preliminary stage of development.

5. Environmental sustainability and management of water resources. This includes proposals by the EU to cooperate with Central Asia for protection of the environment, forests, develop water policy among countries of the region and support creation of single energy system in Central Asian region. The most beneficial proposal is suggestion about integrated policy of water resources management. Provided mutually beneficial implementation of the proposal along with creation of common energy system will be achieved, it may solve several obstacles of effective integration of the region. However, very deep contradictions between countries of the region and lack of a unified approach make it impossible move successfully in this direction. Meanwhile, cooperation is realized within the framework of EU - Central Asia Dialogue on Environment and the Working Group of the EU - CA about water. At the same time, national dialogue on water policy was developed and conference on water management was held in Berlin [Wasserinitiative Zentralasien, 2008].

6. The fighting against common threats and challenges. This program supports fighting against extremism and drug trafficking, promotion of overall security in the region, developing of modern border management in Central Asia. The sixth sphere of priorities is the most important for Central Asia. Regulation of border disputes, joint struggle against extremism and drug trafficking provision of general security in the region are necessary for economic prosperity of Central Asian countries. Stable Central Asia is useful for the European Union. However, for effective involvement in the region the EU should establish links with regional security organizations as the SCO and the CSTO, with which the EU has no formal relations.

As part of this direction the first Security Forum EU – Central Asia was held in Paris [EU-Central Asia Security Forum, 2008] in continuation of the regional projects as BOMCA and CADAP.

7. Building bridges - dialogue of cultures. Variety of religions and secular traditions of peace and tolerance constitute valuable heritage of peoples of Central Asia. Building on this foundation, the EU will promote dialogue within civil society and respect for religious freedom.

The strategy was adopted in 2007. The first report about results of the Strategy was presented in June 2008. The report of the European Commission in June 24, 2008 refers to the work done for the year under the EU Strategy in Central Asia [The European Union and Central Asia: The New Partnership in action, 2009]. It argues that the first time in the history of relations between the EU and Central Asia, an ambitious framework for cooperation have combined strategic political objectives and working programs in the field. There was noted growth of interest from the Central Asian countries in cooperation with the EU at all levels and in almost all spheres. All Central Asian countries have expressed their consent to continue structured dialogue with the EU on human rights. The national coordinators of the Strategy were assigned by all countries of Central Asia to demonstrate an increased interest and willingness to cooperate.

The second report was submitted in June 2010. It has highlighted the progress made over the last years. It has accentuated the main attention on safety. Also, after this report, an emphasis was given to the problem of water in Central Asia, social issues and migration. The priorities of the Strategy remained the same as human rights, rule of law, economic development and coordination to allow effectively reaction to common threats [Council of the European Union, 2010].

In May 26, 2011 the European Parliament held its hearing on the EU strategy for Central Asia. In the process of discussions parliament has expressed its hope that the EU will be able to refine its approach so that it will allow Brussels to play more effective role in supporting regional stability and prosperity.

Perfection of normative legal base of cooperation. Considering high importance and value which are opened for Kyrgyzstan by cooperation with the EU it is important to upgrade its legal environment. In recent years it became obvious that legal collisions emerging from discrepancies in legislation between the EU and Kyrgyzstan hamper successful development of external trade between the EU member states and Kyrgyzstan. Optimization of trade and economic cooperation. Analyzing development of trade and economic cooperation of Kyrgyzstan with the EU member countries, it is important to consider a number of negative trends emerged up to date. Dynamic of export in 1994 was instable and continued with sharp declines. It has reflected reduction of republican export from 11,5% in 1994 down to 1,6 % in 2010 [European Commission, 2011].

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that export from Kyrgyzstan to the EU member countries has single sided and raw materials supply nature (97% of export is gold and only 3% is commodities). Growth of external trade with the EU countries is hampered by a number of both subjective and objective issues. They are remote and geographically inconvenient location of republic, customs, tariff and non-tariff limitations, low competitiveness of export products, absence of informational base for consultation of external trade operations.

At the same time, the current situation is not critical and requires certain revision of cooperation programme between Kyrgyzstan and the EU. It must be aimed at achieving optimal balance between import and export, more active attraction of FDI from the EU and development of science intensive industries in the republic, optimization of fiscal system and removal of existing customs and tariff constraints. These and other tasks cannot be solved at once, but it is necessary to solve them step by step as a stimulus for development and successful economic integration of Kyrgyzstan.

Building of civil society and human rights. Periodic tensions in the relations of official Bishkek and Brussels raise questions about problems in the sphere of building civil society and human rights in Kyrgyzstan. Similar situation is characterized for relations of the EU with majority of CIS and Central Asia countries. Kyrgyzstan was an exception until 2000 and received high score of leader in democratic reforms in Central Asia. However, after elections in 2010, Kyrgyzstan became again leader of democratic reforms. But events of 2005 and 2010 have undermined democratic image of the republic and led to revision of policy of the EU towards to Kyrgyzstan. Certain disappointment by results of transformation in society of Kyrgyzstan has brought critics by the EU about internal policy of authorities in the republic.

Cooperation in the sphere security. Analysis of existing documents and practical results in the sphere demonstrates that it is one of most dynamically developing fields in partnership between the EU and Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia. The EU countries make an active influence on integration of states of the region in global and regional security (UN, OSCE, NATO, etc.) via significant and grant aid for strengthening of national security of countries in the region.

Since 2010 Representation of the European Union headed by Ambassador Ms. Chantal Hebberecht has started its work in the Kyrgyz Republic [The Delegation of the EU in the KR, official site, 2010].

At present, relations between the European Union and the Kyrgyz Republic are mainly presented in the form of technical assistance to the Kyrgyz Republic, as well as assistance in establishment of adequate food supplies and humanitarian aid.

In the framework of the Strategy the following directions have higher priority for Kyrgyzstan as education and participation in the project BOMCA-CADAP.

BOMCA (Border Management in Central Asia) and CADAP (Central Asia Drug Action Programme) are the main European programs in this area who have been successfully implemented. With the support of the Programme BOMCA border control points were modernized. The Programme supports renewing of training centers for border guards and more efficient use of sniffer dogs to detect drugs.

In summer of 2009, current toxicology laboratories in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan were provided with specialized equipment for the determination of drugs in the framework of CADAP Programme for the amount of 52 thousand euros [Report, 2009].

In Kyrgyzstan, project "Development of institutional cooperation with the European Commission" is realized in the framework of activation of cooperation with the European Union. It is another step in diversification of relationship with the EU.

The concept includes extension of policy dialogue in education at all levels, increasing resources for exchange programs which could double the number of available scholarships for students and teachers of Central Asia. Concrete steps in this direction were made on the first meeting of partners in Central Asian held in Cairo in May 8, 2008. Representatives of the ministries of five countries discussed priority themes in higher education and development of education sector as a whole.

European support programs in the field of economic development, trade and investment are aimed at supporting successful reforms and improving investment climate in Central Asia. This is because it is basic element for attracting investment to the region.

In Kyrgyzstan, within the framework of one of directions of cooperation between the EU-Central Asia the project "Non-formal vocational training in rural areas of Kyrgyzstan" has started. This project is implemented by the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association together with the Kyrgyz Adult Education Association and 12 Adult Training Centers as well as local authorities and employers from number of regions of Kyrgyzstan.

The aim of the project is to increase employment opportunities and income-generating activities for unemployed low-income rural population by support of supply of courses and access to training to multi-professional skills in demand on the local labor market. As a result of the project, 12 mobile workshops for six occupations were established, not less than 540 unemployed adults from rural areas have acquired new skills for these jobs.

On 21-22 of February, 2012 an eighth meeting of the Committee on Parliamentary Cooperation European Union – the Kyrgyz Republic was held in Bishkek. It was organized after a long break as previous 7 meetings were held in Brussels in 2009. The European delegation was

headed by Paolo Bartolozzi. [Meeting of the Committee on Parliamentary Cooperation “European Union –Kyrgyzstan” in Jogorku Kenesh, 2012].

The main issues discussed at the meeting were trade and economic relations, cooperation in combating terrorism, organized crime and drug trafficking in Central Asia, process of democratization and constitutional reforms including political pluralism, role of the legislature and media freedom. The outcome resolution has emphasized the role of the EU strategy for Central Asia as a platform for closer bilateral and multilateral cooperation. It has underlined that strategy should help common efforts to develop effective and result-oriented approach towards such issues such as water and energy resources, trade and investment as well as the fighting against drug and human trafficking, religious extremism. It has indicated to the role of parliaments in achievement of these goals. In the final resolution, it has been stressed about necessity to increase cooperation for strengthening health system in the Kyrgyz Republic, environmental protection, in particular to address the problem of nuclear tailings on the territory of the Kyrgyz Republic which have transboundary character as well as support of reforming of law enforcement, judicial and penal systems.

In February 23, 2012 the European parliamentarians visited three sites funded by the European Union in the framework of Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA) and the Drug Action in Central Asia (CADAP). Kyrgyzstan has been provided 13 million euros under BOMCA / CADAP in 2012.

Also, as a result of that meeting, the EU will provide 20 million euros in support of education and it was about the allocation of 30 million euro to Kyrgyzstan [European Commission, 2011].

A special area in the development of relations between Kyrgyzstan and the EU occupies the joint implementation of cross-border regional projects of the EU in Central Asia. They are aimed at improving the integration potential of the region and joint resolution of the most urgent tasks of development.

The EU activities in Kyrgyzstan cover almost all spheres of life such as projects to work with young people, projects in the field of hydropower, projects to reduce unemployment, combat against terrorism, drug trafficking, promote health and reform the prison system. For Kyrgyzstan, it is important to receive the EU’s support in promoting tolerance, as this is a multi-ethnic republic with many religious beliefs. However, not all programs are working effectively due to corruption and high level of bureaucracy.

General coordination of cooperation with the EU including financial and donor flows. Separation of spheres of cooperation between Kyrgyzstan and the EU on different departments

without overall coordination can often lead to lower results and duplication. In this context, it is necessary to appoint special Kyrgyzstan representative or coordinator on European policy.

Conclusion

- It is necessary widening the political dialogue and recommend further development of representations and contacts. For example, in Bishkek only the German Embassy actively working, while other countries have embassies in other regional countries.
- The Bologna process is a framework concept for education reform in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. However, there are certain difficulties, problems, reluctance to accept. The strategy needs either to be continued or to change a new framework programme for education reform.
- The German role is getting more important. Germany develops not only bilateral, but also drives the multilateral relations at the EU level.
- Kyrgyzstan needs adopting a programme document, which would regulate its relations with the EU. For example, Kazakhstan has such document – “Path to Europe”. Kyrgyzstan lists the EU as a foreign policy priority, but this is it, nothing more.
- Kyrgyzstan continues perceiving Europe as a donor, but not partner. To change this, it is necessary to take more responsibility in bilateral projects.
- Thanks to the EU strategy, Kyrgyzstan is more active in regional projects. The regional integration is enhanced.

Kyrgyzstan shall develop cooperation on such direction as energy, education, environmental protection, water resource management and development of transport communications.

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