

PROSPERITY AND RESILIENCE AS THE NEW PANACEA? THE NEW CENTRAL ASIA STRATEGY IN VIEW OF THE SECURITY-DEVELOPMENT NEXUS

Karina Turan

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About the Author

Karina Turan holds a German-French Bachelor's Degree in History (Bielefeld and Paris Diderot) and Law. She graduated from the European School of Political and Social Sciences in Lille with a Master's Degree in International Security Policy. Her Master's thesis studied the effectiveness of the EU sanctions regime against Iran between 2010-2015 in view of the sanctions' impact on the Iranian population. Karina's personal interest was based on the common resort to sanctions as a foreign policy tool and its double-edged efficacy. Her main research interests include EU external relations and non-international armed conflicts in the Middle East.

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Introduction

Since the independence of the five Central Asian republics in the 1990s, the European Union (EU) has been enhancing its ties with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The core engagement of the EU focused on strengthening resilience and promoting state- and institution-building strategies in the region. In 2007, the EU adopted its first Central Asia strategy in order to revisit EU-Central Asian relations and consolidate a new partnership. Since then, new challenges with regional and geopolitical implications have occurred, the Central Asian republics have progressed and new interests have been manifested in the region, making the need for a revised version of the EU strategy more demanding than ever. In 2019, the European Commission and the High Representative adopted the Joint Communication on “The EU and Central Asia: New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership” which intended to update the first version of 2007. The new action plan focuses on three pivotal aspects which are resilience, prosperity and regional cooperation in order to achieve better results in the domain of security policy and regional development.

In view of the above, this paper aims to provide a critical state-of-the-art report regarding the new Central Asia strategy of the EU. This paper looks at the guiding paradigms of the new Central Asia strategy and assesses how the EU’s vision can be understood within the security-development nexus. Central Asia is a region of salient interest as it bears a high range of opportunities but also distinct economic and political problems. All things considered, the five republics are equally affected by a multitude of security concerns including corruption, deteriorating social conditions, organised crime, drug trafficking and terrorism. The highest probability of arising conflicts is that regarding water resources. In light of the growing scarcity of natural resources, this conflict potential raises security

concerns not only in the given region but for the international community as a whole.

The goal of this paper is to show that the EU identifies a strong correlation between security and development issues in the case of Central Asia. For this purpose, the paper will provide an explanation of the EU’s approach by contextualizing the EU’s new Central Asia strategy with respect to the region’s developments and probable conflict potentials. The detrimental impact of terrorism, illicit drug trafficking and water security poses a threat to both human security and regional stability. It will be seen that the European understanding of security and development becomes a key element of the EU’s new strategy to the given region.

In what follows, I will briefly lay out the conceptual foundations by defining the notions of security and development before having a closer look at the Central Asia strategy of 2019 and its guiding principles. In the final part of this research note, I will try to shed light upon the situation of the five Central Asian states in terms of the security-development nexus by exploring the issues of terrorism, drug-trafficking, human security and water security. Unfortunately, the limited frame of this work will not allow an exhaustive assessment but tries to be as comprehensive as possible.

Defining Development and Security

A substantial body in the academic and policy discourse has emerged on the inextricable link between the concepts of (in)security and (under)development bringing together distinct understandings and conceptualisations of both notions and the way they interact with each other in political-economic processes across the globe.¹

1 Maria Stern and Joakim Öjendal, “Exploring the Security-Development Nexus.” In Ramses Amer, Ashok Swain and Joakim

The traditional vision of security is very state-centric as it refers primarily to elements such as territorial integrity and stability as well as the capability of states to make use of political, legal or coercive policy tools to ensure their specific interest at the international level.² In response to the many critics on the state-centric and military view, the definition of security was broadened in the 1990s encompassing non-traditional security issues that could equally result in violent conflicts issuing from poverty, migration, environmental degradation or energy and food security. In view of this paradigmatic shift, the concept of security referred to a multitude of conflict potentials be it of political, social, economic or environmental nature and entailed the imperative to respond to these challenges through effective prevention, reduction or resolution strategies.³

This being said, the concept of development can be used to designate distinct stages and processes. More precisely, these strategies can aim at achieving prosperity and equitable living standards and are deemed essential for ensuring sustainable peace, viable partnerships and effective governance frameworks.⁴ According to M. Duffield, the concept of security has experienced a radical change with the expansion of neoliberalism from the 1980s onwards.⁵ Following his line of reasoning, globalisation and increased interconnection have resulted in an

internationalisation of instability which could be increasingly experienced in the Global North.⁶ Hence, root causes of conflicts such as refugee flows, terrorism and other criminal activities appearing in the Global South could have far-reaching dimensions for the Global North.⁷ With respect to these observations, fostering development has become synonymous with the pursuit of security whilst making security a prerequisite for sustainable development.⁸

This emerging nexus between security and development resulted in the common assumption that these challenges could not be settled through mere diplomacy, peace-making efforts or even the use of force but had to be tackled within a holistic and comprehensive approach.⁹ Indeed, the articulations of security and development have had a decisive impact on aid policies, control and outlaw of migration and can touch upon both human security and the state.¹⁰ In practice, the understanding of the security-development nexus is crucial for humanitarian, development and peace and security actors in addressing the root causes of conflict-affected areas. Here, three sectors can be regarded as essential for building sustainable peace which include governance, the security sector and the rule of law.¹¹ In the same way, a paradigmatic example can be found in the case of the EU which has recognized a close connection between (in)security and (under) development with destructive implications

Öjendal, eds., *The Security-Development Nexus: Peace, Conflict and Development* (London: Anthem Press, 2012), 13-40.

2 International Peace Academy, "The Security-Development Nexus: Conflict, Peace and Development in the 21st Century", International Peace Academy Report, accessed April 05, 2020, https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/security_dev_nexus.pdf.

3 Ibid.

4 International Peace Academy, "The Security-Development Nexus."

5 Mark R. Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security*. (New York: Zed Books, 2001).

6 Pablo Martín, "El nexo seguridad-desarrollo y la resiliencia como sucedáneos de la seguridad humana en las políticas de la Unión Europea: el caso del Sahel." *Relaciones Internacionales*, No. 43 (2020): 69-86.

7 Martín, "El nexo seguridad-desarrollo."

8 Ibid.

9 International Peace Academy, "The Security-Development Nexus."

10 Duffield, *Global Governance*.

11 International Peace Academy, "The Security-Development Nexus."

for third countries.¹² In 2003, the European Council adopted its first security strategy (ESS) establishing principles and goals in terms of European security interests. By doing so, the EU did not only make security become a precondition for development but equally raised human security as the strategic doctrine in its external policies.¹³

Likewise, the EU has continuously worked on its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) with not only strengthening the realm of its Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) but also enhancing the domain of development cooperation.¹⁴ The development instruments predestined to respond to security challenges can differ according to the specific assessment of the situation. Whilst the root causes of poverty or unjust distribution are primarily tackled through development funding, some security challenges are viewed to undermine development activities and must be overcome first in order to ensure the development of third countries.¹⁵

The EU's New Central Asia Strategy

Especially the emergence of new security challenges with not only regional but global repercussions has led to a reappraisal of European economic and security interests in Central Asia. Therefore, a new Central Asia strategy was adopted in 2019 in order to increase the EU's visibility in the region. The first Central Asia strategy of 2007 was often criticised for being merely a "declaration of intent" due to its far too general approach to the uneasy

region.¹⁶ One reason for this uneven progress since 2007 was the strategy's weak resource planning in light of the multitude of priorities.¹⁷ Unlike its former vision, the EU is committed to take into account the specific country situation of each Central Asian republic in order to effectively promote resilience, prosperity and cross-border cooperation across the region. Indeed, some problems that have already been identified in the first strategy are still present today and demand a better implementation of the new EU action plan in order to respond to both old and new challenges.¹⁸ But the new strategy of 2019 also introduced new areas of cooperation such as it is the case in the domain of digital economy.¹⁹ Key priorities in the region are the promotion of resilience and prosperity with the concrete goals to enhance the Central Asian countries to tackle internal and external concerns, to support individual reforms and to foster the respect for human rights and the rule of law at the national level as well as offering solutions and opportunities in dealing with environmental challenges.²⁰ As regards the pursuit of prosperity, the EU intends to support the development of a competitive private sector

12 Hans Merket, "The EU and the Security-Development Nexus: Bridging the Legal Divide." *European Foreign Affairs Review* 18, Special Issue (2013): 83–102.

13 Martín, "El nexo seguridad-desarrollo."

14 Merket, "Legal Divide."

15 Ibid.

16 Sebastien Peyrouse, "Sebastien Peyrouse on the EU's New Central Asia Strategy." Interview by Catherine Putz (July 16, 2019), *The Diplomat*, accessed April 07, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/07/sebastien-peyrouse-on-the-eus-new-central-asia-strategy/>.

17 Martin Russel, "The EU's new Central Asia strategy," (European Parliamentary Research Service, January 2019), [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/633162/EPRS_BRI\(2019\)633162_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/633162/EPRS_BRI(2019)633162_EN.pdf).

18 Ibid.

19 European Commission, "The EU and Central Asia: New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership", accessed March 15, 2020, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/joint_communication_-_the_eu_and_central_asia_-_new_opportunities_for_a_stronger_partnership.pdf.

20 European Union, "EU builds a strong and modern Partnership with Central Asia." *Euractiv*, accessed April 02, 2020, <https://en.euractiv.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/infographic/Infographic-New-Strategy-for-Central-Asia.pdf>.

and to enhance the investment environment and economic modernisation in the region. In line with these goals, the EU also intends to support the accession of the Central Asian republics to the World Trade Organisation.²¹ The third pillar of the new EU strategy puts major emphasis on regional cooperation. This goal includes the establishment of common rules, a regional approach in tackling environmental degradation and terrorism, the promotion of peace in Afghanistan as well as the ambition to render the regional market more integrated.²²

Actually, the European objective to build the resilience of the five republics can equally be interpreted as an unnamed attempt to respond to new geopolitical dynamics in the region and exercise significant leverage on Russia's and China's presence in Central Asia.²³ Some voices emphasise that Russia experiences a better reputation than the EU, given Russia's strong historical relationship with the region, the fact that the EU is locally perceived to lack concrete commitment in Central Asia or the local distrust in the EU's attempts to counter regional authoritarianism.²⁴ Others argue that the EU's considerably small presence in the past could be one of the EU's major strengths in engaging with the region in future politics.²⁵ However, it is questionable whether the EU's soft power approach as a foreign policy tool will be effective to address both societal and contemporary security challenges in the long term given the regional influence of China and Russia.²⁶

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Steven Blockmans and Mrdвика Sahajpal, "The New EU Strategy on Central Asia: Collateral Benefit?", CEPS, accessed March 09, 2020, <https://www.ceps.eu/the-new-eu-strategy-on-central-asia/>.

24 Peyrouse, Interview.

25 Zhanibek Arynov, "Dem Untergang geweiht? Die Wahrnehmung der Europäischen Union in Zentralasien im Wandel," *Zentralasien-Analysen*, No. 127-128 (2018): 9-12.

26 Blockmans and Sahajpal, "New Strategy."

The following chapter will briefly highlight the disparities between the Central Asian republics in terms of politics and economy in order to illustrate their uneasy regional context. This will be of interest for assessing whether there is a visible connection between security concerns and developmental issues in Central Asia.

Studying Central Asia with the Security-Development Nexus

Central Asia is not a homogenous region due to differing levels of political and economic development.²⁷ Actually, the onset of Central Asia's economic development is rooted in the region's historical and geographical context making the region an interesting case to this study. This fact is also highlighted by Laruelle and Peyrouse emphasising the region's comparatively slow development with respect to "a relatively unfavourable climate, low population density, and economic specialization in raw materials instead of in value-added industries."²⁸ De Haas argues that the lacking cooperation at the regional level coupled with the authoritarian rule causes political and economic instability.²⁹ In this regard, the uneasy regional security context of Central Asia can be majorly explained by lacking economic endeavours and an absent cross-border cooperation rendering the correlation between security and development visible. In response to these challenges, the EU is committed to

27 European Parliament, "Central Asia. Fact Sheets on the European Union – 2020", accessed April 05, 2020, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/178/central-asia>.

28 Marlène Laruelle and Sebastien Peyrouse, "The Challenges of Human Security and Development in Central Asia." Ramses Amer, Ashok Swain and Joakim Öjendal, eds., *The Security-Development Nexus: Peace, Conflict and Development* (London: Anthem Press, 2012), 137-160.

29 Marcel De Haas, "Security Policy and Developments in Central Asia: Security Documents compared with Security Challenges," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 29, No. 2 (2016): 203-226.

enhance regional trade relations from an economic perspective and equally address common security problems.

In terms of politics, Turkmenistan's regime remains one of the most authoritarian ones at the global level whilst Kyrgyzstan's democratic advancement significantly stands out although recent developments have underpinned the vulnerability of democratic development and human rights in the country.³⁰ With this in mind, the internal and external threats are reported to reside in the authoritarian regimes themselves.³¹ The illustrated picture gives an understanding of the EU's political interest in the region. Hence, the new Central Asia strategy emphasises that "promoting the rule of law, strengthening the accountability of public institutions and ensuring respect for human rights are key conditions for the success of the sustainable development of Central Asia."³²

The Central Asian states can be defined as rent economies: Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are rich in raw materials such as oil, gas, cotton and gold but also in strategic minerals including uranium.³³ Actually, the region's overall development is inherently linked to world prices of oil, gas, metals or cotton since these resources make up the core of the countries' economies.³⁴ In contrast, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are the poorest states in the region basically because both countries do not have any hydrocarbon reserves nor agricultural products that could be exported so that the countries' economic performance is dependent on the extraction of precious metals as well as the energy support of Russia.³⁵ Notwithstanding,

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are basically dependent on Russian remittances and Chinese foreign investment and lending in order to be able to cope with economic challenges.³⁶ The EU is not only Central Asia's biggest economic partner but the European development aid for the region has also intensified in the past years with the probability of increased funding for the period of s2021-2027.³⁷ In this respect, the EU is committed to strengthen the investment environment, to develop the private sector and to enhance regional trade. The uneasy regional context of Central Asia demands a multitude of distinct means to tackle issues arising in the economic, political and security realm of the region. In the following, distinct security issues and the EU's response to these threats will be assessed in order to explore the new Central Asia strategy from the perspective of the security-development nexus.

Terrorism

As for the current security situation of Central Asia, the region is facing both internal and external threats ranging from separatism³⁸ and extremism to disputes concerning border, water and energy resources as well as regional

Haas, "Security Policy."

36 European Parliament, "Fact Sheets on the European Union."

37 Russel, "The EU's new Central Asia strategy."

38 Anastasiya Bayok, "Die Bedeutung Zentralasiens für China – eine chinesische Perspektive," In Institut für Friedensforschung und Sicherheitspolitik an der Universität Hamburg, ed. OSZE-Jahrbuch 2016: Jahrbuch zur Organisation für Sicherheit und Zusammenarbeit in Europa (OSZE), (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2018), 357-370. Although separatism poses a minimal threat in Central Asia, Uyghur separatism in Western China is viewed as a pressing issue by the Chinese government. Due to increasing political pressure from Beijing, the Central Asian authorities have classified separatism as a major security threat along with terrorism and religious extremism. The implications of China's influence can be seen best in the case of Kyrgyzstan where suspected links to Uyghur separatist movements have been severely condemned.

30 European Parliament, "Fact Sheets on the European Union."

31 De Haas, "Security Policy."

32 European Commission, "The EU and Central Asia," 3.

33 Richard W. T Pomfret, *The Central Asian Economies since Independence*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

34 Ibid.

35 Laruelle and Peyrouse, "Challenges of Human Security"; De

armed conflicts that have issued from the spill-over from Afghanistan.³⁹ Especially in the case of the latter, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan are most vulnerable to such tensions due to their poorly defended borders with the country.⁴⁰

The collapse of the Soviet Union had not only severe socio-economic implications for Central Asia but yielded equally a significant rise in religious extremism in the region with terrorism becoming an imminent threat.⁴¹ In the first 15 years following the independence of the Central Asian states, the biggest terrorist threats at the regional level were posed by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) together with its offshoot the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) which have launched armed attacks against targets in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan from its base in Tajikistan at the turn of the century.⁴² Since then, low-scale Islamic insurgency and terrorist attacks have only been short-lived and badly organised, but violent extremism remains a security concern in the region with regard to spill-overs from Afghanistan.⁴³ More than 4,000 Central Asians are estimated to have joined ISIL/Daesh in Syria and Iraq.⁴⁴ The issue of returning ISIL/Daesh fighters from Syria or Iraq to their Central Asian home countries and the challenge of rehabilitation and reintegration present a significant threat to domestic stability and is of salient importance to the Central Asia strategy of the EU.⁴⁵

The Central Asia strategy clearly stresses that terrorism is a common security threat to both the EU and Central Asia. In light of violent extremism and terrorism, it is not very clear which countries have a National Security Strategy (NSS) and which do not. Whilst Kazakhstan has one, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan lack a NSS.⁴⁶ In return, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have applied very determinant measures in fighting the menace of terrorism. In the latter case, the country imposed restrictive counter terrorism measures which deliberately refrained personal, religious and political rights.⁴⁷ In Turkmenistan, the government has surveyed carefully any religious and political activities and further intensified its counter terrorism policies at a growing pace.⁴⁸ The pervasive governmental efforts that are supposed to ensure regional stability could also explain why “[t]errorism in Central Asia is related to the state in a number of ways,” as Edward Lemon argues.⁴⁹ That being said, state repression of the past ten years “resulted in far more casualties than terrorism itself” and triggered violent attacks targeting almost exclusively law enforcement agencies including security services, police and army.⁵⁰ The Kyrgyz and Kazakh republics were, in comparison, much softer in their approach although strategies have changed in light of the increasing authoritarian trends in recent years.⁵¹

In response, the EU intends on the one hand to consult EU security and counterterrorism

39 De Haas, “Security Policy.”

40 Ibid.

41 Mariya Y. Omelicheva, “Counterterrorism Policies in Central Asia,” *Central Asian Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

42 Lemon, “Terrorism in Central Asia.”

43 Lemon, “Terrorism in Central Asia.” Central Asian officials have labelled a total number of 19 terrorist attacks which have occurred between 2008 and 2018. Half of the incidents occurred in Kazakhstan whilst Tajikistan experienced the highest number of deaths related to terrorist attacks.

44 Russel, “The EU’s new Central Asia strategy.”

45 Gavin Helf, “Central Asia Leads the Way on Islamic State Returnees,” *United States Institute of Peace*, accessed April 14,

2020, <https://www.usip.org/blog/2019/09/central-asia-leads-way-islamic-state-returnees>.

46 De Haas, “Security Policy.”

47 Omelicheva, “Counterterrorism.”

48 Ibid.

49 Edward Lemon, “Talking up Terrorism in Central Asia,” *Kennan Cable*, No.38 (December 2018), accessed April 05, 2020, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/kennan_cable_38.pdf.

50 Lemon, “Terrorism in Central Asia.”

51 Omelicheva, “Counterterrorism.”

experts whilst promoting an “exchange of good practice on the prevention of violent extremism.”⁵² It becomes evident that the EU is very eager to combat terrorism both within the EU and in Central Asia by putting major emphasis on the exchange of know-how and preventive measures. Although these measures rather focus on dealing with terrorism from a security angle, it is also important to highlight that socio-economic deterioration and pauperisation are main causes of violent extremism. By focusing on the region’s most acute vulnerabilities, the EU expects a positive spill-over effect of its development cooperation in many areas ranging from counter-radicalisation to private sector development.⁵³ Especially in the case of the latter, the EU will adopt new economic development models with a special focus on Small and Medium-sized Enterprises.⁵⁴ This is majorly because the EU is convinced that the private sector plays not only an important role in the diversification of the Central Asian economies but is also vital for reducing socio-economic inequalities, combating poverty, investing in human security and improving decent working conditions across the region.⁵⁵ It is stated that „[e]conomic reform and modernisation should bring benefits to the entire societies and contribute to reduce inequalities as well as regional disparities and the rural divide.”⁵⁶ In terms of concrete measures of development cooperation, the EU is eager to set up a dedicated dialogue on labour

52 European Commission, “The EU and Central Asia,” 5.

53 Ibid., 3. “EU-Central Asia dialogues and EU-funded regional programmes will contribute to promoting cooperative solutions at the regional level in areas such as the environment, water, climate change and sustainable energy; education; the rule of law; sustainable connectivity; drugs policy; security and the prevention of radicalisation; border management and intra-regional trade facilitation.”

54 European Commission, “The EU and Central Asia.”

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid., 8.

standards including business and human rights and use available financial instruments in order to improve the investment climate and promote vocational training and quality jobs at home.⁵⁷

In particular, poor segments of society are most likely to join radical Islamic groups: soaring unemployment rates, poverty, poor governance, ethnic discrimination and repressive law enforcement can be among the main reasons for increasing grievances against local authorities, especially in the isolated peripheral areas of the Central Asian republics.⁵⁸ According to Omelicheva, who explores in her research the ethnic dimension of religious extremism in Central Asia, radical Islamic groups have been more successful in recruiting particularly ethnic Uzbeks in Southern Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan and mobilising ethnic Tajiks in Uzbekistan.⁵⁹ This trend which could be specifically observed in the early 2000s can be explained by the uneven revival of Islamic faith and religious practice across the region.⁶⁰ To be more precise, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan emerged as the epicentres of Islamic radicalised groups given the strong presence of Islamic clergy as well as a firmer religious identification of Uzbek and Tajik Muslims.⁶¹ In response, Turkmenistan had taken more severe measures against ethnic Uzbeks probably for fear of emerging pro-Islamic sentiments among the

57 Ibid.

58 Omelicheva, “Religious Extremism.”

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid. Religious extremism is mostly associated with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Hizb ut-Tahrir in Tajikistan (which is reported to have its largest following from the Uzbek community) and further radical Islamic organisations.

61 Ibid., 176. “Thus, in the communities of the Tajik and Uzbek Muslims, social and political conditions, the presence of influential Islamic clergy, a developed religious infrastructure, and the intellectual environment were ripe for the emergence of radical Islam. The societies of the indigenous Kyrgyz, Kazakh, and Turkmen Muslims lacked these important preconditions.”

local Uzbek community.⁶² Likewise, increasing radicalisation of predominately ethnic Uzbeks in Kazakhstan has prompted the Kazakh government to take a harder line by tightening the control over religious practices especially in the country's South from 2004 onwards.⁶³ The rise of radical and militant forms of Islam can be interpreted as an expression of local grievances and point out to socio-economic and political reforms that are urgently needed in order to prevent such ethnic and religious tensions across the region.⁶⁴ The EU is eager to do so by fostering the resilience of local communities in Central Asia and strengthening the rule of law and human rights in line with the UN Action Plan on Preventing Violent Extremism.⁶⁵ That being said, it is questionable whether the value-based agenda of the EU in concert with repressive efforts of the Central Asian republics are likely to address the security concern of terrorism effectively.

Drug trafficking

Since the 1990s, Central Asia has become a transit space of Afghan narcotics trafficking routes, which have been transported majorly along the "Northern Route" to Russia's booming drug market and enabled criminal structures to gradually spill-over onto transport networks, money laundering companies and banking mechanisms.⁶⁶ Drug trafficking is thus a security threat that can be linked to the instability of Central Asia in terms of organised crime and

terrorist activities. In fact, the collapse of the Soviet Union along with the civil war in Tajikistan (1992-1997) represented a fertile ground for large-scale smuggling of opium and heroin given the growing poppy production in Afghanistan along with an increasing demand for heroin in Russia.⁶⁷ Both Tajikistan and Turkmenistan are very exposed to cross-border spill-overs from Afghanistan due to border management issues. The majority of cross-border-related violence is related to opium and heroin with an estimated value of \$2 billion being imported from Afghanistan.⁶⁸ The illicit narcotics are passing nowadays mostly through Tajikistan as the primary transit country in order to reach not only Russia but also Eastern Europe and China.⁶⁹ This makes the trafficking in illicit drugs not only a regional but global security concern in addition to terrorism. Although there is no centralised drug mafia in Central Asia, dozens of small-medium size groups are reported to have formed in each country since 1991.⁷⁰ In this context it is important to note that strategic political-criminal partnerships have emerged between criminal syndicates and state actors across the region with Tajik and Kyrgyz politics being the most influenced by the local mafia.⁷¹

Apart from border incursions, the narcotics have also caused an alarming rise of social problems due to drug addiction such as it is the case in the Kazakh city Temirtau near Karaganda which faces today the severe socio-economic consequences of the industrial collapse in the end of the Soviet era.⁷² In fact, drug trafficking

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 European Commission, "The EU and Central Asia," 5.

66 Svante E. Cornell and Niklas L.P. Swanström, "The Eurasian Drug Trade. A Challenge to Regional Security," *Problems of Post-Communism* 53, No. 4 (2006):10-28.; Filippo De Danieli, "Beyond the Drug-Terror Nexus: Drug trafficking and state-crime relations in Central Asia," *International Journal of Drug Policy* 25 (2014), 1235–1240.

67 Cornell and Swanström, "The Eurasian Drug Trade.;" De Danieli, "Drug-Terror Nexus."

68 Lemon, "Terrorism in Central Asia."

69 De Haas, "Security Policy."

70 De Danieli, "Drug-Terror Nexus."

71 Ibid.

72 Nargis Kassenova, *Relations between Afghanistan and Central Asian States after 2014: Incentives, Constraints and Prospects* (Solna: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2014).

has to be recognised as a serious issue that is actually embedded in the social structure of the Central Asian republics: Especially in Tajikistan, vulnerable groups such as women and children are most affected since they majorly serve as couriers for self-produced drugs.⁷³

The new Central Asia strategy refers to past programmes⁷⁴ in the region by putting major emphasis on future cooperation in the realm of a modern integrated border management with a special focus on Afghanistan.⁷⁵ The European measures aiming at strengthening national policies and addressing illicit drug trafficking go hand in hand with the attempt to fight against organised crime, migrant smuggling and human trafficking.⁷⁶ According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Central Asia is reported to have counted 358,000 drug users in 2011 but numbers are estimated being higher.⁷⁷ These developments point out to the increasing threat of narcotics on human security at the domestic and regional level. By means of EU-Central Asia dialogues and EU-funded regional programmes, the EU is committed to work out cooperative solutions. Here again, the European approach intends to foster resilience and prosperity in the various countries by strengthening the population and the government via social reform-related support. The specific impact of drug trafficking on human security as well as border incursions hampering the regional stability are thus significant concerns which the EU will only be

able to address by increasing its development aid in the region.

Human Security and Development: Education in Central Asia

Following estimations, Central Asia's total population will increase to about 86 million by 2040, entailing manifold consequences on regional water resources and infrastructure.⁷⁸ As for Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, these countries are facing a multitude of challenges ranging from the prevailing authoritarian rule and a detrimental human rights record to a hardly independent media and judiciary landscape.⁷⁹ According to Peyrouse, "to be most effective in addressing these concerns, the EU should consider increasing its investment in development projects, which so far have remained underfunded and in the shadow of EU assistance to the region's military and border security."⁸⁰

In light of the increasing aim to strengthen human security and development in the region, the domain of education has become a more and more important paradigm of the new Central Asia strategy. The official document emphasises that the "development of skills will be key to Central Asia's competitiveness and social cohesion."⁸¹ By focusing on the rapidly growing young population of the region and addressing the issue of youth unemployment through new job offers, the EU is convinced to open up promising prospects of development and well-being.⁸² The support of education

73 Laruelle and Peyrouse, "Challenges of Human Security."

74 De Danieli, "Drug-Terror Nexus." For example, the European Commission spent a total amount of 43 million euro between 2003 and 2007 for the implementation of two projects in the context of the EU's regional counter-narcotics assistance, namely the Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA) and the Central Asia Drug Action Programme (CADAP).

75 European Commission, "The EU and Central Asia."

76 European Commission, "The EU and Central Asia."

77 Laruelle and Peyrouse, "Challenges of Human Security," 143.

78 Aibek Zhupankhan, Kamshat Tussupova and Ronny Berndtsson, "Water in Kazakhstan, a key in Central Asian water management," *Hydrological Sciences Journal* 63, No. 5 (2018): 752-762.

79 European Parliament, "Fact Sheets on the European Union."

80 Peyrouse, Interview.

81 European Commission, "The EU and Central Asia," 13.

82 European Commission, "The EU and Central Asia."

includes in particular the promotion of vocational education and training. Apart from job creation, the EU equally intends to support the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises in the region.⁸³

In reality, the rural populations of Central Asia are a very vulnerable group by fearing incremental impoverishment and high unemployment rates. The preservation of traditional domestic economies with patriarchal social functioning in rural areas of the countries are adversely affecting the development of the Central Asian republics.⁸⁴ In particular, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan are reported to have had a high number of children and adolescents between the ages of 10 and 15 years working in cotton fields.⁸⁵ This has had detrimental consequences for rural families as many children were retrieved from public schooling in order to support their families financially. Among some positive changes of prior EU engagement in the area, we can certainly count the EU's efforts that have contributed to end the use of child and forced adult labour in Uzbek cotton harvests.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, it has become very frequent in Tajikistan that girls are retrieved prematurely from school, a trend which has also been observable in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.⁸⁷ It is also reported that all five republics have not demonstrated any foresight in terms of educational measures related to the domestic rural populations.⁸⁸

Here again, the EU intends to enhance its political momentum by promoting education and strengthening the young population of the region via educational programmes and increasing employability with a special focus

on women and girls.⁸⁹ The gender-sensitive approach and the EU's focus on ensuring human security by strengthening the domain of education and employment both underpin the European commitment to contribute with its approach towards a positive development in the region. An improvement of the educational sphere along with further investment projects will create viable opportunities and certainly prevent the emergence of violent extremism or illicit drug trafficking. Hence, human investment will certainly be a significant contribution to a better socio-economic development in the region.

Water security

The collapse of the Soviet Union left the five Central Asian republics with an unequal distribution of natural resources as the production and distribution of water and energy in Central Asia had been previously controlled by Moscow.⁹⁰ Principally, the interstate conflict situation emerged between the upstream countries (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) and downstream countries (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) related to energy provision and fresh water supplies.⁹¹ But climate change and the competition for water pose an alarming threat to the uneasy region of Central Asia. With regard to the region's two longest rivers, the Syr Darya basin has become the central arena for barter agreements on water use and hydropower resources between Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan whilst the Amu Darya basin affects Turkmen-Uzbek relations since the independence of the Central

83 Ibid.

84 Laruelle and Peyrouse, "Challenges of Human Security."

85 Ibid.

86 Russel, "The EU's new Central Asia strategy."

87 Laruelle and Peyrouse, "Challenges of Human Security."

88 Ibid.

89 European Commission, "The EU and Central Asia."

90 Leila Zakhirova, "The International Politics of Water Security in Central Asia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 65, No. 10 (December 2013), 1994–2013.

91 Zakhirova, "Politics of Water Security."

Asian states.⁹²

As the agricultural sector manifests one of the mainstays of the regional economy, it raises an excessive water demand for the irrigation of cotton and rice crops.⁹³ In particular, the Uzbek economy is significantly dependent on agricultural production resulting in more than 90 percent of Uzbek fresh water resources being used for irrigation needs.⁹⁴ The main problem is the detrimental situation of irrigation systems and the lack of a viable regional approach to sustainable water and energy resources. Hence, a land reform is urgently needed in order to overcome increasing pauperisation, rural poverty and unemployment.⁹⁵ Likewise, almost 70 percent of the arising development problems in Kazakhstan can be led back to freshwater shortages.⁹⁶ This can be basically explained by the worsening socio-economic and ecological conditions hampering an appropriate water management policy in the area.⁹⁷

The water issue is of salient importance in a region where “water wars” have to be taken as a realistic security threat: Especially disputes on water, energy and border issues have been a revolving problem between the republics of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. A prominent example has been Uzbekistan’s former complaint about Tajikistan’s Rogun hydropower plant project which shows that water scarcity can be a source of cross-border conflict.⁹⁸ The tensions experienced a peak

in 2010 following threats from both sides.⁹⁹ With the presidential change in Uzbekistan, the dispute has experienced an easing under Shavkat Mirziyoyev who declared to follow UN conventions on water management and to engage in dialogue with the other Central Asian republics.¹⁰⁰

That being said, the water issue is considered by each country a zero-sum game with detrimental implications for the rest of the region and can easily fuel tensions among the local populations.¹⁰¹ The only successful example of transboundary water management in Central Asia is the interstate cooperation between the Kazakh and Kyrgyz republics which share the Chu and Talas river basins.¹⁰² “Since water is a major natural resource for all Central Asian states, the ability to use this resource in a responsible manner holds an important key to the peaceful and sustainable future of Central Asia.”¹⁰³ This emerging nexus between water and security and its impact on regional stability is equally taken into account by the EU in its Central Asia strategy.

the already weak inter-state cooperation in the region; Richard Weitz, “Uzbekistan’s New Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity under New Leadership,” Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, (January 2018). Under the presidency of Islom Karimov, the Uzbek government warned in 2012 that regional disputes over water resources could lead to war.

92 Zakhirova, “Politics of Water Security.”

93 International Crisis Group, Central Asia: Water and Conflict, accessed April 05, 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/uzbekistan/central-asia-water-and-conflict>.

94 De Haas, “Security Policy.”

95 Laruelle and Peyrouse, “Challenges of Human Security.”

96 Zhupankhan et al., “Water in Kazakhstan.”

97 Ibid.

98 De Haas, “Security Policy,” 221. Tensions over water resources in the past have resulted in ongoing border closures worsening

99 Barbara Janusz-Pawletta and Mara Gubaidullina, “Transboundary Water Management in Central Asia. Legal Framework to Strengthen Interstate Cooperation and Increase Regional Security,” Cahiers d’Asie centrale 25, (Bichkek Paris: Ifeac, 2015), 195-215.

100 Weitz, “Uzbekistan’s New Foreign Policy.”

101 Jakob Granit, Anders Jägerskog, Rebecca Löfgren, Andy Bullock, George de Gooijer, Stuart Pettigrew and Andreas Lindström, Regional Water Intelligence Report Central Asia: Baseline Report, Regional Water Intelligence Report No. 15 (Stockholm: Water Governance Facility, 2010).

102 Janusz-Pawletta and Gubaidullina, “Transboundary Water Management.”

103 Zhupankhan et al., “Water in Kazakhstan,” 754.

In the past, the Central Asian governments have carried out distinct measures in the attempt to tackle the water issue unilaterally or bilaterally including the international support from the Asian Development Bank, World Bank, United Nations and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.¹⁰⁴ Already in 1992, the five republics had signed the Agreement on cooperation in joint management, use and protection of interstate sources of water resources (Almaty Agreement), thus forming the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination of Central Asia (ICWC) which has become since then the negotiating level for water allocation in the region.¹⁰⁵ Apart from this exception, the lack of collective institutions for the control, use and preservation of freshwater resources at the regional level makes transboundary water management a challenge and the biggest problem when it comes to water security in Central Asia.¹⁰⁶ The uneasy regional context is one major reason why the interest in hydro politics and water management has considerably increased in the past years.¹⁰⁷ The Aral Sea

disaster specifically compelled Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to take action as both countries were directly affected by the exacerbation of the related water situation. Especially Kazakhstan's past rescue measures to revive the Aral Sea have shown positive results in the rise of the water level: The \$64-million Dollar project of the Kazakh government and the World Bank has built the Kok-Aral dam which successfully trapped the water from the Syr Darya in the northern part of the sea basin.¹⁰⁸

The EU intends with its refreshed strategy to cooperate also on water, environment and energy issues. As the EU's regional agenda for Central Asia puts central emphasis on water, peace and prosperity as the guiding priorities, the EU is committed to strengthen regional cooperation through sharing expertise, the promotion of integrated water resources management, the reduction of water waste and the amelioration of water quality as well as the modernisation of related infrastructure in terms of modern agricultural irrigation systems.¹⁰⁹

It can be said that the Central Asian states show visible efforts in promoting their own projects concerning water management and water security which is a promising outlook. However, water scarcity, climate change and population growth remain an imminent threat to all five republics and could fuel future tensions. This reveals not only the close link between water and (in)security but also its potential consequences on regional stability in Central Asia. It remains open to question whether the issue of water security demands merely technical solutions in terms of appropriate water-monitoring facilities or even includes the promotion of specific

104 Beate Eschment, "Wasserverteilung in Zentralasien. Ein unlösbares Problem?" (Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2011); See The World Bank, "In Tajikistan, Better Water Resource Management is Critical to Food Security and Livelihoods," accessed June 21, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/03/13/in-tajikistan-better-water-resource-management-is-critical-to-food-security-and-livelihoods>. One recent example of water management at the national level is the Second Public Employment for Sustainable Agriculture and Water Management Project (PAMP II), led by the Tajik government in collaboration with the World Bank, with the aim to improve water management and to intensify agricultural crop production by improved irrigation management.

105 Eschment, "Wasserverteilung in Zentralasien."

106 Ibid.

107 Zhupankhan et al., "Water in Kazakhstan"; International Crisis Group, *Water and Conflict*. Already in 2002, the International Crisis Group reported four key areas of tension concerning the situation of water security in Central Asia including "(1) lack of coherent water management; (2) failure to abide by or adapt water quotas; (3) non-implemented and untimely barter

agreements and payments [and] (4) uncertainty over future infrastructure plans."

108 Eurasianet, "Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan: Differing Approaches on Aral Sea," accessed June 23, 2020, <https://eurasianet.org/kazakhstan-uzbekistan-differing-approaches-on-aral-sea>.

109 European Commission, "The EU and Central Asia."

political, social and economic factors. In any case, the soft power approach of the EU intends to do both. What can be said with certainty is that transboundary water management will remain a key factor for a peaceful solution in Central Asia as regards fresh water supplies.

Conclusion

The given paper shed light upon the EU's commitment to promote strategies on stabilisation, security and development within the scope of the new Central Asia strategy. The interlinkages between (in)security and (under)development could be seen in the cases of distinct security issues that were either historically rooted in Central Asia or have arisen from developmental problems. Likewise, increasing pauperisation, unemployment and state repression are just some of the root causes of socio-economic deterioration, violent extremism or drug trafficking, issues which represent overarching human security challenges. Whilst emphasising the importance of human security in the EU's value-based agenda, the EU shows a strong engagement in human investment which is supposed to fuel developmental process in the region. However, visible results in the domain of human rights, rule of law and transparency demand a regional and comprehensive approach and will only appear through unremitting dedication and funding in future.

Studying the new Central Asia strategy in terms of the security-development nexus allows us two different readings: On the one hand the regional approach of the EU intends to tackle both security challenges and development concerns in Central Asia with the ultimate goal to enhance regional cooperation; on the other hand, the EU plans to foster regional cooperation such as in the case of water management and cross-border issues with the aim to strengthen security across the region. Offering viable opportunities to the

Central Asian youth, developing the investment environment, fostering regional trade and rendering the Central Asian republics more resilient are the remedial responses to internal and external security concerns.

Furthermore, the growing scarcity of natural resources, population growth and regional water security have reached an alarming degree and show the strong correlation between development and security. Due to the obsolete infrastructure and outdated irrigation systems as well as a lacking regional approach to water security, the emergence of "water wars" remains a serious risk for the region's stability, making water security not only an environmental challenge but a political problem. By promoting peacebuilding initiatives and sharing expertise in effective water resources management, the EU intends to enhance the region's prosperity in relation to economic and developmental incentives. These attempts aim at fostering a vital cross-border cooperation environment including transport, energy and water. Ensuring sustainable water management and regional cooperation will have a positive impact on the security situation in the border areas and beyond. Although the emergence of new opportunities and challenges has led to a reappraisal of European interests in the region, the importance of human security remains the doctrine of the EU's external actions and engagement in Central Asia.

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