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**UACES Student Forum 13th Annual Research Conference**

**Why is there "Central Asia" for European Union?**

(Draft: Please do not quote)

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**Abstract**

*Central Asia is commonly understood as a region uniting former USSR members - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, despite vagueness of such approach of regionalization. In particular, such view of considering these independent countries as somewhat single and monotone region is present in policies and expressions of international bodies - foreign states and organizations, as a signifier of lack of interest and/or clear objectives in regards to these countries. Situation is to be changing in the light of increasing energy demands and intensifying bi/multilateral contacts in economic and political areas. This paper aims at discussing the dilemma of misperception of "Central Asia as a region" and strife for stronger cooperation with European Union from the problems with self-identity of both parties and their outside positioning.*

## **Outline**

Introduction

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## Introduction

Despite the common views from European Union in considering Central Asia as a region already established and single, there is no clear definition of what is regarded as a 'region' per se. This controversy is triple: problematic character of self-identity of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan; disputable role of European Union in its external relations; and growing desire to cooperate within regions. Energy area hence displays this dilemma of regionalization approach.

### 1. Is Central Asia a “region”?



- 2.
- 3.

Regional theories are numerous, but none gives one and exact definition of what is a region. Yet if countries are determined themselves (mainly), regions are usually not. It is in a sense a construct – unclear term to describe group of units which tends to deny their modifications. The working definition of region/subregion refers to the territorial group of two or countries that are inter-related historically, socially, economically, and politically with a certain commonality present to all and aimed at balance in their foreign policy. In fact, this definition is ideal and may not satisfy the current regionalization present in the world; but it outdraws the main features of expected development of a region (not a standard, but set of desired criteria).

Does Central Asia satisfy such ‘region’? Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan are of course not a primordial region of Central Asia. Tracing back in history, it can be observed that these 5 countries were not geographically shaped in its current borders and received external influence in their formations. These formations include not only territorial delimitations, but also ethnic and nation constructions.

Specifics of those formations were the wide range of opportunities and methods to create new nations within the single USSR. The decision to territorially delimitate nation-state (*natsional’no-gosudarstvennoe razmezhevanie*) Middle Asia (as the region was named at that time: Middle Asia and Kazakhstan<sup>1</sup>) came on October 27, 1924, leading to creation of: Uzbek SSR with Tajik SSR in its content, Turkmen SSR, Kara-Kyrgyz autonomous region within Russian Federation, and Kazakh SSR.<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> The five countries were further on made in a region under the USSR mainly out of economic concern: resource-exporting region (cotton, oil, gas, etc.)

<sup>2</sup>Центральный Исполнительный Комитет СССР. Постановление от 27 октября 1924 года «О размежевании советских республик в Средней Азии и о вхождении в Союз ССР Узбекской

Soviet policy was mainly driven by ethnicity-based division, even at time where those ethnicities did not exist (as for the case of Kazakh and Kyrgyz among the others), and communities were governed by dynastic, religious and/or religious principles in their political and cultural life (Tishkov, 1997). Neither a certain unifying name, nor collective entity as somewhat single ethnic group existed to be claimed as absolute (Kryukov, 1989).

The collapse of the USSR led not only to new legal status of these five countries, but also opened their path in defining internal self-identity and outside positioning. In a social aspect, that brought a period of finding basis for ethnic identity which had been imposed during USSR. Every country had its own way of dealing with it and there is no cooperation noticeable among the 'Central Asia' to address such development, as for example language policy remains inter-state area. Russian language is legally recognized only in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyz Republic. Among other factors that led to emigration flows and disproportions in population sizes and qualifications can be observed.

Economically and politically they also went different ways. Economic growth differed and is still not the same for all.<sup>3</sup> Such region is in fact including economically developing Kazakhstan and the poorest in the whole former Soviet Union Tajikistan. Politically they are not democratic, but feature established elected government and written Constitution; however degree of political freedom and human rights is not similar.

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Советской Социалистической Республики и Туркменской Советской Социалистической Республики» Retrieved from [http://www.lawrussia.ru/texts/legal\\_861/doc861a386x939.htm](http://www.lawrussia.ru/texts/legal_861/doc861a386x939.htm)  
<sup>3</sup> UNDP (2005) Central Asia Human Development Report. Retrieved from: [http://78.136.31.142/en/reports/regionalreports/europethecis/central\\_asia\\_2005\\_en.pdf](http://78.136.31.142/en/reports/regionalreports/europethecis/central_asia_2005_en.pdf)

There has been and still are tendencies and projects for integration.<sup>4</sup> But those are not well-balanced and their functionality is questionable. Reasons for that are usually seen as lack of political will and absence of guiding leaders. Economic success and active international appeals of Kazakhstan may seem at the first glance that the country is to lead others. Yet whether those others are willing to be guided is not certain. Hence, Uzbekistan views Kazakhstan as its near rival and thus avoids participation in its initiatives.

In the self-identity and outside positioning these five countries pursue different goals. Not all of them decided to follow non-functioning CIS, such as Uzbekistan which from 1999 till 2005 joined GUAM (other members include Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) initiative that is focusing on establishing trade corridor to EU with the long-term aim of integrating with European-Atlantic structures. While Turkmenistan, for instance, sets itself as a Caspian state and puts relations with Iran and Azerbaijan as a priority, Tajikistan is focusing upon South Asia and Kazakhstan is looking at bridging Europe and Asia in its vision of itself as 'Eurasian' country.<sup>5</sup> (Imanaliyev, 2008). Eurasianism is common in the rhetoric on identity of these five countries among the scholars.<sup>6</sup> Yet this theory is blurry and lacks any basis to establish

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<sup>4</sup>Starting from broad and non-functioning Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and furthering with less broad ones as Economic Cooperation Organization or more specific as Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA); ranging with its member not limited only with these five, but including also Russia, China, Turkey, Iran and so on depending on the subject of the organization.

<sup>5</sup>This idea was found in 1920s by Russian historians N.S.Trubetskoy, P.N.Savitskiy, G.V.Florovskiy, and P.P.Suvchinskiy, and later re-found in XX century by L.Gumilyov. Their views were that Russia has a special place in the civilizational picture of the world as Europe belongs to the West, while Asia – East, leaving Russian its own vector with the communism and revolution. In 1994 President of Kazakhstan Nazarbayev used this conception to formulate the foundations for new political integrational unit in former Soviet environment – Eurasian union – following CIS.

<sup>6</sup> For example Tkatoeva is discussing whether international law of "the States of Central Asia" is belonging to certain Eurasian group, as it qualifies neither to European, nor Asian standards (Tkatoeva, R. (2010) 'Central Asian States and International Law: Between Post-Soviet Culture and Eurasian Civilization,' *Chinese Journal of International Law*, Vol. 9, Issue 1, pp. 205-220, March)

common ground for mutual co-existence. In an area of security scholars and practitioners regard Russia as a guiding control. CSTO and SCO are run by the Russian involvement to the large extent. However, not all Central Asian members are participating in these initiatives. Some are more favouring Russian support (Kazakhstan is part of Customs Union with Belarus and Russia), while others tend to avoid it (Uzbekistan after Andijan events). While Russian interest in the region is shifting as well, which was seen at the conflict situation in Kyrgyz Republic, etc.

Nevertheless, for the outside world their images remained unknown and first reaction was not different from Soviet stance: grouping these countries together in one region and dealing collectively. The regional approach to countries of Central Asia is noticeable in policy and activity of various external bodies, such as NATO, UNO. From European side these views are common in work of OSCE and EU.

Separation or not of Central Asia from post-Soviet space is present in policies. Hence, according to Allison (2004: 466), OSCE aiming at creating separate “security space” in Central Asia does not regard such initiative as a part “of the larger reconfiguration of a post-communist ‘security space.’” Though OSCE aims at intensifying regional integration in Central Asia through creation of “the facilitating conditions” to achieve “a regional cooperative environment.”

In a similar manner, EU is to develop regional approach to Central Asia. Efegil (2010) recommends that not only should EU continue such policy of regional approach, but it is of higher efficiency to develop the approach by co-operating with other actors – such as OSCE, US, NATO and so on - as “a strategic partner to regional states.”

However, 5 countries are not forming a real region due to absence of intensity of co-operation and at times opposite vectors of development. There is no single unifying element to bring them together, despite of undoubted necessity of such cooperation. But from EU side is this perception of region containing more than simple repetition of Soviet regionalization?

### **3. Relations between the EU and Central Asia**

#### **3.1. Is Central Asia becoming a region with the assistance of EU?**

Discussions about European Union's identity in its external relations usually form around the issues of what constitutes Europe and whether there are certain interests and aims it should pursue in its external role. Popularly, these questions refer to widening and deepening (as well as 'including' and 'excluding' (Vogt, 2006). However, the complexity of external relations in particular in addressing former USSR also extends the scope in direction of regionalization. "The political collapse of the communist regimes of the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and of the Former Soviet Union provide the first opportunity for the EU to develop structured approach to its external energy policy." (Andrews-Speed, 2004: 99)

Is EU a global actor, moral agency of international institutions, or cooperative region? (Vogt, 2006) Among scholars and practitioners it is common to regard external role of the Union within the framework of promoting European values (if those are solely European - disputable), such as democratic rule, protection of human rights, respect for human freedom, dignity and others. However, there is also tendency for regionalization promotion.

EU is aiming at region-to-region dialogue in its external relations. Its goal further is seen as Europeanization – as promotion of regional integration outside EU or research of EU (as opposed as the view of inter-regionalism that does not see it credible for other regions to use EU model)<sup>7</sup> Such view in a theory of regionalism contains the idea of governance about the nations through provision of a certain model or references for other regional units to be.

In regards to the former USSR EU has classified un-regionalized former USSR states as either potential EU member or not. Hence, Baltic states already joined the Union, while the rest are not yet considered membership in closer future. Therefore the rest of the former USSR is put under Neighbourhood policy with sometimes seen EU-Russian relations as a special case. Further classification is not something newly created: country grouping is done mainly in the same way as under USSR, as is with the Central Asia.

European Union opened its first delegation in Kazakhstan in 1994 and started engaging in the Central Asian region through bi and multilateral relations within the PAC (Partnership and Cooperation Agreements) with each of the five states and the TACIS (Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States) program to address more region-based view (Matveeva, 2006). The former addressing state-building and economic and commercial reform remained the prime focus in relations between 1996 and 2001 (Efegil, 2010). Terrorist attacks on the USA on September 11, 2001 led to the shift in strategy and perception, as EU has appointed a Special Representative for the Central Asia. New strategy was adopted only in 2006 and

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<sup>7</sup>Dr.Hartmut Mayer in the course “Regional Studies” held in Hitotsubashi University from April 1, 2010 to July 31, 2010

centralized additional concepts in relations: respect and protection of human rights, development of democratization and good governance, and the eradication of poverty (Efegil, 2010).

The TACIS program was aimed at assisting Eastern Europe and Central Asia to transit to market economy and establish democracy. Its measures mainly included: transfer of knowledge; industrial cooperation and partnerships between public and private bodies; technical assistance to accompany investment and investment financing; and purchases of supplies.<sup>8</sup>As a following, EU issued the Regional Strategy Paper (RSP) under the administration of TACIS.<sup>9</sup>The latest RSP for 2007 – 2013 prioritizes both regional and individual country-based approaches.<sup>10</sup>Yet according to Alexander Frenz, who was assisting as a long-term team leader of several regional monitoring projects of the EC's TACIS Programme since its very beginning, Soviet Union as a whole was already an “integrated system,” but with its outbreak newly independent states were eager to be more self-sufficient; and in fact EU through TACIS was promoting at the same time both more independence – “disintegration” – and cooperation on regional issues – “re-installation.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No [99/2000](#) of 29 December 1999 concerning the provision of assistance to the partner states in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Retrieved from [http://europa.eu/legislation\\_summaries/external\\_relations/relations\\_with\\_third\\_countries/eastern\\_europe\\_and\\_central\\_asia/r17003\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/external_relations/relations_with_third_countries/eastern_europe_and_central_asia/r17003_en.htm)

<sup>9</sup>European Commission. Strategy paper 2002-2006 and indicative programme 2002-2004 for Central Asia, *Council Regulation* No 99/2000

<sup>10</sup>European Community Regional Strategy Paper for Assistance to Central Asia for the period 2007-2013 Retrieved from: [http://eeas.europa.eu/central\\_asia/rsp/07\\_13\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/central_asia/rsp/07_13_en.pdf)

<sup>11</sup>Frenz, A. The European Commission's Tacis Programme 1991 – 2006. A Success Story. Retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/regional-cooperation/enpi-east/documents/annual\\_programmes/tacis\\_success\\_story\\_final\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/regional-cooperation/enpi-east/documents/annual_programmes/tacis_success_story_final_en.pdf)

## 2.2. Energy cooperation

The first attempts in energy related cooperation were made not long after establishing official relations. In 1995 the Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe program (INOGATE) was created.<sup>12</sup> The idea of it was to build a regional pipeline system to transport oil and gas to Europe from Caspian sea spots. There are 4 main priorities: energy market convergence on the basis of the EU principles; enhancement of energy security; supporting sustainable energy, and attracting investment towards energy projects of common and regional interest. Yet now this energy cooperation between the EU, the littoral States of the Black & Caspian Seas and their neighbouring countries is mainly addressing technical aspects of energy industry of the countries of Black and Caspian Sea and the neighbouring countries<sup>13</sup>. Such aspects include harmonizing oil and gas standards and practices, capacity building for energy regulators, enhancing security and safety, etc. In 2009 EU spent in total EUR 51.831.355 for this programme.<sup>14</sup> The programme is conducted on intergovernmental level.

In 2009 Intergovernmental Agreement on Nabucco project was signed in Ankara. This gas pipeline is to link Europe (Austria, Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary) with Central Asia via Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran and Turkey that will extend over 3000 km and cost approximately EUR 7,9 billion<sup>15</sup> Nabucco is a priority for the EU to

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<sup>12</sup> [www.inogate.org](http://www.inogate.org)

<sup>13</sup> EU energy policy emphasizes both Central Asia and Caspian countries as a region to develop stronger relations. However, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan belong to both groupings, while clear distinction between aims in dealing with two regions is not clear.

<sup>14</sup> INOGATE 2009 Annual Report

[http://www.inogate.org/attachments/article/46/Inogate\\_AR\\_2009\\_en\\_PRINT.pdf](http://www.inogate.org/attachments/article/46/Inogate_AR_2009_en_PRINT.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> European Commission. Interconnecting Europe: new perspectives for trans-European energy networks. Luxembourg: European Communities, 2008: 20

improve its security of supplies. However, building of the project is to be fulfilled only in 2013 with the first gas flow to be started in 2017<sup>16</sup>.

The energy cooperation is slow or difficult to be reached due to many factors including role of Russia, as Russian Gasprom tries to preserve its monopoly over the natural gas from Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to Europe within the so-called 'pipeline politics.' (Checchi, Behrens, Egenhofer, 2009). These authors in addition state that it was only to the CIS countries, but never European customers that Russian has voluntarily interrupted gas supply (ibid).

In its energy Europe's external dependency is projected to increase in future: by 2025 for 90% for oil and 80% for gas. (Cameron, 2008). Because of the US own oil needs, EU is not likely to receive much crude oil from the Americas (Checchi, Behrens, Egenhofer, 2009). Thus there will be increase in dependency from the unstable countries and regions: Russia, Central Asia<sup>17</sup>, the Middle East and West Africa (Cameron, 2008). The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Middle East are in possession of 70% of global gas reserves (Arima, 2004).

Since EU imports over 60% of its gas and over 80% of its oil, it needs a balanced energy policy that takes into consideration interests of both EU members and energy exporting countries. After energy crisis in Eastern Europe in 2009 the urgency to secure energy supplies became more acute. What is security of energy supplies? It is a "task of modernising, expanding, renewing and inter-connecting Europe's energy infrastructure to secure affordable, reliable and sustainable energy supplies over coming

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<sup>16</sup> From the official web-site of the Nabucco Pipeline Project: <http://www.nabucco-pipeline.com/portal/page/portal/en>

<sup>17</sup> Checchi, Behrens, Egenhofer name the Caspian, not Central Asian region as one of the main oil importers. (Checchi, Behrens, Egenhofer, 2009)

years and decades.”<sup>18</sup> Conceptualized as a policy engaging not only physical security of supply, but also good governance and investment in source countries,<sup>19</sup> as well as concerns about diversification of energy supplies, energy security is a broad area.

The real matter of concern is not however increase of resource import dependence, but rather group of risks that are part of it. Security of supply risks covers geopolitical, geological, economic, technical and environmental risks. Security of supply is often seen either from economic (market rules with the prices as core solution and government intervention only at the time of markets failure) or political (nationalization of energy resources which requires international cooperation, government intervention and military control) perspectives, while together they may constitute full interpretation of the same process. Oil import risks include: transportation vulnerabilities, world rivalry potential over the resources, and the oil prices. Gas risks are: investment and facility risks, exporters’ reliability risks, and transit risks. (Checchi, Behrens, Egenhofer, 2009).

So EU’s view of the former Soviet Union states is twofold: they are for the majority not considered as potential members of the Union, but seen as important present or future energy suppliers (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan). Furthermore, energy security aspects require trade and inward investments to be made (Andrews-Speed, 2004).

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<sup>18</sup>Q&A; European Energy Programme for Recovery. MEMO/10/63 Brussels, 4 March 2010. Retrieved from:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/10/63&format=HTML&aged=0&language=en&guiLanguage=en>

<sup>19</sup>Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy: Providing Security in a Changing World. Brussels, 11 December 2008: S407/08: p.5

Regionalization promotion is described in a form of a dialogue. EU external affairs need to contain dialogue, as it will change the pre-fixed ideas or some absolute-truth-like common values (Mayer, Vogt, 2006). In energy policy it supposes to contain dialogue with all the parties involved (suppliers, transit countries or major consumer countries) should be developed in a balanced and constructive manner.<sup>20</sup>“Only in Europe has the idea of regional collaboration in energy followed through in a systematic manner on a wide range of fronts, and only in Europe have such initiatives been in progress for a sufficient period of time for lessons to be drawn for other parts of the world.” (Andrews-Speed, 2004: 86) If the EU benefits from resources in the region, it should try to help their developments, in the view of the beneficiary and contribution principles (Mayer, Vogt, 2006).

With Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan Union has double policy of both country-to-country and regional approaches.<sup>21</sup> The distinction is drawn between discussed issues: human and economic developments are in bilateral perspective, while border disputes and other problems between the countries are dealt in regional perspective. The question of necessity of both approaches remains.

Most of the views on why EU is regarding Central Asia as a region in energy cooperation are united. They see involvement of Russia and China as the main challenging factors, and since both these countries regard Central Asia as a region, the

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<sup>20</sup>Council of the European Union (2008) Draft report to the European Council on energy security. Presidency briefing. 14090/08. October 14. Brussels. P.13

<sup>21</sup>Council of the European Union. European Union and Central Asia: Strategy for a new partnership. European Communities, October, 2007

same logic is followed by EU. Rational theories treat this as counter-balancing relations for EU to sustain in the area.

However, if we return to external role of EU as a regionalization promoter, this becomes meaningless. Normative approach prioritizes aim, not a challenge or a competition for its basis. So for the security of energy supply it is important to have a region-to-region relations. EU cannot be satisfied with the status quo of indecision regarding Central Asian area (Melvin, 2007)

The reason for looking at energy cooperation in regionalization approach is the availability of regional borders. Central Asia was constructed in its façade during the Soviet period. The energy infrastructure and inter-connections were also constructed in that time. The missing part is the real regional content – overcoming national interests in developing system of relations to achieve common aims.

Kassenova argues that EU unlike Russia, China or US has resources and potential to influence “transformation of a region into a secure and well-governed area.” (Kassenova, 2008: 4) This is one of the numerous examples of regarding Central Asia as a real region, which is not so. Instead, it is more realistic to treat EU engagement through energy cooperation as a means to construct region out of this area.

Since this part of EU’s external role is not covered in academics, there is still plenty of areas to research, such as means of regionalization. According to Alexander Frenz, who was assisting as a long-term team leader of several regional monitoring projects of the EC’s TACIS Programme since its very beginning, Soviet Union as a whole was already an “integrated system,” but with its outbreak newly independent states were eager to be more self-sufficient; and in fact EU through TACIS was

promoting at the same time both more independence – “disintegration” – and cooperation on regional issues – “re-installation.”

Could it be that EU is aimed at de-regionalization of non-functioning old soviet regions<sup>22</sup> or could it be that EU is trying to complete what was not yet achieved in Soviet regionalization? Central Asia was made to group countries that provide resources to the center. EU is also interested in the region not for provision of future membership, but presently for energy cooperation. This involves solving a set of issue related to security of energy supply, which expects regionalization approach.

## **Conclusion**

At the current stage Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan neither form, nor desire to be perceived as - inherited from USSR in definition, but not developed into reality - a single Central Asian region. Intensification of economic and political relations with international bodies yet imposes such perception. European Union as it is recently actively working on energy relations, in particular security of energy supply, has a normative role of implying regionalization approach to these five states and thus take further steps in both its identity and external role.

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<sup>22</sup> This does not mean creation of new Central Asia by such modification of inclusion (i.e. Afghanistan – as suggested by Kassenova (2008) or exclusion member-countries )

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