



POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC INTERESTS OF THE CENTRAL ASIAN STATES

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Article history:	Abstract:
Received: June 4 th 2022 Accepted: July 6 th 2022 Published: August 13 th 2022	The article contains an analysis of the political and economic interests of the Central Asian states, as well as relations between the EU and Central Asia. The main attention paid to the new EU strategy in Central Asia as an important mechanism for stabilizing the region and its development.
Keywords: EU, Central Asian, development, political and economic interests, new strategy	

Modern conditions dictate the need to develop a new format for cooperation between states in the world. For almost 20 years, new independent states have been developing successfully and not very well in the post-Soviet space. For the states located in the Central Asian region, this was a time of difficult decisions, attempts to overcome numerous socio-economic and political problems, which aggravated by the activation of the forces of religious extremism and terrorism.

The foreign policy course of the Central Asian countries determined by the national interests of the countries themselves, the political situation in the world, and depends on the ambitions of the ruling elite. The implementation of this course depends largely on international support, and the European Union plays an important role in this process. EU representatives, who have repeatedly stated that Europe's presence in Central Asia should be more effective, also understand this.

The process of building relations between the EU countries and the Central Asian republics began almost from the first years after they gained independence. Contacts established at the embassy level. Non-governmental organizations financed by various public and private foundations of European countries created and functioned. At the first stages of the formation of new independent states, the principles of building democracy declared, and the member states of the European Union sought to take part in this. First, European countries tried to include the states of the region in the system of European security and conflict prevention through the OSCE. All countries declared their readiness to accept the values, standards and obligations of this organization, however, it should be noted that in practice, after so many years of independence, a truly democratic state has not appeared in any of the Central Asian republics. Perhaps the most advanced in this respect can be called Kyrgyzstan (an active civil society, a strong opposition, legal, civil and social reforms).

The political weight of the European Union in the world began gradually increase. The signing of the Maastricht Treaty (in 1992) and its entry into force in 1993 marked new approaches not only to regional policy, but also significantly expanded the zone of EU interests beyond Europe.

The European Union gradually turned into a supranational structure for political cooperation, search for compromises in domestic policy and coordination of foreign policy guidelines with a new vision of the national interests of states not only in the European region. In 1996, the European Union signed Partnership and Cooperation Agreements with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan (entered into force in 1999), and in 1998 an agreement was initialed with Turkmenistan, in 2004 - with Tajikistan. These documents reflected the mutual interest of the parties in the further strengthening of bilateral contacts.

The decision adopted at the OSCE Istanbul Summit in November 1999 further expanded institutional opportunities for the development of relations between the European Union and Central Asia. Charter of European Security for the New Century. It laid the foundations for the OSCE's activities in the region and demonstrated its intention to strengthen the organization's key role in maintaining peace and stability, post-conflict reconstruction, democratization, respect for human rights and election observation.

Before the start of the NATO anti-terrorist operation in Afghanistan, Russia was the guarantor of external security in Central Asia. However, the events of September 11, 2001 in America changed the entire system of world security. Countries have realized the fragility of peaceful life, even if the largest power in the world with the most powerful security system subjected to such a devastating attack. These events served as a kind of catalyst for revising the policy towards the Central Asian states, as countries located in close proximity to Afghanistan, a source of terrorist danger. To minimize the risks of a recurrence of such



events, the provision of humanitarian, technical assistance and comprehensive cooperation between Western countries and Central Asia, including the provision of soft loans, grants, and the introduction of democratic principles, has intensified.

Since the independence of the Central Asian republics in the early 1990s, the European Commission has provided the region with more than 1.4 billion euros in financial support, representatives of the European Union have always taken part in monitoring the elections of the heads of state of the region, but, it should be noted, they have never recognized these elections are objective and fair. Some work has been carried out by various European organizations (OSCE, European Bank). A program of cooperation and assistance to the Central Asian states was adopted - Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) is a program developed by the European Union for the CIS countries and Mongolia in order to promote the development of harmonious and sound economic and political links between the European Union and these partner countries. The program funded research projects in these countries grant-free through tenders in accordance with the policy of transition to a market economy and democratic society. The allocated funds for approved subsidized projects spent on the results of joint decisions of TACIS representatives and the recipient state. Almost before the adoption of the new EU Strategy in 2007, the EU countries cooperated with the Central Asian states and provided them with assistance mainly through TACIS.

At the present stage, the multilateral orientation of the EU policy, expressed in the desire to interact with different centers of power and different regions in the world, has been preserved. Europe did not define its interests in Central Asia as strategic for a long time. It seems to us that this was because other states traditionally dominated the region, in particular Russia, China, and Turkey.

The processes of globalization have equally affected Europe and Central Asia, and joint decisions were required on many issues. Geographically, the region is located in such a way that security problems come to the fore, in particular, the proximity to Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran increases terrorist risks, since it is known that active hostilities are taking place in Afghanistan and the main forces of 156 many terrorist organizations are located. It is extremely important for European countries to provide assistance in solving the problems of effective border management, migration flows, and the fight against

organized crime, human trafficking, drugs and weapons.

In an effort to minimize dependence on Russia's energy resources, European countries are attempting to diversify their energy supply policy and Central Asia becomes the main resource in this case. EU actions aimed at helping to improve investment conditions in the region increase the production and efficiency of energy carriers and designate new schemes for the supply and distribution of energy carriers. Unlike the Central Asian experts, not all European experts share the euphoria of the adopted strategy and are rather skeptical about the possibilities of its effective implementation; in particular, they doubt the priority of several directions at once. In their opinion, such a number of declared topics as the main ones reduces the possibility of their effective implementation. Many experts doubt the impartiality of the actions of politicians in power in the Central Asian countries, especially the Turkmen leader.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the countries of the European Union were faced with the task of optimizing energy flows, providing assistance in resolving interethnic and interethnic conflicts, and promoting and implementing democratic principles.

In order to understand and understand the existing models of interaction between the EU and Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, we need to go back a little into the history of their relations.

Particular attention drawn to the economic and political heavyweight Uzbekistan, known for strict public administration practices, independence in decision-making and a multi-vector foreign policy. In the first years of independence, Uzbekistan chose the direction to the West. This led to a radical restructuring of the scheme of political and economic relations both within the country and between states. This stage is characterized by the mutual attraction of optimistic Western countries and Uzbekistan, the euphoria of independence and the benefits associated with it (Uzbekistan became an equal member of the world community, could independently build its foreign and domestic policy). All this led to close interaction in the political, economic and cultural fields. Numerous joint ventures, non-governmental organizations created lyceums and cultural centers opened, a flow of investments from abroad poured into the country, and loans from the IMF and the World Bank provided to the country.

However, the violation of democratic rights and freedoms in Uzbekistan, the harsh suppression of popular unrest in Andijan caused serious concern in



Western countries and determined the means of economic influence on the existing regime.

After the Andijan events of 2005, when the country found itself in international isolation, the pro-Western foreign policy of Uzbekistan was reoriented primarily from the far abroad to the CIS countries, mainly Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan; from other countries, first of all - Turkey (the community of Turkic states affected) and China (neighborhood). At the same time, the scheme of relations between the government structures of Uzbekistan and international organizations under the patronage of the West changed. It involved the use of harsh measures against non-governmental organizations. Numerous foreign NGOs and foundations that sponsored the development of democratic reforms in the country were closed. Experts loyal to the regime believe that discriminatory steps on the part of the West, the imposition of sanctions and restrictions, caused such a negative reaction.

The rejection of the Western vector implied the choice by Uzbekistan of possible more developed and strong patrons who could help in realizing its goal - to become the leading regional power in Central Asia. In this case, rapprochement with China was more convenient for Uzbekistan, unlike Russia, which traditionally has closer contacts with Tashkent's competitor in the region - Kazakhstan. Beijing is actively investing in 158 elements of transport infrastructure in Central Asia to form reliable communication routes. For official Uzbekistan, the role of China is convenient as a deterrent to the possible strengthening of Russia's imperial (from Uzbekistan's point of view) ambitions in the region.

The changes affected not only economic markets, but also political interests. To a certain extent, foreign policy prerequisites for the revitalization of the activities of the Republic of Uzbekistan in organizations formed in the post-Soviet space have been formed: the CIS, the SCO, the EurAsEC, and the CSTO. Numerous bilateral and multilateral agreements and treaties have been concluded.

For Uzbekistan, this meant a change in foreign policy partners and a sharp turn towards new "old" friends. The current situation has become similar to I. Karimov's use of political and economic contradictions in the region between Russia and the West. The algorithm of political changes in Uzbekistan also included the participation of the Russian side and the lobbying of its interests by influential representatives of the Uzbek diaspora in Moscow.

The theme of the fight against terrorism came to the fore, which often diverted attention from internal political contradictions. Supporting the frankly authoritarian and harsh regime of I. Karimov, Moscow, for which Uzbekistan remained a partner in the energy sector, unlike the EU, ignored the undemocratic methods of government of the Uzbek president.

Some experts believe that the term combating terrorism in Uzbekistan meant, among other things, opposition to "color revolutions", "radical democracy", etc. Thus, I. Karimov had the resources to counter the opposition, represented by the interests of clans, heterogeneous groups and Islamic organizations, whose activities were primarily aimed at the struggle for power.

Afghanistan has become one of the important foreign policy vectors for Uzbekistan. Close proximity to the borders, problems of political instability and drug threats are feverish in the region and have a negative impact on the internal political situation inside the country, especially the support for Islamic movements, in particular the IMU, received in Afghanistan.

In this regard, the importance of multilateral cooperation between the countries of the region in helping Afghanistan, in restoring control of the central government over the country, its economic development, and humanitarian support for the population with the involvement of other international organizations, as well as Western countries and the United States, is growing.

Western countries included Uzbekistan in the zone of their interests, especially bearing in mind the military and economic strengthening of Russia in the 2000s. But Uzbekistan was looking for new formats of relations with foreign policy partners. In the late 1990s, Uzbekistan welcomed initiatives to interact with the EU, the US, Turkey, and South Korea.

In 2007-2008 there was a return to Europe and the United States while maintaining stable relations with Russia and China in a bilateral format. At present, broad democratic reforms have been announced in Uzbekistan, and Western countries are providing comprehensive support to Tashkent. Thus, the sanctions imposed against Uzbekistan after the Andijan events in 2005 were partially lifted. The EU, in particular, resumed regular meetings of experts stipulated by the partnership agreement. In addition, the European Union no longer insists on its own investigation of the events in Andijan, but agrees to confine itself to the case materials provided by the Uzbek side. High-ranking officials from EU countries frequented the country. Close contacts between



Uzbekistan and Germany make it possible to continue using the airport in Tashkent for military purposes as part of the anti-terrorist operation in Afghanistan.

The defining event of this period of relations was the meeting of President I. Karimov with the Chairman of the Commission of the European Communities Jose Manuel Barroso on January 25, 2011 in Brussels, where important agreements were signed regulating relations between the European Union and Uzbekistan (Agreement on the establishment of an EU delegation, on the opening of a full-fledged European representative offices, Energy Memorandum).

Despite the authoritarian nature of power in Uzbekistan, today the West is striving to normalize relations with this country, which occupies one of the key positions in Central Asia. The leader of Uzbekistan continues the course towards rapprochement with all influential forces in the world and implements in practice the policy of "multi-vector" or "equidistance".

Relations with neighbors in the region, states in the post-Soviet space, developed Western countries, the United States and the Islamic world are formed de jure on the basis of the national interests of the Republic of Uzbekistan, but de facto to a greater extent on the basis of the personal position and preferences of President I. Karimov.

The policy of the West in Uzbekistan has always been focused on providing access to minerals and, most importantly, to Uzbek gas, in particular, through lobbying for the construction of the Nabucco gas pipeline. In addition, the West seeks to protect its investments in the country and cut off the flow of drugs from Central Asia to Europe.

Contacts along the lines of Uzbekistan-EU, Uzbekistan-NATO and Uzbekistan-US are expanding from year to year. The negotiation process is resumed between the parties, and each time this happens at the initiative of both parties. Such a transformation in relations is explained by the fact that the goals and objectives of the Western countries have changed somewhat, in particular, the war in Afghanistan and the struggle for energy resources require an active partnership with Tashkent, and the promotion of democracy has been relegated to the background. The "Andijan issue", which undermined relations with the West at the last stage, is no longer on the political agenda.

In March 2008, Uzbekistan granted the US military the right to use the airfield near Termez for intermediate landings when flying to Afghanistan. But as the US State Department clarified, "the US does not have direct access on a bilateral basis to any of the

military facilities in Uzbekistan." The US military can land in Uzbekistan only on board the German Air Force.

An analysis of the situation shows that, despite fairly even relations with Russia, the continuation of the multi-vector policy leads to a gradual change in the orientation of Uzbekistan's foreign policy towards the EU and the United States.

The dynamics of EU-CA relations depended on the political and economic processes taking place in the world. The formation of new independent states in the post-Soviet space changed the world order of relations, led to the formation of the statehood of the former Soviet republics at a different level, their institutional reform, and the determination of the priorities of these countries in foreign and domestic policy. The confrontation between the USSR and the West is over. The European Union also began to change quantitatively and qualitatively, its strategy towards Central Asia changed.

Thus, relations between the EU and Central Asia depend on various factors, but first they are aimed at cooperation in areas of interest to both sides. The EU countries are interested in the region as a potential partner for energy supplies. For their part, they are potentially important trade partners for Central Asia, sources of financial and food assistance, as well as technical assistance. Support for economic reforms in the region is one of the important activities of the EU. The Central Asian countries also see the EU as one of the guarantors of ensuring security and reducing the terrorist threat in the region. They hope for the strengthening of the mediating role of the European Union in resolving water conflicts, for the assistance of European countries in the development of education, agriculture and industry.

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Available Online at: <https://www.scholarexpress.net>
Volume-13, August-2022
ISSN: 2749-3601

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