



# Working | paper

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# Assessing the Effectiveness of the EU's and Russia's Cultural Diplomacy towards Central Asia

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## List of abbreviations

BMZ – **Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung** (German Federal Ministry for Cooperation and Development)

BOMCA – Border Management Programme in Central Asia

CA – Central Asia

CADAP – Central Asian Drug Assistance Programme

CAEP – Central Asia Education Platform

CD – Cultural Diplomacy

CIS – Commonwealth of Independent States

CoE – Council of Europe

CSOs – Civil Society Organisations

CSTO – Collective Security Treaty Organisation

DALF - **Diplôme approfondi de langue française** (Diploma in Advanced French)

DCI – Development Cooperation Instrument

DELFL – **Diplôme d'études en langue française** (Diploma in French Language Studies)

EAEU – Eurasian Economic Union

EC – European Commission

EEAS – European External Action Service

EL-CSID – European Leadership in Cultural, Science and Innovation Diplomacy

EU – European Union

EU MS – EU Member States

EUCAM – Europe-Central Asia Monitoring

EUNIC – EU National Institutes for Culture

EUSRCA – EU Special Representative for Central Asia

FSB - **Federal'naya sluzhba bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii** (Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation)

GONGO – Government-organised Non-governmental Organisation

GOPA – **Gesellschaft für Organisation, Planung und Ausbildung** (Society for Organisation, Planning, and Training)

HEI – Higher Education Institution(s)

MIP – Multi-annual Indicative Programme

NGO – Non-governmental Organisation

ODA – Overseas Development Assistance

PCA – Partnership and Cooperation Agreement

SCO – Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

TACIS – Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States

TFEU – Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

UK – United Kingdom

UNESCO – The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

US – United States

## Abstract

This paper attempts to analyse the European Union's (EU) cultural diplomacy (CD) efforts in five Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, hereinafter 'Central Asia'). Beginning in the early 2000s, EU Member States looked at the region with increased interest. Aside from major engagements on trade, energy and security, education and intercultural dialogue were stressed as priority areas in the 2007 EU Strategy for Central Asia. To measure EU effectiveness as a CD actor in Central Asia, a comparative dimension is proposed by analysing the role Russia has pursued. At law and policy level, since Putin's return to the Presidency in 2012, Russia has reaffirmed its ambitions to strengthen both hard and soft presence in Central Asia, viewing the region within its sphere of influence. This engagement was reiterated in the 2015 Strategy of National Security and in the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept. To draw a comparison, actors' CD effectiveness is measured in terms of willingness, capacity, and acceptance, based on the theoretical framework proposed by Kingah, Amaya and Van Langenhove<sup>1</sup>.

This paper finds that European CD efforts had mixed results due to an inconsistent policy towards the region. Although EU cultural heritage and educational influence are widely acknowledged, Russia remains today the major foreign actor in Central Asia, displaying strong levels of attractiveness among citizenry and elites. Historical and cultural ties, but also institutional and economic efforts allowed Moscow to keep its leading position. However, Russia's future regional leadership should not be taken for granted, as all Central Asian states have been looking at Moscow's cultural engagement with increased scepticism.

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<sup>1</sup> KINGAH, Stephen, AMAYA, Ana B. and VAN LANGENHOVE, Luk, Requirements for Effective European Union Leadership in Science and Cultural Diplomacy on (Inter)Regionalism in the South, *EL-CSID Working Paper, Issue 1*, <http://cris.unu.edu/sites/cris.unu.edu/files/W-2016-3%20paper.pdf> Retrieved on 14 November 2017.

## 1. Introduction

Over the last few years, the interest in the use of culture in the European Union's (EU) external relations has been growing steadily. The topic has gained so much importance, that in a communiqué the European Commission (EC) has recently suggested to put it "at the heart of EU international relations"<sup>2</sup>. EU High Representative and Vice President of the Commission Federica Mogherini stated that "culture is a powerful tool to build bridges between people [...] against those trying to divide us [...] which is why cultural diplomacy must be at the core of our relationship with today's world". Tibor Navracsis, the European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, emphasised that "culture is the hidden gem of our foreign policy [and] it has a great role to play in making the EU a stronger global actor"<sup>3</sup>.

This ambition to enhance the EU's image and role in the world by means of culture stems from the general perception that cultural diplomacy (CD) would enhance a country's or organisation's image and thus soft power<sup>4</sup>. It is seen as a friendly way of making one's country and culture –and possibly also norms– more attractive to others, who might even adapt to it. So where hard power pushes, soft power pulls. Joseph Nye, when developing the concept, set out three primary sources of soft power: political values, culture and foreign policy<sup>5</sup>. Soft power and CD are nearly always being linked, be it by countries or even by organisations like UNESCO<sup>6</sup>. As such, interest in soft power has been rising at the national, regional and international levels.

Whilst the term 'soft power' has gained more and more popularity within the realm of international relations, so have soft power analyses. An example is offered by the Soft Power 30, an index measuring countries' attraction published by Portland Communications and the USC Center on Public Diplomacy. Two of the six objective criteria mentioned are culture and education. In the 2016 ranking, the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK) and Germany held the top three places. Interestingly, many other European countries held a place in the top-30, as for instance France (5<sup>th</sup> place), Switzerland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Italy and Spain (respectively 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> place)<sup>7</sup>. In 2017, the ranking shifted, with France, the UK and the US on the top three. Other European countries remained at around the same place.

However, there is no need to always see culture as a soft power tool and as a means to showcase European culture. CD, when referring to the definition proposed by the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, would rather be "a course of actions, which are based on and utilise the exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture or identity, whether to strengthen relationships, enhance socio-cultural cooperation, promote national interests and beyond"<sup>8</sup>. It could thus also be perceived as a means to strengthen ties and as a mediation tool between countries and regions.

Defined in the Council Conclusions of 22 June 2015 as a "region of strategic importance"<sup>9</sup>, Central Asia (CA) has been targeted by increasing European activity since the early 2000s. Aside from major engagements on trade, energy and security, education and inter-cultural dialogue were stressed as

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<sup>2</sup> EUROPEAN COMMISSION, *A New Strategy to Put Culture at the Heart of EU International Relations*, 8 June 2016. [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-16-2074\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-2074_en.htm) Retrieved on 13 November 2017.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>4</sup> NYE, Joseph, *Soft Power: Means to Success in World Politics*, New York: Public Affairs, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> PORTLAND, *The Soft Power 30, a Global Ranking of Soft Power*, 2016. <https://portland-communications.com/pdf/The-Soft-Power-30-Report-2016.pdf> Retrieved on 16 August 2017.

<sup>6</sup> UNESCO, *The Soft Power of Culture*, [http://www.unesco.org/culture/culture-sector-knowledge-management-tools/12\\_Info%20Sheet\\_Soft%20Power.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/culture/culture-sector-knowledge-management-tools/12_Info%20Sheet_Soft%20Power.pdf) Retrieved on 14 November 2017.

<sup>7</sup> PORTLAND, *The Soft Power 30...*, *op. cit.* p.5.

<sup>8</sup> INSTITUTE FOR CULTURAL DIPLOMACY, *What is Cultural Diplomacy? What is Soft Power?*, 2017. [http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/index.php?en\\_culturaldiplomacy](http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/index.php?en_culturaldiplomacy) Retrieved on 15 December 2017.

<sup>9</sup> COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, *Council conclusions on the EU Strategy for Central Asia*, 22 June 2015, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/06/22/fac-central-asia-conclusions/> Retrieved on 15 November 2017.

priority areas in the 2007 EU Strategy for CA and remain pertinent for future EU actions. By establishing delegations in four out of five countries of the region (Turkmenistan being at present the exception), Brussels has sought to gain more visibility and influence, especially in comparison to other regional competitors. Russia, for example, has always remained a major regional actor for historical and geographical reasons. Additionally, a rise in Moscow's general soft attraction was also witnessed in the past years<sup>10</sup>.

Even though the EC has been treating Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan as one unique entity, it is rather problematical to argue that the five discussed countries form a political region. As it is hard to generalise in terms of CD, it is attempted to also discuss the countries separately, and not only as a region.

This paper has been written in the framework of the project for European Leadership in Cultural, Science and Innovation Diplomacy (EL-CSID), analysing the relevance of cultural, science and innovation diplomacy for the EU's external relations in the evolving global context. This paper looks at the effectiveness of the EU's CD towards CA. In doing so, a comparative dimension is proposed by analysing the role Russia has pursued. To date, such a research has not been conducted on the region, although both Russia and the EU have been engaging themselves diplomatically these past decades. In addition to culture, this paper also includes educational efforts in the analysis, therefore proposing a more extensive definition of CD.

To discuss and compare the effectiveness of the EU's and Russia's policy, the paper relies on the framework proposed by Kingah, Amaya and Van Langenhove<sup>11</sup> in the inception paper of Work Package 5 for EL-CSID project. The framework analyses the effectiveness of the EU's promotion of regional and inter-regional processes in the south through cultural, science and innovation diplomacy. Given the specific features of each country and those of the region itself, the framework was slightly adapted. As such, this paper looks at **willingness** (chapter four), **capacity** (chapter five) and **acceptance** (chapter six) of both the EU and Russia regarding CD in CA. Willingness delineates the scope of actors' ambition in CD, while capacity covers elements that pertain to breadth, depth, quality and quantity of resources mobilised for effective CD. Finally, acceptance refers to the extent of credibility and ability to attract through culture that an actor is able to appeal. A general presentation of the region in the post-Soviet era and an overview on bilateral and regional approaches precede the assessments of CD indicators.

## 2. Geopolitics of Central Asia

In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the five former Soviet Republics of CA faced three different and interrelated types of challenges as new born entities: state- and nation-building processes, transitioning from a centrally planned economy to a market economy, and shaping their new place at the international level<sup>12</sup>.

### 2.1 Nationalising States: What Space for Minorities?

Since the Tsarist conquest of the region in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, CA has progressively become an ethnically diverse region. Multiple ethnic groups, often nomadic, were already living there, and many ethnic Russians moved later to CA in order to receive financial benefits. This trend dramatically accelerated during Stalin's rule, with constant processes of massive delocalisation and re-localisation of ethnic

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<sup>10</sup> Russia has experienced a small rise in the Portland Soft Power index: whereas in 2015 it did not occupy a place in the Portland Soft Power 30, it took the 27<sup>th</sup> place in 2016 and rose to the 26<sup>th</sup> place in 2017. PORTLAND, *The Soft Power 30...*, *op. cit.*, p.5.

<sup>11</sup> KINGAH, S., AMAYA, A. B. and VAN LANGENHOVE, L., Requirements for Effective..., *op. cit.* p.4.

<sup>12</sup> See ALLISON, Roy. Regionalism, regional structures and security management in Central Asia. *International Affairs*, vol. 80, no. 3, 2004, pp. 463-483; LARUELLE, Marlene and PEYROUSE, Sebastien. *Globalizing Central Asia: geopolitics and the challenges of economic development*, New York: ME Sharpe, 2013.

groups. Created in the 1920s under *razmezhevanie*, that is, the national delimitation process assigning territories to ethnic groups, the new-born republics inherited Soviet institutions and practices, which continued to exist during the post-Soviet era.

Nation-building efforts became stronger after the collapse of the Soviet Union and were largely led by former Communist bureaucratic elites. As noted by Akçali, with the only exception of Kyrgyz leader Akaev, “all of the post-Soviet era leaders of CA [...] were the First Secretaries of the Communist Parties in their own republics”<sup>13</sup>. Based on that common history, CA states have often been considered as examples of ‘nationalising states’, in which an ethnic majority aimed “to reinforce and promote its national identity upon the state, its institutions, symbols, and practices”<sup>14</sup>. As such, it could be argued that nation-building is imagined and pursued by former Soviet and ethnic majority elites, following a top-down approach that seeks power concentration.

Of course, one should also note that nation-building processes in CA were partly facilitated by the consistent return migration flows of Russian minorities. Between 1989 and 2008, ethnic Russians in the region decreased by 42 per cent. Today Kazakhstan still possesses the largest Russian minority, accounting for about 23.7 per cent of the total population in 2009. However, return migration was also coupled with increasing migration of Central Asians seeking work in Russia. In Peyrouse’s view, this forced CA governments “to maintain legal, linguistic, cultural, educational, and informational links with the old imperial centre”<sup>15</sup>.

## 2.2 Transitioning and Reliance on Natural Resources

As a more dramatic challenge, CA states were also obliged in the 1990s to transition to market structures and to pursue economic integration at the international level, whilst corruption remained spectacular.

Perhaps most importantly, market inefficiencies have been coupled with overwhelming reliance on natural resources export. At present, Kazakhstan possesses the world’s twelfth largest oil reserves: Turkmenistan has negligible quantity of oil in the soil but ranks fourth for the largest world gas reserves after Iran, Russia, and Qatar. When it comes to the other CA countries, Uzbekistan has extensive gold deposits, Kyrgyzstan exports coal, gold, and uranium among others, and the poorest resource-based economy, Tajikistan, has specialised in aluminium and cotton export. In the current phase of low commodity prices, CA states suffer the same fate as the Russian economy and are additionally facing a consistent decline in remittance from workers settled in Russia<sup>16</sup>.

## 2.3 Between Bandwagoning and Isolationism in the Regional Arena

As a consequence of contrasting political and economic priorities, CA leaders resorted to different policy choices at the international level in general, and within the post-Soviet bloc in particular. The most striking example of this phenomenon is to be noticed in regional memberships. It could be suggested that CA states resorted to two different strategies to interact in the neighbourhood:

- a) **Bandwagoning.** According to Allison, a number of CA states followed a path of accommodation with the regional leader, that is, Russia<sup>17</sup>. This could explain participation in more advanced regional structures such as the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and a deeper involvement in other security structures (Collective Security Treaty Organisation,

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<sup>13</sup> AKÇALI, Pinar, Nation-State Building in Central Asia: A lost Case?, p.96 in PARVIZI AMINEH, Mehdi, *Central Eurasia in global politics: conflict, security and development*, Leiden: BRILL, 2005, pp. 95-115.

<sup>14</sup> ISAACS, Rico and POLESE, Abel, Between “imagined” and “real” nation-building: identities and nationhood in post-Soviet Central Asia, *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2015, p. 373.

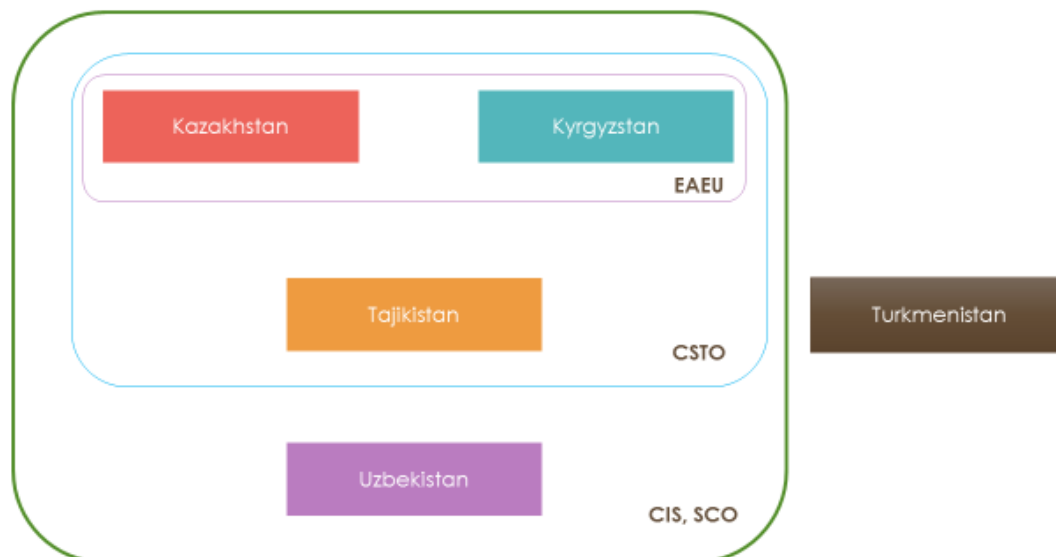
<sup>15</sup> PEYROUSE, Sebastien, The Russian minority in Central Asia: Migration, politics, and language, *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars*, 2008. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/OP297.pdf> Retrieved on 6 October 2017.

<sup>16</sup> OVOZI, Qishloq, Down And Out In Central Asia, *RFERL*, 9 April 2016. <https://www.rferl.org/a/qishloq-ovozi-economic-crisis-central-asia-russia-remittances/27664253.html> Retrieved on 6 October 2017.

<sup>17</sup> ALLISON, Roy, Regionalism, regional structures..., *op. cit.*

CSTO, and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, SCO). In this regard, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan tend to be considered as examples of bandwagoning with the regional leader, although Kazakhstan has showed a more active role in the process leading to the creation of the EAEU. Tajikistan's case could be considered another example of bandwagoning, as Dushanbe enjoys full integration within most of the regional organisations and is considered a prospect member of the EAEU.

Table 1: Venn diagram showing CA states' membership in regional organisations.



**b) Soft and hard isolationism.** Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have resisted regional integration at different levels and stages of their post-Soviet history and have largely followed a non-alignment route. As a member of the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) and SCO, Uzbekistan displays a softer isolationist position. In the early 2010s, Tashkent re-launched both an ideology of self-reliance (*mustaqillik*) and balancing between superpowers, culminating in 2012 with the decision to quit for the second time the CSTO<sup>18</sup>. Following a harder line of non-alignment, Turkmenistan has refused any project of regional integration and pursued closer ties with other international actors so to balance Russian hegemony in the neighbourhood.

Despite its overwhelming presence and interests, in the post-Soviet era Moscow has been facing increasing competition as a regional leader. In the last decade, China's engagement has covered many spheres: from multilateral cooperation on security under SCO to cooperation on energy and trade. Also, it should be noted that, in the Silk Road Economic Belt initiative, CA is intended to play a bridge role, connecting European and Asian markets.

When it comes to the US, in the aftermath of the independence Washington offered bilateral economic assistance and promoted defence cooperation. Following the steady decline in military presence in Afghanistan, the US has paid less attention in the region and let other actors play a greater role.

In light of common Muslim and Turkic ties, the role of Turkey should not be neglected. All CA states are members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and the Türksoy, while Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are also part of the Turkic Council, together with Azerbaijan and Turkey. In 2012, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu stated that Turkey's primary objectives in the region were support to democracy and free-market economy, energy assistance, and strengthening the Euro-Atlantic

<sup>18</sup> SAMOKHVALOV, Vsevolod, The new Eurasia: post-Soviet space between Russia, Europe and China, *European Politics and Society*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2016, pp. 82-96.



vocation in the region<sup>19</sup>. Also, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey expanded its educational programmes and Turkish language studies in the region under the slogan of 'Brotherhood of Turkish Nations'. With governmental and private funds, Turkey has since then funded a number of joint higher education institutions (HEIs) in the region<sup>20</sup>. As an example, Kyrgyzstan today hosts Kyrgyz Turkish Manas University, created in 1995 as the result of a common agreement between Ankara and Bishkek.

Finally, and in opposition to any Euro-Atlantic cooperation, Iran has increasingly asserted its presence in CA, and in particular in Tajikistan, where Iranian state-controlled media outlets were launched already in the early 1990s and used to spread the ideas of the Islamic Revolution. On this, Vinson has noted that "in spite of the challenges, Iran does attempt to project religious/ideological soft power that goes beyond the more obvious economic and cultural cooperation"<sup>21</sup>.

To summarise, in the aftermath of the implosion of the Soviet Union, a number of political and economic changes swept across CA countries. As key members of the old Soviet *nomenklatura*, the leaders of the new-born entities were charged with nation-building processes on one hand, and free market transition on the other. While at the political level top-to-bottom approaches favoured power concentration and increased control by majority elites, since the 1990s much of CA countries' economic survival has relied on natural resources export. Despite increased autonomy in the international arena, and the growing number of players interacting in the region, most of the actions taken by CA states have confirmed Russia's significant role in the region, and a substantial cleavage persists on the interactions with Moscow.

### 3. Floating Between Bilateral and Regional Approaches

As a universal development, globalisation has been strongly interrelated with regional processes<sup>22</sup>. Since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many geographical areas have increasingly acted as regions, sharing political, economic and/or security projects and portraying their authority beyond those regional borders. As part of a dialectic process of "global structural change"<sup>23</sup>, globalisation and regionalism have called into question the role and the authority of the Westphalian state and even led scholars to look at alternative new world orders, in which regions would play the main role in global affairs, from trade to conflict management<sup>24</sup>. As a major regional actor, the EU has often been portrayed as the champion of regionalism and has encouraged regionalism processes throughout the world these past decades. In particular, three variations in the EU policy of inter-regionalism across regions were identified: "(i) promoting a liberal internationalist agenda; (ii) building the EU's identity as a global actor; and (iii) promoting the EU's power and competitiveness"<sup>25</sup>.

In spite of this growing trend, in the early 1990s EU engagement in CA remained timid, lacking not only a regional strategy, but also consistent action at the bilateral level. Only by 1996, with the notable exception of Turkmenistan, all countries concluded Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs)

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<sup>19</sup> SATKE, Ryskeldi, MICHEL, Casey and KORKMAZ, Sertaç, Turkey in Central Asia: Turkic Togetherness?, *The Diplomat*, 28 November 2014. <https://thediplomat.com/2014/11/turkey-in-central-asia-turkic-togetherness/> Retrieved on 6 October 2017.

<sup>20</sup> FOMINYKH, Alexey, Russia's Public Diplomacy in Central Asia and the Caucasus: The Role of the Universities, *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2016.

<sup>21</sup> VINSON, Mark, Iranian Soft Power in Tajikistan: Beyond Cultural and Economic Ties, *The Jamestown Foundation - Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol. 9, no. 52, 14 March 2012. <https://jamestown.org/program/iranian-soft-power-in-tajikistan-beyond-cultural-and-economic-ties/> Retrieved on 6 October 2017.

<sup>22</sup> SODERBAUM, Fredrik and SBRAGIA, Alberta, EU Studies and the New Regionalism: What Can be Gained by Dialogue?, *Journal of European Integration*, 2010, vol. 32, no. 6, pp. 563-582.

<sup>23</sup> HETTNE, Björn. Globalization and the new regionalism: the second great transformation. In: *Globalism and the new regionalism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1999. p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> SODERBAUM, Fredrik, Rethinking Regions and Regionalism, *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 2013, vol. 7, pp. 9-17.

<sup>25</sup> SODERBAUM, Fredrik et al., The EU as a Global Actor and the Dynamics of Interregionalism: A Comparative Analysis, *Journal of European Integration*, 2006, vol. 27, no. 3, pp. 365-380.

with the EU, although their terms of agreement appeared consistently more modest when compared to those agreed with Ukraine or Russia<sup>26</sup>.

As key geo-political events of the new century, 9/11 and the war in Afghanistan had an indirect, yet profound, impact on Central Asian republics. Following its geographical closeness to Afghanistan and Pakistan and the presence of Western military facilities in the field, one could argue that no other geographical area was more affected by security developments during this period. In this respect, at least at the discursive level, 9/11 opened up windows of opportunity for the EU's relations with CA. First, the West saw the need to act in order to prevent "a second 9/11 from occurring", showing a reactive "disaster mentality that frames the decision-making of Brussels"<sup>27</sup>. Second, a general consensus arose that security affairs such as border controls had to be managed regionally – in cooperation with such neighbouring countries as Russia and international organisations<sup>28</sup> (which would turn out to be challenging). Consistent EU aid became available through the Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA), which also helped to enhance the Central Asian Drug Action Programme (CADAP). As a matter of fact, stability and security became the main objectives at the regional level.

In the light of this increased regional interest, 2005 witnessed the creation of the post of EU Special Representative for Central Asia (EUSRCA). Two years later, under the initiative of the German Presidency, the Strategy for a New Partnership was approved by the European Council. Quite ambitiously, the 2007 Strategy aimed at "a balanced regional and bilateral approach" that would "foster regional cooperation among the CA states and between those states and other regions"<sup>29</sup>. Bilateral cooperation would be of special importance in answering the special needs and requests of the partner countries. The regional approach was meant to deal with all common regional challenges, ranging from border issues concerning drug, arms, and human trafficking to environmental and energy issues<sup>30</sup>.

Despite the new discursive engagement, this approach turned out to be quite ineffective, especially given the history of non-cooperation within the region. Building international alliances seemed to receive the priority over region building, especially in the absence of a 'common identity claim'. Today CA remains an area deprived of any "regional integrationist project with a well-developed institutional structure"<sup>31</sup>, and national players even tend to withdraw from any sort of shared sense of belonging. For instance, Kazakh 'nationalists' have kept pursuing the discourse that Kazakhstan was not 'Central-Asian', but rather an entity on its own<sup>32</sup>. One explanation for missing regional attempts could be offered by Libman and Vinokurov, who defined the concept of *holding-together regionalism*: whereas in most regions countries gradually strive to strengthen their economic and political ties (*coming-together regionalism*, which usually tends to be most effective), post-Soviet states' attempt to cooperate after belonging to one single empire seems to be developing rather slowly. Indeed, this phenomenon does not only occur in the Central Asian region, but also in the Caucasus, where most states maintain rather cold relationships<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> MELVIN, Neil (ed.), *Engaging Central Asia: the European Union's new strategy in the heart of Eurasia*, Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies, 2008.

<sup>27</sup> KAVALSKI, Emilian, *Central Asia and the rise of normative powers: contextualizing the security governance of the European Union, China, and India*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2012, p. 93.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with former member of DG EAC/C4 International Cooperation.

<sup>29</sup> COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, *The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New partnership*, 31 May 2007, [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/st\\_10113\\_2007\\_init\\_en.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/st_10113_2007_init_en.pdf) Retrieved on 15 November 2017.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>31</sup> KIMMAGE, Daniel, Security Challenges in Central Asia: Implications for the EU's Engagement Strategy in MELVIN, *Engaging Central Asia*, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>32</sup> MOLCHANOV, M.A., *Eurasian Regionalisms and Russian Foreign Policy*, Surrey: Ashgate, 2015.

<sup>33</sup> LIBMAN, A. and VINOKUROV, E., *Holding-Together Regionalism: Twenty Years of Post-Soviet Integration, Introduction*, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

After the review of the 2007 Strategy, a broad consensus was reached that the EU had outlined too many 'priorities' and focused too much on regional cooperation, resulting in limited to no results in most cooperation areas<sup>34</sup>. Serious arguments were given that the EU had to dramatically narrow its focus in the region if it wanted to make any difference at all. Also, the budget was too fragmented over too many projects on a too long timeframe. There are many other reasons why the EU strategy had almost no impact on several cooperation areas: a lack of willingness of the regional actors to cooperate; corruption; democratic backsliding and the more prominent financial and political presence of Russia, China and other players like the US (which often dwarfs EU assistance). Also, the willingness of EU MS itself had been backsliding, as the area was no longer a geopolitical priority. As a matter of fact, the attention on Afghanistan around 2001 had been lost to the more recent geopolitical tensions closer to home<sup>35,36</sup>. The question here is, of course, if it is wise to concentrate on short-term priorities instead of long-term implications.

Based on this, it was proposed to only focus on matters where actions do have a tangible impact. As emphasised by EUCAM (Europe-Central Asia Monitoring) and the European Parliament, key issues to address from then on were: bilateral partnerships and closer ties with civil societies (by providing political and financial support); support for democratisation and defending human rights; security cooperation based on conflict prevention; broader economic cooperation and a simplified development policy with a heavy emphasis on education<sup>37</sup>. In the 2017 Council conclusions<sup>38</sup> for CA, this list was broadened as emphasis was also put on developing bilateral relationships, good governance, the rule of law, and human rights.

Contrary to the EU, Russia never really oscillated between regional and bilateral cooperation, consistently privileging the latter. Of course, Moscow does see CA both as a region and as a group of states, depending on whether emphasis is on security, where bilateral engagement is preferred, or energy infrastructure, where a regional view tends to suit Moscow's needs<sup>39</sup>. Straight after the early 1990s disengagement, a new doctrine promoted by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Primakov emphasised the need for closer ties with former Soviet republics. Partly inspired by that trend, straight after his election, Putin further engaged in the region, securing infrastructure and energy investments in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan through a number of affiliated companies. At the security level, the prevention of risks of destabilisation in CA became a priority to be addressed by Russia in cooperation with CIS Member States.

From the absence of any CA strategy in the 1990s and throughout the late 2000s and the early 2010s, Russia implemented a foreign policy that privileges either traditional bilateral relations or a 'conditional' regional approach, 'imagining' a region that should include Russia as the key player. The clearest example is perhaps offered by the Eurasian Union, where both Russia and three CA countries are members.

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with former member of DG EAC/C4 International Cooperation.

<sup>35</sup> JOS BOONSTRA, *Reviewing the EU's approach to Central Asia*, February 2015. [http://www.eucentralasia.eu/uploads/tx\\_icticontent/EUCAM-PB-34-Reviewing-EU-policies-in-Central-Asia-EN\\_01.pdf](http://www.eucentralasia.eu/uploads/tx_icticontent/EUCAM-PB-34-Reviewing-EU-policies-in-Central-Asia-EN_01.pdf) Retrieved on 18 July 2017.

<sup>36</sup> EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, *Implementation and review of the European Union – Central Asia Strategy: Recommendations for EU Action*, January 2016. [http://www.eucentralasia.eu/uploads/tx\\_icticontent/Implementation-EU-Central-Asia-Strategy-Recommendations-2015.pdf](http://www.eucentralasia.eu/uploads/tx_icticontent/Implementation-EU-Central-Asia-Strategy-Recommendations-2015.pdf) Retrieved on 18 July 2017.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>38</sup> COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, *Council Conclusions on the EU Strategy for Central Asia*, 19 June 2017. <file:///C:/Users/eboers/AppData/Local/Temp/st10387.en17%20conclusions%20on%20the%20EU%20Strategy%20for%20Central%20Asia-1.pdf> Retrieved on 2 August 2017.

<sup>39</sup> OLIPHANT, Craig, *Russia's role and interests in Central Asia*, *Saferworld*, October 2013. <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/downloads/pubdocs/russias-role-and-interests-in-central-asia.pdf> Retrieved on 18 July 2017.

## 4. Willingness

Within the framework proposed to discuss and compare the effectiveness of the EU's and Russia's CD policy, actors' willingness or aspiration is a key critical variable. Willingness of a regional organisation or a national actor is expressed by the existence of law and policy tools recognising CD role, and the presence of committed leaders among public representatives or in private business.

### 4.1 Inclusion of CD Goals in Black Letter Law and Policy

The presence of CD goals in black letter law and policy is the first critical element to assess actors' effective CD leadership in general, and their willingness in particular. At the European level, the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) highlights the role that the EU should have on education and culture at the international level. While a clear-cut reference to the concept of CD is missing, the TFEU engages the Union to promote educational (article 165), and cultural (article 167) cooperation with third countries and relevant international organisations. In both areas, articles also put special emphasis on cooperation with the Council of Europe (CoE)<sup>40</sup>.

In the past years, black letter law willingness has been translated into policy initiatives aimed at enhancing EU CD action. The 2007 Communication on a European agenda for culture in a globalising world emphasised the role of culture "as a vital element in international relations" and stated that the EU would pursue "the systematic integration of the cultural dimension and different components of culture in all external and development policies, projects and programmes"<sup>41</sup>.

However, despite this engagement the Strategy for a New Partnership between the EU and CA approved by EU MS in 2007 did not mention culture as a key field of engagement, while at the educational level it emphasised support for the development of an e-silk-highway and scholarships "for students from Central Asian countries to European universities"<sup>42</sup>. Since 2007, the Strategy has undergone four reviews that have all confirmed the need for further educational mobility and cooperation between EU MS and CA.

In 2016, the approval of the joint communication 'Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations' by the EC and the European External Action Service (EEAS) marked a new step on CD<sup>43</sup>. In its fourth section, the strategy set two key CD priorities: strengthening EU cooperation in non-EU countries, and enhancing mobility of students and researchers. In the Multiannual Indicative Programme for Regional Central Asia (2014-2020) two focal sectors were mentioned: regional sustainable development and regional security for development. For this first focal sector, socio-economic development was identified as a key sub-area in order to develop "a dedicated regional high capacity, high quality connectivity network for education and research purposes"<sup>44</sup>.

In Russia, increased interest in soft power initiatives arose in the aftermath of the colour revolutions in the mid-2000s, when policy-makers called for tools to counter Western activities and enhance Russia's image in the post-Soviet area. This quest for attraction was translated into a policy initiative for the first time in 2008 with the new Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (hereafter

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<sup>40</sup> HIGGOTT, Richard and VAN LANGENHOVE, Luk, Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations: An Initial, Critical but Constructive Analysis, *EL-CSID Working Paper*, [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/0bc3be\\_261d8b4db5344a11abdce75250c5eb54.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/0bc3be_261d8b4db5344a11abdce75250c5eb54.pdf)

<sup>41</sup> EUROPEAN COMMISSION, *Communication on a European Agenda for Culture in a Globalizing World*, 10 May 2007. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM%3A2007%3A0242%3AFIN%3AEN%3AHTML> Retrieved on 16 May 2017.

<sup>42</sup> COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, *The EU and...*, *op. cit.*

<sup>43</sup> EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE, *Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations*, 8 June 2016. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=JOIN%3A2016%3A29%3AFIN>. Retrieved on 16 May 2017.

<sup>44</sup> EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE AND EUROPEAN COMMISSION, *Multiannual Indicative Programme Regional Central Asia 2014-2020*, 12 August 2014. <https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/mip-2014-2020-central-asia-regional-20140812-en.pdf> Retrieved on 6 August 2017.

'Concept'). Drafted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and signed by the President, the Concepts present priorities and objectives of Russia's foreign policy. While the first Concept appeared in 1993, since Putin's rise to power it has been published every 3 to 5 years (2000, 2004, 2008, 2013, and 2016).

In its fifth section (International humanitarian cooperation and human rights), the 2008 Concept highlighted Russia's commitment "to the diffusion of the Russian language as an integral part of the world culture and an instrument of inter-ethnic communication"<sup>45</sup>. When it comes to Compatriots, that are ethnic Russians living abroad, the protection of their "rights and legitimate interests" should be coupled with "increased space for Russian language and culture" in those geographical areas. As a regional priority, the concept emphasised that "in the humanitarian sphere", Russia aims at "preserving and increasing common cultural and civilisational heritage"<sup>46</sup>. It should be noted that in official documents the word 'humanitarian' (*gumanitarnyy*) has a number of different meanings and also addresses cultural exchanges and cooperation<sup>47</sup>.

The 2013 Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly and the 2013 version of the Concept revealed slight changes in the cultural sphere, as the promotion of Russian culture in its external relations was now also seen as a part of the Kremlin's new soft power diplomacy. In this version of the Concept, soft power was defined as "an indispensable component of modern international relations" promoting "Russia's positive image worthy of the high status of its culture and education" and "its participation in programs of assistance to developing countries"<sup>48</sup>. This new way of conducting diplomacy was seen as a "toolkit for achieving foreign policy objectives building on civil society potential, information, cultural and other methods".<sup>49</sup> CIS countries were clearly priority countries for the Russian Federation in several areas, and a "particular attention was going to be paid to compatriots living in the CIS Member States"<sup>50</sup>.

The Concept signed by President Putin on 30 November 2016 marked a new step towards a more consistent cultural foreign policy. Russia set as its aim to strengthen its role "in international culture; promote and consolidate the position of the Russian language in the world; raise global awareness of Russia's cultural achievements and national historical legacy, cultural identity of the peoples of Russia, and Russian education and research"<sup>51</sup>. In the International Humanitarian Cooperation and Human Rights section, emphasis was also put "to sustain and develop the network of Russian educational institutions abroad, and to support foreign branches and representative offices of Russian educational institutions"<sup>52</sup>. This applied to CIS countries in general, and to EAEU members Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in particular.

The focus on education was also expressed in the Treaty of the Eurasian Economic Union between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan (and later also Kyrgyzstan and Armenia) in 2014 in the section on labour migration (XXVI). In articles 96 and 97 it was repeated that the certificates of education or academic degrees of the Member States would be treated equally and that the procedures of recognition would not be necessary anymore<sup>53</sup>. Interestingly, CD challenges were also addressed

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<sup>45</sup> KREMLIN, *The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, 12 January 2008. <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/4116/print>. Retrieved on 16 May 2017.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>47</sup> See TSYGANKOV, Andrei P. If not by tanks, then by banks? The role of soft power in Putin's foreign policy. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 2006, vol. 58, no 7, p. 1079-1099;

<sup>48</sup> KREMLIN, *The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation*, 12 February 2013. [http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/official\\_documents/-/asset\\_publisher/CptlCk6B6Z29/content/id/122186](http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCk6B6Z29/content/id/122186) Retrieved on 16 May 2017.

<sup>49</sup> SMITS, Yolanda, *Russia Country Report*, 26 February 2014. [http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/culture/policy/international-cooperation/documents/country-reports/russia\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/culture/policy/international-cooperation/documents/country-reports/russia_en.pdf) Retrieved on 20 May 2016.

<sup>50</sup> KREMLIN, *The Concept of the Foreign...*, *op. cit.*

<sup>51</sup> KREMLIN, *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on November 30, 2016)*, 30 November 2016. [http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/official\\_documents/-/asset\\_publisher/CptlCk6B6Z29/content/id/2542248](http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCk6B6Z29/content/id/2542248) Retrieved on 16 May 2017.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>53</sup> EURASIAN ECONOMIC UNION, *Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union*, 29 May 2014.

within the National Security Strategy approved by President Putin on 31 December 2015. Developing Russian culture at the international level was defined as a key defence national interest and a tool to counteract “external cultural and information expansion”<sup>54</sup>.

Finally, when it comes to general legislation on compatriots, the Russian Federation has undertaken obligations to negotiate recognition of educational documents, qualifications and economic degrees between CIS member states: a practice that started with signing agreements with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in 1998. In 2004, eleven CIS countries concluded a detailed agreement on mutual recognition of equivalence of educational documents on secondary (complete) general education, primary vocational education and secondary vocational (special) education. By 2009, this system interconnected all CIS countries<sup>55</sup>.

#### 4.2 Presence of Committed Leaders

Black letter law may not be sufficient to advance CD objectives in the absence of effective leadership. Leaders not only have to ensure that legal provisions are properly implemented, but should also take advantage of unexpected windows of opportunity to further their own vision. When it comes to CD efforts in CA, at the EU level a double leadership challenge can be highlighted. A first challenge is thematic: despite recent trends, culture remains largely marginal when compared to such ‘harder’ spheres as trade and energy. A second and more serious leadership challenge pertains to the region itself, that has long been relatively neglected by the EU. In spite of this double marginality, European institutions have increasingly shown commitment to both CD and to a more active role in the region.

In 2011, the European Parliament addressed for the first time the need to design a cultural strategy for EU external relations. Its resolution emphasised “the importance of cultural diplomacy and cultural cooperation in advancing and communicating [...] the values that make up European culture”<sup>56</sup> and paved the way for the Preparatory Action, commissioning a comprehensive study by a consortium of cultural institutes and organisations led by the Goethe Institute. In June 2016, High Representative Mogherini invested much of her political capital in the Global Strategy for the EU’s Foreign and Security Policy, reaffirming the key role of education and culture “to nurture societal resilience”<sup>57</sup>. In the same month, Mogherini and Commissioner Navracsics presented a proposal to develop an EU strategy for international cultural relations.

At the national level, some EU MS have paid special attention to CA. Among others, Germany and Latvia have repeatedly pursued CA as their priority on the occasion of their EU Presidency. In January 2007, straight after the beginning of Germany’s Presidency, Foreign Affairs Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier stressed the importance of the area and emphasised his country would step forward to develop a single coherent strategy. Not surprisingly, Berlin’s declarative emphasis and policy action was coupled with activism at the national level. As a matter of fact, Germany is to date the only EU MS with embassies in every CA country. Stimulated by the presence of a consistent national minority in Kazakhstan (about 180,000 inhabitants or 1% of the total population), Berlin’s financial engagement has also led to the development of private initiatives. An example is the German-Kazakh University, founded in 1999 and run by the non-profit Fund for German-Kazakh Cooperation in Education.

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<sup>54</sup> KREMLIN, *National Security Strategy*, 31 December 2015, <http://www.iecee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Russian-National-Security-Strategy-31Dec2015.pdf> Retrieved on 29 May 2017.

<sup>55</sup> FOMINYKH, *Russia’s Public Diplomacy...*, *op. cit.*

<sup>56</sup> EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, *Cultural dimensions of EU external action*. European Parliament resolution of 12 May 2011 on the cultural dimensions of the EU’s external actions, 12 May 2011 (2010/2161(INI), Strasbourg, 2011. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2011-0239+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN> Retrieved on 18 July 2017.

<sup>57</sup> EEAS, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy*, June 2016. <https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en/global-strategy-foreign-and-security-policy-european-union> Retrieved on 18 July 2017.

In 2015, it was again an EU Presidency that provided a member state with the opportunity to pursue CA as a priority. As a country with a similar history, Latvia has been able to turn its historical ties into mutual cooperation with CA in general, and with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in particular<sup>58</sup>. On the occasion of the Presidency, Riga pushed at the European level for a review of the CA strategy. To do so, Germany, who was equally interested in further engagement with the region, became a key ally of the Baltic country. Also, another source of support was Steinmeier's return to the Foreign Affairs Office in 2013, when the Presidency agenda was to be defined. Pastore remarks that Steinmeier's engagement was key to enhancing Latvia's mission as Germany sent its national experts to Riga to assist in the preparation works<sup>59</sup>. Results of the review were particularly highlighted in the education sector: according to an EU national expert, the process increased CA governments' awareness of the deficits in their education systems. As a result, they "invited the EU to cooperate more closely and to increase its input"<sup>60</sup>.

This positive attitude and willingness of EU MS to cooperate more closely with CA was indeed a push factor for the EU to engage more closely with the region, and in particular with Kazakhstan. In May 2016, Federica Mogherini and Erlan Idrissof, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, signed the Enhanced PCA<sup>61</sup>, including 29 key policy areas, among which culture and education. A year later, in November 2017, on the occasion of a ministerial meeting between the High Representative and the five Central Asian foreign ministers in Samarkand, Mogherini pointed out that to bring positive change in the region, the EU was committed to raising "the quality of education so that children can reach their full potential"<sup>62</sup>.

While in Russia CD is a relatively new concept, such expressions as soft power and public diplomacy entered Russian political science and press discourse more than a decade ago. Russian soft power has been explicitly inscribed in two versions of the Foreign Policy Concept and its use is supposed to nurture CIS relations. Of course, one could argue that among Russian elites the concept of soft power suffers from a realist 'conceptual stretching': for instance, in Vashchenkov's and Koyazhov's views, soft power should be purely intended as a "means of attainment of national political goals"<sup>63</sup>. In October 2017, on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between CA countries and Russia, a statement written by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov was published in *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*. Lavrov emphasised that Russia is engaged in "creating a shared educational, scientific, and cultural space. It is encouraging that Russian remains a native or second language for quite a number of citizens in the region"<sup>64</sup>. Common cultural and educational ties were also raised on the future of the EAEU, "a multilevel integration model aimed at ensuring the sustainable development of the entire continent, including, of course, CA"<sup>65</sup>.

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<sup>58</sup> PASTORE, Gunta, Leadership Through the European Union Council Presidency: Latvia and Central Asia, *Latvian Institute of International Affairs*, March 2016. <http://liia.lv/en/publications/leadership-through-the-european-union-council-presidency-latvia-and-central-asia-509> Retrieved on 18 July 2017.

<sup>59</sup> PASTORE, Leadership Through the..., *op. cit.*

<sup>60</sup> Interview with an MFA of a EU member state mentioned in PASTORE, Leadership Through the, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>61</sup> EUROPEAN UNION EXTERNAL ACTION, EU and Kazakhstan sign Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, 12 May 2016, [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/1661/eu-and-kazakhstan-sign-enhanced-partnership-and-cooperation-agreement\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/1661/eu-and-kazakhstan-sign-enhanced-partnership-and-cooperation-agreement_en) Retrieved 20 January 2018.

<sup>62</sup> DAVLETOVA, Nozima, Mogherini: Recent developments in Central Asia open new perspectives for EU's cooperation with it, *Astana Times*, 9 November 2017. <https://astanatimes.com/2017/11/mogherini-recent-developments-in-central-asia-open-new-perspectives-for-eus-cooperation-with-it/> Retrieved on 18 July 2017.

<sup>63</sup> VASHCHENKOV Sergey, and KOTYAZHOV, Andrey, Soft Power as a Means of Attainment of National Geopolitical Goals, *International Affairs*, vol 62, no. 6, 2016, p. 84.

<sup>64</sup> LAVROV, Sergei, Russia and Central Asia: A Partnership Tested by Time, *The Current Digest of the Russian Press*, vol. 69, n° 40, 8 October 2017, p. 14. Translated article from *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 4 October 2017, p. 8.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*.

## 5. Capacity

Actors' willingness is a necessary, but not sufficient, pre-condition to enhance leadership in the realm of CD. Black letter law and leaders' visions and commitment should be coupled with "the resources to develop, promote and invest in the specific policy area and thus have an influence"<sup>66</sup>. In other words, effective CD policy is implemented when the actors involved show consistent capacity. For the purpose of this paper, two determinants of capacity are taken into account on EU's and Russia's CD efforts: the financial resources invested and channelled through a number of initiatives and activities; and the presence of established and specialised institutions and agencies advancing CD goals.

### 5.1 Investing Financial Resources

Central Asian countries have been receiving direct EU assistance since their independence in the 1990s. This was first done through the Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) programme, pursuing democratisation, the strengthening of the rule of law and the transition to a market economy in 11 CIS countries and all CA states. At the end of 2006, following a comprehensive restructuring of EU aid, TACIS in CA was integrated into a broader instrument – the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI). In comparison with TACIS, DCI is less focused on democratisation and the rule of law and targets mainly the reduction of poverty at the global level.

For the period 2007-13, the CA region benefited from a total DCI budget of €635 million (314 million for 2007-10 and 321 million for 2010-13), including regional and bilateral aid. When it comes to the regional funding, in the education sector, the EU provided a total support of 70 million<sup>67</sup>, that is, about 34% of total amount spent for regional cooperation. On bilateral aid, about 39 million were allocated: 8% of the EU's budget for Kazakhstan went to education, whilst for Kyrgyzstan this amounted to about 17%<sup>68</sup>. In the same period, no educational aid was directly allocated to Tajikistan.

Under the regional multi-annual indicative (MIP) 2014-2020 programme, the total indicative budget is €245 million. While higher education remains a "strategic sector for sustainable development and poverty reduction in CA", EU support is channelled under ERASMUS+, providing a complementary funding of 115 million for the region.

**Figure 1:** Donor Matrix of regional EU-funded educational initiatives starting from 2011<sup>69</sup>.

<i>Target countries or region</i>	<i>Title of the project</i>	<i>Implementing organisation</i>	<i>Budget</i>	<i>Duration</i>
CA	CAEP 2: Central Asia Education Platform – Phase 2 (CAEP 2)	GOPA	EUR 1 845 000	2015-2018
CA	Erasmus Mundus II	EU	EUR 13 000 000	2013-2017
CA	TEMPUS IV 2012 for Central Asia	EU	EUR 16 611 200	2012-2016
CA	QUADRIGA: Qualification Frameworks in Central Asia: Bologna-Based Principles and Regional Coordination	Consortium	EUR 611 171	2012-2015
CA	TUCAHEA: Towards a Central Asian Higher Education Area: Tuning Structures and Building Quality Culture	Consortium	EUR 1 291 757	2012-2015

<sup>66</sup> KINGAH, AMAYA and VAN LANGENHOVE, Requirements for Effective ..., *op. cit.*

<sup>67</sup> EUCAM, *Mapping EU Development Aid to Central Asia*, July 2013, p. 7. [http://www.eucentralasia.eu/uploads/tx\\_icticontent/EUCAM-FS-1-EN.pdf](http://www.eucentralasia.eu/uploads/tx_icticontent/EUCAM-FS-1-EN.pdf) Retrieved on 17 August 2017.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>69</sup> Data from Central Asia Education Platform (CAEP) Projects Database, *All Projects*, 2017. <http://dbase.caep-project.org/all-projects/> Retrieved on 15 December 2017; EC AND EEAS, *Multiannual Indicative Programme...*, *op. cit.*



CA	Central Asian Education Platform (CAEP)	GOPA	EUR 1 820 450	2012-2015
CA	CA Research and Education Network 2	EU/DANTE	EUR 3 574 865	2013-2015
KAZ, KYZ, TAJ	Documentation for quality assurance of a study programme	Università degli Studi di Genova	N/A	2011-2014
KAZ, KYZ, TAJ	Modernization and Development of Curricula on Pedagogy and Educational Management in CA	Compostela Group of Universities	EUR 769 373	2011-2014

Figure 1 and 2 provide respectively a matrix of region- and country-targeted EU-funded educational initiatives starting from 2010. One of the main projects, the Central Asia Education Platform (CAEP), started in 2012 and implemented by German consulting firm GOPA (*Gesellschaft für Organisation, Planung und Ausbildung*), was intended to ensure smooth progress on the implementation of the CAEP. Details on activities are discussed in 5.2.

Data on students and staff mobility are offered by TEMPUS and ERASMUS MUNDUS reports. The Tempus Budget steadily increased from the early 2000s, with €10 million allocated in 2005. Under TEMPUS III, over 222 individual mobility grants were awarded, allowing CA staff members to travel and work to European HEIs. The majority of grants were offered to Uzbek nationals (122). Since the launch of the programme and throughout its four phases, 258 CA HEIs participated in TEMPUS projects. In Kazakhstan, a local HEI was project coordinator for the first time in 2013<sup>70</sup>.

Launched in 2004, the Erasmus Mundus programme was designed to support academic cooperation and mobility between European HEIs and partner countries. Between 2007 and 2013, mobility for 2124 students was organised, with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan as top departure countries<sup>71</sup>.

At the bilateral level, consistent financial aid to Kyrgyzstan can be observed. EU support to the education sector in the country started in 2011, highlighting “a need to assist the government to strengthen the institutional and human resources capacities necessary to elaborate, manage and implement the education sector reform with a relevant monitoring system and indicators”<sup>72</sup>. Beginning in 2011, the programme has so far supported 10 projects for about €7.1 million. Among other European donors, the German Federal Ministry for Cooperation and Development (BMZ) provided between 2010 and 2016 about €16.7 million for regional projects on reforms of educational systems, professional education and vocational training<sup>73</sup>.

<sup>70</sup> EUROPEAN COMMISSION, *The main achievements of the Tempus Programme in Central Asia 1994 – 2013*, April 2014, <https://publications.europa.eu/it/publication-detail/-/publication/ac6ecbab-0775-4a79-96a4-576f19c53dbc> Retrieved on 15 December 2017.

<sup>71</sup> EUROPEAN COMMISSION, *From Erasmus Mundus to Erasmus+*, May 2014. [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus\\_mundus/tools/documents/repository/em\\_central\\_asia.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus_mundus/tools/documents/repository/em_central_asia.pdf) Retrieved on 15 December 2017.

<sup>72</sup> EUROPEAN COMMISSION – EUROPEAID, *Support to the reform of the education sector in the Kyrgyz Republic. Guidelines for grant applicants*, 2016. <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/europeaid/online-services/index.cfm?ADSSChck=1513356856288&do=publi.detPUB&searchtype=AS&zgeo=35479&debpub=&orderby=upd&orderbyad=Desc&PubliList=15&page=1&aoref=152098> Retrieved on 15 December 2017.

<sup>73</sup> EC AND EEAS, *Multiannual Indicative Programme...*, *op. cit.*

**Figure 2:** Donor Matrix of national EU-funded educational initiatives in CA from 2011<sup>74</sup>.

<b>Target countries or region</b>	<b>Title of the project or action</b>	<b>Implementing organisation (applicant)</b>	<b>Grant awarded</b>	<b>Duration</b>
TAJ	Technical Assistance to the Ministry of Education and Science in the areas of In-Service Teacher Training, Learning Assessment and Planning, Budgeting and Monitoring	Hulla	EUR 7 165 000	2016-2020
TAJ	Technical Assistance to the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment in the area of In-Service Teacher Training for the Initial Technical, Vocational Education and Training system	GOPA	EUR 3 589 300	2016-2020
TUM	Support to the education sector	European Profiles S.A.	EUR 4 625 200	2016-2020
KYZ	Development of financial mechanisms for a safe educational environment at schools in the Kyrgyz Republic	Konrad Adenauer Stiftung	EUR 1 000 000	2016-2018
KYZ	Strengthening the education attainment assessment to affect decisions about instructional needs, curriculum and funding	CESIE	EUR 1 000 000	2016-2018
KAZ	ETF: Country Project Kazakhstan	European Training Foundation	N/A	2011-2017
KYZ	Kyrgyzstan-Bishkek: Support to the education sector in the Kyrgyz Republic	Diadikasia Symvouloi Epicheiriseon	EUR 1 465 000	2014-2016
TAJ	Support to the formulation of the bilateral programme in education and development of baseline studies in Tajikistan	CFBT Education Trust LBG	EUR 248 957	2015-2015
KYZ	Support to increase the level of transparency in the Education budget process as a way to manage public resources more efficiently and effectively	Jarandyk Demilge Network KG	EUR 250 722	2012-2015
KYZ	Fostering and monitoring of the education reforms in Kyrgyz Republic	KA Stiftung	EUR 500 000	2012-2015
TUM	Further improvement of quality and relevance of professional education in central Asia/Turkmenistan	WIG International Limited	EUR 2 602 000	2011-2013
KYZ	Towards Improved Vocational Education and Training in Kyrgyzstan	International Organization for Migration	EUR 928 961.60	2011-2013
KYZ	Promoting access to modern and innovative vocational education system for better employability and income of rural population	ICCO	EUR 968 918.36	2011-2013
KYZ	Creating work opportunities for persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups through an enhanced cooperation between Vocational Educational Training schools and employers	Association Federation Handicap International	EUR 369 903.28	2011-2013
KYZ	Strengthening social partnership development in vocational and educational training in Kyrgyzstan	Gustav Stresemann Institute	EUR 492 750	2011-2013
KYZ	Ensuring wider access to the primary vocational education and training	Centre for Public Policy	EUR 152 078.04	2011-2013

<sup>74</sup> Data from EUROPEAID Call for Proposals Search Engine.

Although the EU framework programme supporting the cultural sector, Creative Europe, does not directly fund CA countries, the European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC), a coordinating mechanism set up in 2006 to promote EU culture and to build bridges with other cultures, is co-funded by Creative Europe<sup>75</sup>. EUNIC Cluster Funds support joint European activities on the ground upon application and are also financed by EUNIC Members. EU MS thus contribute voluntarily, and the EU may co-finance projects designed and implemented by EUNIC Clusters around the world. Today CA hosts two EUNIC clusters (see 5.2).

When discussing Russian public and private sectors, experts tend to see financial opacity as the rule rather than the exception<sup>76</sup>. Availability and reliability of information regarding public spending remain minimal, and the amount of funding received by GONGOs and NGOs is uncertain. Also, private funding of cultural events within Russia and abroad is consistent, provided by foundations (Prokhorov and Potanin foundations), energy companies (Rosneft and Gazprom), and banks (Sberbank and VTB). An example is offered by the opening of the 'Centre for the Study and Testing of the Russian Language' in Jalal-Abad, Kyrgyzstan, to which Gazprom International provided financial aid<sup>77</sup>. Such an example should warn the reader: as noted by Vendil Pallin and Oxenstierna, "the fact that a considerable share of the work of think tanks is funded through sponsorship and grants from big business with strong links to the political leadership suggests that the act share of state funding is less important"<sup>78</sup>.

At present there are no official documents presenting Russia's expense for culture in international relations. General calculations made by Larionova, Rakhmangulov, and Berenson suggest that Russia has become a "re-emerging donor" over the past years<sup>79</sup>. According to authors' data, Russia's total overseas development assistance (ODA), including bilateral and multilateral aid, has almost doubled since 2010, ranging from 774.5 million US\$ in 2010 to 1.54 billion US\$ in 2014. At the bilateral level, Central Asian countries have been top recipients of Russian aid, accounting for almost 26% of total bilateral ODA in 2013. In the region, Kyrgyzstan has received by far the largest amount of bilateral ODA when compared to its neighbours, with about 83% of the regional amount received in 2013 (76.73 US\$).

**Figure 3:** Bilateral ODA from Russia destined to Central Asian countries (US\$ millions)<sup>80</sup>.

	2011	2012	2013
Total bilateral ODA	240.40	214.71	361.85
Central Asia	25.15	55.6	92.18
Share %	10.45	25.89	25.47

In its capacity as an autonomous federal government agency, *Rossotrudnichestvo* has also received higher funding in the past years. Details on its mission are provided in 5.2. In 2013, Putin issued an edict raising its budget from 2 billion to 9.5 billion roubles (i.e. approximately from €48 to €228 million at that time) by 2020, although it was later reported that the measure would only apply to individual bilateral projects. This could be explained by the decision to decrease the contribution to the World Bank, as its decentralised multilateral development aid was too anonymous, and it would not contribute to a good image of the country. As such, this rebalancing move towards bilateralism could be considered as a strategy towards a more consistent Russian soft power<sup>81</sup>.

<sup>75</sup> EUNIC, *Clusters*, <https://www.eunicglobal.eu/clusters>. Retrieved on 16 November 2017.

<sup>76</sup> See ANTIPOVA, Tatiana; BOURMISTROV, Anatoli, Is Russian public sector accounting in the process of modernization? An analysis of accounting reforms in Russia, *Financial accountability & management*, vol. 29, no. 4, 2013.

<sup>77</sup> GAZPROM INTERNATIONAL, *The Russian Language Centre Opens in Southern Kyrgyzstan*, 12 October 2015. <http://www.gazprom-international.com/en/news-media/articles/russian-language-centre-opens-southern-kyrgyzstan> Retrieved on 15 December 2017.

<sup>78</sup> VENDIL PALLIN, Carolina and OXENSTIERNA, Susanne, Russian Think Tanks and Soft Power, *Swedish Defence Research Agency*, August 2017, p. 18.

<sup>79</sup> LARIONOVA, Marina; RAKHMANGULOV, Mark; BERENSON, Marc P. Russia: A re-emerging donor. In GU, Jing (ed.), *The BRICS in International Development*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016. pp. 63-92.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>81</sup> KOMMERCANT, *Myakhhkuyu silu cnabzhayut sredstvami*, 5 June 2013, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2204815> Retrieved on 16 November 2016.

The exact budget for exchange programmes to the Russian Federation is also difficult to find, but there is a law which gives foreign citizens the right to seek Russian-sponsored places in Russian public universities<sup>82</sup>. Quota for international students to be accepted in Russian universities has been rising to a number of 15000 students in 2013<sup>83</sup>. The quota for Kazakh students shows a rising trend: in 2014, there were only 150 places available for state-sponsored education, whilst in 2015 there were already 240 places and in 2016, this number had risen to 300 places<sup>84</sup>. The same tendency could be observed for Tajik students; for the academic year 2017/2018, 600 student places were made available, whilst in 2015, the quota was less than 500<sup>85</sup>. When allowed for a grant to study in Russia, the states' stipend would cover free education in a chosen university for the entire academic year, a monthly stipend (1500 roubles/ 21 euro) and free accommodation, if there are available places at the university<sup>86</sup>.

In March 2017, Lavrov stated that more than 150,000 citizens from CA enrolled in Russian universities, and about 46,000 were granted a state-financed place (from the federal budget)<sup>87</sup>. In 2015, almost three out of four Kazakh students moving abroad chose Russia. The second destination was China, with about 14,000 students. Only a very small number moved outside the region: 2,000 Kazakh students enrolled in the US Higher Education system, and 1,600 chose to go to the UK<sup>88</sup>. In general terms, the number of CIS students coming to study in Russia has doubled between 1994 and 2008. On top of that, it is no longer a secret that the Russian security services' (FSB) academy has been welcoming Central Asian students. As an example, in July 2017 Kyrgyz news agency Kabar reported that 11 students graduated from the Academy, and that Kyrgyz security services counterparts attended their graduation ceremony in Moscow<sup>89</sup>.

## 5.2 Establishment of Institutions Fostering and Dedicated to Cultural Diplomacy

For CD purposes, in CA the EU mainly relies on the activities organised through the EUNIC clusters in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and Tashkent, Uzbekistan. The latter cluster is rather small, with only the British Council, the Goethe-Institut and the Institut Français as members. The cluster in Almaty, on the other hand, consists out of many organisations: the Alliance Française, the Goethe-Institut, the British Council, the General Consulate of Hungary, the Società Dante Alighieri, the Spanish and Swiss Embassies, the Akimat of Almaty, the EU Delegation in Astana, the KIMEP University, Czech and Turkish Airlines, and the Arman Cinema Center<sup>90</sup>.

National institutes either organise events together, under the umbrella of EUNIC (for instance film festivals, language courses, dissemination events on EU higher education, and the like), or on an individual basis, representing their own country rather than the EU. The British Council, for example, has set up a broad range of English language courses and exams, so students can obtain proficiency

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<sup>82</sup> RUSSIAN LAWBOOK, Federal'nyj Zakon "Ob obrazovanii v Rossijskoj Federatsii" N 273-f3 ot 29 dekabnja 2012 goda s izmenenijami 2017-2016 goda, 29 July 2017, <http://zakon-ob-obrazovanii.ru>, Retrieved on 16 November 2017.

<sup>83</sup> ROSSIYSKAYA GAZETA, *Postanovlenie Pravitel'stva Rossijskoj Federatsii ot 8 oktjabnja 2013 g. N 891 g. Moskva Öb Ustanovlenii kvoty na obrazovanie inostrannyx grazhdan i lits bez grazhdanstva v Rossijskoj Federatsii*, 10 October 2013, <https://rg.ru/2013/10/10/obuchenie-site-dok.html> Retrieved on 16 November 2017.

<sup>84</sup> FORBES, *MON RF v 2016 vydajet 300 kvot na obuchenie na Kazachstanskim Studentam*, 4 March 2016, [https://forbes.kz/news/2016/03/04/newsid\\_107459](https://forbes.kz/news/2016/03/04/newsid_107459) Retrieved on 16 November 2017.

<sup>85</sup> ROSSOTRUDNICHESTVO, *Aktual'nye voprosy postuplenija tadjikistantsev v rossijskije vuzy byli ocveshhyony na press-konferentsii v RTSNK g. Dushanbe*, 8 February 2017, <http://rs.gov.ru/ru/news/7106> Retrieved on 16 November 2017.

<sup>86</sup> STUDY IN RUSSIA, *Russian Government Scholarships*, <http://studyinrussia.ru/en/study-in-russia/scholarships/> Retrieved on 16 November 2017.

<sup>87</sup> THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, 15 march 2017, *Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with the newspaper 'Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn'*, [http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2680435](http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2680435) Retrieved on 16 November 2017.

<sup>88</sup> ICEF MONITOR, *Outbound mobility from Kazakhstan up 140% over past decade*, 12 December 2016, <http://monitor.icef.com/2016/12/outbound-mobility-kazakhstan-140-past-decade/> Retrieved on 16 November 2017.

<sup>89</sup> KABAR, *11 Kyrgyz students graduated from Russian FSB Academy this year*, 2 July 2017. <http://old.kabar.kg/eng/society/full/13434> Retrieved on 15 December 2017.

<sup>90</sup> EUNIC, *Where we are*, [www.eunicglobal.eu](http://www.eunicglobal.eu) Retrieved on 26 November 2017.

certificates. They also provide information for local students on how to go abroad and study in the UK and how they can apply for scholarships and funding through their website and special Study UK Exhibitions<sup>91</sup>. In the area of culture, a Creative Central Asia Forum was organised and brought together people from the creative industries of Kazakhstan and the UK<sup>92</sup>. Another project led by a coalition made up of the British Council, the Kazakh-British Technical University, Almaty Akimat and the Almaty Development Centre, and funded by a grant from the EU, is the 'WeAlmaty' project. WeAlmaty is a three-year initiative that aims to develop Almaty into a 'smart city' by supporting new forms of cooperation between civil society organisations, local authorities and the private sector<sup>93</sup>.

The Alliance Française performs similar activities: it provides information about French Higher Education system and offers language courses and corresponding DELF/DALF exams to obtain certificates. In terms of culture, it organises ballet performances and concerts, gastronomy days, and several exhibitions regarding French culture (history, art, and photography among others)<sup>94</sup>. Also, in 2014, following an inter-governmental agreement between France and Kazakhstan, the Institute Sorbonne-Kazakhstan was launched in Almaty. Today the Institute offers Kazakh, Russian and French-language Bachelor and Master's programs in a number of disciplines.

Similarly to other national organisations, the Goethe-Institut offers language courses on several levels, certificates, and cultural events<sup>95</sup>. In Kazakhstan, Germany has created a number of instruments addressing the German ethnic minority: these include "more than 20 branches of the ethno-cultural association Wiedergeburt (Revival), [...] the German Academic Exchange Service, [...] a German drama theatre and radio station and a German language newspaper"<sup>96</sup>. Some other European countries such as Poland and Bulgaria have also kept institutional ties with their diaspora communities in Kazakhstan (respectively about 34,000 and 4,500 people). There are several Polish schools in Kazakhstan, together with some associations and three Houses of Polish Culture (**Domy Kultury Polskiej**)<sup>97</sup>. A poetry competition and a music festival are also organised every year<sup>98</sup>. When it comes to Bulgaria, the ethnocultural center Zlata, created in Astana in 2011, organises art and music festival, and facilitates student exchanges<sup>99</sup>.

Whilst CD is mostly managed on the national level by EU MS and EUNIC, educational initiatives have been largely set up by EU institutions and organs. An example is the special platform CAEP which helps implementing the European Education Initiative for Central Asia. It mostly addresses vocational education and training, and higher education, in conjunction with the Erasmus+ Programme, within the CA region. CAEP tries to enhance inter- and intra-regional cooperation simultaneously, as to strengthen the education reforms in the region, but also to better coordinate all the donors' actions.

In pursuing CD efforts, national institutes are often supported by European embassies on social media. In a study assessing the diplomatic e-strategies of 14 European embassies in Kazakhstan on Facebook, Collins and Bekenova found that, instead of aiming at a 'sense of belonging' (engagement with the local audience in order to achieve social acceptance and cooperation), the majority of the countries' posts were about self-representation. Especially Belgium, Latvia, Sweden, the UK and Italy were good at promoting their own country's education, tourism, culture, language, and the like. British

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<sup>91</sup> BRITISH COUNCIL, *Study in the UK*, <https://www.britishcouncil.kz/study-uk> Retrieved on 26 November 2017.

<sup>92</sup> BRITISH COUNCIL, *Creative Central Asia- Astana Forum*, <https://www.britishcouncil.kz/creative-central-asia> Retrieved on 26 November 2017.

<sup>93</sup> BRITISH COUNCIL, *WeAlmaty Project*, <https://www.britishcouncil.kz/wealmaty> Retrieved on 26 November 2017.

<sup>94</sup> CULTUREFRANCE, *Culture et Savoirs*, <http://www.culturefrance.kz/-Arts-visuels> Retrieved on 26 November 2017.

<sup>95</sup> GOETHE INSTITUT, *Deutsche Sprache*, <https://www.goethe.de/ins/kz/de/index.html> Retrieved on 26 November 2017.

<sup>96</sup> COLLINS, Neil and BEKENOVA, Kristina, European Cultural Diplomacy: diaspora relations with Kazakhstan, *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 2017, vol. 23, no. 6, 732-750.

<sup>97</sup> EMBASSY OF THE POLISH REPUBLIC IN ASTANA, *Informacje Polonijne*, [http://www.astana.msz.gov.pl/pl/informacje\\_konsularne/informacje\\_polonijne/](http://www.astana.msz.gov.pl/pl/informacje_konsularne/informacje_polonijne/) Retrieved on 30 January 2018.

<sup>98</sup> COLLINS and BEKENOVA, European Cultural Diplomacy..., *op.cit.*

<sup>99</sup> ASSEMBLY OF PEOPLE OF KAZAKHSTAN, *Ethnocultural Associations*, <http://astana.assembly.kz/en/ethnocultural-associations-0> Retrieved on 30 January 2018.

and German embassies, in contrast, seemed to reach an adequate level of engagement with the local audience and in the local language<sup>100</sup>.

During recent years, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been investing considerably in its cultural infrastructure abroad. It has set up different tools to promote the Russian language and culture, often in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science. Russia simultaneously focuses on its outreach towards ethnic Russians living abroad. In December 2012, President Putin announced that the government was going to promote culture and language in its international relations. As stated by Smits, six elements seem to be part of Russia's strategy "1) image building; 2) outreach to the Russian diaspora community; 3) dissemination of the Russian language; 4) international academic and student exchange; 5) scheme of bilateral 'years' or 'seasons' of culture with foreign countries; and 6) cultural heritage preservation"<sup>101</sup>.

Compared to EU MS, Russia had less tools to promote culture in external relations, but has been increasing the number of its agencies and centres. In 2008, the Ministry has set up the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation, commonly known as **Rossotrudnichestvo**. Among others, the agency supports Russian language teaching in the CIS and provides educational material to approximately 7,000 schools around the world where the Russian language is taught. **Rossotrudnichestvo** coordinates the Russian Centres for Science and Culture, promoting cultural and educational exchanges with the many countries where it is represented. In 2012, the Agency had 59 centres for science and culture over the world<sup>102</sup>. In 2018, this number increased to 72 centres in 62 states, and 23 representatives of the Agency serving in another 21 Russian Embassies across the globe<sup>103</sup>. Such centres are also established in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan<sup>104</sup>. Although these networks have the word 'science' in their name, there is only limited involvement in science and technology – mainly through the organisation of exhibitions and conferences. They are mostly dedicated to the dissemination of Russian language and culture: they are cultural centres, in the usual diplomatic sense. Their role is also to strengthen links with the Russian expatriate community<sup>105</sup>.

Another important foundation regarding Russian culture is **Russkiy Mir** (Russian world), which was jointly set up by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Science in 2007 and is supported by both public (the federal budget) and private funds. It has many partners in the Russian education, literature and diplomacy sector and forges ties with educational organisations around the world. **Russkiy Mir's** main goals are the popularisation of the Russian language, support of the Russian diasporas, attracting foreign students to study in Russia and organising educational exhibitions. It also provides grants for several projects linked to the Russian language, such as Russian foreign media abroad or the organisation of seminars on the history and culture of Russia<sup>106</sup>.

There are also several smaller bodies that promote Russian culture and language. The Pushkin Institute, for example, is a teaching and research centre that provides Russian courses and issues language certificates meeting international standards<sup>107</sup>. Gosfilmofond is a National Film Foundation of Russia supporting the promotion of Russian films through the organisation of film festivals. Also, a non-profit institution dealing with art development in Russia, the Russian Academy of Arts (RAA), supports exhibitions of Russian artists abroad and those of foreign artists in Russia. Finally, another

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<sup>100</sup> COLLINS, Neil and BEKENOVA, Kristina, Digital Diplomacy of the European embassies in Kazakhstan, September 2017, EL-CSID Policy brief, [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/0bc3be\\_51c7b782e9d84cbd8e2a02020f1a0c72.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/0bc3be_51c7b782e9d84cbd8e2a02020f1a0c72.pdf) Retrieved on 15 December 2017.

<sup>101</sup> SMITS, *Preparatory Action: Culture...*, *op.cit.*

<sup>102</sup> SMITS, *Preparatory Action: Culture...*, *op.cit.*

<sup>103</sup> ROSSOTRUDNICHESTVO, *About Rossotrudnichestvo*, <http://rs.gov.ru/en/about> Retrieved on 27 December 2017.

<sup>104</sup> ROSSOTRUDNICHESTVO, *Contacts*, <http://rs.gov.ru/en/contacts> Retrieved on 27 December 2017.

<sup>105</sup> RUFFINI, Pierre-Bruno, *Science and Diplomacy: a New Dimension of International relations*, Berlin: Springer International Publishing 2017. Translation from the French language edition: Paris: Editions du Cygne, 2015.

<sup>106</sup> RUSSKIY MIR, *Fond "Russkiy Mir"*, <https://ruskiymir.ru/fund/> Retrieved on 16 November 2017.

<sup>107</sup> PUSHKIN INSTITUTE, *The Institute: General Information*, <http://www.pushkin.edu.ru/en/> Retrieved on 30 January 2018.

non-profit institution, the Russian Council of Academic Mobility (Rosam), is charged with promoting international exchanges of students and scholars<sup>108</sup>.

Along with media, Russian language studies and scholarship programmes do indeed play a big role in Russia's soft power strategy in the post-Soviet region. Especially towards CA countries, the Kremlin uses a wider range of 'softer' tools like educational exchanges and scholarship programmes<sup>109</sup>. This is somewhat opposed to the approach used in the Baltic states and Ukraine, where Russia often employs more manipulative methods and a more 'aggressive' style when it comes to its public diplomacy. It should be noted that such moves may have an opposite effect on Eurasian neighbours, as they still hold feelings of 'imperialistic behaviour' towards Russia, despite the shared narrative of common cultural values and political habits. Therefore, Russia has also placed most of its education and scholarship programmes under its development assistance and economic integration policies. To compete against educational initiatives from the EU, the US, China and Turkey, Russia has encouraged national state-owned universities to recruit CA students and establish partnerships in the region<sup>110</sup>. CA countries now represent a major transboundary market for Russian universities, due to geographic proximity, economic interdependence and the status of Russian as a second language.

## 6. Acceptance

To measure the effectiveness of CD efforts in CA, acceptance is another key variable. Even when actors display significant law and policy instruments and capacities, a lack of acceptance might undermine CD efforts in the region. To measure acceptance in CA, two sub-variables are taken into account: committed citizenry, measuring the level of engagement at the civil society level, and buy-in from political elites.

### 6.1 Committed Citizenry

In general terms, a committed citizenry can play a key role "in voicing dissent or support for specific initiatives"<sup>111</sup>. Gauging how CA citizens react to EU's and Russia's CD policies and initiatives gives substantial room for adaptation and, if need, reorientation of the action. This is especially true when one considers that, in general terms, culture and education are easier fields for citizens' involvement compared to such areas as human rights and democratisation.

Nevertheless, in discussing committed citizenry in CA, three points should be stressed. First, in spite of some similarities, this study has already emphasised that CA countries display substantial differences when it comes to civil society's *marge de manoeuvre*. For instance, while in such countries as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, participation in cultural events organised by European centres does not present any difficulties, in Turkmenistan individuals are obliged to justify their visits<sup>112</sup>. A second and more important point pertains to the complexity of providing valid quantitative surveys to measure civil society's view-point on EU's and Russia's CD. As noted by Peyrouse, "there are very few survey institutes active in the region and the ones that do operate have scarce financial and human resources. There are no independent institutes in Turkmenistan or Uzbekistan, and in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan those that exist sometimes face substantial hurdles"<sup>113</sup>. While effective surveys have been increasingly conducted in the region, most of them give only general ideas on how

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<sup>108</sup> SMITS, *Preparatory Action: Culture...*, *op. cit.*

<sup>109</sup> FOMINYKH, *Russia's Public Diplomacy...*, *op. cit.*

<sup>110</sup> FOMINYKH, *Russia's Public Diplomacy...*, *op. cit.*

<sup>111</sup> KINGAH, AMAYA and VAN LANGENHOVE, *Requirements for Effective...*, *op. cit.*

<sup>112</sup> PEYROUSE, Sebastien, *How Does Central Asia view the EU?*, *EUCAM Working Paper*, no 18, 2014, p. 11. [http://www.eucam.eu/fileadmin/user\\_upload/PDF/Working\\_Papers/EUCAM-WP18-How-does-Central-Asia-view-the-EU-1.pdf](http://www.eucam.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF/Working_Papers/EUCAM-WP18-How-does-Central-Asia-view-the-EU-1.pdf). Retrieved on 6 October 2017.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

CA citizens view the EU and Russia and do not provide substantial indications on feelings and reactions about CD activities.

Bearing in mind these observations, this paper looks at the EDB Integration Barometers, measuring post-Soviet citizens' attraction to a country<sup>114</sup>. Promoted by the Eurasian Development Bank's Centre for Integration Studies and the Eurasian Monitor, the Barometer measures three dimensions of attraction: political, economic, and sociocultural. While it is hard to claim the existence of a causal link between EU's and Russian CD policies and their respective perceptions, surveys can shed some light on the EU's and Russia's general clout at the cultural level.

In the survey, Russia is one of the available choices for 'potentially attractive countries' together with 'Great Britain', 'Germany', 'France', and 'other EU countries'. Responses are therefore grouped by four attraction vectors: 'CIS region', 'EU', 'other countries', and 'autonomy', that is, no international attraction. As such, one should note that EDB surveys assess the interest in EU MS rather than the interest in the EU as such.

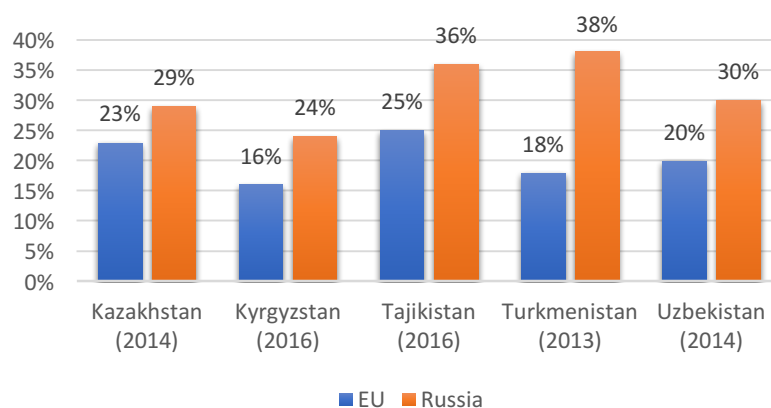
The 2016 fifth wave of the survey included Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan while the 2014 third wave of the survey also displayed results from Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan<sup>115</sup>. To provide a comprehensive view, both surveys were therefore used in this paper. Among the 20 questions included in the survey, three displayed a clear-cut CD value:

**T7:** 'For which of the listed countries would you say you have an interest in their history, culture, and natural geography?'

**T9:** 'Please indicate which of the listed countries you would like to travel to for studies. (Only asked of respondents younger than 35 years old) Or: Which of the listed countries would you like to send your children to for studies? (Only asked of respondents 35 years and older).'

**T12:** 'In your opinion, from which countries do we need to invite into our country more actors, writers, and artists, and buy and translate books, movies, musical productions, and other cultural works?'

**Table 2:** Respondents' answer to T7 'For which of the listed countries would you say you have an interest in their history, culture, and natural geography?'. Data from EDB Integration Barometer 2014 and 2016.



In T7, CA's respondents displayed a unanimous preference for Russia over EU MS. A slight difference was observed for Kazakhstan (6 points) and Kyrgyzstan (8 points), while among Turkmens the attraction gap was the highest of the region (20 points). In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, Turkey's

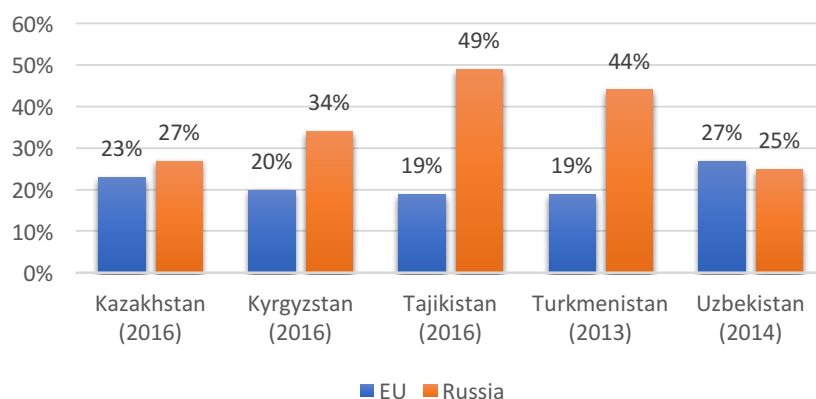
<sup>114</sup> EURASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK – CENTRE FOR INTEGRATION STUDIES, *EDB Integration Barometer. 2016. Fifth Wave Of The Survey, Report 40, 2016*. <https://eabr.org/en/analytics/integration-research/cii-reports/integratsionnyy-barometr-eabr-2016/>. Retrieved on 6 October 2017.

<sup>115</sup> EURASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK – CENTRE FOR INTEGRATION STUDIES, *Integratsionnyy Barometr Yeabr. 2014. Tret'ya Volna Izmereniyem*, Report 25, 2014 (in Russian) <http://eurasiamonitor.org/rus/research/event-251.html>. Retrieved on 6 October 2017.



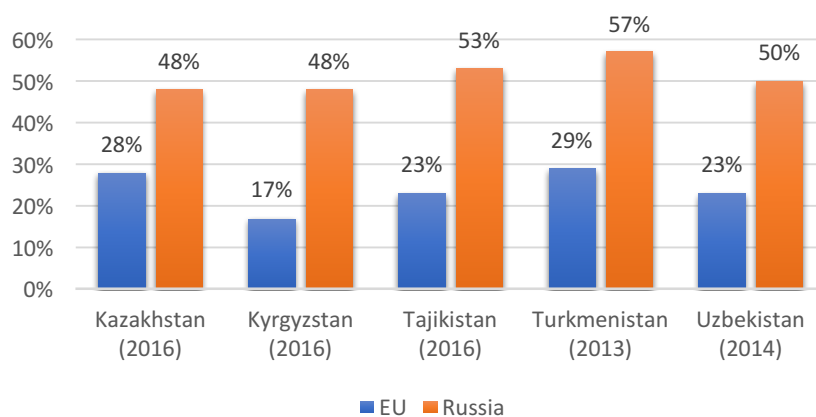
significant attraction was confirmed, while India was the in the top 3 most attractive actors in Tajikistan together with Russia and the EU.

**Table 3:** Respondents' answer to T9 'Please indicate which of the listed countries you would like to travel to for studies (or send your children to for studies)'. Data from EDB Integration Barometer 2014 and 2016.



T9, introducing the subject of education, offered some differences. In the region, Uzbekistan was the only country where respondents slightly preferred an EU member state over Russia for educational purposes (-2%). A small gap was observed in Kazakhstan (4%), while a major difference was shown in Tajikistan (30%) and Turkmenistan (25%). Interestingly, in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, the US was third most preferred destination after Russia and EU countries. Turkey and China were also suitable choices respectively in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.

**Table 4:** Respondent's answer to T12 'In your opinion, from which countries do we need to invite into our country more actors, writers, and artists, and buy and translate books, movies, musical productions, and other cultural works?'. Data from EDB Integration Barometer 2014 and 2016.



Finally, in T12 respondents from all CA countries consistently showed a preference for Russian arts over European. Like for T7 and T9, Kazakhstan displayed the lowest gap (20%). Also, in the country, France and Germany were in the top 3 together with Russia, while Turkey and India were among the most attractive countries according to Kyrgyzstan's and Tajikistan's respondents. A possible interpretation of this wider gap between European and Russian attraction could be related to the use of Russian as *lingua franca* in the region together with the role that Russian media play. On the latter, Huasheng has noted that "although no statistical data on this matter is available, there is no doubt that Russian news and social media sites are widely popular"<sup>116</sup>.

<sup>116</sup> HUASHENG, Zhao, Is Russia's Strategic Presence In Central Asia On The Decline?, *Bishkek Project*, 19 April 2017. <https://bishkekproject.com/memos/27>. Retrieved on 6 October 2017.

Overall, EDB Barometers seemed to confirm that Russia remains the most attractive actor when it comes to CD efforts in the region. It should also be noted that, in spite of the high results in the socio-cultural part of the survey, the fifth wave of the survey from 2016 highlighted how in general terms “Russia’s position in the countries of the Central Asian sub-region has weakened”<sup>117</sup>. The report stressed a decline in Tajikistan, due to a decrease in the attractiveness of Russian financial resources and a desire to reorient cooperation with other actors of the international arena. In Kazakhstan, a fall in the interest of Russian goods was also observed. As such, one should remark how, despite a number of substantial challenges faced by Moscow, the Barometer still displayed Russia’s strong cultural role in the region. However, while Russia plays a leading role, yet it is no longer solitary as a number of actors (the EU, the US, China, and Turkey) have increasingly strengthened their CD position in the region.

Furthermore, the survey analysis tends to highlight a correlation between openness and orientation toward CD activities from both actors, in line with Peyrouse’s view: “Paradoxically, the two countries with the most Russophile elites – Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan – are also the most oriented toward Europe”<sup>118</sup>. Finally, a last point focuses on the features of the survey itself. At present EU countries lack their own tools to assess perceptions through quantitative surveys in the region. While much has been said on the challenges faced by survey institutes in the region, regional barometers analysing CD actions are key to monitoring and pursuing any needed reorientation.

## 6.2 Buy-in from Political Elites

Assessing political elites’ approval in CA is another strong tool to measure acceptance on CD efforts. Declarations and engagements from national and local politicians are vital to shape public debate and to strengthen or undermine international actors’ public image. While an exhaustive overview is beyond the reach of this paper, this part attempts to gauge elites’ general views on EU’s and Russia’s CD based on current literature and political declarations.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Astana has pursued what President Nazarbaev defined in the 1990s as a multi-vector foreign policy<sup>119</sup>. Yeltsin’s disengagement in the region throughout the decade opened up new windows of opportunity and space for cooperation with the major world powers. In his first two years of power, Kazakhstan signed agreements with Russia, the US, and China.

When it comes to the EU, it appears that Kazakh elites perceive it as having “substantial economic leverage, but barely any political clout compared to Moscow, Washington, or Beijing”<sup>120</sup>. While there is a clear recognition of the EU as champion of democratic values, its visibility in the economic sector appears weaker. At the cultural level, Kourmanova recognised a slight increase in EU visibility “through the work of EU delegations and relevant EU MS embassies that help to promote European culture and standards, as well as broader global values”<sup>121</sup>. In a number of interviews given by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Roman Vassilenko recognised EU MS’ educational efforts in the country<sup>122</sup>,

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<sup>117</sup> EDB, *EDB Integration Barometer*, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>118</sup> PEYROUSE, *How Does Central...*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>119</sup> CUMMINGS, Sally, Eurasian bridge or murky waters between east and west? Ideas, identity and output in Kazakhstan's foreign policy, *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2003, pp. 139-155.

<sup>120</sup> KOURMANOVA, Aitolkyn, National views: Kazakhstan in PEYROUSE, *How Does Central...*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>122</sup> See: European External Action Service (EEAS), *EU and Central Asia ministers of education agree to expand cooperation*, 7 July 2017. [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/29477/eu-and-central-asia-ministers-education-agree-expand-cooperation\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/29477/eu-and-central-asia-ministers-education-agree-expand-cooperation_en) Retrieved on 6 October 2017; GOTEV, Georgi, Kazakh minister: Two ‘revolutionary’ stories are happening in Central Asia, *Euractiv*, 31 August 2017. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/central-asia/interview/two-revolutionary-stories-are-happening-in-central-asia/> Retrieved on 6 October 2017.

while at the national level Kazakh ambassador in Berlin pointed out that Germany remains a strategic partner in the development of the system of dual technical and vocational education<sup>123</sup>.

Interestingly enough, Astana's recent decision for a switch of the Kazakh language from Cyrillic to Latin by 2025 was seen by many as an attempt to emphasise the country's distance from the Russian cultural sphere<sup>124</sup>. For instance, on this, Gushchin noted that "the switch to Latin today is evidence of a long-term trend which shows that Kazakhstan does not belong to the Russian world in full"<sup>125</sup>. As an attempt to adapt to the current Latin-dominated scientific environment, Nazarbaev pointed out that this would not erase Russia's key role for Astana. In other words, Kazakhstan "will not forget Russian culture and the Russian language. We learned world culture using the Russian language, and it will always remain with us". As such, Nazarbaev's moves and declarations seem to confirm that, in pursuing a multi-vector and pragmatic foreign policy, Astana has also adopted a multi-vector cultural policy, seeking to floating between Russia and the West, including the US., the EU, and Turkey.

In spite of this repositioning, one should not forget that current Kazakh elites remain strongly russophile and support further integration with Moscow. On this, Ó Beacháin and Kevlihan mention the example of Miras, an elite private primary and secondary school in Almaty<sup>126</sup>. Children are offered two different language streams: either Kazakh and Russian or Russian combined with English, while a Kazakh-English solution is not available. In the authors' view, the anecdote reveals how "Russian remains the de facto language of elite education and communication and an important gateway language, particularly in the hard sciences, engineering and military studies"<sup>127</sup>.

Similarly to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz elites have displayed a multilateral orientation and supported cooperation with both actors. Juraev remarks that despite its role as one of the most generous donors in the country, the EU delegation in Kyrgyzstan has not increased its visibility<sup>128</sup>. While political elites are well aware of the support received by both the government and CSOs, EU CD efforts remain unknown among the general public.

When it comes to Russia, Kremlin's soft activism in Kyrgyzstan eventually paid off, despite some controversies around the role of Tolstoy's language. In 2012, Foreign Minister Kazakbayev's declaration put an end to the debate. By recalling that questioning its official status was a mistake, Kazakbayev emphasised how "the Russian language helped the Kyrgyz to join international science and culture"<sup>129</sup>. Helped by a substantial Russian-friendly media environment, at present Kyrgyz elites display a clear orientation towards Russian culture and education. As such, Saunders observes that "Russian remains a marker of the older elite and reflective earlier patterns of internationalism"<sup>130</sup>, while Kosmarskaya notes that Russian language current status "should be viewed not only via a top-down approach (Kyrgyz state language policies, support of the RCLS by Russia), but, more

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<sup>123</sup> SEITZHAN, Galiaskar, Kazakh, German partnership is versatile, says Kazakh ambassador, *Astana Times*, 12 July 2017. <https://astanatimes.com/2017/07/kazakh-german-partnership-is-versatile-says-kazakh-ambassador/> Retrieved on 6 October 2017.

<sup>124</sup> RFERL, *Kazakhstan To Outline Latin-Based Alphabet By End Of 2017*, 26 July 2017. <https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-cyrillic-latin-alphabet/28638741.html> Retrieved on 6 October 2017.

<sup>125</sup> Cited in OSPANOVA, Aygul, In Kazakhstan, Cyrillic Alphabet To Go The Way Of The Soviet Union, *Caspian News*, 23 August 2017. <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/in-kazakhstan-cyrillic-alphabet-to-go-the-way-of-the-soviet-union-2017-8-22-34/> Retrieved on 6 October 2017.

<sup>126</sup> Ó BEACHÁIN, Donnacha and KEVLIHAN, Rob, Threading a needle: Kazakhstan between civic and ethno-nationalist state-building, *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 19, no. 2, April 2013, pp. 337–356.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>128</sup> JURAEV, Emilbek, National views: Kyrgyzstan, in PEYROUSE, *How Does Central...*, *op. cit.*

<sup>129</sup> THE VOICE OF RUSSIA, *Russian language status in Kyrgyzstan to remain unchanged*, 5 April 2012. [https://sputniknews.com/voiceofrussia/2012\\_04\\_05/70715995/](https://sputniknews.com/voiceofrussia/2012_04_05/70715995/) Retrieved on 6 October 2017

<sup>130</sup> SAUNDERS, Robert A., The Geopolitics of Russophobia: The Problems and Prospects of Post-Soviet "Global Russian", *Globality Studies Journal*, Issue 40, 15 July 2014, p. 6.

importantly, through the prism of micro-level family/individual life trajectories and survival or social promotion strategies"<sup>131</sup>.

Balancing has also been a key policy choice for Tajik elites. As a result of the civil war that was fought immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Dushanbe developed relations with the EU later than its neighbours. In his qualitative study, Olimov found that Tajik elites appreciate European educational and cultural programmes but they refrain from enhancing EU influence in the country, as this could endanger the authoritarian rule of the regime<sup>132</sup>. Among the general public, it was also found that European institutions enjoy a more positive perception than EU MS.

Similarly to its neighbours, a review of the role of the Russian language was attempted in the last decade. In 2009, a bill removing the constitutional role of Russian as a language for inter-ethnic communication was prepared. Later President Rakhmon clarified that its status would remain unchanged, and that "acts of the President and government in the Republic of Tajikistan are accepted in Tajik and Russian languages, dozens of newspapers and magazines are published in Russian, which, in my opinion, is evidence of the real state of things"<sup>133</sup>. In discussing relations with Moscow, the Tajik Ministry of Foreign Affairs website emphasised how "Tajikistan and Russia are historically linked by centuries-old tradition, close interaction and friendship, and a deep interpenetration of cultures"<sup>134</sup>.

In Uzbekistan, CD trajectories have been heavily influenced by both domestic events and foreign policy orientations. In 2005, strong EU reactions to the Andijan protests and the request for an international investigation were toughly rejected by Tashkent. Imposed straight after the massacre, sanctions were finally removed in 2009 under Germany's initiative. Yuldasheva acknowledged the existence of a large consensus among Uzbek elites of the EU's positive role in the country, noticing that "EU assistance is particularly visible in sector such as higher education, the health and social system"<sup>135</sup>. As recently as in 2012, the Ministry of Higher and Specialised Secondary Education recognised the role of the EU Tempus programme "on the overall modernisation process, including on the improvement of university facilities, the installation of modern computer and laboratory equipment, and the development of modern teaching materials and textbooks"<sup>136</sup>.

In spite of foreign policy ups and downs and the desire to modernise the education sector, due to common Soviet legacies Russia remains a clear cultural and educational reference in Uzbekistan. Throughout the last decade Uzbek elites have welcomed the establishment of three international branch campuses of Russian universities: Tashkent hosts divisions of the Moscow State University of Lomonosov, Plekhanov Russian University of Economics and the Russian State Oil and Gas University of Gubkin. As such, Russian educational activism in the country has contributed to further curriculum diversification and academic competition and its role has been increasingly recognised by Uzbek elites<sup>137</sup>.

Finally, Turkmenistan offers perhaps the least opportunities for buy-in from political elites for both the EU and Russia. Peyrouse observes that "even the educated, and the governmental, bureaucratic and

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<sup>131</sup> KOSMARSKAYA, Natalia, The Russian language in Kyrgyzstan: changing roles and inspiring prospects, *Russian Journal of Communication*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2015, p. 221.

<sup>132</sup> OLIMOV, Muzaffar, National views: Tajikistan in PEYROUSE, *How Does Central..., op. cit.*

<sup>133</sup> RIA NOVOSTI, Status russkogo yazyka v Tadjikistane ostayetsya neizmennym – Rakhmon, 22 October 2009. <https://ria.ru/culture/20091022/190107839.html> Retrieved on 6 October 2017.

<sup>134</sup> MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN, Relations of Tajikistan with Russia, 2017. <http://mfa.tj/?l=en&cat=90&art=158> Retrieved on 6 October 2017.

<sup>135</sup> YULDASHEVA Guli, National views: Uzbekistan in PEYROUSE, *How Does Central..., op. cit.*

<sup>136</sup> EACEA, *Higher Education in Uzbekistan*, 2002, p. 21. [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/participating\\_countries/overview/Uzbekistan.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/participating_countries/overview/Uzbekistan.pdf) Retrieved on 6 October 2017.

<sup>137</sup> SIA, EngKee, Student motivation, intercultural competence and transnational higher education: Uzbekistan, a case study, *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, vol. 15, no. 1, February 2015.

business elites are largely unaware of the EU and how cooperation could be forged<sup>138</sup>. While signs of a possible rapprochement were identified recently and President Berdimuhamedov stressed that relations with Moscow are of a special nature, Russia's CD mission in Turkmenistan remains much more problematic than it is in Ashgabat's neighbours as local elites see Moscow's activism in a suspicious light<sup>139</sup>.

Overall, this section seems to confirm a correlation between the degree of openness of the country and a more positive vision of CD efforts from both the EU and Russia. This is the case of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and applies also to Tajikistan to a certain extent. Relations with Russia have been somewhat more controversial even in the most Russophile countries, and political elites have attempted to call into question the role of Russian language and culture in the countries. Relations with international actors remain more complicated in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan as their elites are cautious of any action that could undermine both the authoritarian rule and the isolationist path.

## 7. Discussion and Conclusion

This paper sought to provide a qualitative analysis of the EU's and Russia's CD efforts in the CA region. In doing so, it also discussed the actors' different history of cooperation with CA states. As a newcomer in the region, the EU designed a comprehensive strategy in the mid-2000s and became a valuable donor. European engagement remains however not comparable to the political, economic and cultural legacies that still link Russia to CA. As such, this paper has confirmed that, in spite of a declining position, Russia remains the major foreign actor in CA. At the declarative level, black letter law and policy showed increased awareness on the role of CD, and CA countries were mentioned as part of Moscow's fundamental areas of interest. In terms of capacity, Russia has managed a deep restructuring of its development assistance in the past years, with increased funding and the creation of a number of public, mixed, and private institutions and agencies dealing with CD goals. Also, by stimulating student exchanges, language courses and scholarship programmes, Russia has mainly tried to build CD activities on common values and shared language, culture and history. Finally, on the level of acceptance, Russia's culture and education remain highly attractive among citizenry and elites in the whole region.

When it comes to the EU, CD efforts have led to mixed results. Despite a strong financial engagement that makes Brussels one of the largest regional donors, the EU's contribution is not highly visible, and its influence has been declining. One of the explanatory reasons might be the inconsistent approach towards the region when it comes to bilateral or regional financial engagement. On top of that, too many priorities were outlined before the new strategy in 2007, which left a lot of financial aid shattered across many 'key areas'. Interestingly, the EU is more attractive in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, where countries' elites are the most Russia-oriented at the regional level. Two non-CD-related factors seem to influence the EU's and Russia's different CD results in the region. On the one hand, it is indubitably true that in the current international context Central Asia occupies a very low position in the EU foreign policy agenda. This is somewhat opposed to the early and mid-2000s context, when geographical proximity to Afghanistan was a serious concern for Western policy-makers. On the other hand, as noted by Laruelle and McGlinchey, the presence of pro-Russia media and "deep cultural and historical ties, such as the presence of a substantial Russian minority in Kazakhstan and half a million Kyrgyz labour migrants in Russia, help to ensure that Russian state narratives resonate"<sup>140</sup>. But whilst the EU

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<sup>138</sup> PEYROUSE, *How Does Central... , op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>139</sup> See DUBNOV, Arkady, A New Russian Turn to Turkmenistan?, *Carnegie Moscow Center*, 18 February 2016. <http://carnegie.ru/commentary/62814%20> Retrieved on 6 October 2017; AZIZOV, Demir, Uzbekistan, Russia open new page of co-op, *TREND News Agency*, 6 April 2017. <https://en.trend.az/casia/uzbekistan/2739136.html> Retrieved on 6 October 2017.

<sup>140</sup> LARUELLE, Marlène, and MCGLINCHHEY, Eric, Renewing EU and US Soft Power in Central Asia, *EUCAM Commentary*, no. 28, October 2017. [http://www.eucentralasia.eu/uploads/tx\\_icticontent/EUCAM\\_Commentary\\_28\\_Renewing\\_US\\_and\\_EU\\_Softpower\\_in\\_Central\\_Asia.pdf](http://www.eucentralasia.eu/uploads/tx_icticontent/EUCAM_Commentary_28_Renewing_US_and_EU_Softpower_in_Central_Asia.pdf) Retrieved on 28 December 2017.

has shown a rather temporary and instable excitement for the region, some EU countries such as Germany and Latvia have always been active in pushing the EU agenda regarding CA. Even before that time, these countries have been pursuing their own policies in the region (and targeting small ethnic minorities), which has eventually paid off in terms of stable relationships.

While at present Russia remains the *de facto* CD leader, this analysis also emphasized that, similarly to the EU, Russia's efforts have not been successful in the whole region. While some countries have been bandwagoning with Russia, others have followed individual paths and rejected closer ties. Even in the most Russophile CA states, the attitude towards Russia is sometimes referred to "forced interdependence" or "let the sleeping dog where it is"<sup>141</sup>. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, Moscow's idea and use of soft power portray CA as a fundamental part of the 'Russian world'. And while most of CA states welcome cooperation with Moscow, as noted by Juraev, their elites have been able "to play cats and mouse"<sup>142</sup> and to make balancing exercises, as in the case of Kyrgyzstan, which willingly accepts financial help from both Russia and the EU. As such, in the current global environment, Brussels could and should see its cultural diplomacy as a tool to balance Russia's 'soft' assertiveness.

By assessing the EU's and Russia's roles in Central Asia, this paper sought to shed some light on competing cultural narratives and practices in the shared neighbourhood, where both actors have been consistently engaging. As CD studies are a relatively new academic field, further research on different areas of the post-soviet space (for instance Eastern Partnership member states, the Baltics, Transcaucasia, and the like) would represent a valuable mapping exercise, uncovering the features of the EU's and Russia's conflicting strategies. At a non-comparative level, assessments on the mandates of the cultural actors targeted for CD activities, and on the level of coherence between policies formulation and implementation would also be precious to fully comprehend CD efforts in the post-soviet space.

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<sup>141</sup> GUSSAROVA, Anna, and KHON, Yevgeniy, Russian Soft Power in Kazakhstan (and Central Asia): Taken for Granted?, *Central Asia Institute for Strategic Studies – CAISS*, October 2017. <http://caiss.expert/russian-soft-power-in-kazakhstan-and-central-asia-taken-for-granted/>. Retrieved on 28 December 2017.

<sup>142</sup> JURAEV, Shairbek, Comparing the EU and Russia engagements in Central Asia, *L'Europe en Formation*, vol. 374, no. 4, 2014, p. 79.

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