



## EU POLICY IN CENTRAL ASIA: A VORTEX OF BALANCES OR A TIGHTROPE WALKER ON THE ROPE

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**ABSTRACT:** - This article is devoted to the relations between the European Union and the Central Asian republics. It discusses a number of internal and external factors that may affect the development of bilateral and multilateral relations. These factors force the European Union to pursue a balanced policy in the region. The success of the Union's policy in Central Asia depends on the stable maintenance of this balance. In this sense, the author likens the European Union to a tightrope walker performing a grand spectacle.

**KEYWORDS:** European Union, Central Asia, strategy, region, cooperation, partnership, distribution of powers, balance, approach, mutual interest.

### INTRODUCTION

The art of tightrope walking, well-known also as a funambulism, occupies a special spot in the historical traditions of both Eastern and Western nations. Especially, in the Middle Ages and even until recent times, national and local celebrations did not pass without demonstrating various games on the ropes. A tightrope walker who can walk on a thin rope

at a height of several tens of meters and perform various exercises has been making people's hearts flutter for several centuries. The skill of the tightrope walker who walks "on a tightrope like a sword's edge" lies in the ability to use the anchor in his hand correctly and to keep his balance. If he can't keep his balance, he is sure to fall down.

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The European Union, which is increasingly active in world politics, can be compared to that tightrope walker. The Union should keep a balanced foreign policy in international arena. Otherwise, the Union cannot achieve any success in external policy. The Union's policy in Central Asia is no exception.

Based on this, the Union must ensure the following balances in order to conduct a successful foreign policy in the region:

First, the European Union should balance the interests of institutional (EU) and national statehood (Member-states) in foreign policy, first of all, by coordinating its activities subordinated to the interests of the Union with the foreign policy of the Member States aiming at national interests. That is, the European Union is a structure that unites 27 member states and takes responsibility for the legal regulation and management of a number of areas of economy and social life. In these areas the European Union exercises legislative authority, ensures control over the execution of legislative acts, establishes an independent judicial authority. Other areas of economy and social life are within the jurisdiction of the Member States. Some areas fall under the joint competences of the Union and the Member States. Striking a balance in the area of joint competences is not particularly easy. Thus, the European Union is a statelike structure that operates on the basis of the principle of distribution of powers.

As in domestic policy, foreign policy follows the principle of separation of powers between the EU and the Member States: the limits of competence in domestic policy apply equally to the foreign policy of the Union and the Member States. Therefore, the desire to ensure the distribution of powers and the balance of interests between the European Union and the Member States is clearly visible in the Union's strategies for Central Asia.

Secondly, based on the principle of reciprocity, the European Union has to balance its interests with the regional interests of Central Asia within the framework of interregional partnership relations. Because partnership relations develop and strengthen only on the basis of mutual interest. One-sided interest cannot be the basis for stable relations. Therefore, in its relations with Central Asia, the EU should take into account not only its own or its Member States' interests, but also the joint or separate interests of the countries of the Central Asian region and balance them;

Third, the Union should “regionalize” its policy in Central Asia at the regional level and balance its regional approach, which provides a unified solution to common problems specific to the region, with a differentiated individual approach that is focused on each country in the region deriving from their uniqueness. It is necessary to harmonize the framework of multilateral relations with the framework of bilateral relations. One of these two approaches should be chosen depending on the extent to which the goals and objectives of cooperation are expected to be more effective or the nature of the problem to be solved;

Fourthly, the European Union seeks to establish cooperation and partnership with all the countries of Central Asia. Without it, the policy of the Union in the region will not gain integrity and may turn into chaos. The Union aims to establish relations with each country of the region, taking into account its specific characteristics. At the same time, such “consideration of specific characteristics” should not create discriminatory situations between them. A differential approach based on the circumstances of each country cannot be interpreted as discriminatory. Therefore, the Union's individual approach to each country in Central Asia should be conducted on the basis of the principle of equality and

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rationally balanced. In particular, the distribution of the Union's financial assistance to the countries of the region should not demonstrate discriminatory sharp differences between them. The experience of the past years shows that there was an uneven distribution of financial assistance provided by the EU to the countries of the region (especially per capita), which at the time caused dissatisfaction among the countries of the region;

Fifth, it is important that the Union is able to balance its economic interests in the region with its political interests. It is natural that the demands of human rights and democracy were not matured for the Central Asian republics, which in the first decades after independence put the main emphasis on economic recovery. In some cases, the politicization of cooperation, that is, the main emphasis on political aspects, can damage the economic interests of both parties.

According to some observers, the first strategy of the Union, adopted in 2007 [1], frustrated the attempts to “Europeanize” the internal politics of the Central Asian republics. [2] The requirements and demands of European democracy and human rights did not give the expected results.

However, the EU's new strategy adopted in 2019 [3] places a wider and deeper focus on human rights. The word “human rights” appears in more than 20 parts in the document “The EU and Central Asia: New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership”. However, it can be felt that some politically sensitive issues were sounded in a slightly softened tone. For example, the phrase “democratization” found in the first strategy was replaced by the phrase “promoting democracy”. In the new strategy, it is observed that the EU has taken a step towards a pragmatic approach that seeks more material and economic interests;

Sixth, as it moves closer to the Central Asian region both geographically and geopolitically, the EU has to balance its short-term plans with long-term goals. Sure thing, the era of foreign policy based on the pursuit of short-term interests has passed. Today's international relations agenda relies on the logic of long forward-looking steps.

The European Union and Central Asia have a long history of relations. The future possibilities of this relationship with historical traditions are endless. The fact that both regions are located in one geographical space - the Eurasian space - requires the EU to balance long-term strategies with short-term goals;

Seventh, investment cooperation is the most important direction of the EU-Central Asia relations. The European Union and its advanced Member-states are also the main source of high technologies and investments for Central Asia.

A significant share of the private sector in the European economy requires balancing the participation of the state and private sector in the external economic activities of the Union, in particular, in investing into the countries of Central Asia;

Eighth, the EU-Central Asia relations should not be limited only to official circles. After all, the main beneficiaries of these relations are ordinary people and society. The weak aspects of the EU-Central Asian relations are still relevant in connection with this logic.

Since increasing the active participation of “people's diplomacy” in bilateral and multilateral relations is one of the main tasks of the Union, it is important to balance the official inter-governmental institutional dialogue with informal non-institutional non-governmental relations in the relations of the European Union with Central Asia.

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Ninth, the EU needs to be able to select tactical tools appropriate to its long-term and short-term strategies in the region and establish a reasonable balance between them.

Some experts argue that the European Union's 2007 strategy for Central Asia has failed. According to experts, although certain positive results have been achieved, concrete results have not been achieved since “the goals were too broad, and the means to achieve them were too narrow”[4]. It follows from this that it is possible to achieve the expected results only when the strategic goals of the Union and the tactical means of their realization are mutually proportional. This was one of the main lessons of the first strategy of 2007;

And finally, and tenthly, one should not forget the geopolitical factors affecting the relations between the European Union and Central Asia. The short-term and long-term strategies of the Union require taking into account and balancing the interests of the more powerful players in the region like Russia, China, the USA, and Iran.

In other words, the European Union is subject to Russia's geopolitical whims, China's growing economic influence, the United States' “political uncertainty”, Iran's “imperceptibly slipping” into region, India's “wrapped up” policy in cultural ties, Turkey's ambitions of “Turkish language brotherhood”, the Islamic world's policy of religious solidarity should be able to pursue its own policy and find its place in the geopolitical space of the region.

Although external factors are not denied, the European Union has enough internal opportunities and reserves to further develop partnership and cooperation in Central Asia. Now, the EU needs to balance not only with the main geopolitical players in the region, but also between its internal and external capabilities. Only then will the Union's policy in Central Asia be successful.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the European Union differs from other subjects of international relations with its complex organizational-political structure and legal status in the international arena. In the context of multilateral interests, goals and tasks, the EU should be able to choose long-term and short-term strategies and appropriate tactical tools, coordinate the external activities of the organization and, at the same time, the Member States, and thereby ensure a reasonable balance between them.

The European Union, as described above, is a metaphorical tightrope walker on the rope. It has become a matter of life and death for the Union to be able to maintain balance in the vortex of various contradictions and processes. Its position, influence and power in the international arena depend on how to extent it maintains this balance. At the time being, the situation of the Union in this regard can only be assessed as satisfactory. As the cumulative influence of the factors influencing the balance increases, it becomes more and more difficult to further the balance on the ropes. It all depends on the skill of “the tightrope walker” now.

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