Regional Security Cooperation Between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the European Union

Kazakhstan has much to gain in terms of economic development and improved security from its partnership with the European Union and can benefit even more from positioning itself within the transatlantic relationship between the European Union and the United States.

The European Union (EU) and Kazakhstan have been partners since the day the republic obtained its independence; their dialogue constantly expands. Kazakhstan assigns a special place in its foreign policy to cooperation with the EU, which occupies leading positions in world politics and the world economy. Maintaining Kazakhstan–EU relations at a high level is a priority goal. Close ties between Kazakhstan and the EU are fostered by their shared interests in regional and international security, economic ties, and social and cultural development, in conducting investment activity and major international projects, and in attracting advanced technologies and knowledge into the country.

Given that the European Union comprises independent states with equal rights, Kazakhstan offers a two-tier relationship—with the EU as a whole and with each state separately. The two tiers complement each


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other, as reflected in the signing of various agreements and the implemention of various projects.

During the early years of cooperation, EU–Kazakhstan dialogue focused on matters of trade and investment and on the development of democratic institutions, but since 2002 it has also covered other important fields like power engineering, transportation, jurisprudence, the legal system, and security. As is well known, the basic document governing the partnership between the EU and Kazakhstan is the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) signed in 1995, which went into effect in 1999.¹

In 2007, the EU raised its political approach to the region to a higher level by approving the Strategy for a New Partnership with Central Asia.² A year later, Kazakhstan adopted the state program “Road to Europe.”³ In conjunction, these initiatives have provided a foundation for multifaceted interactions, which today encompass many important areas from political dialogue to cultural exchange at the level of civil society, from trade to questions of the rule of law and regional security.

Cooperation between Kazakhstan and the EU has passed through several stages in its development. The current stage is aimed at strengthening and expanding the EU’s positions in Central Asia and the Caspian region. The EU has already worked out its vision of the future of Central Asia as a region capable of blocking the paths of drug traffickers, illegal migrants, and religious extremists.

At the same time, the EU is becoming more active in the Caspian, because its members’ energy requirements tend to rise constantly. It is already obvious that, in contrast to earlier periods, the EU is concentrating its efforts in the economic and energy sectors and relegating issues of democratization, pluralism of opinion, and human rights to the background.

In May 2009, discussions began in Brussels and Astana concerning a new and improved agreement. At the regional level, Kazakhstan is a high-priority country within the framework of the EU’s Strategy for a New Partnership with Central Asia. In developing its interaction with the EU, Kazakhstan proceeds from the expectation that such interaction will involve the republic in the settlement of general European problems, strengthen the European flank of its foreign policy, and provide additional security guarantees.

Kazakhstan’s approach to the emerging system of Euro-Atlantic security is aimed primarily at realizing the possibilities offered by the general
situation of instability and uncertainty and at warding off the threats inherent in this period. In the case of relations between Kazakhstan and Europe, these possibilities arise out of the EU’s interest in preserving stability in Kazakhstan and other Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries and in conducting economic, social, and political reforms to improve stability in those countries.

Cooperation on security rests on the basic principles of European Partnership and Cooperation (EPC), which envision close political dialogue on matters including the fight against terrorism and the localization and peaceful settlement of regional conflicts and close cooperation in the sphere of jurisprudence and domestic affairs in general. Such cooperation corresponds to Kazakhstan’s strategic goals and national interests.

The search for common approaches to solving these problems is a constant feature on the agenda of the Council for Cooperation Between the European Union and Kazakhstan. As noted by Kurt Juul, the general director of the European Commission for External Relations, in light of the “identical problems facing Kazakhstan and the EU” in the fight against various crimes, the “sides are harmonizing their positions on issues of migration, border management, the fight against terrorism, drug smuggling, money laundering, and reform of the judicial system.”

At meetings of this council, the EU has repeatedly called on Kazakhstan to adopt a more effective approach to the management of borders and migration and emphasized the need to conduct the war on terrorism in conformity with international standards and basic principles of human rights, especially by strengthening legislation aimed against money laundering and by improving existing instruments. It is important for Kazakhstan to obtain the EU’s assistance in implementing specific regional projects on security and the fight against transnational crime, as well as EU assistance for the border troops.

There is a certain similarity in the security problems of the Central Asian region and the EU—namely, the superimposition of several security structures on one region. The EU strategy of creating an independent security and defense system within the framework of international relations intersects Kazakhstan’s strategy of multidirectional cooperation. The formation of an independent security system for the European Union also has significance for the Central Asian countries, because to a certain extent the strengthening of the EU’s military role and responsibilities predetermines the prospects for interaction between West and East in terms of security. Given that the Europeans are starting to strengthen
their own defense structures, it seems to me necessary to pay serious attention to developing cooperation with European organizations. In addition, the experience accumulated by the Europeans in improving their own defenses seems to me very useful.

Kazakhstan is actively promoting a policy of integration in the region. While such a policy may create a common economic space, it cannot succeed without a collective security system. The formation of the European model of such a system, while still far from its logical completion, offers useful experience. In this connection, we can already adopt many elements of the European model—for example, standardization of the armaments and military equipment of all interested states and mutually complementary cooperation among their military–industrial complexes.

The European countries possess enormous experience in such matters as the fight against terrorism, extremism, separatism, and drug trafficking. Their experience interests the countries of Central Asia, which have already encountered these problems. Thus, the experience of regional and interregional cooperation among the EU members has great significance for Central Asia.

The changing geopolitical situation is forcing the EU to work out new approaches to security problems. The leading European states are not abandoning plans to strengthen European identity in terms of security and defense within their own institutional framework. While persistently moving toward setting up its own security system, the EU is not abandoning attempts to achieve effective results. In this respect, the new Lisbon Treaty is an important step in European integration; it will help united Europe solve the problems of the twenty-first century and open up possibilities for globalization. United Europe will be able to present a united front in the international arena and acquire greater consistency in various areas of foreign policy—such as diplomacy, security, trade, and humanitarian assistance.

One problem in ensuring regional stability is how to halt the production, sale, and transportation of drugs. To assist the war on drugs and improve the management of borders, the EU has worked out two programs. The Border Management Program in Central Asia (BOMCA) is aimed at enhancing the security of the region, easing lawful trade and transit, and reducing the illegal movement of goods and people. The goals of the program were defined as supporting more harmonious, coordinated, and modern methods of border management at the regional level while
improving border cooperation and supporting legal trade and transit across the borders of the Central Asian countries.

In 2003, BOMCA entered its active phase. Three stages of this program have now been completed: projects have been implemented under its aegis for joint study of possibilities for border management in the region, including Kazakhstan, and regular training has been organized to raise the qualifications of personnel of border and related services. Within the framework of technical assistance offered under BOMCA, the European Union is helping improve institutional reforms in the field of border management and augment personnel potential in Central Asia while continuing to finance the enhancement of infrastructure along the main trade routes of the region. BOMCA is financed by the European Union and implemented by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

The Central Asia Drug Action Program (CADAP) aims at the gradual adoption of European and international practices in the field of antidrug activity. In October 2000, the Office of the EU’s Regional Representative for the Fight Against Drugs in Central Asia was opened in Almaty. The EU implemented CADAP at the end of 2001. The priority tasks of this project are to improve the work of control agencies in the large airports of the region; to strengthen cooperation among Central Asian law-enforcement agencies in the fight against drug trafficking; and to create a unified information network for coordinating the work of the National Security Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan (NSC RK), the Border Service of the NSC RK, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Customs Control Agency. CADAP also envisions the organization and conduct of training seminars for law-enforcement personnel, the supply of equipment, and the provision of technical assistance.

Kazakhstan is actively cooperating with the Office of the EU’s Regional Representative for the Fight Against Drugs in Central Asia. Further cooperation in this area is taking place under the aegis of CADAP and the EU’s General Strategy for the Fight Against Drugs (2005–12). It concentrates on such areas as strategic planning for the implementation of national and multilateral programs, legislation, the work of law-enforcement agencies and judicial cooperation, control of precursors and permitted drugs, money laundering, the uprooting of illegal plantations, and measures to reduce the demand for drugs. Through the recently designed Action Program for the Fight Against the Transportation of Drugs, the EU is offering to help the countries of Central Asia fight drug
smuggling, which is taking place along new routes from Afghanistan to European cities.

Ensuring security in Eurasia serves Kazakhstan's interests, because the country is involved in the global economy. Above all, these interests concern the safe transportation of energy exports. Energy cooperation relies on the safety of energy deliveries, on the maintenance and expansion of transportation routes for Kazakhstan's hydrocarbons. The political leaders of Kazakhstan recognize the enormous strategic importance of oil and gas reserves for the global economy in the next century and make use of the energy factor in their foreign policy to strengthen Kazakhstan's position in the world. The neighboring Caspian states act in a similar fashion. Today the European Union and its members, through their influence on the development of the transportation corridor along which oil and gas will be conveyed to Europe, can act as a sort of arbitrator and guarantor of stability. Also of fundamental significance for Europe is the status of Kazakhstan as a non-nuclear weapons state.

In addition to the PCA, there are other agreements in fields of mutual interest, including nuclear protection and nuclear fusion. The Republic of Kazakhstan and the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM) have signed three nuclear agreements:

— the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Nuclear Protection (signed in July 1999, entered into force June 2003), which establishes cooperation between Kazakhstan and EU members in nuclear and radiation protection and in the development and application of scientifically substantiated safety standards for adoption by the international community;

— the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Nuclear Fusion Research (signed in November 2002, entered into force in April 2004), in connection with which the Kazakhstan–EURATOM Coordinating Committee held its first session on 31 August–1 September 2006 at the National Nuclear Center in Almaty; and

— the Agreement on Cooperation for the Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy (signed in December 2006, entered into force on 1 September 2008).

Free access to water resources will be a world problem in the twenty-first century. Most of the main ecological problems of Central Asia are connected with the distribution and use of water or with the protection of water quality. The dialogue between the EU and Central Asia on environmental issues that began in the spring of 2006 will lay a foundation
for cooperation. Regional dialogue at all levels must take environmental protection into account. In this connection, the EU will support introduction of the EECCA (Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central Asia) component into the “EU Water Initiative” for safe water supply.

Ensuring protection of the environment is an urgent matter for Kazakhstan. It is therefore a pressing necessity to work out and implement a program to bring the nation’s ecological legislation into closer conformity with the experience of the European countries.

The extension of the European Union to the borders of the CIS is a positive development for Kazakhstan and corresponds to the country’s pragmatic interests. EU enlargement further preserves stability in the region and throughout Eurasia.

Our country participates actively in international affairs within the framework of multilateral security mechanisms. It strives to extend useful European experience to Asia, which would be a significant step forward in the creation of multilateral security structures. Kazakhstan attaches great importance to cooperation with Europe through such organizations as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In this context, we need only recall that, while chairman of the OSCE, President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan proposed aiming at the creation of a single Euro-Asian security system.

Central Asia’s role in the international political system is growing—above all, because of its geostrategic location; its potentially large oil, gas, and other resources; its significant production and scientific-technological potential; and the prospects for the development of its transportation infrastructure. These factors have turned the region into a field both for broad cooperation and for rivalry among various forces. The leading states and world centers have recently taken a greater interest in Central Asia and its problems as a result of the growth of threats and risks associated with ecology, terrorism, the drug trade, and religious extremism.

Kazakhstan, like the other Central Asian countries, must study the evolving transatlantic partnership, which may affect the the region’s ties with the European Union and the United States. As global players in the international arena, the EU and the United States draw all states, whatever their geographical location, into their orbit.

Although the EU and the United States pursue similar goals—regional security, economic development, democratization—they differ significantly in the strategy and tactics used to accomplish their purposes.
The U.S. military presence in the region has spread the influence of the United States throughout Central Asia and beyond. The Europeans, in accordance with the bilateral partnership and cooperation agreements, adhere to a regional approach in their policy.

The EU and the United States have an interest in guaranteeing access to the natural resources of the Caspian and in preventing the penetration of radical Islamist ideas that foster terrorism and Muslim extremism in Central Asia. The Europeans and Americans are united in their readiness to fight drug trafficking, economic backwardness, and the violation of basic human rights in the region.

The Central Asian countries, having partnerships with both the European Union and the United States, must find their place in that transatlantic relationship and use the experience of this bilateral and multilateral cooperation to develop their economies and establish stable democracies in which human rights are respected. Kazakhstan has an interest in strategic partnerships with Western states that take a long-term view of their policy toward Kazakhstan and can provide real support in solving the problems of security and stable development. Analyzing the prospects of European policy in the area of security and defense, we can say that transatlantic ties will retain their key role, at least in the short and medium term.

Thus, Kazakhstan adheres to the principles of strengthening international security, cultivating a climate of trust, and developing political and economic cooperation. Kazakhstan stands for the creation of effective and mutually acceptable security systems. These positions have found reflection in cooperation between Kazakhstan and the EU.

Notes

5. Ibid.