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BALANCED POLICY OF THE EU IN CENTRAL ASIA

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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.

The relations between the EU and Central Asia have a peculiar history and development trends. The mutual relations of the Central Asian countries with the European Union differ from relations with other international organizations. Author pays a special attention to the current state and proposes to upgrade these relations through enhancement of externally and internally balanced policy.

KEYWORDS

The European Union, Member-states, Central Asia, foreign policy, balance, reciprocity, cooperation, partnership, strategy.

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.

The European Union (EU), 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 (CA) is no exception.

Meaning and scope of the "balance" in the foreign policy of the EU

towards Central Asia.

The term of "balance" has a special meaning in the foreign policy of the European Union. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that it manifests itself as an expression of internal policy in external relations, reflecting coherence with the internal order and principles of the Union.

Based on abovementioned, 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. The exclusive competences of the Union are defined in the EU Treaties, namely in the Articles 2-6 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) [1]. Other areas of economy and social life are within the exclusive jurisdiction of the Member States.

Some areas fall under the joint competences of the Union and the Member States. In other words, "Shared competence" means that both the EU and its Member States may adopt legally binding acts in the area concerned. However, the Member States can do so only where the EU has not exercised its competence or has explicitly ceased to do so.

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.

The interests of the European Union in Central Asia are manifested in the following points:

First, with its territory of about 3.5 mln. km² and 75 million populations, Central Asia is a great consumer market for the European Union. The continued increase of population and high consuming capacity of the region makes it even more attractive. In other words, there is a diversified market for all of the products produced in Europe.

Second, the EU member states are massive consumers of Central Asian energy resource products. Especially, the region's gas, oil, uranium and precious metal deposits have long been of keen interest to European business. Central Asia's richness in gas and oil reserves makes the region especially attractive. The EU seeks to secure energy supplies, especially in view of its dependency on Russia, which delivers substantial part of its oil and gas imports.

Third, located among Russia, China, India and Iran, the region is the most sensitive part of geopolitical balance of the Eurasian continent. The disturbance of this balance may provoke strategic threats of various kinds. For example, the potential threats within the region: extremism, separatism, nationalism, parochialism, drug traffic, and other kinds of threats could constitute a source of threat for Europe's security as well. That includes the situation in Afghanistan, which is integral part of regional security of Central Asia.

Finally, with its rich history, traditions, national and local peculiarities, enlightenment and other features, Central Asia is an attractive region to Europe. The increasing flow of tourists to the region is the best proof for such a statement. This region has promising chances of becoming "spiritual and cultural resort" or "relaxing base" for Europe in near future.

In its turn, having united 27 states, with a half billion people and 4,233,255.3 km², third by its population

number, after China and India and appeared seventh biggest by its territory, the European Union has a significant rank in foreign policy of Central Asian republics. Multilateral and bilateral relations with the European Union and its member states is considered one of the main foreign policy directions of the countries of the region.

The significance of bilateral relations for Central Asia is reflected on the following statements:

First, the leading states (Germany, France, Italy, Spain and others) of the European Union constitute the source of high technologies to Central Asia. Applying modern western technologies in aircraft construction, mechanical engineering, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, construction and generally, in all aspects of production is of vital importance in developing medium and small business in Central Asia.

Second, the European Union (taken as a whole with all its member states) represents the second biggest, after CIS, consumer-market for supplies of Central Asian countries.

Third, Western Europe is not only the main commercial partner of the region, but also the main source of investments. From initial periods of independence, one of the central concerns was to attract foreign investments into the countries of the region, and favorable investment environment has been created for them.

Finally, ensuring and maintaining common stability and security in Eurasia is an urgent task for both respective parties. The European Union and Central Asia are equally concerned with fighting threats such as international terrorism, drug trade, extremism and other kinds, and providing regional stability.

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.

Specifically, in the first strategy adopted in 2007, (Part IV. Bilateral and regional cooperation) a balanced bilateral and regional approach of the EU had been emphasized according to which “the EU will balance policy approaches in Central Asia according to the differing needs of every country and to the performance of each country. The EU will foster regional cooperation among Central Asian States and between Central Asian States and other regions.

Bilateral cooperation will be of special importance. It will be strengthened to respond adequately to individual proposals brought forward by each of the five Central Asian States. It is essential to cooperate bilaterally on issues such as human rights, economic diversification, energy and other sectoral issues, including youth and education. The intensity of the cooperation will reflect the commitment to transition and reform of each country.

A regional approach is suitable for tackling common regional challenges such as organized crime, human, drugs and arms trafficking, terrorism and non-proliferation issues, inter-cultural dialogue, energy, environmental pollution, water management,

migration as well as border management and transport infrastructure. In this regard the EU will cooperate with international financial institutions, multilateral and regional organisations and institutions” [2].

In the new strategy adopted in 2019, the main elements of bilateral relations have retained their importance. In particular, it was noted that respect for human rights remains an important element of the EU's bilateral relations with the countries of the region. At the same time, the Union has maintained a regional approach to solving regional and transnational problems in Central Asia.

In short, although the new 2019 strategy shows the EU's desire to maintain and coordinate the bilateral and regional approach, it does not draw a sharp straight line between the bilateral and the regional approach.

Fourthly, the European Union seeks to establish cooperation and partnership with all the countries of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan). 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 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, frustrated the attempts to “Europeanize” the internal politics of the Central Asian republics [3]. 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 places a wider and deeper focus on human rights [4]. 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.

Unfortunately, although the official level relations (i.e. diplomatic and intergovernmental) have been developing steadily, unofficial relations i.e. public diplomacy (relations between nongovernmental structures, civil society institutions) remain underdeveloped and need to be given serious attention.

Moreover, EU-CA relations have not been noticed (or, unpopular) in “lower” levels of society. Ordinary public is not well informed about the contributions of such relationships in their lives. Recent developments in EU’s internal and external policies, “Brexit” and other events have increased a necessity for reliable and unbiased information about the EU and its’ consequences in other regions like CA.

Academic and scientific exchanges also remain insufficiently developed. Scientific publications and scholarly works on the European Union remain underdeveloped in Central Asia. The EU-CA academic networks, scientific communities, joint projects and grants well below their actual potential. Fostering relations between academic communities may contribute to the further development of other areas like cultural and scientific cooperations, mutual understanding between peoples, business-touristic cooperation in, etc. Therefore, it is very important to convene non-officials, civil societies and academic representatives around the table through the joint workshops and seminars, and to increase the amount and quality of publications (both public and scientific) in order to provide policy makers as well as general public with reliable and necessary information.

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” [5]. 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.

Geopolitical aspect of the EU Policy in Central Asia.

Finally, 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.

The new 2019 strategy emphasizes the interests and participation of third parties in the region and the non-exclusive principle of cooperation with them. According to paragraph 8 of the Council's conclusions, "The Strategy of the EU is aimed at establishing a non-exclusive partnership with the countries of Central Asia". The Union aims to establish a strong, modern and non-exclusive partnership, which aims to make Central Asia a stable economic and political, developing and interconnected region. But every one may ensure that the principle of non-exclusivity is very variable and depends on geopolitical reality.

The EU's success in Central Asia also depends on its cooperation with its key partners and allies in the region. At the moment, the question of what role the United States, the third global power in the region, will play in Central Asia in the future remains open. In 2011,

the Silk Road Initiative project put forward by the US Secretary of State H. Clinton did not move forward, it seems that the interests and influence of the United States in the region are fading [6]. In which direction this situation will be changed by the next administrations remains a very urgent and, at the same time, puzzling question [7].

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.

The EU policy on Central Asia: from a cooperation strategy to the new partnership opportunity.

In fact, the relations of the EU with the countries of the Central Asian region have never been linear. The studies of evolution of the relationship between the EU and Central Asia show that EU had to change its strategy, position and policy a number of times. Lack of information about the region in general, and countries of the region in particular, immaturity of common external policy and institutional arrangements at the 1990s could be seen as the main reasons for that.

However, pertinent transformations in the region are undoubtedly pushing the EU to modify its strategic priorities in the region.

Historically, Central Asia has a centuries-old tradition of bringing Europe and Asia together as it lies at a strategically important intersection between the two continents. The Central Asian states have undergone serious political and economic transformations since the beginning of their independence. When CA countries entered into the international scene as independent states 30 years ago, a number of European countries started establishing a permanent dialogue with them.

The break-up of the Soviet Union and emergence of new independent states in Central Asia in the 1990s led to significant geopolitical changes. The formation of the republics of Central Asia was taking place during a crucial moment in the history of international relations and encouraged to change the geopolitical situation on the Eurasian continent, adjusting the interests of world powers. At the beginning of the 21st century, the time has come for a new partnership between the EU and Central Asia states in a globalized world. The common goal to achieve stability and prosperity by means of a peaceful inter-action made Europe and Central Asia relations for increased cooperation. The strong EU commitment towards its Eastern neighbours within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy has also brought Europe and Central Asia closer to each other, both in terms of political cooperation and economic development.

Up to present days, these relations have significantly developed and revealed closeness of values, economic and security interests. The growing dynamics of bilateral relations between the EU Member States and the countries of Central Asia also confirmed that there

is a significant potential for strategic partnership between the EU and CA region.

However, EU-CA relationship has not reached its peak yet. Within the framework of current relationships there are many unutilized spaces, and these are the areas of opportunity. Prospects of the future cooperation will depend on the effective utilization of those missed opportunities. Particularly, many challenges facing the globalized world affect Europe and Central Asia alike, and warrant a common response. Security questions and regional economic development require close cooperation of the EU with each Central Asian state, considering their geographical location, in particular with respect to Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. This applies to developments in the areas of border management, migration, the fight against organized crime and international terrorism, as well as human, drugs, and arms trafficking.

The dependency of the EU on external energy sources and the need for a diversified energy supply policy in order to increase energy security open further perspectives for cooperation between the EU and Central Asia. EU efforts to strengthen local energy markets will help to improve investment conditions, increase energy production and efficiency in Central Asia and diversify energy supply and distribution in the region.

At the time of the European Union's recognition in the international arena as a major economic and financial institute, the necessity of uplifting Central Asian political, economic, trade and cultural relations with this organization and its member states to a new stage requires elaboration of a thorough analysis of politico-legal and economic bases of these bilateral relations.

The EU's strategies on Central Asia favour a balanced bilateral and regional approach which takes due account of the specific requirements and performance of each individual country. Regular political dialogue with the countries of the region will aim not only to increase cooperation in the various fields such as economics, transport, energy, the environment and education, but also to create a broader foundation of shared values based among other things on the rule of law and human rights.

It should be noted that the growing dynamic cooperation is one of recent characteristics of the EU-Central Asia relations. Moreover, these relations cover almost all aspects of cooperation. According to former HR/VP Federica Mogherini "... the European Union and Central Asia are partners for change... But this isn't just about business, as it wasn't just about the trade route. Diversity and pluralism are written in this region's history, and there is no reason to fear them, be it on Central Asian territory, in Europe or elsewhere. On the contrary, diversity and pluralism can only make our States and our societies stronger. With independent media, an open space for civil society, human rights for all, institutions are more credible, States more resilient in times of crisis – and you know that we are crossing times of crisis - and economies are more solid and attractive. This is another interest we share. A partnership for change is a partnership for innovation, for research and for human growth" [8].

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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