EU Human Rights and Democracy Promotion in Central Asia: From Lofty Principles to Lowly Self-Interests

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Abstract

This paper aims to highlight issues of policy incoherence concerning EU democracy and human rights policy, regarded as an important aspect of contemporary global governance, with particular reference to the case of Central Asia. Promoting democracy and human rights has been repeatedly stated as a key objective of both EU foreign and development policy, including in their policies towards Central Asia, perceived as crucial to the achievement of a number of global governance goals. These include international development and poverty reduction, with the promotion of common values of “human rights, fundamental freedoms, peace and democracy” highlighted in the European Consensus on Development (European Council, 2005: 6), as well as international security and stability, with the European Security Strategy stating that, “The best protection for our security is a world of well-governed democratic states” (European Council 2003: 10). Specific attention to the issue of policy coherence has been given, with a Commission Communication of May 2001 attempting both to increase the profile of democracy and human rights promotion in activities with all third countries and to provide for a more coherent approach. Subsequently the intent has been stated to ‘mainstream’ democracy and human rights in EU external policy, that is to “integrate human rights and democratisation issues into all aspects of EU policy decision-making and implementation, including trade and external assistance” (Commission 2006: 1), and inclusive of all country and regional strategies (Commission 2006: 6). Consistent with such pronouncements, the EU’s new Central Asia Strategy, adopted by the European Council in June 2007, emphasises “good governance, the rule of law, human rights and democratisation” as “key areas” (European Council 2007: 1).

Yet this paper questions whether the stated objectives are pursued rigorously and if policy coherence is maintained. It examines EU democracy and human rights promotion in the five states of Central Asia. Preliminary findings are of the demotion of democracy and human rights objectives, with policy coherence sacrificed when confronted by other commercial and geo-strategic concerns. Rather than democracy and human rights being valued not only as “universal values to be pursued in their own right”, but also as “integral to… achieving the Millennium Development Goals, as vital tools for conflict prevention and resolution, and as the indispensable framework for combating terrorism”
(Commission 2006: 1), it appears that democracy and human rights face a trade-off with other economic and foreign policy goals. Democracy and human rights objectives are found to be trumped in three areas. First, the prioritisation of military co-operation with Central Asian rulers overrides human rights and democracy concerns, especially in the context of ongoing military operations in Afghanistan, with Central Asian states strategically important as sites of military bases and overflight routes for NATO. Second, the substantial oil and gas reserves in three Central Asian countries constitute a higher-order EU foreign policy priority than democracy promotion, with energy interests overshadowing the human rights agenda. The role of giant European energy sector transnational corporations is not insignificant here in stifling criticism of Central Asian governments on democracy and human rights grounds. Third, in protecting its security and commercial interests, the EU values stability over political reform, with direct and indirect support provided to authoritarian regimes in Central Asia, with consequences that are antithetical to democratisation in the region.
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1. Introduction

This paper examines EU external relations policy in the area of human rights and democracy promotion through a case-study of Central Asia. It focuses on the interaction between the expression of fine-sounding principles in policy statements and the operation of base self-interests in practice. It argues not only that the latter trump the former in a hierarchy of foreign policy objectives, but that the statements of lofty principles serve to legitimise the ongoing ‘co-operation’ with authoritarian and semi-authoritarian rulers. Outcomes contradict stated intent, with such regimes more likely to be strengthened than moving towards political liberalisation and respect for human rights. The EU may like to present itself as a normative actor in the world, yet its actions are increasingly those of a realist power, where norms are sacrificed to interests. Central Asia may be a tough test for EU policy, with a dearth of fertile ground for democratisation, but it is an appropriate one as contradictions between policy statements and policy implementation are stark.

Promoting democracy and human rights has been repeatedly stated as a key objective of both EU foreign and development policy, including towards Central Asia. As well as being valued as “universal values to be pursued in their own right”, human rights and democracy are regarded as “integral to… achieving the Millennium Development Goals, as vital tools for conflict prevention and resolution, and as the indispensable framework for combating terrorism” (European Commission [EC] 2006a: 1). They are portrayed not only as complementary to other EU foreign policy goals but as playing a foundational role in their achievement, as reinforced in recent major statements of both EU development and security policy. The promotion of common values of “human rights, fundamental freedoms, peace and democracy” is highlighted in the European Consensus on Development (Council 2005c: 6), while the European Security Strategy states robustly that, “The best protection for our security is a world of well-governed democratic states” (European Council 2003: 10).
The high profile of these objectives has led to attempts to ‘mainstream’ democracy and human rights within EU external policy, that is to “integrate[...] human rights and democratisation issues into all aspects of EU policy decision-making and implementation, including trade and external assistance” (EC 2006a: 1), inclusive of all country and regional strategies (ibid.: 6). The EU’s new Central Asia Strategy, for instance, adopted by the European Council in June 2007, highlights “good governance, the rule of law, human rights and democratisation” as “key areas” for support (European Council 2007: 1).

To what extent have such stated policy objectives been implemented? Have human rights and democracy objectives been pursued rigorously and has complementarity with other foreign policy goals been maintained? To address these questions, EU democracy and human rights promotion is explored in the five states of Central Asia. The paper is in six sections. After this introduction, the second section examines EU human rights and democracy policy in general and in Central Asia. Third, the range of possible EU human rights and democracy promotion instruments are examined. Fourth, human rights and democracy promotion in practice is investigated in Central Asia, inclusive of an empirical analysis of European Initiative on Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) projects in Central Asia (2003-06). Fifth, explanations are sought as to why policy implementation has fallen short of policy intent, with analysis focusing on the reality of competing rather than complementary foreign policy objectives. Finally, as well as the trumping of principle by self-interest, concluding remarks note the role played by EU human rights and democracy policy in legitimising ongoing EU co-operation with authoritarian rulers in Central Asia, with potentially anti-democratic outcomes.

2. EU Human Rights and Democracy Policy

It is commonly stated that the EU is “founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law” (EC 2007d: 4). In external relations, such principles have been gradually translated into increasingly
rigorous policy statements in support of democracy and human rights in third countries. This section looks at how such policy has evolved.

2.1 EU-level policy

The promotion of democracy and human rights has been a stated priority objective of EU foreign and development policy since the 1992 Maastricht Treaty on European Union. Article 11(1) initially established the development and consolidation of “democracy and the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” as objectives of the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), while Article 177(2) outlined the same set of objectives as a priority aim of development co-operation. Such aims were reinforced in subsequent treaties. The 1999 Amsterdam Treaty first stated that the Union itself is founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, while the 2000 Nice Treaty extended these principles into economic, financial and technical cooperation with all third countries (Article 181 bis), thus making them a cross-cutting objective of all EU external activity.

Within development co-operation policy, human rights and democracy promotion actually pre-dated the Maastricht Treaty. The Council Resolution of November 1991 on ‘Human Rights, Democracy and Development’ had established the promotion of human rights and democracy both as an objective and a condition of development co-operation. Such aims have been re-affirmed in numerous statements since then, most notably in the Commission’s Communication of May 2001 on ‘The EU’s Role in Promoting Human Rights and Democratisation in Third Countries’ and in the European Consensus on Development, adopted in November 2005 by the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission.

The Commission Communication attempted both to increase the profile and coherence of democracy and human rights promotion. It aimed at “placing a higher priority on” and developing a “more strategic approach to” human rights and democratisation in relations with third countries (EC 2001: 5). Measures included the mainstreaming of democracy promotion activities into regional development co-operation programmes, as well as a
more focused approach to the European Initiative on Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), the Commission’s own democracy assistance fund. It was stated that democracy and human rights objectives were to be integrated into all regional and country strategy papers, and indeed to “permeate all Community policies, programmes and projects” (EC 2001: 3).

The European Consensus on Development claims that it provides “for the first time ever, a common framework of objectives, values and principles” for the EU, inclusive of its Member States, the Commission, and the European Parliament, as a global player in international development (EC 2005: 18). The first part of the document outlines the ‘EU vision for development’, inclusive of the promotion of common values of “human rights, fundamental freedoms, peace and democracy” (Council 2005c: 6), and applicable to the programmes of both Member States and the Commission. The second part is specific to European Community development programmes (i.e. managed by the Commission), with the primary objective stated as “the eradication of poverty …, including pursuit of the MDGs, as well as the promotion of democracy, good governance and respect for human rights” (ibid.: 15), and that such “objectives will be pursued in all developing countries and applied to the development assistance component of all community co-operation strategies with third countries” (ibid.: 25).

An intent to translate such objectives into practice is indicated by a Commission ‘Programming Guide for Strategy Papers’, issued in July 2006. In compliance with the European Consensus on Development, the goal is to “integrate human rights and democratisation issues into all aspects of EU policy decision-making and implementation, including trade and external assistance” (Commission 2006a: 1). It is stated unequivocally that this “mainstreaming of the promotion of human rights and democracy shall be undertaken in all programmes” under the new financial perspectives for 2007-2013 (ibid.: 6).

2.2 Central Asia policy
The EU’s new Central Asia Strategy, adopted by the European Council in June 2007, emphasises “good governance, the rule of law, human rights and democratisation” as “key areas where the EU is willing to share experience and expertise” (European Council 2007: 1). This is in continuity with the EU’s previous regional Strategy Paper (2002-2006) which outlined the “over-arching objectives” of EU co-operation with Central Asia as “to foster respect for democratic principles and human rights and to promote transition towards a market economy” (EC 2002: 4). At the bilateral level, the stated objectives in the Partnership and Co-operation Agreements (PCAs), signed between the EU and all five Central Asian states, include the consolidation of democracy and the development of a market economy (Article 1), with respect for democracy and human rights as an essential element of the Agreement (Article 2).\(^1\)

However, have such lofty principles been pursued rigorously in practice or have they remained simply as rhetoric in policy documents? The next two sections turn to the issue of EU policy in practice, first by examining the range of available instruments, and second by exploring policy implementation in Central Asia.

### 3. EU Human Rights and Democracy Promotion Instruments

The EU has the possibility of promoting human rights and democratisation in its external relations through a number of instruments. These range from traditional foreign policy tools to financial and technical assistance through its development co-operation programmes. This section outlines the different instruments, with the following section examining their application in Central Asia.

#### 3.1 Common Foreign and Security Policy

The EU’s CFSP itself entails a number of foreign policy tools, inclusive of démarches and declarations, common positions and joint actions. Démarches entail a more traditional diplomatic approach behind closed-doors, while CFSP declarations are public statements. Common positions are adopted unanimously in the Council and are binding

\(^1\) The PCAs with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have been in force since 1999, while those with Tajikistan (signed 2004) and Turkmenistan (signed 1998) have yet to complete their ratification processes.
on Member States. They are a statement of EU policy with regard to particular countries or regions or thematic topics, and can be used to put restrictive measures in place. Joint actions entail co-ordinated action by Member States in a particular country, region or thematic area, entailing the deployment of resources (financial, human, technical) to further policy objectives. The establishment of EU Special Representatives is one example of joint actions. Human rights dialogue is another feature of the CFSP that has been highlighted in recent years, notably after the EU’s adoption of ‘Guidelines on Human Rights Dialogues’ (December 2001), pledging to raise the issue of human rights and democracy in all meetings with third countries (Council 2003: 31).

3.2 Human Rights Clauses

A human rights clause has been inserted into European Community agreements with individual countries for over a decade, standardised since May 1995. This stipulates that respect for human rights and democratic principles are an essential element of the agreement, enabling its possible use as a conditionality mechanism in the event of a breach of such principles. Restrictive measures could involve the suspension of the agreement and/or the imposition of so-called ‘targeted’ or ‘smart sanctions’ such as visa bans and the freezing of assets of regime leaders (Portela 2007: 3). Nevertheless, the EU states that the clause is intended as a ‘positive’ instrument to promote human rights and democracy through shared principles rather than a means to impose punitive measures (EC 2007b: 13).

3.3 Mainstreaming Human Rights and Democratisation

It is the stated intent to mainstream “human rights and democratisation issues into all aspects of EU policy decision-making and implementation, including external assistance” (EC 2007b: 13). The Commission’s Country Strategy Papers (CSPs) should therefore include an assessment of the situation regarding human rights and democratisation, which in turn informs the assistance strategy aimed at achieving improvement. Since the beginning of 2007, coinciding with the new financial perspective (2007-2013), the Commission has introduced a new structure for programmes of external assistance, with Central Asian countries now covered by the Development Co-operation Instrument.
3.4 European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)

As part of reforms to the financing instruments, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) commenced in 2007 with a budget of €140 million, replacing the old European Initiative on Democracy and Human Rights (1994-2006). It has three important characteristics (EC 2007d: 2). One, it provides funding mainly to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and inter-governmental organisations. Second, it is “complementary” to geographical programmes of financial and technical co-operation, which themselves “will increasingly mainstream democracy and human rights” with a focus on public institutions (ibid.). Third, it operates independently, without the need for consent from third country governments.

4. Central Asia: EU Human Rights and Democracy Promotion in Practice

This section examines the implementation of EU human rights and democracy promotion policy in Central Asia. It takes each of the available instruments and investigates the extent to which they have been utilised.

4.1 Common Foreign and Security Policy in Central Asia

The EU has used the range of CFSP instruments in relation to Central Asia in recent years, though to a limited degree. From 2005-2007, almost twenty CFSP statements were issued concerning Central Asian countries, with a ‘common position’ adopted after the Andijan massacre in Uzbekistan in 2005, and a ‘joint action’ undertaken through the appointment of a Special Representative for Central Asia.

Although CFSP declarations or ‘statements’ are used to commend actions, for example, progress towards the abolition of the death penalty in Kyrgyzstan (9 January 2006), the majority are critical in tone and used to rebuke abuses of civil and political rights and draw attention to flawed electoral processes. Recent statements followed the murder in Kyrgyzstan of Alisher Saipov, a journalist and human rights defender of Uzbek origin (31

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2 Dates here refer to the press release of the EU CFSP statement.
October 2007), and the imprisonment of human rights activists (4 May 2007) and opposition political leaders (9 March 2006 and 19 June 2006) in Uzbekistan. Regarding electoral processes, while improvements may simultaneously be commended, those deemed not to have met international standards include presidential (14 November 2006) and parliamentary (4 March 2005) elections in Tajikistan, and parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan (4 March 2005) and Uzbekistan (11 January 2005). An affirmative statement was made following the February 2007 presidential elections in Turkmenistan, held after the death of President Niyazov in December 2006, presumably aimed at encouraging political dialogue with the EU (16 February 2007). Over the three-year period (2005–07), negative CFSP statements have been issued concerning both human rights and democracy issues in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Somewhat surprisingly, dictatorial and authoritarian Turkmenistan, especially under the absolute rule of President Niyazov until December 2006, attracted no such declarations. Similarly, Kazakhstan, economically wealthier due to its vast oil and gas resources, has not been the subject of a CFSP statement during this time, despite the EU’s own webpage noting democratic regression in terms of “crackdowns on media outlets, opposition groups, and non-governmental bodies that have been critical of government policies” (EC 2006b).

The one ‘common position’ adopted by the EU in relation to Central Asia concerns the Andijan massacre in Uzbekistan in May 2005. Up to 750 people, mainly unarmed civilians, died in the government’s violent suppression of the Andijan uprising in mid-May 2005, with a subsequent crackdown on human rights activists and independent journalists who drew attention to the events (International Crisis Group 2005). Extraordinarily, the EU did not make any condemnatory statement at the time within the CFSP process. Rather belatedly, the EU did adopt a ‘common position’ in November 2005, following concerns about the trials of fifteen individuals held responsible for the Andijan events. The common position entailed the imposition of limited sanctions, including diplomatic sanctions, an arms embargo and a visa ban on those senior Uzbek officials deemed responsible for the massacre (Council 2005b). The arms embargo and visa bans were renewed in November 2006, while lifting the diplomatic sanctions that had limited political contact with the Uzbek government (Council 2006), and again in
Despite the official unanimity of a ‘common position’, apparently there were significant differences between member states, with Germany in favour of lifting sanctions in November 2006 without conditions having been met. Additionally, German troops continued to be stationed at an Uzbek military base throughout this period (Congressional Research Services 2006: 20), with the German government subjected to criticism for “assigning a higher priority to working with the Uzbek government than to issues such as human rights and democratisation” (International Crisis Group 2006: 20-21). Such dissension within the EU clearly weakens the measures taken and its overall resolve.

In July 2005, a ‘joint action’ under the CFSP entailed the appointment of a EU Special Representative for Central Asia, mandated to contribute to the implementation of EU policy objectives in the region, inclusive of the “strengthening of democracy, the rule of law, good governance and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” (Council 2005a). Special Representatives support the work of the EU High Representative for the CFSP, Javier Solana, who made a trip to Central Asia in October 2007. Yet, despite repeated policy statements emphasising human rights and democracy objectives in Central Asia, Mr Solana’s remarks in Astana made no mention of human rights and only one about democracy, perhaps indicating their real status. The one remark was to positively note Kazakhstan’s engagement with “the development of peace, stability and democracy throughout the continent” in the context of Kazakhstan’s bid for the chairmanship of the OSCE (Council 2007b) in 2010.3 Instead the emphasis of the EU High Representative’s remarks was on “stability, security and development in Central Asia”, stated as “the objective of the EU since the establishment of independent states in the region in the early 1990s” (Council 2007b). Yet notions of stability and security are open to varied interpretation, with authoritarian leaders likely to interpret this as support for the security and stability of their own regimes, especially in the context of a perceived Islamist political threat. The rule of law was also mentioned in Mr. Solana’s remarks, but

3 Kazakhstan’s bid was in fact agreed at the OSCE’s Ministerial Council in November 2007. Human Rights Watch (2007b) has criticised this decision given Kazakhstan’s poor human rights record and noted that it has yet to hold an election that meets OSCE standards.
solely in an economic context as the “best guarantee for economic growth” (Council 2007b).

The emphasis on human rights dialogue within the CFSP has been noted. In its new Central Asia Strategy, the EU states the intent to establish both a regional political dialogue at Foreign Minister level with the EU troika and a bilateral human rights dialogue with each Central Asian state (European Council 2007: 2). Therefore such dialogue remains aspirational at the present time, though the EU states that it does raise human rights issues in co-operation meetings with (unspecified) Central Asian countries (Council/EC 2007: 73). One exception, however, is the establishment of an EU-Uzbekistan Human Rights Dialogue in the post-Andijan context. This is said to have been proposed by the Uzbek government on 8 November 2006, with the first meeting taking place in Tashkent on 9 May 2007 (ibid: 22-3). Not coincidentally, both these dates immediately preceded the EU sanction reviews on 13 November 2006 and 14 May 2007 (ibid.: 73), indicating a fairly cynical attitude to such a dialogue by the Uzbek authorities.

4.2 Human Rights Clauses in Bilateral Agreements
The bilateral Partnership and Co-operation Agreements (PCAs) with all five Central Asian countries include respect for democracy and human rights as an essential element (Article 2), thus enabling the EU to suspend the agreement in the event of an alleged breach. In Uzbekistan, limited ‘smart sanctions’ have been taken against senior officials, yet implementation of the PCA continues unhindered. It would appear that the reinterpretation of these human rights and democracy clauses as a positive rather than a negative measure (EC 2007b) can be used to justify the continuation of ‘co-operation’ in situations of human rights abuses and violations of democratic principles. The reluctance by the EU to take selective economic and financial sanctions in Central Asia questions whether these clauses have any real meaning, or merely exist for presentational purposes. The scale of ongoing co-operation and financial assistance, maintained in the face of widespread violations of civil and political rights and of democratic principles in most Central Asian states, is evident in the following sub-section.
4.3 Mainstream European Community Assistance to Central Asia

Information on European Community financial assistance to Central Asia, both regional and bilateral, is examined here. Main findings are two-fold. First, European Community assistance has been substantial. From 1991 to 2006, bilateral assistance alone amounted to €1.378 billion (EC 2007a: 42), inclusive of assistance from the TACIS programme, macro-financial (or budget) support, food aid and humanitarian assistance. An indicative budget of €719 million has been earmarked for the region for the period 2007-13 (ibid.: 3), said to “double the financial means for assisting Central Asian States” (European Council 2007: 2). Second, within such assistance, democracy and human rights support has been virtually absent, despite the statement in the regional strategy for 2002-06 that fostering “respect for democratic principles and human rights” were “over-arching objectives” (EC 2002: 4). There has been a failure to mainstream human rights and democracy assistance in regional and bilateral programmes in Central Asia, despite the instruction to do so in the Commission Communication of May 2001. This sub-section examines the overview of European Community regional and bilateral assistance (2002-06) provided in the new ‘Regional Strategy Paper for Assistance to Central Asia’, before outlining intentions for 2007-13.

During 2002-06, European Community regional assistance focused on promoting trade and investment in the two priority areas of energy (oil and gas) and transport (EC 2007a: 17). Such assistance has included the harmonisation of oil and gas standards with those of the EU, the provision of gas transport infrastructure, and general road, rail and maritime infrastructural projects (ibid.: 17). Substantial regional grants have been provided in these sectors, totalling €45 million in support to oil and gas networks between 2002 and 2006, and €29 million to the transport sector between 2004 and 2006 (ibid.: 17). Such expenditure would appear to encourage and facilitate investment from EU transnational corporations, particularly the energy giants, amounting to support for European private corporate interests from EU public money. A further priority under 2002-06 strategy was grandly entitled ‘Freedom, Security and Justice’, but amounted to activities in three areas: the fight against organised crime; border management; and migration and asylum.

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4 Since 1993, the transport sector has received over €150 million (EC 2007: 17).
management (ibid.: 18). A total of €112 million was apparently allocated to this area in regional programmes from 2002-06 (ibid.: 18). But rather than promoting systems of legal justice within Central Asian states, such activities and expenditure relate more to the EU’s own concerns and perceived self-interests with regard to limiting the impact on EU Member States from organised crime, economic migration and asylum seeking originating from Central Asia.

Turning to the bilateral programmes, these have totalled €142 million from 2002 to 2006 (EC 2007a: 19). Nearly sixty percent of such funds is said to be directed at ‘poverty reduction’, inclusive of budget support to governments, local development projects, and food security and agricultural development programmes. Public financial management is one significant element of central government support programmes, notably in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (ibid.: 19). A second component, entailing 20 percent of funds, is “administrative, legal and regulatory reforms” (ibid.: 19). The aim here is “to align their [Central Asian countries] respective legal frameworks with that of the EU, and to undertake regulatory convergence in economic sectors” (ibid.: 3). It is claimed that the establishment of such legal frameworks has “made progress”, notably in Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyzstan (ibid.: 20). While the improved functioning of the rule of law may be desirable for all citizens, it is a self-interested economic motivation that seems to prevail here. The focus would appear to be those issues that relate most closely to economic reform and which facilitate trade and investment by EU companies, suggesting a more calculated and cynical element to a seemingly principled exercise. For example, in Uzbekistan, “legal approximation” is discussed in terms of trade liberalisation, including the removal of a “discriminative tax regime” (ibid.: 58). A ‘Small Project’ programme with civil society organisations is another feature of bilateral programmes, but with little or nothing to do with human rights and democracy, for example, a ‘Manager Training’ programme (ibid.: 19).

It can be stated with assurance that there has been no human rights and democracy promotion component within mainstream European Community co-operation with Central Asian countries, either in regional or bilateral programmes, up to 2007. At most,
there has been some support to public financial management reforms, which could be
categorised under the related heading of ‘good governance’. Financial assistance is
clearly oriented at serving EU economic objectives with regard to trade and investment
promotion and EU political objectives in relation to concerns about organised crime and
migration. The European Commission itself states that its programmes have been “most
successful when addressing issues relating to an enabling regulatory environment for
trade, business and investment” (EC 2007a: 23). It is evident that the overarching aim has
been to stimulate business for European companies and to construct a market economy,
not the promotion of ‘human rights and democratic values’ as stated. Yet, for the period
2007-13, the same document continues to spin the notion that “democratisation, human
rights [and] good governance” constitutes one of three priority areas for regional action
(ibid.: 27), and also states that the “second focus of bilateral assistance [after poverty
reduction] will be the promotion of good governance and democratic processes” (ibid.:
Annex). Given that ‘overarching objectives’ were previously ignored in practice, there is
no reason to expect a different outcome for the new financial period.

4.4 EIDHR in Central Asia
Central Asian republics received very little funding from EIDHR from 1994 to 2004, due
to their non-inclusion as eligible countries, and have only recently become EIDHR
recipients. A database of all EIDHR projects from 2003 to 2006 (EC 2007c) has been
analysed to provide the following information.

**EIDHR Projects and Expenditure in Central Asia**
Assistance to Central Asia in 2003 and 2004 was limited to three projects out of 473
worldwide, all regional in focus with funding provided to international organisations.
Two projects were in collaboration with the OSCE’s Office for Democratic Institutions
and Human Rights (ODIHR), while the third entailed an information campaign by an
international NGO on the International Criminal Court.

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It is only since 2005 that Central Asian countries have become more regular recipients of EIDHR funds. From 2005, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have been eligible for micro-project funding to local civil society organisations, where funding decisions are taken by the EU Delegation in Almaty, as well as for the larger projects administered in Brussels, with funding mainly received by international NGOs and inter-governmental organisations. This co-incided with an expansion in micro-project schemes, rising from 8% of EIDHR funding in 2002 to 30% in 2006 (EC 2007d: Annex III). Tables 1-4 show the number of projects and expenditure in Central Asia in 2005 and 2006 as a proportion of global EIDHR funding.

**Table 1: Number of EIDHR projects in Central Asia**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Asia</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of World</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>594</td>
<td>954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>634</td>
<td>1027</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2: Proportion of EIDHR projects in Central Asia**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Asia</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of World</td>
<td>91.6%</td>
<td>93.7%</td>
<td>92.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3: EIDHR expenditure in Central Asia**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Asia</td>
<td>€ 2,285,972</td>
<td>€ 4,193,994</td>
<td>€ 6,479,965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of World</td>
<td>€ 145,440,473</td>
<td>€ 142,681,448</td>
<td>€ 288,121,920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>€ 147,726,444</td>
<td>€ 146,875,441</td>
<td>€ 294,601,886</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4: Expenditure in Central Asia as a proportion of total EIDHR funds**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Asia</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of World</td>
<td>98.5%</td>
<td>97.1%</td>
<td>97.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: EC 2007c
Tables 1-4 indicate that the number of projects in Central Asia is not insignificant, 7.1% of global projects in 2005 and 2006. In expenditure terms, however, the proportion is much lower, with only 2.2% of total EIDHR funds expended in Central Asia over the two-year period. While the number of projects may be roughly proportionate to the size of the region in global terms, the percentage of expenditure is not.

**EIDHR Funding by Country**

Figures 1 and 2 and Table 5 outline the distribution of EIDHR funds by country within Central Asia, first by project and then by expenditure.

*Figure 1: Number of projects by Central Asian country*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>€ 939,875</td>
<td>€ 2,219,994</td>
<td>€ 3,159,869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>€ 345,500</td>
<td>€ 529,442</td>
<td>€ 874,943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td>€ 243,628</td>
<td>€ 544,317</td>
<td>€ 787,945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkmenistan</td>
<td></td>
<td>€ 900,240</td>
<td>€ 900,240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>€ 756,969</td>
<td>€ 756,969</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>€ 2,285,972</td>
<td>€ 4,193,994</td>
<td>€ 6,479,965</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: EC 2007c
The figures and table above indicate that, with the exception of one large project in Uzbekistan, EIDHR projects have been limited to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Perhaps this is not surprising given the EU ‘common position’ on Uzbekistan, post-Andijan, and the closed, authoritarian regime in Turkmenistan under President Niyazov, at least until his death in December 2006. Assisting civil society organisations in both contexts may pose a considerable challenge, though support for human rights defenders in Uzbekistan would be significant, both in practical and morale-boosting terms. The above information also shows a concentration of assistance to Kazakhstan. There are more projects in Kazakhstan than in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan combined, while expenditure of over €3 million in Kazakhstan accounts for almost half of all EIDHR funds in Central Asia. Somewhat surprisingly, the very substantial nature of the single project in Uzbekistan means that its share of total regional expenditure is greater than that of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

*EIDHR projects by category*
The reason for this apparent disjuncture between number of projects and share of regional expenditure becomes clearer when projects are classified by category. In Tables 6 and 7, the EU’s own categories are used.6

**Table 6: EIDHR projects in Central Asian countries by EU category (2005-06)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Kazakhstan</th>
<th>Kyrgyzstan</th>
<th>Regional</th>
<th>Tajikistan</th>
<th>Uzbekistan</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Combating Racism, Xenophobia etc</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fostering a Culture of Human Rights</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micro Projects</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting the Democratic Process</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abolition of the Death Penalty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>36</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>73</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: EC 2007c

**Table 7: Expenditure on EIDHR projects in Central Asian countries by EU category (2005-06)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Kazakhstan</th>
<th>Kyrgyzstan</th>
<th>Regional</th>
<th>Tajikistan</th>
<th>Uzbekistan</th>
<th><strong>Total</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Combating Racism, Xenophobia etc</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>€333,275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fostering a Culture of Human Rights</td>
<td>€1,112,597</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>€1,112,597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micro Projects</td>
<td>€1,402,688</td>
<td>€874,943</td>
<td></td>
<td>€787,945</td>
<td></td>
<td>€3,065,575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting the Democratic Process</td>
<td>€644,584</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>€900,240</td>
<td>€1,544,824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abolition of the Death Penalty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>€423,694</td>
<td>€423,694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>€3,159,869</strong></td>
<td><strong>€874,943</strong></td>
<td><strong>€756,969</strong></td>
<td><strong>€787,945</strong></td>
<td><strong>€900,240</strong></td>
<td><strong>€6,479,965</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: EC 2007c

It is immediately evident that the large majority (65 out of 73) are micro projects, that is relatively small-scale funding to local civil society organisations, with project management by the EU Delegation. Grants are all under €100,000, ranging from €10,566 for a ‘young lawyers’ association’ in Kyrgyzstan to €91,299 for a ‘civic education for youth’ project in Tajikistan. In contrast, the remaining eight projects managed from Brussels attract much larger grants to international NGOs and inter-governmental organisations. Of these, two were regional, five were in Kazakhstan and one in

6 EU categories changed somewhat from 2005 to 2006, with category headings for both years included here.
Uzbekistan, while Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan received micro-project funding only. The Uzbekistan project attracted the largest single grant, with funding of €900,240 provided to the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung for a media project aimed at ‘strengthening critical social and political reporting’, surpassing the funding for all micro-projects in Kyrgyzstan and in Tajikistan over the two-year period. Other large grants include: €423,694 to the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights for a regional project in support of the abolition of the death penalty; €762,597 to the Kazakhstan office of Freedom House, a US organisation, for ‘combating torture in Central Asia’; €319,770 to the Soros Foundation in support of ‘civil initiatives in the transition period’ in Kazakhstan; and €350,000 to the United Nations Children’s Fund for the ‘development of a child rights Ombudsman’ in Kazakhstan. The outcome in financial expenditure terms of this mix of a large number of small grants to local NGOs and a small number of large grants to international organisations is shown in Figure 3 below. Despite being the recipients of 65 out of 73 projects (i.e. 89%), local NGOs only received 45.1% of funds in 2005 and 2006, with almost the exact same proportion of funding received by international NGOs.

*Figure 3: EIDHR funding in Central Asia by recipient (2005-06)*

Source: EC 2007c

This type and level of support in Central Asia from the EIDHR looks set to continue. From 2007 onwards, a ‘country-based support scheme’ (CBSS) has replaced the micro-projects scheme, with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan continuing as ‘qualifying countries’. Similarly, the CBSS aims at ‘strengthening the role of civil society in
promoting human rights and democratic reforms’ and involves small-scale financial assistance to local NGOs. Funding levels seem unlikely to rise, however. Financial allocations for 2007-10 for CBSS amount to 29.1% of total EIDHR funds, of which 15% is shared between ‘Asian and Central Asian countries’. Thus in 2007, for example, Asia and Central Asia receive 15% of €30 million, that is €4.5 million shared amongst 12 countries (EIDHR Strategy paper 2007: Annex I). Therefore, although the exact allocation for Central Asia is concealed within this wider regional category, CBSS expenditure in Central Asia for 2007-10 is unlikely to substantially surpass the average of €1.5 million per year in 2005-06 under the micro-projects scheme.

The concentration of EIDHR assistance in Kazakhstan has been noted. Yet why is this? The most plausible explanation focuses on a combination of EU economic interests in Kazakhstan, especially its gas and oil reserves, and the fact that Kazakhstan is somewhat less politically authoritarian. The EU’s emphasis on the energy and transport sectors in its mainstream assistance programme has been noted above, coinciding with EU corporate interests. The concentration of EIDHR support in Kazakhstan, the economic power-house of the region, is in line with the EU’s promotion of economic liberalisation and the commercial interests of its TNCs. Support to the development of local NGOs and thus to fostering political openness and liberalisation in Kazakhstan is no doubt regarded as complementary to the EU’s aim of promoting a more open and liberal economy from which it can benefit.

The following summary points can be made regarding EIDHR support in Central Asia. First, somewhat belatedly from 2005, EIDHR has provided small-scale support for human rights and democracy-oriented civil society organisations in three Central Asian countries, in addition to a small number of large grants to international organisations. This type of support is set to continue under the new EIDHR introduced in 2007, especially with eligibility for the CBSS for the same three countries. Second, while inclusion in EIDHR is welcome, funding to Central Asia remains low at 2.2% of total
EIDHR expenditure in 2005-06. It is also questionable whether such a large proportion of funds to Central Asia should be disbursed to relatively well-resourced European and American NGOs, such as the Soros Foundation and Freedom House, and to relatively well-funded inter-governmental organisations, such as UN agencies and the OSCE. Levels of funding for 2007-10 look unlikely to rise significantly. Third, the relatively small amounts of funds available for democracy and human rights projects, less than €6.5 million over 2005-06 and virtually nothing before, contrasts with the substantial mainstream funds that are expended in other sectoral areas, notably energy and transport, amounting to almost €1.4 billion from 1991 to 2006. This belies the notion that the promotion of “democratisation, human rights [and] good governance” are “principal objectives of [European Community] assistance” (EC 2007a: 27). It is also noted that EIDHR funds are not complementary to those in the main regional and bilateral instruments of development co-operation, given their absence in mainstream assistance. Perhaps the role of EIDHR funds is to provide a sop to the notion that such objectives are being pursued in Central Asia.

5. From Principles to Self-Interests: Explaining Policy Decline

It is clear from the above that implementation of the EU’s human rights and democracy policy in Central Asia has been very limited, at best, with statements of principled policy intent becoming severely downgraded in practice. Why is this? Three related explanations are outlined here focusing on: the relationship between democracy and security; democracy and energy security; and democracy and political stability. Despite the rhetoric of democracy as complementary and supportive of other foreign policy goals, in reality democracy is secondary to and trumped by those goals which approximate to EU self-interest. Additionally it is suggested that these goals constitute relatively long-term priorities in the region and not simply an immediate response by the EU to a specific state of affairs at a particular moment in time. In this respect, these three elements provide not only an explanation as to why democracy and human rights policy has not

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7 It is acknowledged that the regimes themselves do not allow much pro-democracy activity, while recalling that EIDHR is specifically intended to operate independently, without host country consent.
been implemented in the past, but also suggests that it is unlikely to be pursued vigorously in the future.

5.1 Democracy and Security

A lack of policy coherence is evident in this area. On the one hand, the positive linkage between democracy and security interests, as noted in the European Security Strategy, has enhanced the significance of democracy promotion as a stated foreign policy objective. Indeed, the EU’s new Central Asia Strategy continues to depict a positive interaction between the promotion of democracy and human rights in Central Asia and the protection of security interests, while presenting this relationship in terms of the benefits for Central Asia rather than the EU. The document states that “strengthening the commitment of Central Asian States to… human rights and democratic values… will promote security and stability in Central Asia” (European Council 2007: 4). On the other hand, Central Asia’s strategic importance quickly overrides any human rights and democracy concerns, with EU security policy requiring military co-operation with (semi-)authoritarian rulers in Central Asia, especially in the context of ongoing military operations in Afghanistan and fears about the rise of Islamic extremism and its association with ‘terrorist’ activities. From 2002 onwards, all Central Asian states have offered overflight routes and other support to initial US-led and later NATO operations in Afghanistan. Most significantly, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have provided airbases and hosted troops, including German troops in Uzbekistan (reportedly numbering about 300 in early 2006), and French forces in Tajikistan (reportedly 400 troops in mid-2006) (Congressional Research Service 2006: 20). All the Central Asian states except Tajikistan joined NATO’s Partnership for Peace by mid-1994, with Tajikistan joining in 2002, and a NATO summit communiqué in June 2004 pledged Alliance attention to the countries of the South Caucasus and Central Asia (Congressional Research Service 2006: 21), thus offering implicit support to Central Asian regimes against the perceived threat of Islamism. In such ways, the notion of democracy promotion as a means to enhance security easily switches to a trade-off between security

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8 Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan also endorsed the US-led war in Iraq, with Kazakhstan sending a small contingent of troops.
and democracy, embracing and strengthening (semi-)authoritarian states as allies for security reasons.

5.2 Democracy and Energy Security

The substantial oil and gas reserves in Kazakhstan (oil and gas), Turkmenistan (gas) and Uzbekistan (gas) constitute a higher-order EU foreign policy priority than democracy promotion. The EU is especially concerned about its reliance on Russia for its energy needs, with its dependency and vulnerability becoming particularly evident with the gas disputes between Russia and Ukraine (January 2006) and Belarus (January 2007). Central Asia’s energy wealth is perceived as an important means to reduce that dependence on Russia. Correspondingly, European corporate interests in the oil and gas reserves in Central Asia are considerable, most notably in Kazakhstan where major European energy giants have significant investments in oil and gas production, including Shell (the Netherlands), Eni (formerly Agip) (Italy), TotalFinaElf (France), British Gas (UK). The EU is the largest source of foreign direct investment in Kazakhstan, of which around “80 to 90 per cent goes to oil and gas sector” (EC 2006c).

The EU intent to establish closer co-operation with Central Asian states through its new strategy document has been largely driven by its energy security concerns, with, significantly, the German government especially pro-active and intent in getting the new document adopted during its term holding the EU presidency. The strategy is quite explicit in this respect, with the EU keen to “lend political support and assistance to Central Asian countries in developing a new Caspian Sea - Black Sea – EU energy transport corridor” (European Council 2007a: 11). The prioritisation of energy security and the commercial interests of European giant energy corporations serve to stifle criticism of Central Asian governments on democracy and human rights grounds, especially given that the West is in direct competition here with Russia and China (Olcott 2006: 7-13). Thus, it is almost certain that “energy interests [will] overshadow the human rights agenda” (Yermukanov 2007). Kazakhstan has not even been the subject of a negative CFSP statement, despite recognition of violations of civil and political rights.
and democratic principles on the Commission’s own webpage on Kazakhstan, but instead rewarded with the chairmanship of the OSCE in 2010.

5.3 Democracy and Political Stability

In order to protect its security, energy and commercial interests, the EU appears to accord greater importance to the maintenance of political stability in the region than to democratisation efforts. This emphasis is reinforced by fears about the possible rise of Islamic extremism in the predominantly Muslim countries of Central Asia and of ‘weak states’ becoming ‘havens for terrorists’. Such views strike a chord with the current secular regimes in Central Asia who perceive the main threat to their rule coming from the rise of political Islam, for example, in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Such common thinking leads to a shared emphasis by the EU and current Central Asian leaders on the language of ‘security and stability’. These two notions feature prominently in EU pronouncements on Central Asia, for example, in the new Central Asia strategy (European Council 2007) and in Javier Solana’s remarks in Central Asia in October 2007 (Council 2007b), at times in a relationship of mutual reinforcement with democracy and human rights, at other times in a more ambiguous relationship. And indeed this language is open to varying interpretation, with Central Asian rulers likely to understand such concepts as referring to the security and stability of their own regimes. The EU emphasis on stability over political reform, with direct and indirect support provided to incumbents in Central Asia, has two likely consequences, both antithetical to democratisation.

First, the authoritarian nature of present ruling elites is reinforced and their grip on power strengthened. The embrace of Central Asian states by the EU due to their strategic importance in combating perceived Islamist threats and in seeking energy security can be manipulated by authoritarian rulers to provide them with enhanced legitimacy at home and a relatively free hand in repressing opposition political parties and non-governmental activist groups. In particular, the convenient banner of the ‘fight against terrorism’ enables crackdowns on Islamic organisations, including non-violent ones. In this way,
Western support is more likely to result in rising authoritarian trends than in political liberalisation and democratisation.

Second, a related consequence could be a rise in support for Islamist groups, with increased state repression pushing them into the adoption of violent methods. Paradoxically, the EU would be culpable in such developments. Increased support for radical Islamism could arise not only as a result of greater internal political repression, but also from a discrediting of ‘Western democracy’ through the association of the EU with oppressive and corrupt regimes, given their “willing[ness] to forsake principles in exchange for economic or military advantage” (Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis report cited in IWPR 2004).

6. Conclusion
This paper has examined EU human rights and democracy promotion efforts in Central Asia. It has noted the high profile of human rights and democracy objectives in EU external policy generally, inclusive of its stated objectives in Central Asia. It has contrasted the rhetoric of policy statements with the reality of promoting human rights and democracy, and found the practice to be limited across a range of different possible measures. How is this gap between rhetoric and reality explained? It is recognised that Central Asia provides less than fertile ground for the promotion of civil and political rights and democratic institutions and processes, given that the political regimes in the five republics span from, at best, flawed electoral democracies in Kazakhstan to deep-seated authoritarian rule in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. However, the analysis offered here focuses less on the problems and difficulties for would-be democracy promoters and more on the contradictions and trade-offs between different foreign policy objectives. Three concluding points are made.

First, although EU rhetoric poses democracy as complementary to and interrelated with other external policy objectives, notably security objectives, it is evident that the reality entails a trade-off between competing objectives, one in which ‘hard’ security concerns
are prioritised over ‘soft’ human rights and democracy issues. In this respect the idealist portrayal of the relationship between democracy and security, as expressed in the European Security Strategy, is misplaced and erroneous.

Second, it is clear that the EU is motivated more by self-interest than by altruism. The energy needs of EU member states and the commercial interests of its corporate sector, especially the energy giants, are of a significantly higher order than desires to promote respect for human rights and democracy. This is evident from the actual priorities of assistance.

Third, analysis here goes beyond pointing to a hierarchy of competing rather than complementary external policy objectives, one where geo-strategic and economic self-interests unfortunately trump and downgrade human rights and democracy objectives. Rather the suggestion is that the policy rhetoric of human rights and democracy promotion serves a significant purpose in itself. By being dressed-up as lofty principles, EU external policy is presented in a positive and favourable manner, while simultaneously serving to conceal lowly self-interests and to legitimise ongoing co-operation with (semi-)authoritarian rulers, with potentially anti-democratic outcomes. The EU’s presentation of itself as a normative actor on the world stage masks its true character as motivated by realist goals, as is evident in Central Asia.
References


