One Size Fits None: Is there a Regional Approach to Central Asia?

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Regional Perspective

Perspective régionale
One Size Fits None: Is there a Regional Approach to Central Asia?

Julian Plottka

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In the first half of 2015, a review of the EU’s Central Asia policy was undertaken during the Latvian Council Presidency, resulting in Council conclusions1 on The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a new partnership (in the following Central Asia Strategy).2 Even though the conclusions confirm that the “main objectives and priority areas […] remain pertinent”,3 EU decision-makers were assigned with the task to renew the EU’s Central Asia policy with regard to two principles. First, decision-makers on EU and national level shall make use of synergies and better coordinate their policies targeting the region. This objective is not special to EU-Central Asia relations, but can be found in a number of EU policy fields today. Especially since the new European Commission under President Jean-Claude Juncker came into office, efforts of better coordinating EU policies were strengthened. The most visible example is the Vice-Presidents of the European Commission who hold the responsibility of coordinating Commission’s action in different thematic clusters, such as EU foreign relations. Second, the Council conclusions call for a reassessment “between regional and bilateral

1. Council of the EU, Relations with Central Asia – Council Conclusions on the EU Strategy for Central Asia, Doc. 10191/15.
3. Council of the EU, Relations with Central Asia, 2015, p. 3.
engagements in the region. Also this objective is not a lesson exclusively learned from EU-Central Asia relations, but ‘differentiation’ is discussed with regard to the European Neighbourhood Policy, too. The debate gained momentum when the crisis in Ukraine made visible the need for a review of EU’s relations with its neighbours in the East.

While the Council—as well as the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign and Security Policy in their 2014 review of the strategy5—differenitates on an abstract level between bilateral and regional approaches to Central Asia and a wider regional approach that includes international organisations active in the region as well as major foreign powers and neighbouring countries, the latter is not mentioned as a guiding principle for EU’s future policy targeting the region. But when it comes to specific policies for Central Asia, the conclusions call for a coordination of EU policy with those actors quite often (e.g. good governance, natural resources, security, transportation), and for seeking synergies with them in specific policy fields (e.g. security, transport, energy and sustainable development).6 In contrast, the need for a bilateral approach is mentioned just ones—for the field of security policy, where the EU’s Central Asia policy shall address problems on all three levels: bilateral, regional, and wider regional. In general, the Council conclusions display a clear bias of the EU towards (wider) regional approaches. Being a project of regional integration itself, the EU’s bias is not surprising, but underlines the upcoming task to discuss in the light of increasing differentiation in Central Asia when bilateral and when regional or wider regional approaches seem to be more fruitful for the EU’s Central Asia policy.

This article contributes to the upcoming debate by reviewing in its first section the EU’s Central Asia policy since the early 1990s, with regard to the question, whether problems were addressed with a bilateral or a regional approach. In the second section the hypothesis of increasing socio-economic differentiation among the five Central Asian states is tested. Finally, the thematic clusters of the EU Central Asia Strategy are reviewed and suggestions are given for which policy fields which approach might be fruitful.

The EU-Central Asia Relations 1992–2014—a Region in the Making?

The relations of the EU with the new states of Central Asia started with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. From an administrative point of view, they can be divided into two periods. During the first one 1992–2006, the rela-

4. Ibid., p. 3.
6. Council of the EU, Relations with Central Asia, 2015.
tions were organised under the *Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States* (TACIS) programme. During the second one since 2007, the EU’s objectives in its relations with Central Asia are defined in the Central Asia Strategy and the most important programme, the *Development Cooperation Instrument* (DCI). In addition to the TACIS programme and the DCI, bilateral *Partnership and Cooperation Agreements* (PCA) have been important instruments to develop the relations during both periods. Already this brief overview shows that the EU’s policy towards the region contained a mix of approaches since its beginning.


From 1991 until 2006, the TACIS programme covered all newly independent states (later including Mongolia)\(^7\) and was not exclusively addressed to Central Asia. Designed to support the transformation processes of these states, four Council regulations\(^8\) set the broad guidelines and general objectives. Covering diverse countries from Belarus to Mongolia, the objectives were narrowed down by indicative programmes and annual action plans defining concrete actions for each country, which were negotiated between the EU and all newly independent state individually. From 1992 until 2003, the indicative programmes for the five Central Asian states were negotiated on a bilateral basis. Already in 1995, the European Commission’s perception of Central Asia as one region resulted in the publication of a communication titled *Towards a European Strategy for Relations with the Independent States of Central Asia*.\(^9\) Finally in 2002, the bilateral approach was turned into a regional one, when the first regional strategy for Central Asia was published and the EU negotiated a TACIS indicative programme for the whole region of Central Asia. The first regional indicative programme for Central Asia covered the period from 2002 until 2004 and was followed by a second for 2005 and 2006.

One of the purposes of the European Commission’s 1995 communication on an upcoming Central Asia strategy was to discuss the feasibility of a “global

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\(^7\) In 1991 the initial addressee of the TACIS programme was the Soviet Union before its dissolution.


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approach"\textsuperscript{10} towards the region. It identified weak national identities, disputed boarders, ethnic tensions, centralised structures, and weak states and governments as features common to all five Central Asian states, but underlined that the economic situations varied "\textit{substantially}".\textsuperscript{11} With regard to the economic relations, the five states formed three groups: Relations with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were most advanced, while the focus of the relations with Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan was the TACIS programme. Relations with Tajikistan remained static due to the civil war that even led to a suspension of the TACIS indicative programmes from 1997 until 2001. Also with regard to the political relations, the communication made clear: "\textit{Even if the [...] objectives apply on a regional basis, the wide variations which exist between the republics preclude the use of instruments common to all.}"\textsuperscript{12} Thus, it is obvious that already in this early stage of EU-Central Asia relations the European Commission was aware of a mismatch between its common policy objectives applied to all five Central Asian states and the growing diversity between them.

The \textit{Strategy Paper 2002–2006} accompanying the \textit{Indicative Programme 2002–2004 for Central Asia} clearly differentiated between national agendas of the individual countries and a common regional agenda for the whole region. Under the headline "regional agenda", the strategy named energy policy, environment, security, and transport and communications systems as issues where the five states face regional interdependencies which can be solved best with a regional approach. But the European Commission concluded that regional cooperation among the five Central Asian states was still problematic as especially the resource-rich countries preferred bilateral cooperation. Just Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan "\textit{have recognised that they are very much dependent on regional integration for their future growth prospects}"\textsuperscript{13} and that "\textit{one positive spill-over of the Afghan war has been to stimulate negotiations between neighbouring countries and to apparently create a greater scope for the expansion of cooperative activities.}"\textsuperscript{14} Despite this unfavourable analysis, the indicative programme defined increased regional cooperation as a goal: "\textit{It is clear that the challenges facing CA, at both the national and regional level, call for the efforts to foster increased cooperation between partner countries.}"\textsuperscript{15}

With regard to the regional dimension of the TACIS programme we can observe an incremental development putting increasing emphasis on regional co-

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p. 5.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p. 10.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 17.
operation in Central Asia. While the first regulation addressed just the Soviet Union, the second one assigned modest importance to a regional dimension. TACIS regulation No. 1279/96 was the first one to stress the importance of inter-state, inter-regional and cross-border cooperation.\textsuperscript{16} The final TACIS regulation No. 99/2000 put even more emphasis on this dimension than the previous one.\textsuperscript{17} As shown above, these readjusted objectives changed the programming of the TACIS programme, which switched from bilateral to regional. Being aware of the obstacles for regional cooperation in the region, the European Commission still favoured this approach in its last strategy paper under the TACIS programme. The 2005 appointment of the first EU Special Representative for Central Asia, Ján Kubiš, is another indicator for the increasingly prevailing perception of Central Asia as one region.

*Partnership and Cooperation Agreements*

The PCAs are mainly an instrument of bilateral trade relations which focuses on trade, business, and investment. They also provide a general basis for bilateral relations between the EU and each of the Central Asian states, including political dialogue, legislative, economic, social, financial, civil, scientific, technological, and cultural cooperation. Regional cooperation is hardly mentioned in the PCAs. If so, it is considered as a means to contribute to achieve objectives which are also addressed under bilateral cooperation. Also the new Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Kazakhstan—on which negotiations have been concluded in September 2014—will not prominently feature regional cooperation, but will remain an instrument to establish bilateral cooperation meanwhile covering more than 30 policy fields.\textsuperscript{18}

*Central Asia Strategy and Development Cooperation Instrument (since 2007)*

Under the German Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the EU-Central Asia relations received a new basis provided by the new Central Asia Strategy,\textsuperscript{19} covering nine priority areas. Initially defining the objectives for the EU’s Central Asia policy for the period of 2007–2013, the Central Asia Strategy continued the aforementioned development of the TACIS programme with regard to the relevance of the regional dimension within the EU’s Central Asia policy. The Central Asia Strategy treats the five addressees as one region without

defining objectives for bilateral relations with individual states. Even though the 2007 strategy puts more emphasis on the regional dimension compared to the previous strategy papers, this is a rather incremental and not a substantial change. Until 2006, the strategic priorities were defined together with the preparation of the TACIS indicative programmes. Thus, the aforementioned 1995 and 2002 strategy papers were closer to policy implementation, and consequently discussed the objectives defined for the region as a whole in the context of implementation, which included bilateral as well as regional approaches at the latest since 1996. The 2007 strategy endorsed by the European Council received another, more prominent status and focussed on defining common objectives for the region, while considerations on strategy implementation were left out.

That the EU’s approach to Central Asia did not fully switch to targeting the region as a whole is already apparent in the previous section, as the bilateral PCAs remain the basis of the EU’s policy towards the region until today. Also the DCI under Regulation (EC) No. 1905/200620 and later Regulation (EU) No. 233/201421—being the most important funding instrument for the EU’s policy towards Central Asia since the TACIS programme expired—combines bilateral projects targeting just one country, and regional projects for cross-border cooperation. Under the geographic dimension22 for Central Asia, art. 8(f) of the Regulation (EC) No. 1905/2006 defines the promotion of “regional cooperation, dialogue and integration” in the fields of environment, education, energy and transport sectors a priority of DCI funding in Central Asia. Art. 8(f) of the Regulation (EC) No. 1905/2006 also defines cross-border cooperation in border regions a funding priority for Central Asia, which is confirmed by the Regulation (EU) No. 233/2014.23 But with regard to education, environment, energy and climate change “promoting bilateral and regional cooperation” is funding priority under this regulation.24 Another indicator for increasing differentiation of the EU’s policy towards Central Asia under the new DCI regulation is the fact that Kazakhstan is only eligible for funding when it participates in regional cooperation projects. Projects targeting just the country are not eligible for funding anymore, due to Kazakhstan significant own financial resources.

22. The DCI has a thematic and a geographic dimension. While the former defines general objectives for all states, which are eligible for funding under DCI, the geographic dimension defines objectives for specific regions.
The programming of the DCI is very similar to the programming of the TACIS programme. In a first step, the priorities and objectives defined in the Central Asia Strategy and the DCI regulation were narrowed down in a multiannual regional strategy paper for the whole period of 2007–2013, which was followed by two multiannual indicative programmes until 2013 and a new one in 2014 for the new DCI under Regulation (EU) No. 233/2014. The 2007 regional strategy paper defined the “[p]romotion of Central Asian regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations” as the first priority area of DCI funding. The two other priority areas, which were addressed on a bilateral basis, were “[p]overty reduction and increasing living standards” and “[s]upport for good governance and economic reform.” The first indicative programme of 2007–2010 defined transport, energy, SME, environment, border and migration management, fight against organised crime, customs, education, science, and people-to-people activities as fields covered by the regional priority area. 30% of funding was earmarked for projects of the first priority area, while 70% of the funding was earmarked for bilateral cooperation. Under the second indicative programme for 2010–2013, the focal sectors under the first priority area remained mostly unchanged. SME and transportation were deleted as focal sectors, while the rule of law has been added. Also the funding allocations were hardly changed, with a slight increase of funds for regional cooperation to 33%.

The new multiannual indicative programme for 2014–2020 under the new DCI defines two focal sectors: Regional Sustainable Development, covering energy, environment, water and socio-economic development, and Regional Security for Development, covering integrated border management, fight against drugs and crime, and rule of law. They are complemented by a so called “blending mechanism”, which provides support for investment in key infrastructures, and a Multi-country Technical Assistance Facility, which provides expertise for Central Asian states in the fields of institutional, administrative, legal and economic reforms, as well as trade. At a first glance, the new multiannual indicative programme seems to intensify the regional approach at the expense of differentiation, as no focal sectors are exclusively reserved for bilateral cooperation. But the indicative programme stresses the “unequal development and significant diversity in terms of political, economic and social systems” in Central Asia and underlines the need for “tailor-made programmes […] at national level” to implement the DCI.

29. Ibid., p. 2.

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Reviewing the development of the EU-Central Asia relations from 1992 until 2014 with regard to the regional approach in the EU’s Central Asia policy, it has been shown that its importance increased over time until 2007, when the Central Asia Strategy was adopted. Following the defined priorities, it remained of equal importance from 2007 until 2013. The turning point might become 2014, when the more differentiated approach to Central Asia used in the new DCI Regulation (EU) No. 233/2014—and called for in the latest review of the Central Asia Strategy—as well as the 2015 Council conclusions on the strategy—will gain momentum in the next years.

Central Asia—A Region of Increasing Diversity?

The aforementioned turn in the EU’s Central Asia policy towards more differentiation is based on the frequently repeated assumption that Central Asia is a region of increasing diversity. Thus, it would be of utmost interest to analyse whether we can really observe growing disparities between the five Central Asian states—or maybe just the EU’s wishful thinking of Central Asia being a region in the making has come to an end, while the countries remain as diverse as ever. Unfortunately, due to limited space a longitudinal analysis of the socio-economic development of the five Central Asian states since their independences cannot be presented here, but a snap-shot of the current situation, which suffices to discuss the outlook on differentiated approaches to EU-Central Asia relations in the following section.

With regard to the political transition of the five Central Asian states it depends very much on the level of analysis whether there are more commonalities or differences. At a first glance we are able to observe four consolidated authoritarian regimes and one semi-consolidated authoritarian regime in the case of Kyrgyzstan. A closer look reveals a possible ranking of three groups of the Central Asian states according to their democratic quality: Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan form a group of the least democratic states (2.78 and 2.85 for political transformation on the Bertelsmann Transformation Index, BTI; ranked 178 and 166 out of 180 countries with regard to freedom of press); Tajikistan and Kazakhstan allow few more political liberties (3.6 and 3.85 on the BTI; ranked

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31. Council of the EU, Relations with Central Asia, 2015, p. 3.
116 and 160 for freedom of press); and Kyrgyzstan (5.8 on the BTI; ranked 88 for freedom of press) underwent some steps of democratisation. But still, all these classifications are based on highly aggregated data and do not reveal similar problems that justify a common approach. With President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov in Turkmenistan, President Islom Karimov in Uzbekistan, President Nursultan Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan, and President Emomali Rahmon in Tajikistan, four of the Central Asian states are presidential systems that never experienced an orderly succession in power. This poses a threat of severe crises when the leaders die—with regard to their age probably in the short- to mid-term future. The probability of a crisis is highest in Uzbekistan which already faces an “imminent succession crisis”.35 The only exception is Kyrgyzstan which replaced its presidential system following the 2010 riots with a parliamentary one that effectively limits the executive’s powers, and which has seen an orderly succession in the presidential office in 2011. But latest developments in Kyrgyzstan also point towards a worsening of democratic standards.36

With regard to the political systems of the five Central Asian states, the short overview reveals that all of them face similar challenges—especially stability in the mid-term perspective—while the political systems are too diverse for a ‘one size fits all’ approach. It is also important to bear in mind that the EU’s Central Asia policy does not directly address democratic transformation anymore, but focuses on the rule of law and good governance. While political salient reforms face resistance from the ruling elites in Central Asia, reforms on the technical level with regard to good governance and rule of law are potentially more successful, when tailored to the specific circumstances of the addressee.

While four of the five Central Asian states reveal similarities in the field of democratic transition seen from a macro perspective, in the field of economic development the differences are apparent at once (see table 1). On all economic indicators Kazakhstan holds an outstanding position based on its revenues from oil and gas exports. Consequently, the decision to exclude the country from bilateral funding under the DCI makes sense, as the country possesses own resources to fund reforms. Also Turkmenistan might become a medium income country in the near future, due to its revenues from gas exports. Uzbekistan is the third resource rich country in the region, but is far behind the former ones in economic terms. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan belong to the poorest countries of the newly independent states. Even this brief overview shows that with regard to economic cooperation, a ‘one size fits all’ policy does not seem to be fruitful. While Kyrgyzstan followed the 2010 riots with a parliamentary one that effectively limits the executive’s powers, and which has seen an orderly succession in the presidential office in 2011. But latest developments in Kyrgyzstan also point towards a worsening of democratic standards.36

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gyzstan and Tajikistan are heavily dependent on foreign aid, the other three countries are to different degrees able to exploit their natural resources.

Table 1: Macroeconomic Data of the Five Central Asian States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Kazakhstan</th>
<th>Kyrgyzstan</th>
<th>Tajikistan</th>
<th>Turkmenistan</th>
<th>Uzbekistan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>GDP 2014</strong></td>
<td>212 Billion $</td>
<td>7 Billion $</td>
<td>9 Billion $</td>
<td>47 Billion $</td>
<td>62 Billion $</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GDP per capita 2014</strong></td>
<td>12,276 $</td>
<td>1,269 $</td>
<td>1,099 $</td>
<td>9,031$</td>
<td>2,037 $</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exports 2012</strong></td>
<td>91 Billion $</td>
<td>2 Billion $</td>
<td>1 Billion $</td>
<td>25 Billion $</td>
<td>14 Billion $</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own table based on Worldbank Databank, last accessed 30 August 2015, http://databank.worldbank.org

In addition to the political systems and the economic development, the geopolitical situation in the region and the cooperation of the five Central Asian states with other foreign powers is of crucial importance for the EU’s approach to the region, too. Due to their common history under Soviet times, Russia remains a dominant actor in the region with more or less close ties to all five Central Asian states. On the one hand welcomed, because not being interested in democratic reforms, human rights standards, and good governance, Russian dominance is also considered a potential threat to national independence. Thus, the Central Asian states pursued for long multi-vector foreign policies to balance the influence of different foreign powers. Partly due to strategic calculations, but also resulting from the Russian economic crisis, China has become an important foreign investor and trading partner for the region. While these tendencies point towards increasing differentiation in Central Asian foreign policies, the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU)\(^{37}\) might become a central challenge for EU’s external relations not just in Central Asia but also in its Eastern neighbourhood. With Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan being members of the EEU and maybe Tajikistan joining in the future, the EEU might become the first stable project of regional cooperation covering parts of Central Asia. As it is more a political project guaranteed by Russia than an integration project based on mutual benefits, this outlook does not seem to be unlikely. Then, the EU needs a common approach to the five member states of the EEU for all the policy fields it covers.

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Differentiated Approaches to Central Asia on Three Levels: Bilateral, Regional or Wider Regional

The brief discussion whether the five Central Asian states have more communalities or differences showed that—with the exception of the potential the EEU might reveal in the future—a differentiated approach towards the region is more promising than a ‘one size fits none’ policy. Still, a number of challenges in the region, such as border management or the resolution of conflicts over water resources, cannot successfully be addressed by a bilateral approach. Also the example of the EEU shows that for some issues even a regional approach is not inclusive enough, but a wider regional approach is necessary. As a consequence, the following section proposes that the planned readjustments of the EU’s policy towards Central Asia should differentiate between bilateral, regional and wider regional approaches. To illustrate the usefulness of this differentiation and to show that some of the EU’s policy priorities need to be addressed on all three levels, this section presents a preliminary discussion of the priority areas of the Central Asia Strategy.

Democracy Promotion

Unless the common challenges the EU’s policy faces in all Central Asian states, they still do not justify a common approach: (1) negative influence of Russian authoritarian tendencies; (2) potential destabilization of political systems in the near future due to unclear successor rules of current rulers. While the first issue underlines the need to include the field of democratisation in the EU-Central Asia relations, the personal factor of the second challenge shows the need for country specific, bilateral approaches in this field. There is currently no obvious element of the political systems which all five Central Asian states have in common and which calls for a regional approach. But with regard to the activities in all five Central Asian states, the coordination, monitoring and evaluation has to be improved, which should be done under a common framework which allows for learning from best and worst practices in project implementation in the Central Asian states.

Education

Corruption in the sector of higher education is the central challenge, which is common to all Central Asian states. But beyond this, we mainly observe differences between Central Asian states. Turkmenistan remains a closed country, which seems to have no interest in developing its educational system and opening it to the outer world. Uzbekistan is more open and interested in cooperation in the educational sector. Like Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan has...
Economy

While Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are comparably rich countries due to their fossil fuel reserves, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are two of the poorest countries on earth. Protectionism remains a crucial problem in Central Asia, with the exception of Kazakhstan. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are WTO member states and Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have observer status, while Turkmenistan—most protectionist—shows hardly any interest in joining the organization. With regard to international trade, Kazakhstan constitutes a specific case among the Central Asian states, since it is a member state of the EEU with Belarus and Russia. Being a genuinely regional policy field as free-trade requires cooperation, a regional approach in the EU’s Central Asia policy seems to be far away. Before considering a regional approach to trade and investment policy in Central Asia, country specific programs are needed to work on creating a basis for such a regional approach in the future.

Energy and Transportation

Energy closely relates to the field of economy in the cases of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, and to the policy field of water and environment in the cases of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Considering the fossil fuels of the three former countries a commodity the EU wants to buy, the EU needs to negotiate with each of these countries on a bilateral basis. But transporting oil and gas to
Europe requires a regional approach with regard to transportation routes. This regional approach must not be limited to EU-Central Asia cooperation, but has to include China, which currently announced to build a new ‘silk road’ route to Europe via Central Asia. So far, EU and Chinese transport route projects in Central Asia have not been coordinated, but—literally—run in parallel, just a few kilometres apart. For the necessity of a regional approach to hydro-energy generation in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan see the following section on water.

**Water and Environment**

In the policy field of water and environment, a regional approach is urgently needed. With regard to the main environmental challenges like global warming, the Central Asian states should be part of a global solution, demanding cooperation beyond the EU-Central Asia relations. But with regard to water management and regional environmental problems which often relate to the water sector, none of the Central Asian states can pursue a unilateral policy, respectively doing so increases tensions between the Central Asian states. Especially with regard to the water consumption, any sustainable policy requires the cooperation between upstream energy producers (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) and downstream consumers (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan). But such a regional approach should not be limited to the question of water rights, but include the issues of sustainable water consumption and water quality. In this regard, the specific case of the Aral Sea needs to be dealt with in a cross-border approach, too. On a more technical level, country-specific programs can contribute to solving these problems, but they will not succeed without a policy on the regional level.

**Security**

The need for a regional approach in the security field is even more obvious. All five Central Asian states face the threat of destabilization caused by post-2014 Afghanistan instability, especially drug, weapon and human trafficking, which are per definition cross-border challenges. The same is true for border management, which should not be addressed country by country, but in cooperation among the Central Asian states. A regional approach to security policy cannot be limited to the EU and the five Central Asian states, but has to include Afghanistan, as a source of problems, and international organisations like the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) as well as China and Russia. Both countries have security interests in the region and offer, like international organisations, own assistance to the Central Asian states in the security sector. These attempts should be coordinated to avoid program duplication, and to reach synergies. Still, such a regional approach has to be complemented with country specific programs, as security
sector reforms are a sensitive issue concerning the rule of law promotion and good governance.

Table 2: Differentiated Approaches to Central Asia on Three Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Field</th>
<th>Wider Regional Approach</th>
<th>Regional Approach</th>
<th>Bilateral Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democracy Promotion</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Coordination, evaluation and monitoring</td>
<td>Sensitive issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth and Education</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Exchange programs</td>
<td>Education sector reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Trade and investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy and Transportation</td>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Exploitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water and Environment</td>
<td>Global warming</td>
<td>Water rights</td>
<td>Water-saving measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>Security threats and boarder management</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Security sector reforms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s table.

Legend of acronyms: CAS = Central Asian states; RUS = Russia; PRC = People’s Republic of China; AFG = Afganistan; IO = International Organisations.

Conclusion

The article showed that the regional dimension of the EU’s policy towards Central Asia was of an ever growing importance until the EU Central Asia Strategy was adopted in 2007. Remaining of equal importance for another six years, 2014 might become the turning point, when differentiation replaced the regional approach as the guiding principle of the EU-Central Asia relations. The short overview of the degree of diversity among the five Central Asian states supports the hypothesis that the regional approach towards Central Asia was rather the result of EU decision-makers’ wishful thinking than an adequate response to the challenges in the region. However, the brief snap-shot does neither confirm nor defeat this hypothesis that deserves a more detailed longitudinal analysis for the period 1992-2014. At least, the presented diversity suggests that a three-dimensional policy applying bilateral, regional, and wider regional approaches to specific problems in all priority areas of the Central Asia Strategy might be the
most promising way to deal with upcoming challenges in the region. The brief discussion in the previous section is just a first impulse for further debate that is to be pursued in the next years.

Abstract
The article discusses whether the EU’s policy towards Central Asia should follow a regional or a bilateral approach. First, it takes stock of the EU’s policies towards the region and analyses, for which policies regional and bilateral approaches have been applied. Based on the analysis of the other contributions to the special issue and own analysis, the article looks at six priorities (democracy promotion, youth and education, economy, energy and transportation, water and environment, security) and discusses the central challenges in these policy fields. It comes up with a proposal how to address them best on three levels: with a bilateral approach, a regional approach or a wider regional approach, including other international players active in the region.

Résumé
L’article examine la question de savoir si la politique de l’UE à l’égard de l’Asie centrale devrait suivre une approche régionale ou bilatérale. D’abord, il fait le point sur les politiques de l’UE dans la région et analyse les politiques pour lesquelles les approches régionales et bilatérales ont été appliquées. Sur la base de l’analyse des autres contributions à ce numéro spécial et de l’analyse de l’auteur, l’article se penche sur six priorités (promotion de la démocratie, jeunesse et éducation, économie, énergie et transports, eau et environnement, sécurité), et examine les défis principaux dans ces domaines. Il conclut avec une proposition afin de mieux les aborder sur trois plans : avec une approche bilatérale, une approche régionale ou une approche régionale plus large, incluant d’autres acteurs internationaux actifs dans la région.