

Principled Pragmatism in EU Foreign Policy *vis-à-vis* Central Asia: De-Centring EU External Governance

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With China and Russia acting more assertive *vis-à-vis* Central Asia, an important cross-road in terms of energy, trade and infrastructure connecting ‘the East’ and ‘the West’, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan – albeit to varying degrees – have gradually moved to the core of contemporary Eurasian geopolitics. In the past, the European Union (EU) has purposefully sought to promote its norms and values in the region, eventually framing the Central Asian countries as “neighbours of its neighbours” and thus implicitly putting them into the fold of a wider EU-spurred European Neighbourhood Policy. However, in light of the Western dual crisis – resulting from a major economic downturn since the global financial and economic crisis as well as the relative loss of major Western institutions’ political attractiveness because of the changes affecting US and UK foreign policy –, the EU has started to revise its foreign policy and “external governance”. Towards this background our paper asks how the EU has been recalibrating its relationship towards Central Asia over the past years – especially as part of the making of a new EU Central Asia Strategy expected to be endorsed in 2019. Theoretically, we will ask whether the EU’s external governance has become more de-centred – putting more emphasis on state resilience rather than democracy in Central Asia on the one hand and stronger engagement with other actors in the wider region on the other. We also ask to what degree EU policy foreign is becoming more “normalised” in its pursuit of interests towards outside interests. We argue that the reformulated EU foreign policy towards Central Asia is pragmatically taking its lead from Chinese and Russian policy in the region recognizing that, in the end, geography continues to shape geopolitics in Central Asia.

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Introduction

With China and Russia acting more assertive *vis-à-vis* Central Asia, an important cross-road in terms of energy, trade and infrastructure connecting “the East” and “the West”, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan – albeit to varying degrees – have gradually moved to the core of contemporary Eurasian geopolitics. In the past, the European Union (EU) has purposefully sought to promote its norms and values in the region, eventually framing the Central Asian countries as ‘neighbours of its neighbours’ and thus implicitly putting them into the fold of a wider EU-spurred European Neighbourhood Policy. However, in light of the Western dual crisis since 2007/8– resulting from a major economic downturn since the global financial and economic crisis as well as the relative loss of major Western institutions’ political attractiveness because of the changes affecting US and UK foreign policy –, the EU has started to revise its foreign policy approach. Towards this background the EU has been devising a new strategy for Central Asia since 2017. This regional strategy, which will replace the one endorsed in 2007, is set to be adopted by the EU Council under Romania’s Presidency in 2019. It will be amongst the first regional strategies to function under the umbrella of the EU’s global approach expressed in the Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) of 2016. The previous Central Asia Strategy operated in a different geopolitical environment prior to the Russo-Georgian war of 2008 and the hay-day of the economic and financial crisis.

Today, the EU has ceased to be “the only game in town”, in particular not in Central Asia, a region where interests of several major powers intersect. Central Asia embraces five countries, namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, which became independent after the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 represent significant landmass of the former Soviet territory. From the immediate aftermath of the East-West conflict, Central Asia and its countries have hardly been met with significant political or economic interest beyond security and trade from neither the EU, the US, Russia or China. With regards to the latter the negligence was very much a result of the political and economic transformation in which Russia and China were embroiled throughout the 1990s. The EU and its member states for their part were strongly occupied by managing the process of enlargement to include countries from Central and Eastern Europe (as well as the Mediterranean). This negligent attitude only changed superficially when the EU eventually started to sketch out a Central Asia Strategy, which was endorsed under the German European Council Presidency of 2007. Since then, Central Asia gradually attracted more interest from both scholars and practitioners alike; interest in light of various foreign policy initiatives spelt out by external powers such as Chinese and the United States presenting their respective “Silk Road” initiatives.

The EU has been looking at the “wider region” primarily through the prism of its European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) for a long time. This is well reflected in the European Commission’s communication on ‘strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy’ (ENP)

when it considered the possibility to develop regional cooperation activities between ENP partner countries on the one hand and Central Asia, the Arabian Gulf and Africa on the other – and thus to embrace the ‘neighbours of our neighbours’ (European Commission 2006, p. By using ENP countries, such as Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, as vehicles for EU-spurred norm and policy diffusion, this perspective is premised on the idea that EU norms and values could “travel” across the ENP sphere to lock in on a path towards Europe even those countries and regions which lie well outside the EU’s immediate vicinity. Interestingly, at that time of the launch of the ENP, the Kazakh Foreign Ministry expressed interest in the policy asking for potential inclusion of the country – a desire that spurred quite some deliberations in the European Parliament in 2006 (European Parliament 2006).

In this paper we argue that the EU is putting more emphasis on state resilience rather than democracy in Central Asia on the one hand and stronger engagement with other actors in the wider region on the other. The de-centring agenda in European foreign policy literature focuses on the notion of understanding non-European perspectives from the “outside-in”, rather than just on the EU perspective (Fisher-Onar and Nicolaïdis, 2013; Keukeleire and Lecocq, 2018; Lecocq and Keukeleire, 2018). Keukeleire and Lecocq argue, that we must step away from a Eurocentric point of view and adopt a decentralised standpoint in assessing European foreign policy (Keukeleire and Lecocq, 2018). These authors posit that the Western system of values, describe the current European vision of the world predicated on individualism, human rights, individual freedoms, and secularism. Conversely, other cultures bring different views and priorities to the system of values, such as different views on collectivity and the value of groups and personal relations, responsibilities and obligations, religion or spirituality. Understanding these contexts can help reframe Western-centric values and attitudes to be less Euro-centric and more aware of non-Western societal and foreign policy traditions (Lecocq and Keukeleire, 2018) as well as understanding the role of the state and organisational traditions in politics and international relations differently according to the regions and cultures of the wider world (Bartelson, Hall and Teorell, 2018). We see the EU’s approach to de-centring in Central Asia as being part of a wider pragmatic normalisation of EU foreign and security policy since the EUGS and the realisation that values and norms need to be backed up with pragmatism in the EU and externally with a focus on interests. The de-centring of EU foreign and security policy is done within the wider context of “external governance” priorities; the “normalisation” of the process of policy has been underway for several years already.

Our paper proceeds as follows: The next section will briefly combine the external governance paradigm with the emerging ‘de-centring’ agenda. Then the analysis sets out the relationship between the EU and Central Asia from the perspective of the exercise of “principled pragmatism” in EU foreign policy and how this is received in Central Asia. It then analyses great power interests in Central Asia with particular reference to Russia, China, and the US. Finally, the paper concludes with comments on EU norms and material interests in Central

Asia and how this has been received in the region internally. What does this mean for European strategic culture, EU external governance, de-centring and also for how Central Asia deals with the EU?

De-centring EU external governance

The concept of external governance has been used as an analytical tool for assessing processes of EU foreign-policy-making from ‘a more institutional, structural view’ (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2009, p. 794) – in sharp contrast to analyses of EU external relations that ultimately subscribe to more actor-based perspectives of traditional foreign policy analyses. According to Lavenex, EU external governance occurs ‘when parts of the *acquis communautaire* are extended to non-members’ (2004, p. 683) without the (immediate) prospect of membership, thus focusing on ‘institutional processes of norm diffusion and policy transfer’ (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2009, p. 794). However, external governance and the ability of the EU to Europeanize extra-EU territories in Europe’s vicinity has real empirical limitations, which have been pointed out by Lavenex et al in a recent special issue of *European Foreign Affairs Review* and also by others (Lavenex et al, 2017; Wunderlich, 2012). According to Schimmelfennig ‘EU market power and supranational regulation are the most important factors in making non-member states adopt the modes and rules of EU governance, either as a result of direct conditionality or through indirect externalization’ (Schimmelfennig, 2012, p. 656). Where the EU does not have such a regularized relationship with an external state, the Unions ability to Europeanize the state from the outside is considerably lessened. The EU sees itself as an exporter of its own definitions of the rule of law, human rights, and labour standards which are inherent in its own foundational laws and practices (Brown, 2018, p. 218).

Studies of EU external governance have become a hallmark of contemporary EU foreign policy analyses operating in a continuum between accession-driven modes of governance – involving hierarchical (EU-spurred) leadership on one side as well as network- and market-based (non-hierarchical) modes of steering on the other. Many analyses of EU enlargement processes have used the template of EU external governance – or more succinctly “(external) Europeanization” – in order to understand the conditions and impact of the EU’s extension of its regulatory, transactional, and – ultimately – institutional boundaries to encompass new members. With the traditional enlargement approach having come to an end as an effective tool of hierarchical EU steering in external affairs, the study of external governance beyond enlargement has started to ‘take into account that there is more than one institutional solution to EU-third country relations’ (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2009, p. 794) – also in light of “Brexit”. In the past, some of these alternatives have been framed as strategic or privileged partnerships. Most importantly, however, external governance approaches have maintained not only a strong sectoral bias, but also tend to de-contextualize the bilateral relationship involving the EU and

the target country from its broader geopolitical environment. Even as far as many studies of EU enlargement – as one instance of EU external governance – are concerned, they have systematically excluded the geopolitical environment in analytical terms. This may be due to the fact that geopolitical contenders in Central and Eastern Europe for most of the 1990s and early 2000s – such as the Russian Federation and China – have not come to play a prominent role. Clearly, Russia has forged its concept of the “near abroad” early in the 1990s, but it never mustered enough power to sustain the idea politically *vis-à-vis* the post-Soviet space. However, this has remarkably changed today, after Russia engaged in Georgia in 2008 and, later, Ukraine.

In practice, the EU is semi-detached from Central Asia compared to Russia and China. The strategic culture of the EU demands that regional states adopt EU standards and governance practices. However, the geographical remoteness of Central Asia has led to the EU not to pursue its normative policies with vigor (Warkotsch, 2006), but instead pragmatic policies predicated on economic and geopolitical interests. Instead, EU policies lack focus and have remained largely reactive (Kavalski and Chul Cho, 2018, p. 54). Indeed, the ‘ambiguity backstopping such strategic attitudes has urged some to suggest that the EU’s preoccupation with its normative power is merely a distraction from the confrontation with “the reality of Europe’s provincialization in world politics”’ (Kavalski and Chul Cho, 2018, p. 60). The EU’s half-hearted interactions with Central Asia confirm that it is not player in the region and that it takes its lead from China and Russia geopolitics. Chinese and Russian Hobbesian approaches to order chime much better with the authoritarian leaders of Central Asian states than the EU’s rule-based conditionalities with strings attached (Yu, 2018, p. 231). The transactional costs associated with China in particular for Central Asian states (compared to the EU) are therefore lighter as are the levels of regulation and transparency in decision-making. The EU has neither the will nor the ability to challenge Chinese economic hegemony in Central Asia. Indeed:

The very conspicuous failure to link the EU’s demands for reform in Central Asian states to any meaningful dynamic for Europeanization indicates that the EU is far short of conceptualizing (let alone validating) the role of its normative power both in the region and...“out-of-Europe” areas more generally (Kavalski and Chul Cho, 2018, p. 60).

This is partly due to different EU member state interests in Central Asia and how different EU member states interact with Chinese policy in the region. Indeed, ‘...Beijing puts strong emphasis on courting Central and Eastern European countries with its ‘16 + 1’ cooperation framework, which has shown significant potential for generating a strong pro-China lobby within the EU’ (Yu, 2018, pp.231-232). Pardo highlights that certain EU member states reliance on Beijing’s ‘16 + 1’ cooperation framework undermines the prospects for EU external

governance in Central Asia (Pardo, 2018). This goes further though and is played out in the context of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Differences between levels of Chinese investment in infrastructure and financial markets in EU member states underline collective EU responses to Central Asia (Pardo, 2018). Additionally, there exists a cultural dissonance between China's and the EU's worldviews and the resulting clash of ideologies between EU norms/values and Chinese power politics induces further divisions on how to deal with China within and between EU member states in Central Asia (Pardo, 2018). This in turn undermines the prospects for the EU external Europeanization of Central Asian states.

Pardo goes even further and finds that 'cash-starved Europe [due to a sovereign debt crisis and the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis] can tap on the recently launched Silk Road Fund, Maritime Silk Road Fund and other initiatives from the Chinese government' (Pardo, 2018, p. 237). The resulting political divisions in Europe which are induced by Chinese investment, 'as well as normative differences in terms of standards and practices' within the EU and between the EU and China attenuate EU influence in Central Asia. China is the new game in town globally and is seen to be an attractive source of investment for cash strapped economies in Europe and elsewhere (Pardo, 2018, p. 237).

Likewise, Beijing and Russia operate a system of indirect authoritarian influence in Central Asian states, which are authoritarian themselves. This dissipates EU influence through democracy promotion, good governance, conditionality clauses and even through trade deals. Indeed, with the Chinese BRI, the EU has become even less influential in Central Asian business and political circles given China's (and Russia's) investments and no questions asked mentality when handing out money for projects. As is stated above, the EU need for Chinese infrastructure investment in Europe under BRI and other PRC projects also undermines EU influence and collective action in Central Asia (Pardo, 2018). Moreover, 'a process of indirect authoritarian diffusion, in combination with the region's illiberal societies and Western democracy promotion fatigue, undermines the development of civil society and makes authoritarian persistence in Central Asia likely' (Ziegler, 2017, p. 549). Local particularisms in the politics of Central Asia are themselves shaped by an authoritarian culture that is amenable to external investment from authoritarian states such as China and Russia. This in turn lessens the prospects for EU external governance strategies from having long-term sustained impacts on governance, business and society in Central Asia. Indeed, 'the substance of US and EU democracy promotion in Central Asia has neglected the cultural and political contexts of these states, while the Russian and Chinese models of governance and development have provided a better match to the interests of the ruling elites' (Omelicheva, 2015, p. 75).

Kavalski defines EU strategic culture as the pursuit externally of the rule of law, good governance and human rights (Kavalski, 2012, p. 79). The EU has sought to diffuse its norms in Central Asia to try and Europeanize the behaviour of states in the region. Central Asia is not part of the European Neighbourhood Policy and EU influence in the region has been carefully

crafted not to offend Russia in its self-defined sphere of influence (Kavalski, 2012, p. 79). Brussels calls for democratization have been a barrier for effective communication with elites in Central Asia thereby undermining the prospects for EU external governance, Europeanization and associated norm diffusion. Finally, evidence drawn from the experience of ENP states highlights ‘the importance of domestic factors in processes of external governance even despite the presence of major external powers’ (Hageman, 2013, p. 767), with the EU favouring governmental elites in Central Asia over civil society groups (Axyonova and Bossuyt, 2016, pp. 207-217), in order to gain traction in elite policy-making in the region. Others maintain that the effectiveness of external governance varies across policy areas and this in turn attenuates the prospects for EU rule transfer (Dimitrova and Dragneva, 2009, p. 853). Likewise, EU-Russia-China interactions and the effectiveness of their respective policies in Central Asia depend on the interplay between ideas, circumstances, capabilities (Samokhvalov, 2018) as well as the power relations between the EU, Russia and China in Central Asia.

National interests are also such in EU external governance strategies that some EU member states seek to upload their preferences onto the EU's Central Asia agenda (as Europeanization literature would state (Lavenex, 2004), whereas other member states work through the EU to achieve a multilateral policy. These basic choices are formulated according to ‘the perceived salience of the policy goals, the extent to which member states can carve out a niche, their perceived capabilities and the level of Europeanization of their national foreign policies’ (Bossuyt, 2017, pp. 441-460). This all serves to undermine the prospects for a centralised EU Central Asia policy, and, also, allows great powers such as China and Russia to upload their agendas in Central Asian states and in EU policy towards Central Asia respectively.

The EU is not, however, arguably engaged in power politics with Russia and China in Central Asia. Instead, it is an “honest broker” in the region attempting to attain influence rather than power; a second order actor in the region actor that is not wholeheartedly engaged in the regional geopolitics of ‘neighbours of neighbours’ (Bailes and Dunay, 2015). The EU seeks to balance its and other great powers security interests in Central Asia with its internal values by projecting those values externally (Juraev, 2014). The EU is relatively influential in security governance in the region but is not fully engaged in setting the geopolitical terms of the Central Asian regional security complex, which is mainly defined by Russia, China and the states of Central Asia (Spaiser, 2018). There are limits to EU external governance as a means of influencing developments in Central Asia and the Union has a secondary role in the region which will continue even after the EU rewrites its Central Asia Strategy given the defining role in the region of Russia and China.

As to where the EU is going with its revised strategy on Central Asia, due in 2019, the likelihood is that the EU’s approach to the region will be predicated on a mixture of soft power and strategic interests in selected areas of policy (Kassenova, 2017). There is a belief that the

EU needs to engage with the issue of migration in Central Asia (Laurelle, 2013) to stem arrivals from the region in Europe, but also to increase life chances in Central Asian states through training, education and associated programmes. There are those who specify that the EU needs to supply technical assistance and information exchange with Central Asian states as a means for practical cooperation that is helpful to the countries of the region (Bossuyt and Panchuk, 2017, pp. 334-359). In a more general sense, the EU is trying to gain economic advantage in Central Asia by increasing economic and political ties in the region, but this is set against the realities of the Chinese Belt and Road initiative and the Russian Eurasian Economic Union which are the new Great Games in Central Asia and the EU is a second order player in that regard (Pantucci, 2018). There are those thinkers who believe that the EU should exploit its undoubted European cultural diplomacy in Central Asia, especially with regard to EU citizens' diaspora in the region and towards Central Asian diaspora in the EU respectively as part of a broader strategy of soft power influence (Collins and Bekenova, 2017, pp. 732-750). Any new EU Central Asia strategy will need to grapple with how the EU can gain greater influence in Central Asia whilst still projecting its values effectively into the region. That is the challenge for EU policy-makers.

EU Priorities in Central Asia since 2007

As is stated above, the EU has been looking at the “wider region” through the prism of its European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). However, the majority of EU member states perceived of the ENP as a way of compensation for these countries not to rush into a membership application – while at the same time Russia grew increasingly wary of the EU's objectives in its Eurasian periphery – a process which ultimately culminated in the so called “Ukraine crisis” since 2014. Interestingly, at that time of the launch of the ENP, the Kazakh Foreign Ministry expressed interest in the policy asking for potential inclusion of the country – a desire that spurred quite some deliberations in the European Parliament in 2006 (European Parliament 2006).

With the Russian President Vladimir Putin speaking of the collapse of the Soviet empire as “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century” in 2005, Russia, in turn, increasingly started viewing, the Central Asian region – similarly to other post-Soviet regions and countries – as part of its “near abroad”. China eventually has started more forcefully to enter the geopolitical interface between West and East, providing a point of reference by setting the “One Belt, One Road” (OBOR) Initiative which is substantially backed by investment pursuing the ultimate objective of creating and improving land-based and maritime infrastructure between European and China (Ferdinand, 2016, pp. 841-857). Because of a string of political and economic crises, both the European Neighbourhood Policy and the European Union have lost clout in Eurasia over the past few years. In addition, the European Union has come up with

a new global strategy in terms foreign policy, reversing on some its ENP-topped premises. Toward this backdrop, the paper assesses the wider ramifications of these internal and external developments on the European Union's policies towards Central Asia.

Adopted in 2007, the EU's Strategy for Central Asia was welcomed at the time as one of the first attempts to define common interests and potential areas for cooperation and to provide a comprehensive stance *vis-à-vis* the region as a whole. It sought to reconcile EU material interests in terms of e.g. energy security, and its attempt to foster human rights and democracy in the region. This approach was well-documented in projects such as the "EU Rule of Law initiative" and "Human Rights Dialogue" as core instruments towards achieving that end. Fenton (2015, p. 171) has stressed the extent to which the EU's 2007 Central Asia Strategy was modelled along the lines of the ENP and its off-spring for the East European neighbours, the Eastern Partnership. Both Eastern Partnership and the Central Asia Strategy include a multilateral prologue encouraging 'region-building' amongst the five countries of Central Asia, yet, are in practice based on the principles of strict bilateralism in practical terms. They also converge on several objectives and policy priorities set for the relationship such as the enhancement of energy security. Hence, it could be seen as 'as the continuation of an internal process of institutionalization' (Lavenex 2003, p. 685) underlined by bureaucratic dynamics inside the European Commission – the key author of the policy script – as well as a legacy of enlargement-tested policies to be applied to the immediate vicinity. Interestingly, as Kassenova observed, 'it was not a strategy in the conventional sense of the word, yet it served the purpose of signalling the EU's special interest' (2016, p. 1) in the region – albeit running short on clear-cut commitments and objectives.

The implementation of the EU Strategy on Central Asia of 2007 has failed to "Europeanize" the domestic politics of Central Asian states which remain impervious to democracy promotion, Western human rights regimes and shared policy discourses. It is instead hypothesized that the EU has engaged in forms of external governance that are predicated on the pragmatic self-promotion of EU material (mainly economic) interests and the protection of European homeland security around issues such as borders, migration and counter-terrorism. Therefore, any EU engagement with Central Asia is based on a transactional model of policy-making rather than one based on communities of shared ideas and discourses. This helps to explain why the European Security Strategy (2003) emphasis on the EU in the wider world guided by normative power has been replaced by a focus on Europe itself and on economic/security interests in the European Union Global Strategy (2016). It is further hypothesized that the focus on pragmatism in EU foreign policy led to realist thinking in EU Central Asia strategy focusing less on the transporting of values into the European periphery rather than on the need to forge public and private sector deals and protect European security via a series of formal agreements and tacit understandings with Russia and China as well as competition.

Specifically, with regard to Central Asia, EU policies are predicated on structured partnerships in security and economic terms. Nevertheless, the EU is not necessarily a key actor – trade aside – in Central Asia in comparison to the United States (US), Russia, China and other regionally-based actors in the broader region. Both rhetorically and empirically the EU has pursued self-interested policies towards Central Asia, and the region is secondary in importance for the EU to South-East Europe, the Balkans, and Ukraine plus other “nearer” Neighbours to Europe. This equates to a form of “normalisation” in EU foreign policy based more on self-interest as opposed to primarily on values as Manners suggests (Manners, 2002). EU policy towards Central Asia did not really gain momentum until the “Strategy for a New Partnership with Central Asia” (European Council, 2007). The 2007 Strategy was mainly concerned with security, trade, development aid, good governance, rule of law, human rights, democracy promotion and energy (European Council, 2007). The EU’s member states have been divided on how to approach Central Asia. Some EU member states such as France, Germany and Italy have consistently emphasised economic, security and energy interests over values, whereas other EU member states such as the Scandinavians and the British have favoured a focus on good governance and human rights as well as specific issues related to corruption in the public sector. The EU implemented structured political dialogues, human rights structured dialogues, educational initiatives, energy and transport initiatives, rule of law initiatives and other related programmes with the states of the region: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. However, tellingly the states of Central Asia were not included in either the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) or the Eastern Partnership, being seen as part of the backyard of the Neighbourhood. The EU’s 2012 progress report highlighted issues with the countries of the region five years after the implementation of the initial strategy (European Council, 2012). In the intervening five years the EU insisted on a High-Level EU-Central Asia Security Dialogue and a renewal of the EU Special Representative, currently assumed by the Slovakian Peter Burian, a former secretary of state and ambassador to NATO and the US. The revised strategy also emphasised economic development, border regions, energy, human rights, good governance and corruption as being key issues (European Council, 2012). EU bilateral and multilateral policies have been undermined to a certain extent by the division of member states between those favouring the pursuit of materially-based interests around energy and security (Germany, France and Italy) and those favouring the pursuit of liberal internationalist values around human rights and good governance in foreign policy (United Kingdom and Scandinavian member states of the EU). As late as March 2016, the decidedly pro-normative power European Parliament (EU) highlighted: ‘[...] the need for an EU-Central Asia strategy that is not based on geostrategic interests but is designed to develop a participative and democratic society[...]’ (European Parliament, 2016).

Shifts of EU Strategic Culture? Towards “Principled Pragmatism” in EU Foreign Policy

In the vast literature on European foreign policy the EU is often portrayed as being a reflexive multilateral actor that is *sui generis* in international relations. Furthermore, the EU has famously been conceptualised as being an exemplar of civilian (Duchêne 1972) if not normative power (Manners 2002) derived from soft power characteristics. This was certainly how EU grand strategy was defined after the Cold War (Howorth, 2010) in documents such as the ESS (2003). Indeed, this has also led to criticism that the EU was overly focused on the projection of its values at the expense of material interests. Conversely, there is a burgeoning literature which argues that the EU does not follow its norms through at point of delivery and instead promotes selfish Commission and member state interests that are usually related to economic gain, energy security, securing Europe’s borders and the like. Nevertheless, the EU is publicly committed to its reflexive multilateral strategy and, therefore, should be judged against this yardstick. The EUGS (2016) is an attempt to mainstream more geopolitically focused thinking into EU strategy to work alongside the traditional normative approaches (Conley, 2016). To project this new identity the EU came up with the notion of “principled pragmatism” in its foreign policy (Tocci, 2016).

Traditionally, strategy has been associated with military tools and policy and is closely linked to the realist definitions of superpower interests that were prevalent during the Cold War (McClean, 1995). Snyder defines strategic culture in a realist-behaviouralist way as ‘the sum of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behaviour that members of a national strategic community share’ (Snyder, 1977, p. 8). The EU is less governed by military logic and is generally characterised as a civilian power which is traditionally also an economic power (Duchêne, 1972). The EU is also frequently characterised as being a normative power that primarily propagates soft power policies of aid, trade, development and projects its mainly civilian power identity onto the international stage (Manners, 2002). The European Security Strategy (ESS) (2003), updated in 2008, encapsulated EU normative and civilian power and defined strategy broadly speaking in these terms (Biscop, 2005). This ambition is perhaps captured best in the EU’s aspiration that it is its ‘task [...] to promote a ring of well governed countries to the East of the European Union and on the borders of the Mediterranean with whom we can enjoy close and cooperative relations’ (ESS 2003, p. 8). In contrast, the EUGS recedes to the goal of “principled pragmatism” which is less inclined to actually change styles of government and governance in the neighbouring countries rather than fostering the resilience of neighbours for the sake of stability.

Although it is only being mentioned at three occasions in the EUGS, “principled pragmatism” – together with the idea of “resilience” is among the conceptual cornerstones of the strategy document. The term has regularly been used to assess the performance of US presidents and can be thought of terms as a combination of a particular kind of “vision” and “cognitive style” or, more bluntly, a highly successful blend of idealism and pragmatism (Siemers 2004).

Similarly, Obama has been praised for his a flexible “principled pragmatism” which brought to bear diplomacy and soft power in order to reduce international tensions in a long-term perspective – without resorting to military solutions in the short-term (Huard 2017). “Resilience” – referred to more than 30 times in the EUGS – is yet another term somewhat complimentary to “principled pragmatism”. As a concept, it has been developed since the 2000s, primarily as a tool in both scholarly literature and practice of peace-building (Juncos, 2017). In a nutshell, it prioritises the need for stable state institutions and structures over concerns of democracy promotion.

In the EU context, “principled pragmatism” is based on the respect of democratic values within EU institutions and its Member States as the primary instrument of their international promotion; more flexible partnerships between the EU and other international actors; and a renovated multilateralism to allow the EU to reach its full potential on the international scene. The EUGS also seeks to increase the EU’s strategic autonomy from other international security providers such as the United States (US) or the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) (European Union, 2016; Biscop, 2016a). The EUGS also seeks to make the EU a leading player in diplomacy and in managing international security issues inside and outside Europe (Davis-Cross, 2016). Nevertheless, a central focus of the EUGS is Europe and how international actors impact on European security (Malksoo, 2016). Additionally, the EU aims to become more “pragmatically realist” in its dealings with the outside world rather than being governed solely by liberal internationalist principles (Smith, 2011). The impact of Brexit is likely to be significant in EU foreign and security policy (Dassù and Menotti, 2016), but slight with regard to Central Asia. With regard to the neighbourhood, despite the EU’s protestations, the Union appears to be being far more selective in dealing with its nearest neighbours from the mindset of how they impact on the continent of Europe (Smith, 2016).

EU-Central Asia: From Norms to “Principled Pragmatism”, and Inside out to Outside in?

The change from a focus on cosmopolitan values to principled pragmatism in EU external action is possibly most keenly felt with regard to the Neighbourhood. In a wider global sense, the EU appears to be targeting new markets in emerging great powers such as China, India and the BRICS, but is also developing a pragmatic approach to broader issues of the management of global security (Howorth, 2016a). In the end, the EUGS (2016) signifies a shift in EU foreign policy from normative power to principled pragmatism. Regarding Central Asia the EU approach to policy is guided by self-interest in terms of how the states of the region impact on European security and also how the EU can influence Central Asian states. As Biscop states:

[...] there is a strong focus on Europe's own security (which was much less present in the ESS) and on the neighbourhood: "We will take responsibility foremost in Europe and its surrounding regions, while pursuing targeted engagement further afield [...] [responding to recent terrorist attacks and the migration crisis in Europe] [...] The [neighbourhood] [...] is defined very broadly though, going beyond what Brussels now often calls the "neighbours of the neighbours": "to the east stretching into Central Asia, and south down to Central Africa" (Biscop, 2016b, p. 2).

The EUGS (2016) also contains much less emphasis on democracy promotion in EU foreign and security policy (Biscop, 2016b, p. 2). The main emphasis is on how Neighbourhood countries and their near neighbours' impact on Europe in terms of security, migration, terrorism, and economically. The EU therefore prioritises internal and border security according to a pragmatic case-by-case engagement with external actors in the vicinity of Europe according to a principled pragmatic policy paradigm. Relations between the EU and its nearest neighbours are now governed as much by this new pragmatic realist agenda as they are by liberal internationalist principles. Nevertheless, some have implicitly – perhaps unwittingly – criticised the EU not for being realist but for a lack of ability and ambition to implement the EUGS, particularly in the defence and security fields (Colemont, 2016). Others squarely criticise the EUGS for having a lack of ambition, particularly in Asia, and hints that Europe free-rides on America despite being the leading trade partner with Central Asia (Grand, 2016, p. 20).

The EUGS (2016) – led by the External Action Service and Commission – has in the meantime decided to back a "principled pragmatic" approach towards Central Asia being driven by security and business interests to a greater extent than liberal values. Instead, EU policy is predicated on the attainment of resilience in the political and economic systems of the (near) Neighbourhood states and less by the "normative power" projection of the EU from the inside-out. As Maull states: 'Of course, the EU should engage more in strengthening the resilience of neighbouring countries to the south and the east of the Union (in other words, Europe should strive to get better at state-building abroad)' (Maull, 2016, p. 35). Indeed, as Howorth affirms:

The EU's former Neighbourhood Policy [...] proved a failure and the EUGS suggests helpful steps in the right direction. Instead of bold assertions about "normative power" and the "export of European values" to Africa, the Middle East and Eurasia, we read about the need to generate "resilience" among the states of the neighbourhood. The enhancement of resilience emerges as the main statement of the EU's responsibility in the neighbourhood – which has been extended all the way into Central Asia and Central Africa (Howorth, 2016b).

In a broader sense, the EU is the largest trade partner with Central Asia with €13.8 billion of imports from Central Asia into the EU single market and €8.4 billion exports from the EU to Central Asia in 2016 (European Commission, 2017). However, this has not leveraged into greater democratisation or the adaptation of liberal intergovernmentalist principles in Central Asia. Indeed, the most influential external influences in the Central Asia are of Russian and Chinese origin, especially as they relate to energy politics (Marantidou, and Cossa, 2014), and the EU (and for that matter US policies) lack the impact of Russia and China. The EU and US often ineffectively channel their development policies through the United Nations Development programme (UNDP), their defence policies through NATO (Peyrouse, 2015, p.4), their democracy promotion policies through the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and their trade policies often bilaterally between individual EU and Central Asian states respectively. Indeed, Peyrouse presciently captures the operational and ideational environment of EU policy towards Central Asia as follows:

Meanwhile the local governments [in Central Asia] encourage the competition patterns between external actors, as they enable the regimes to enforce ‘multi-vector’ strategies by pitting these actors against each other. This results in multiple uncoordinated initiatives over which they can exert greater control. Central Asian regimes are interested in having good links with Europe, which is an alternative to the more direct and substantial influence of Russia and China. Nevertheless, EU policy will remain torn between different approaches, but with an already visible trend to prioritize energy and security over the values agenda. Even dynamized, the EU Strategy in Central Asia remains without measure compared to the Eastern Partnership (directed toward Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, and the three South Caucasian states) (Peyrouse, 2015, pp. 6-7).

Since the end of the Cold War, EU policy towards Central Asia has been embedded in its own external governance regime. The EU has also attempted to export its *acquis* in the region with varying degrees of success in the areas of good governance, rule of law and values. The export of EU norms and values has been perhaps less than impactful in Central Asia, where states are not necessarily as receptive to democracy promotion and have increasingly taken their lead from Russia and/or China (Sharshenova and Crawford, 2017). Broader EU strategy since the EUGS (2016) has also become more pragmatic, more focused on the EU itself, and also less focused on the projection of norms and values abroad. In a sense, EU policy towards Central Asia recognises that there is a limit to the extent that external governance approaches to policy-making and norm diffusion tells the full picture of EU engagement in the region, or the role

taken by other great powers. Indeed, the role of the other great powers in Central Asia – the US, Russia and China – represents another form of external governance towards Central Asia, towards each other respectively, and towards the EU. The EU is one player in the new great game and has pragmatically adapted its external governance approach accordingly in Central Asia. Indeed, it is time for analyses of Central Asia to go beyond the self-focus on the export of EU norms/values/policies both conceptually and empirically to consider other great actors influence in the region; especially at a time when the EU itself is also becoming a more pragmatic and Europe-focused actor in its foreign and security policy as is evidenced by the EUGS (2016). It is clear the EU is increasingly taking its lead from Russia and China in Central Asia in its foreign policy, recognising that in the end geopolitics is the driving force behind great power politics towards the region and hence makes an analysis the role of the US, Russia and China essential.

Beyond external governance? The role of the US, Russia and China

In this paper, we see Europe ‘not as an autonomous and self-centred entity but as one that is influenced by increasing interdependencies in a multipolar world’ (Gole, 2012, p. 665). As such, we are interested in understanding non-European perspectives from the “outside-in”, rather than just those predicated on the EU perspective (Fisher-Onar and Nicolaïdis, 2013; Keukeleire and Lecocq, 2018; Lecocq and Keukeleire, 2018). This is especially the case in Central Asia given the EU’s focus on resilience and a de-centre version of EU “external governance” in the region. Indeed, this makes it even more important to hear voices from other actors engaged in Central Asia, such as Russia, China and the US as well as local actors.

Until very recently the Western approach to the countries of Central Asia and the region as a whole has been dominated by its engagement in Afghanistan following the terrorist attacks in the US in 2001 and the risk of instability spilling over to neighbouring countries. Before that, concern for Central Asia has been rather limited. Ironically, it was Western countries themselves that developed the Silk Road metaphor – now conveniently associated with Chinese most recent initiatives – to frame an emerging East-West axis that would link the newly independent states to Europe. The European and US-backed Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA) project, launched in 1993, with the aim of opening up Central Asia and the South Caucasus through the creation of a vast transport and communications corridor (Laruelle 2015, p. 364). Today, however, Russian and Chinese engagement have come to dominate the international agenda (and to a lesser extent Turkey, Iran and India), which some have conceived of in terms of a ‘new great game’ (Fenton 2014, p. 172). Both, China and Russia, have established in 1996 a comprehensive regional forum, the Shanghai Five grouping, which was turned into Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in 2001 with the signing of the Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions. As a comprehensive intergovernmental

forum for matters of political, economic, and security it brings together Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan (as a guest attendant), and Uzbekistan (2001) – as well as India and Pakistan since June 2017. At the same time, China and Russia have furthered initiatives such as the Chinese “One Road, One Belt” and the Moscow-driven Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) – two projects that have the potential to alter the geopolitical landscape of Central Asia quite significantly.

The United States’ approach to Central Asia

In terms of trade the US interest in the Central Asian region has always been modest. A recent Carnegie study on the United States’ policy towards Central Asia distinguishes three periods: During the first (1991-2001), the US kept a low profile ‘view[ing] the region as relatively low priority’ (Rumer et al. 2016, p. 2) and embarking only upon a long-term process of supporting the creation of democracy and free-market economies in the region. This changed dramatically after 9/11, when the need for closer security cooperation surged with countries hosting US bases engaging in the global war on terror in Afghanistan. Still, both phases had one ‘one theme in common: The region’s significance to the United States was largely derivative of interests that were not indigenous to Central Asia itself but were rather functions of U.S. policies, priorities, and relationships with countries around the region’ (Rumer et al. 2016, p. 3). The military drawdown in Afghanistan started under the Obama administration gradually gave room for the emergence of the New Silk Road strategy of 2011 centring on security, stability and institutional reform, encouraging civil society. The then U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton proposed a plan for Central and South Asia ‘[...] to create a new Silk Road [as] [...] an international web and network of economic and transit connections. That means building more rail lines, highways, energy infrastructure [...]’ (H. Clinton quoted in Laruelle 2016, p. 363). However, while the economic rationality of such a project has been questioned, it also fell again victim to the logic of Central Asia as a second-order US interest that was not indigenous to Central Asia itself as it rather followed the intent to develop Afghanistan’s economy through the improvement of infrastructure and improved integration into the wider region. Indeed, ‘greater regional integration among Central Asian states has been a long-standing goal of US policy, and that America’s own “New Silk Road” initiative was the signature project [...]. The failure of the [US] initiative was perhaps foreseeable, given the focus on Afghanistan and the necessity of close cooperation between Pakistan and India. It is now clearly overtaken by the Chinese [OBOR] proposal’ (Murphy, 2016, p.5.). Furthermore, ‘The Chinese [OBOR] project is a challenge to the US in a number of ways already mentioned – a counter to US ambitions to confine China’s maritime expansion and also to its objectives in Central Asia. It is also a new intrusion in an area of US primacy, the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean.’ (Murphy, 2016, p.5). In 2015, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan and the US created for the first time a joint platform in partnership

with the United States to come together and work on issues of mutual concern; the C5+1 (Walker and Kearney 2016); yet it remains to be seen how the new Trump administration is going to impact on these developments as the US currently is reviewing its strategy towards Central Asia.

Russia's approach to Central Asia

In the immediate aftermath of the dismantlement of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation was relatively disinterested in the region also because there “far less cultural affinity between these nations and Russia” (Samokhvalov 2016, p. 87). For a long time, Russia seemed to consider Central Asia as a rather under-developed periphery and source of potential instability at its borders. This shifted only when Putin came to power documented in the adoption of a set of new strategic documents such as the National Security Concept, the Russia Military Doctrine and the Foreign Policy Concept (Fenton 2014, p. 172).

After the 2001 terrorist attacks in the US, Putin became wary of the surging American and European interests in the region subsequently starting to conceive of Central Asia as part of Russia's backyard in geopolitical terms (Kassenova 2017). While Russia is on the one hand interested sealing itself off against instability either prompted by terrorism or colour-full revolutions, it is as an economic competitor also eager to control energy delivery and infrastructure development affecting Russian interests. At the time of the EU's launch of Eastern Partnership in 2009, Putin suggested the creation of a Eurasian Economic Union in order to bring Eurasian countries of the former Soviet territory into Russia's fold. While the economic foundation of this project is questionable given Central Asia's growing integration into the Asian economy, Russia's geopolitical ambitions are obvious. For the time being, Kazakhstan has already become a member, Kyrgyzstan is about to join, and Tajikistan plans to do so in the near future – however, the Central Asian countries, in particular Kazakhstan, are adamant to ensure that the EEA is ‘to remain an economic rather than political’ (Gross 2015, p. 3) organization. Ironically, the ‘EEU could become a vehicle for Chinese rather than Russian influence in Central Asia’ (Rumer et al 2016, p. 8) as the Presidents of Russia and China, Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping, discussed an integration of the One Road One Belt initiative into the EEA – the proposal has not been well-received by the Central Asian republics who prefer to develop their links to China's Silk Road initiative bilaterally. Fenton (2014, p. 173) rightly summarizes Russia' objectives as ensuring that the countries remain in Russia's fold also by using the Moscow-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) of which Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are part, preventing spill-over of regional instability, providing military security by the presence of Russian military bases and controlling the development and transit of energy resources from the CA countries. More broadly, ‘Nostalgia in Moscow for the world that disappeared twenty-five years ago is still prevalent, not least in

the Kremlin, finding expression in the various efforts to establish a Eurasian Union. So, instead of a Silk Road Economic Belt, Moscow prefers to talk of Eurasian integration. The Chinese have indulged this to an extent.’ (Murphy, 2016, p. 4). In practice, ‘China has in fact emerged as the central geopolitical and economic power of the region [Central Asia]. Trade has been the main motor: in 2013 it surpassed \$50 billion, far surpassing trade with Russia, and generally, the expansion of Chinese influence in the region has been at the expense of Russia’s’ (Murphy, 2016, p. 4).

China’s approach to Central Asia

China is the most important trade partner for the Central Asian countries. It is estimated that trade has grown from just between \$350-750 million dollar in the early 1990s to a staggering \$50 billion in 2013, bypassing trade with Russia and other actors by far (Rumer et al 2016, p. 7). It does not come as a surprise that the Chinese President Xi Jinping announced China’s Silk Road initiative at the occasion of a visit to Kazakhstan in September 2013. Together with complimentary Maritime Silk Road initiative and the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), China’s ambition is to connect the economic corridors from Europe to East Asia including approximately 65 countries – with the Central Asian countries located at an important crossroad. In the end, ‘The [OBOR] strategy will secure the transport of oil and gas and other essential goods, and particularly access to the Central Asian energy resources needed to sustain China’s economy’ (Du, 2016, p. 42).

In addition to Central Asia’s place in the design of these larger geopolitical projects, the region has grown in importance as a significant source of energy provision for China. In addition, oil and gas important from Central Asia help diversify Chinese consumption from Russia and the Middle East. China’s foreign policy objectives in Central Asia are also tied with its internal security agenda. The Uyghurs-dominated Xinjiang province in Western China imminently poses the threat of secession and the creation of an independent ‘East Turkistan’ uniting Uyghurs living in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan with those in the Western part of the Chinese Xinjiang province. With the European Union fostering initiatives of democratization in neighbouring countries, China became extremely wary of the EU’s foreign policy agenda in the past.

While both the European Union and the US are still soul-searching in terms of their future role(s) in Central Asia, Russia and, in particular, China are in the midst of solidifying their relationship with countries of the region. In short, one can say, that whereas Russia seeks to explore security avenues to secure influence, China is primarily relying on its economic might and the ambition of the Central Asian republics to safe-guard their independence *vis-à-vis* Russia in the light of the Ukraine crisis. Thus far, China has refrained from projecting its military power or to maintain bases in Central Asia, but it will most likely keep a watchful eye

on the region's domestic politics and succession to make sure that its interests are being protected.

China is rising and America and the EU are seen to be in decline in Central Asia. The OBOR initiative is an opportunity to extend the Chinese version of globalisation into Central Asia and South East Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Africa. The OBOR is set to become populated by big business interests as well as great power interests. Russian oligarchs will benefit as much as the Chinese government. The US and European large corporations see OBOR as an opportunity to influence Chinese business strategy, but it remains to be seen if this is possible given the nature of Chinese state power in determining policy outcomes (Bolton, 2017). Agricultural trade between China and Central Asia has increased 8.8% due to the OBOR in recent years. Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) have a positive and significant relationship within bilateral trade between China and Central Asian states (Ma and Balezentis, 2017, pp. 41-55), thereby integrating Chinese business and government further into Central Asian markets and polities.

The OBOR has impacted on Central Asia in three main ways. First, '[a]s far as infrastructures are concerned, various Asian powers have adopted Silk Road policies that see Central Asia as a fundamental transit route for their long-haul connectivity projects. In the field of trade, Central Asia's exchanges with other Asian countries have been growing steadily since the 1990s, in some cases even coming to rival, in comparative terms, exchanges with the West. Lastly, in terms of multilateralism, Central Asia is increasingly enmeshed in a web of overlapping institutions with a strong Asian identity, coexisting with the region's Western institutional references' (Contessi, 2016, p. 3). In practice, 'one may understand OBOR as the emergence of various processes of regional and sub-regional integration dynamics in which the Chinese leadership will take a more active role. Conversely, one may emphasise the qualitative and explicit adaptations within the 'OBOR initiative' that constitutes China's contemporary geopolitical grand strategy' founded around the principle that geography determines geopolitics despite globalisation. (Plotberger, 2017, p. 289).

Additionally, Chinese authoritarian modes of governance impact on dissipating EU and wider Western influence in Central Asia in three main ways: 'First, Chinese provision of substantial and unconditional financial assistance makes Western politically conditioned aid appear both ungenerous and an infringement of sovereignty. Second, the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation, inclusive of China's leadership role, creates an institutional means through which the (semi-) authoritarianism of member states is legitimized and challenges Western emphasis on democracy and human rights. Finally, by the power of its own example, China demonstrates that democracy is not a prerequisite for prosperity, the rule of law and social well-being' (Sharshenova and Crawford, 2017, p. 453; Ziegler, 2016, pp. 549-569).

Conclusion

EU policy towards Central Asia is increasingly incorporating non-European perspectives from the “outside-in”, rather than just on the EU perspective from the “centre”. Recently reformulated EU foreign policy towards Central Asia is pragmatically taking its lead from Chinese and Russian policy in the region recognizing that, in the end, geography continues to shape geopolitics in Central Asia. We argue that the EU is putting more emphasis on state resilience rather than democracy in Central Asia, on the one hand, and stronger engagement with other actors in the wider region on the other. In effect, the EU is normalising its foreign policy to pragmatically serve its interests and is also beginning the process of de-centring its foreign and security policies in Central Asia.

EU policy towards Central Asia has not been at the top of the EU’s external policy priorities and it has remained a ‘donor without influence’ (Peyrouse 2017). Presently, the EU and its member states are more concerned with the European migration crisis, EU counter-terrorism cooperation, the election of Donald Trump in America, Brexit and their own domestic concerns around economic growth. As is stated above, with regard to Central Asia, EU policies are predicated on structured partnerships in security and economic terms. Nevertheless, the EU is not a necessarily a key actor – trade aside – in Central Asia in comparison to the US, Russia, China and other regionally-based actors in the broader region. Both rhetorically and empirically the EU has pursued self-interested policies towards Central Asia particularly towards energy, and the region is secondary in importance for the EU to South-East Europe, the Balkans, and Ukraine plus other “nearer” Neighbours to Europe. Furthermore, much activity between European states and the states of Central Asia tends to be bilateral thereby undercutting EU initiatives.

In the past few years, it has become more realistic for the EU to pursue incremental change in the region as a whole. Nevertheless, as is hypothesised above in the present analysis, the EU’s ‘[...] activity in Central Asia has been [traditionally] largely focussed on institution-building and advancement of human rights, and thus is probably not in competition with China [and Russia] there [historically]’ (Murphy, 2016, p. 6.). Paradoxically, in that sense, the EU has been in competition with the US in the areas of democracy promotion and institution-building in Central Asia, but has deprioritised this in the EUGS (2016) in favour of principled pragmatism and resilience in the near Neighbourhood states. Indeed, these days EU policy in Central Asia is guided as much by geopolitics as it is EU values, recognising the limited impact of the latter in Central Asia and the need to compete with China and Russia for influence in Europe’s periphery.

Within the context of the EUGS (2016), the EU needs to develop strengthened security, economic and defence relationships with the countries of Central Asia. The EU’s “comprehensive approach” to peace-building, security-sector reform, and stabilisation should

be pursued through the “principled pragmatic” lens of the EUGS, with a focus on European energy security, the protection of European security interests *as well as* the projection of human security into the Neighbourhood. The EU’s renovated reflexive multilateralism is also an appropriate policy instrument for the EU to pursue its vital interests in the Central Asia at a time when China and Russia are on the rise in the region. The past quarter century of relations between the EU, Central Asia highlights that pragmatic engagement is the most sensible means to pursue each party’s interests and values together. The days of the EU pursuing its own version of “normative power Europe” externally in Central Asia are long gone (Kassenova 2016). As is stated above, reformulated EU policy towards Central Asia is indirectly taking a lead from Chinese and Russian policy in the region in that geography continues to shape geopolitics in the region.

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