

The European Union's Strategy for Central Asia: Policy Shift from 2007 to 2025

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Abstract

European Union has developed close ties with countries of Central Asia since 2007, when the first major EU's strategy for Central Asia was adopted. Throughout these years we saw a visible shift in the relationship between Europe and Central Asian countries, mainly due to geopolitical and regional causes. This article is devoted to the analysis of the changes in EU-Central Asia cooperation strategies of 2007, 2019 and 2023 and the analysis of the joint declaration, published after the first EU-CA meeting in 2025. Authors focus on the main goals and aims of EU in the Central Asia and means to achieve them as stated in aforementioned documents, as well as the evolution of EU-Central Asia relations. Through a comprehensive analysis of official strategy papers, diplomatic engagements and joint declaration the article identifies the main modern goals of EU in the region of Central Asia.

Keywords

European Union, regional policy, cooperation strategies, Central Asia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan

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European Union and its countries emerged as political players in Central Asia after the USSR collapse and “sovereignty parade” (Roy, 2000). Western countries were interested in the geographical position of the region as well as in the natural resources stored in the region (Roy, 2000). In the beginning of European-Central Asian relationship all countries included in this region were stated as “dictatorships, with notable exception of the Kyrgyz republic” (Roy, 2000). Therefore, main goals in building relationship between the West Countries and Central Asia were stated as promoting democratic values, primacy of the law and human rights. These three points laid the foundation for all future EU-CA relations and were reflected in all EU strategies for Central Asia.

European Union started its complex interaction with the region in 2007¹, year when first ever strategy for Central Asia was adopted. After that strategy was updated in 2019² following the geopolitical shift on the Eurasian continent. Turning point in the EU-CA relations was adopting the 2023 “Joint Roadmap for Deepening Ties between the EU and Central Asia”³. This document showed the growing connection between the two regions. In this article authors examine the shift in the EU strategy towards Central Asia throughout the three editions of

the document. Considering the joint EU-CA Summit⁴ held in April 2025 in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, it is essential to analyze the level of connection and cooperation between European Union and Central Asia countries.

The following research methods were used: 1) source analysis – a comprehensive study of EU strategies and declaration after Samarkand’s Summit; 2) comparative analysis – it contains comparison of EU goals and aims in the Central Asia before and now, to make an informative conclusion on prospects of such cooperation; 3) cross-regional analysis – listing of connections between EU- and CA-countries, to conclude the trends for this relationship.

Official EU strategies, documents, news articles and scientific reports were used as sources for the research. For the comparison of the strategies’ goals model proposed by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)⁵ was used.

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First EU strategy for Central Asia (2007). The first ever European Union strategy towards EU was adopted on 31st of May 2007 as the 10113/07 Council of the European Union document⁶. It described Central Asia as a region, that has a “centuries-old tradition of bringing Europe and Asia together”⁷.

¹ The EU strategy for Central Asia 2007. URL: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10113-2007-INIT/en/pdf> (accessed 10.02.2026)

² The EU strategy for Central Asia 2019. URL: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fact-sheet_centralasia_2019.pdf (accessed 10.02.2026)

³ Joint Roadmap for Deepening Ties between the EU and Central Asia 2023. URL: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14587-2023-INIT/en/pdf> (accessed 10.02.2026)

⁴ EU-Central Asia Summit (Samarkand, 4th April 2025) // Joint Declaration. URL: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7745-2025-REV-1/en/pdf> (accessed 10.02.2026)

⁵ Regional cooperation: conceptional framework and Asia-Pacific experience // UNESCAP. URL: https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/ch2_0.pdf#:~:text=Although%20trade%20liberalization%20is%20usually%20at%20the,e%2Dcommerce%2C%20transport%2C%20energy%20and%20other%20infrastructure%20services (accessed 10.02.2026)

⁶ The EU strategy for Central Asia 2007. URL: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10113-2007-INIT/en/pdf> (accessed 10.02.2026)

⁷ Ibid

“The first ever strategy adopted by EU in 2007 was presented as the first document that provided the region the key areas for development as well as the goals and instruments to tackle some of the regional problems” (Apokins, 2015). In our research we divided the goals of the strategy according to the model proposed by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)⁸. These areas are as follows: cooperation in financial issues; in ICT, transport, infrastructure and energy; in research, academic and cultural exchange; in trade, investment and technology transfer; in political and security issues.

The first sphere of cooperation mentioned in the UNESCAP model is the “cooperation in financial issues”. According to the strategy EU is to support economic diversification and further integration of Central Asia into the world trade. As well, “EU is aimed to support the Central Asian states’ effort to implement and improve EU Partnership Agreements”⁹. Economic interactions between two parties are also to be based on the funds delivered through the regional organizations”.

Considering this EU emphasized the importance of Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) between EU and Central Asian countries. The strategy also mentions “the importance of the regional organizations in terms of building cooperation channels between European Union and Central Asian countries”¹⁰.

Second and third spheres of cooperation were “Cooperation in ICT, transport, infrastructure and energy” and “Cooperation in trade, investment and technology transfer”. Here EU aims to improve transport connections and strengthen energy sector since the theme of energy sources plays crucial role in all EU’s strategies for the Central Asia. European Union mostly focuses on providing technological solutions and supporting renewable energy enlargement in the Central Asian countries.

These goals are closely interconnected with the first financial sphere, but here EU for the first time mentions the idea of European companies and countries investing in the Central Asian countries and promoting trade relations between two regions. This sphere is considered the “professional” one, as it speaks to the governments and businesses of the region and the development of economic situation in the region. In this regard cooperation was conducted with the help of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and bilateral projects between EU-countries and Central Asian countries. Significant amount of financial aid was provided through the Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) program¹¹. More thoroughly cooperation between EU and Central Asian countries with help of this initiative will be analyzed later on. The first strategy focused mainly on securing transport connections and energy resources for stabilizing

⁸ Regional cooperation: conceptional framework and Asia-Pacific experience // UNESCAP. URL: https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/ch2_0.pdf#:~:text=Although%20trade%20liberalization%20is%20usually%20at%20the,e%2Dcommerce%2C%20transport%2C%20energy%20and%20other%20infrastructure%20services (accessed 10.02.2026)

⁹ The EU strategy for Central Asia 2007. URL: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10113-2007-INIT/en/pdf> (accessed 10.02.2026)

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. 2025 // CAREC Program. URL: https://carecprogram.org/?page_id=8768. (accessed 14.02.2026).

production chains in the region (Apokins, 2015). Also, one of the main goals in this regard was “supporting renewable energy sources and combating environmental challenges”¹².

Fourth sphere of cooperation considered is also of a great importance as it speaks to the societal aspect of the relationship: “Cooperation in research, academic and cultural exchange”. Here the main goals of the strategy are to develop and improve the education system and to encourage intercultural dialogue. These goals speak to the humanitarian aid programs in the region and to unifying the educational standards in the EU-countries and in the Central Asia. To be competitive, work force in the region should be well-educated and possess basic skills for their occupation. Therefore, different programs were started to enhance the education level in the Central Asian countries. The most important program mentioned in this strategy is “The EU-Central Asia Education Initiative”¹³. The program’s goal is to align the higher education systems with the European Bologna Process. Most of the funds aimed to develop connections between Central Asian and European higher education institutions in such qualifications as short cycle, bachelor, master and doctorate¹⁴. Global educational initiative such as Erasmus Mundus and Erasmus+ also become present for Central Asian students making it easier to achieve European level of education (Yun, Pakulin 2025). In the field of the intercultural dialogue EU is

committed to its “White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue”¹⁵.

And the last but not least fifth sphere of cooperation was “political and security issues”. The most important goals here are enhancing cooperation on human rights and implementation of the rule of law. The other goal of the EU and Central Asian countries is to combat common threats and challenges.

Considering Central Asia geographical border with Afghanistan, EU most important goal was and remains “keeping stability in the region and providing security for its economic partners” (Apokins, 2015). EU assessed the need of the counter-crime measures on the countries’ borders, to control arms, drug, and people trafficking in the region. To tackle this, EU reaffirmed its commitment to support Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA), that was launched in 2003 and provides technology and experience to the Central Asia countries’ custom services¹⁶. EU-countries, such as Lithuania, Hungary, Italy, Poland and the leader of BOMCA – Latvia, all of them contributed funds and personnel to develop border security and train custom workers. The EU’s goal was to provide Central Asia its EU Rule of Law initiative to develop fair and modern judicial system in accordance with international standards. This was in line with the EU’s long-term interests in the region. The 2009 EU Rule of Law Initiative report states “The Central Asian states possess both traditional and

¹² The EU strategy for Central Asia 2007. URL: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10113-2007-INIT/en/pdf> (accessed 14.02.2026)

¹³ The EU-Central Asia Education Initiative – EUCAM. URL: <https://eucentralasia.eu/the-eu-central-asia-education-initiative/> (accessed 14.02.2026)

¹⁴ EU cooperation in education in Central Asia. URL: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eu_cooperation_in_education_in_central_asia_2.pdf (accessed 14.02.2026)

¹⁵ White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue: “Living Together as Equals in Dignity”// Council of Europe, 2008. URL: https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/source/white%20paper_final_revised_en.pdf (accessed 14.02.2026)

¹⁶ Home – BOMCA. URL: <https://www.bomca-eu.org/en/> (accessed 12.02.2026).

Soviet legacies within their legal systems, which make them susceptible to personalism, patronage and corruption. Such tendencies can be overturned, but it will take a generation and a serious, well-planned commitment from the EU marked by clearly stated benchmarks, a substantive publicly

agreed document, and greater transparency and coordination among the technical programmes on the ground”¹⁷.

Using the aforementioned UNESCAP model we divided these goals in the following Figure 1, as all mentioned spheres and their goals focuses on the regional stability

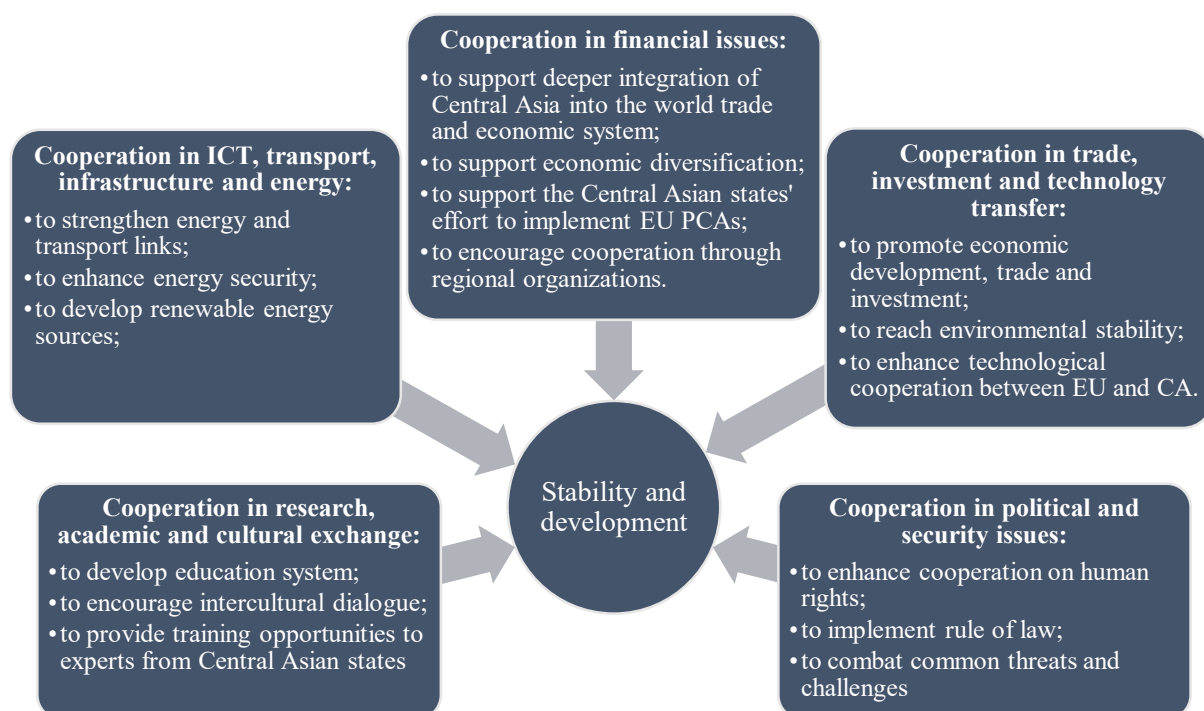


Figure 1. EU 2007 strategy's goals in the framework of the regional cooperation spheres model

and development.

The 2007 EU strategy framed independently-emerged Central Asian countries as a new strategic partnership. Goals and aims of the first document encompassed all of the spheres leading to the developing relations. If we to categorize the priority of the goals to their appearance in the document, we can observe that the most important areas are human rights and the rule of law. After that we will see the financial and cultural spheres which encompass development

of education and new trade and investment opportunities. As well, EU aims to include Central Asian countries to work closer with European Union's institutions in the field of common matters. Energy sector emerged in the first strategy but it is yet to be much more implicated into the future EU goals and aims in the region.

Second EU strategy for Central Asia (2019). First EU strategy was aiming for a five-year period after its adoption – Europe-

¹⁷ The EU's Rule of Law Initiative in Central Asia – EUCAM. URL: <https://eucentralasia.eu/the-eus-rule-of-law-initiative-in-central-asia/> (accessed 12.02.2026)

an Council reviewed the results of the cooperation in 2013¹⁸. Most of them weren't as satisfying, as was expected, though EU saw the challenges as opportunities for renewing cooperation strategy (Mikhailenko, Sukhrob, 2019). One of the main reasons and the sign of progress of EU-CA cooperation was the establishment of the European Commission representatives in Turkmenistan – last Central Asian country without proper EU representation (Prokhorenko, 2019). The boost to renewing strategy was drafted in the 2017, where EU reaffirmed their commitment to develop a strong and durable relationship with Central Asia¹⁹.

Considering proposed UNESCAP model we will start by the “cooperation in financial issues” and “cooperation in trade, investment and technology transfer” spheres of regional cooperation. Financial goals include moving towards common rules and a more integrated regional market and as part of this lays the economic modernization and further cooperation in the framework of the PCAs. Trade and investment goals according to the strategy include promotion of an open investment environment and regional exchanges on the business environment. Then the goal of growth of small and medium-sized enterprises is set to achieve job creation.

As we can examine, the economic part of the strategy became less vague since the 2007 strategy. Now with the help of its instruments drafts the EU's goal is presented

in the development of a clear plan to make Central Asian countries competitive on the global market. That includes further investments in the infrastructure of the region, in the promising companies and of course in the energy sector. In regard to the first four goals EU continued its work through EBRD and CAREC²⁰. Up until 2019 EBRD invested around €1.4 billion in Central Asia countries (Smolaga, 2019). Projects included the development of transport routes and energy plants. The European Union also promoted future cooperation between the Union and Central Asian countries within the framework of the WTO²¹.

It is also important to mention EU's special initiative launched two years after renewing the 2007 strategy. EU started Global Gateway project to counter China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Tagliapietra, 2024). Its aim is to promote EU goals on the global level and to invest in the global infrastructural development. And according to the initiative Central Asia is considered one of the most important regions that require funds for regional development. “This initiative and bilateral cooperation between EU-members and Central Asian countries can provide know-how solutions to the management and economic modernization (like “Team Europe” program)”²². According to the statistics, Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) in the Central Asian Countries in the period between the two strategies (2007-2019) reached \$378.2 billion²³. European Union

¹⁸ The EU strategy for Central Asia 2019. URL: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fact-sheet_centralasia_2019.pdf (accessed 14.02.2026)

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. 2025 // CAREC Program. URL: https://carecprogram.org/?page_id=8768. (accessed 14.02.2026).

²¹ Second Central Asia Trade Policy Forum: Economic integration through WTO accession and membership. URL: https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/acc_0306202409_e/acc_0306202409_e.htm. (accessed 14.02.2026)

²² Team Europe in Central Asia. URL: https://eucentralasia.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/EUCAM_PB40_EU-Central-Asia-EU-development-cooperation-with-Central-Asia-From-abstract-to-concrete_261124.pdf (accessed 14.02.2026).

²³ FDI to Central Asia Reached 378.2 billion Over Past 13 years. URL: <https://astanatimes.com/2020/12/fdi-to-central-asia-reached-378-2-billion-over-past-13-years/> (accessed 16.02.2026)

invested 40% of that (roughly \$151.28 billion). The main beneficiary of these investment was Kazakhstan with 77.7% of these FDI²⁴.

Third sphere of “cooperation in ICT, transport, infrastructure and energy” was now limited to the main ideas of then to-be-implemented Global Gateway principles of sharing know-how solutions in the sphere of energy. “Cooperation in research, academic and cultural exchange” mostly continues the last strategy’s goals of fostering research and innovation skill development for youth.

Here we see a continuation of the previous strategy’s goals but with a positive out-come. EU continues to support educational programs in Central Asia, provides know-how solutions to higher education and further implementation of the Bologna Process²⁵. In 2010 Kazakhstan was the first Central Asian country to join the Process, making it easier for students from the other Central Asian countries to apply for a higher education program in Kazakhstan. And in this regard EU continues to support the development of educational programs in Central Asia (like Central Asia Education Platform²⁶).

EU also support Central Asian countries pursuit of stable network system. With help of the European Delivery of Advanced

Network Technology to Europe (DANTE) company EU managed to replace existing satellite connections with a high-speed internet network. This was done with an aim to interlink more than 500 universities in the Central Asian countries allowing them to share knowledge and to have stable access to the World Web²⁷.

The goals of the fifth sphere of “cooperation in political and security issues” now were focused on the goals that weren’t fully achieved through cooperation in the framework of the 2007 strategy. And the goals became much clearer compared to the previous ones with promoting peace in Afghanistan being the cornerstone of the security sphere. Also, EU aims to cooperate further on promoting human rights and the rule of law. For this to work the delivery of successful reforms is also considered as one of the political goals.

In regard to the “Security” goals it is important to refer to the EU Council’s report on the strategy²⁸. So according to the strategy EU aims “to support Central Asian countries’ right to participate in building the region’s security framework”²⁹. The Union acknowledges that Central Asia countries are “to determine the best structures and mechanisms to promote dialogue and cooperation in the region at their own pace, region-to-region dialogue”³⁰. According to

²⁴ FDI to Central Asia Reached 378.2 billion Over Past 13 years. URL: <https://astanatimes.com/2020/12/fdi-to-central-asia-reached-378-2-billion-over-past-13-years/> (accessed 16.02.2026)

²⁵ Development of the Central Asian Higher Education Area based on the principles of the Bologna Process. URL: <https://www.in-global.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2.Presentation-of-the-CA-HEA-Central-Asian-Higher-Education-Area-discussion-on-possible-cooperation.pdf> (accessed 18.02.2026)

²⁶ Central Asia education Platform (CAEP) – Project overview. URL: <https://pegotec.net/portfolio/central-asia-education-platform-caep/> (accessed 18.02.2026)

²⁷ The EU Education Initiative for Central Asia five years on: lessons learnt? EUCAM. URL: <https://eu-centralasia.eu/the-eu-education-initiative-for-central-asia-five-years-on-lessons-learnt/> (accessed 18.02.2026)

²⁸ Council Conclusions on the New Strategy on Central Asia. URL: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/39778/st10221-en19.pdf> (accessed 18.02.2026)

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Ibid

the strategy Central Asian countries play the key role in supporting peace processes in Afghanistan³¹. Therefore, EU encouraged further political and economic engagement between countries. This process was expected to lead to the stabilization of the region that would lead to economic development of Central Asian countries. Undoubtedly, the EU's economic interests were considered as well. EU also reaffirmed the

statement of 2007 strategy considering the "promotion and protection of the rule of law (in the frame-work of the EU Rule of Law Initiative³²), of human rights and fundamental freedoms"³³.

Considering the reviewed goals, we are again to divide them into the spheres of regional cooperation by the model provided by the UNESCAP. This scheme is depicted in the Figure 2.

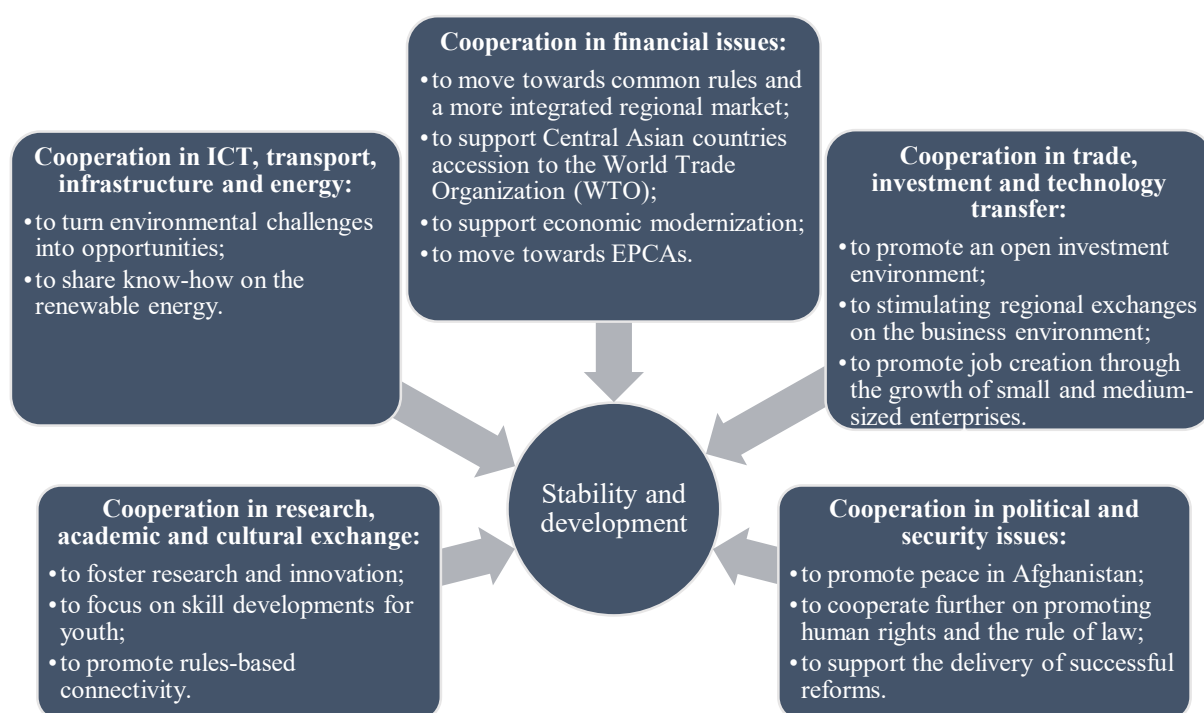


Figure 2. EU 2019 strategy's goals in the framework of the regional cooperation spheres model

New 2019 strategy became more economically-, politically- and security-focused. The achieved progress in the infrastructural, research and technological areas is mirrored in the continuation of the goals mentioned in 2007 strategy. As we can observe from the previous mentioned Global Gateway project – new strategy was meant

to compete with the growing China's BRI interest in the region. The cornerstone of the document remains so-called "resilience" sphere which include issues of political and security concerns. The goals now are leaned for a better balance between EU's and Central Asian countries' interests.

³¹ Council Conclusions on the New Strategy on Central Asia. URL: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/39778/st10221-en19.pdf> (accessed 18.02.2026)

³² The EU's Rule of Law Initiative in Central Asia – EUCAM. 2009. URL: <https://eucentralasia.eu/the-eus-rule-of-law-initiative-in-central-asia/>. (accessed 18.02.2026)

³³ Ibid

Joint Roadmap for Deepening Ties between the EU and Central Asia (2023). The Joint Roadmap became the formal declaration to show the EU and Central Asian countries cooperation³⁴. The introduction to the document mentions that “in the current geopolitical context, new challenges as well as new opportunities have arisen for both EU and Central Asia”³⁵. The Joint Roadmap didn’t have a set of basic goals like in the first strategies. This time it was divided into five key areas which all had clear actions to be undertaken by EU and Central Asian countries in the near future. The document underlined the interest of both EU and Central Asia in deeper cooperation.

In the review of this document we will combine the UNESCAP model we used and the EU’s classification of the strategy’s “key areas”. In the text of the article we will use the EU classification of the goals. In the final visualization we will use the UNESCAP model to ensure continuation of examining strategies through the lens of this model.

Key area number one is called “Deepening the interregional political dialogue and cooperation”. These tasks were presented as the basis of future cooperation – political agreements between EU officials and Central Asian countries’ officials. The new strategy proposed a new mechanism for the EU-CA relationship which is the planned joint summit that was to take place in 2024

(then it was rescheduled to be held 2025) in Uzbekistan. Also, the new strategy mentioned the necessity of regular meetings between the EU and Central Asia especially the annual ministerial meetings. This area also included the continued support for the Rule of Law initiative, defense of the international law and setting labor standards. Thus, the compliance with European standards to work with the EU was underlined once more. “Central Asian countries are to imply European (or EU-approved) standards in key political areas to continue their cooperation”³⁶.

The next Joint Roadmap’s key area is deeply connected with the first one through the setting European-like standards for now economic, trade and investment spheres³⁷. “European Union undertakes the responsibility of organizing the biennial EU-CA economic forum with focusing on the Global Gateway initiative”³⁸. The Global Gateway became one of the most important economic tools of the European Union in its cooperation with other regions. “With all its bureaucratic struggles and economic standards’ differences with the Central Asian countries – both regions seem to be interested in deepening economic cooperation”³⁹. This key area of the Joint Roadmap also aims to “support the European investments and opportunities for European business in Central Asian countries, as well as developing

³⁴ Joint Roadmap for Deepening Ties between the EU and Central Asia 2023. URL: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14587-2023-INIT/en/pdf> (accessed 10.02.2026)

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Global Gateway: Commissioner Sikela reinforces EU-Central Asia partnership to boost prosperity - International Partnerships. URL: https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/global-gateway-commissioner-sikela-reinforces-eu-central-asia-partnership-boost-prosperity-2025-03-20_en. (accessed 18.02.2026)

³⁹ David and Goliath: The EU’s Global Gateway versus China’s Belt and Road Initiative. <https://www.bruegel.org/newsletter/david-and-goliath-eus-global-gateway-versus-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative>. (accessed 18.02.2026)

skills of Central Asian entrepreneurs to enter the European market”⁴⁰. Therefore, according to the strategy EU gives an opportunity for Central Asian goods and workers to enter European market. Though the total turnover of the EU’s trade with Central Asia remains low, EU is region’s main export destination with about a third of its overall exports. According to the official EU statistics “EU goods imports from Central Asia continue to increase (by 68% in 2024), but exports from the EU to Central Asia decreased slightly (by 5%)”⁴¹.

The next Joint Roadmap’s key area focuses on “engaging on energy, climate neutral economy and cooperating on the European Green Deal (EGD) through the development of intraregional connectivity projects (such as CAREC for example, which remains one of the main EU regional instrument to support the development of the Central Asian countries”⁴²). Regions are “to develop together the connectivity through a sustainable Trans-Caspian Transport Network to establish a stable flow of goods”⁴³. In the shifting geopolitical stage both EU and Central Asia need to create a safe connection route as an alternative to the Silk economic route. This is supported by the Article G of the third key area of the

document that states that EU and Central Asia are to “explore linkages with Eastern Partnership (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova) countries in the Southern Caucasus and with like-minded partners in key connectivity...”⁴⁴. EU also mentions the necessity of developing a digital connectivity network between the Central Asian countries. To this point EU focuses on the “Global gateway strategy of Digital interconnection” and working towards “providing broadband Internet access to rural areas”⁴⁵.

The next Joint Roadmap’s key area is connected with energy and resources. Most of the articles are focused on the European Green Deal and its interconnection with Green Central Asia Initiative, Regional Green Agenda Program, addressing “climate change, protecting biodiversity and water resources”⁴⁶. As was mentioned in the previous strategies EU continues to support Green energy solutions in Central Asian countries. In February 2026 ministers of Foreign affairs of Central Asia reassured the cooperation between their countries and “EU declared an aim to achieve goals mentioned in the Joint Roadmap”⁴⁷. These ecological projects also include addressing the Aral Sea problem and “supporting the legal framework for the International Fund for saving the Aral Sea”⁴⁸.

⁴⁰ Joint Roadmap for Deepening Ties between the EU and Central Asia 2023. URL: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14587-2023-INIT/en/pdf> (accessed 20.02.2026)

⁴¹ EU trade relations with Central Asia. Facts, figures and latest developments. URL: https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/central-asia_en (accessed 20.02.2026)

⁴² European Union - Central Asia: opportunities for cooperation in the field of environmental protection and water management. URL: <https://carececo.org/en/main/news/EU-CA-partnership/> (accessed 20.02.2026)

⁴³ Joint Roadmap for Deepening Ties between the EU and Central Asia 2023. URL: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14587-2023-INIT/en/pdf> (accessed 20.02.2026)

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Berlin Declaration by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Central Asia and Germany. German Federal Foreign Office. URL: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/2755728-2755728> (accessed 20.02.2026)

⁴⁸ Joint Roadmap for Deepening Ties between the EU and Central Asia 2023. URL: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14587-2023-INIT/en/pdf> (accessed 20.02.2026)

Next Joint Roadmap's key area is to address the common security challenges. Most of the points are focused on the continuing work between governments of the Central Asian countries and EU-members "in the framework of European security organizations, such as European Peace Facility (EPF), EU-CA High Level Political and Security Dialogue (HLPSPD), European Security and Defense College (ESDC) and United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA)"⁴⁹. Centre of attention here remains the "Afghanistan issue" where EU and Central Asian countries are to "develop common approaches for a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan"⁵⁰. Also, document mentions the necessity to tackle violent extremism, terrorism, disinformation, human and drug trafficking by developing joint solutions and strengthening border control (as was mentioned in the previous strategies).

The last Joint Roadmap's key area is dedicated to strengthening people-to-people contacts and mobility. EU is "set to support joint training programs for diplomats to continue EU-CA dialogue. European Union (together with regional organizations such as CAREC and countries' government) tend to expand on the tourist sector cooperation"⁵¹. "EU promotes the concept of the "Central Asian Cultural Capitals" to attract tourists and to connect these cities with the respective European Cultural Capitals"⁵². Both regions aim to strengthen cooperation in the educational sphere building on the Erasmus+ Mobility partnership, Horizon Europe program and EU-countries scholarships⁵³.

Now, as was mentioned in the beginning of the chapter we are to visualize the reviewed goals in the UNESCAP model with considered modifications. The Joint Roadmap's goals are depicted in the Figure 3.

Adopted Joint Roadmap provided a clear step-to-step instruction for future deepening ties. Following the 2025 Joint summit it is safe to say that EU is deeply interested in continued development of EU-CA prosperous relations. The sphere of political and security issues got divided into two different key areas. That shows the EU's and Central Asian countries' concern specifically in the political and security issues. More specified energy sector goals mark the common interest in the energy, climate neutral economy and further cooperation with the help of Global Gateway framework and other regional organizations. It institutionalizes dialogue and cooperation and set clear goals for every sphere touched in the document. EU turns to a more pragmatic-based approach: economic tools and transport corridors combined with renewed energy projects.

EU-CA summit in Samarkand, April 4th 2025. The EU-CA Summit was held on April 4, 2025, in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, under the motto "Investing in the Future." The summit itself, as well as the agenda, suggests that this high-level meeting was an important step in building strategic relations between the EU and Central Asian countries. The importance of the event is further emphasized by the status of the participating officials. "The summit was attended by the Heads of State of the five Central Asian countries, EU high-ranking officials, includ-

⁴⁹ Joint Roadmap for Deepening Ties between the EU and Central Asia 2023. URL: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14587-2023-INIT/en/pdf> (accessed 20.02.2026)

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Ibid

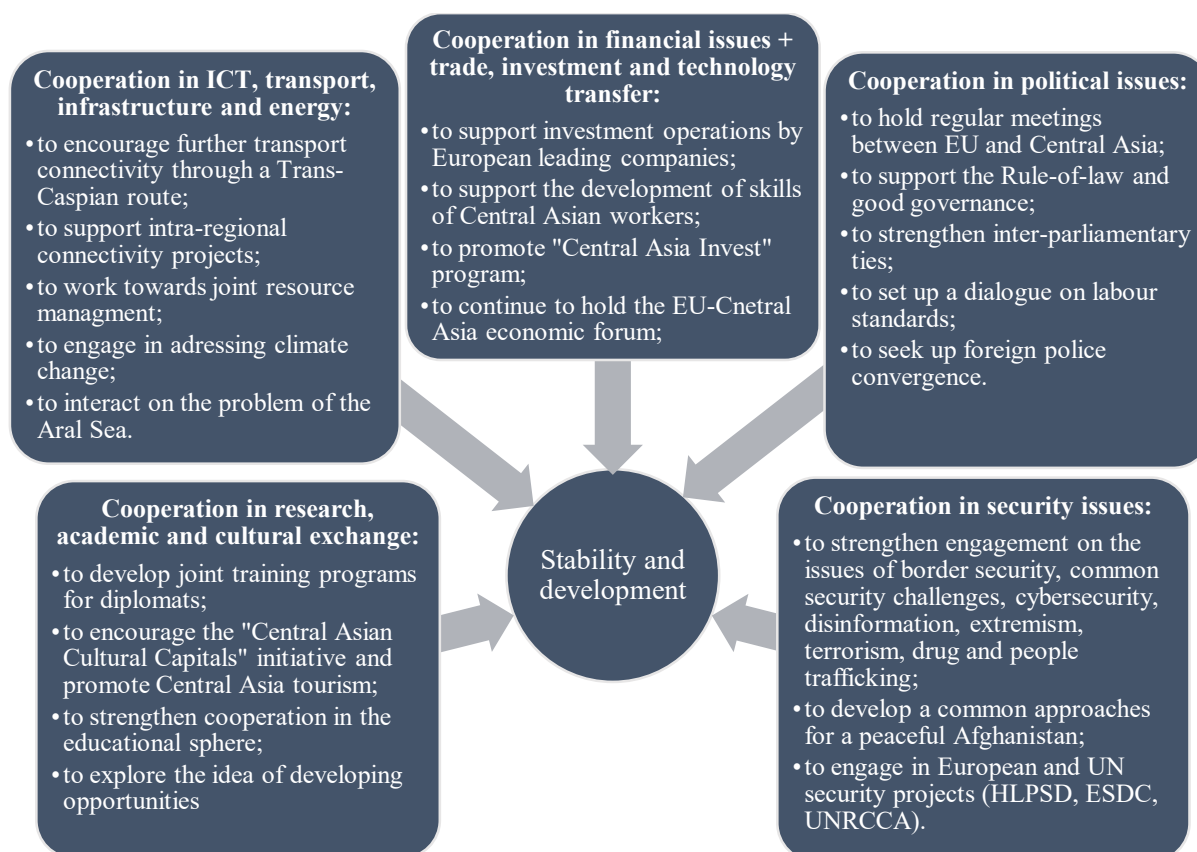


Figure 3. EU 2023 Joint Roadmap's goals in the framework of the regional cooperation spheres model

ing the Presidents of the European Council and the European Commission, as well as the President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development”⁵⁴. It is noteworthy that the first summit, which brought together all the relevant high-ranking officials followed a series of previous meetings, visits (such as the series of visits by Josef Sikel, the European Commissioner for International Cooperation, in March 2025), and high-level consultations between the EU and the Central Asian countries.

The summit's agenda covered the following topics: “strengthening multilateral cooperation, addressing common security chal-

lenges, energy issues, developing trade and investment ties etc.”⁵⁵ The Joint Declaration following the first European Union-Central Asia summit stated that the parties “reaffirming our commitment to deeper cooperation in an evolving global and regional geopolitical landscape, have decided to upgrade relations between the European Union and Central Asia to a strategic partnership”⁵⁶.

Nevertheless, despite the challenging goal, the summit showed that the parties, especially the EU, “are predominantly focused on energy and trade, without considering cooperation in all the declared areas in a comprehensive manner at the

⁵⁴ First EU-CA summit: main results. URL: <https://www.imemo.ru/publications/policy-briefs/text/per-viy-sammit-es-tsentrallynaya-aziya-klyuchevye-itogi> (accessed 20.02.2026)

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Joint Declaration following the first European Union-Central Asia summit. URL: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/04/04/joint-declaration-following-the-first-european-union-central-asia-summit/> (accessed 20.02.2026)

current time”⁵⁷. For example, the International Climate Forum did not take place on the sidelines of the summit. Specific project initiatives were in the fields of energy and economics were discussed: an investment package of €12 billion⁵⁸ through the Global Gateway strategy and energy cooperation through the development of the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor infrastructure. The choice of these two topics is obvious since the EU is one of the top three trading partners in Central Asia, as confirmed by a series of Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (EPCAs). Energy is considered a key issue for the EU in terms of diversifying its energy market.

Undoubtedly, the summit is an important event in strengthening relations between the EU and Asian countries within the adopted Joint Roadmap for Deepening

Ties between the EU and Central Asia 2023. However, the existing documents aimed at strengthening a comprehensive partnership are declarative in nature, and the roadmap can be adjusted. The following question remains open: whether holding such comprehensive summits is part of the EU’s strategy to strengthen its status as a common strategic partner in the region, aimed at implementing bilateral agreements under the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (EPCAs).

Strategy shift from 2007 to 2025

To evaluate the current EU-Central Asia relations it is necessary to compare the existing bilateral agreements – the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Level of cooperation between the EU and Central Asian countries

Country	PCA	EPCA	Characteristics of cooperation
Kazakhstan	Yes, in force since 1999	Yes, signed in 2020	Deepest & most advanced partnership. EU’s EPCA covers 29 areas beyond trade (like justice, energy, transport, environment, human rights). Key EU energy and raw materials partner. Enhanced political dialogue.
Kyrgyzstan	Yes, in force since 1999	Yes, signed in 2024	Standard PCA cooperation with prospects of developing EPCA. Engagement under EU’s “Global Gateway”. Focus on Rule of Law and Education initiatives. Member of EU’s GSP+ scheme.
Tajikistan	Yes, in force since 2004	Not yet, talks initiated in 2025	Standard PCA cooperation with prospects of developing EPCA. Development cooperation focus on education, health, rural development. Strategic cooperation in water-energy/security context (border management).
Turkmenistan	Signed 1998, but not ratified	No	Most limited formal framework. Relations governed by the 1998 Interim Trade Agreement. Political dialogue is regular but formal integration is low. Key interest is energy (gas) and connectivity.
Uzbekistan	Yes, in force since 1996	Yes, signed in 2025	Rapidly deepening partnership. Post-2016 reform agenda opened doors. EPCA signature marks strategic upgrade. Strong cooperation in rule of law, economic modernization, green transition. An EU GSP+ beneficiary.

We also created a timeline of the EU-Central Asia cooperation relationship development with the information from strategies,

realized projects, agreements and cooperation treaties in Figure 4:

⁵⁷ First EU-CA summit: main results. URL: <https://www.imemo.ru/publications/policy-briefs/text/per-viy-sammit-es-tsentrallynaya-aziya-klyuchevye-itogi> (accessed 20.02.2026)

⁵⁸ Ibid

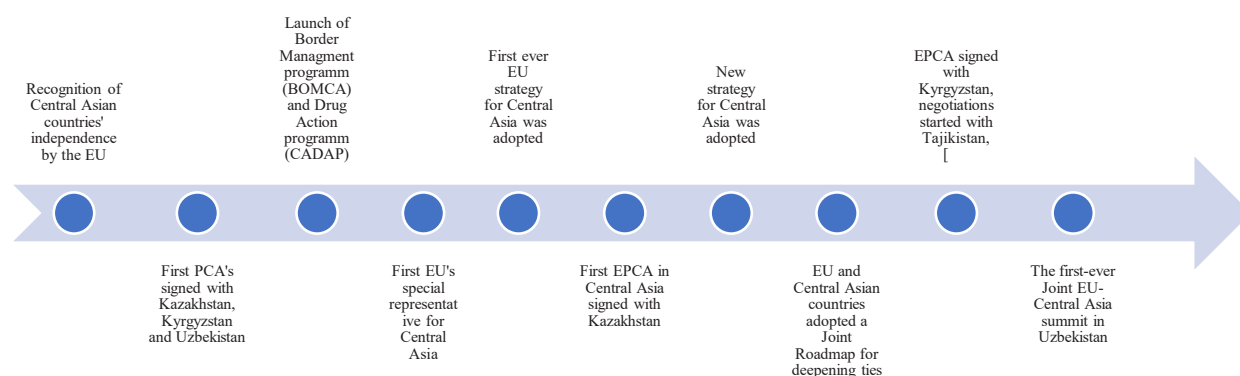


Figure 4. Timeline of EU-CA relationship development

To sum up, the shift in EU's policy in the Central Asia shows the growth of its interest in the Europe-Asian relations and current Joint Roadmap, Joint EU-CA Summit in Samarkand and broadening EPCAs agreements shows the strengthening connection between two regions. Central Asia is a region with a great potential in terms of resources: natural, labor and social ones. Countries are now trying to adjust to the existence in the sphere of interest of three major Eurasian powers: China, Russia and European Union. It is vital that Central Asia continues to expand its connection on the continent being Eurasian "geographical core".

It is important to emphasize that despite the parties' declared interest, the presence of positive results in trade, and agreements on developing cooperation in the energy sector, the climate agenda, and the humanitarian sphere, the mechanisms and institutional tools that the parties are willing to offer are not clarifying at all. Only the first summit has been held, and there is no clear date for the next such meeting. The final document is declarative and framework-based, and the EU needs this format and nature of the documents to guarantee the promotion of its interests, which are aimed at implementing

bilateral agreements under the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreements.

Early engagement stressed energy security, financial stability and most importantly the compliance with international standards (whether they are economical, political or other). Then strategies evolved into mostly principled pragmatism with energetic, security and economical projects prioritized over social and cultural ones. While the latter not completely disappeared from the strategies the role of humanitarian goals is clearly less underlined than in the first EU document.

Considering reviewed timeline and movement towards signing EPCAs clearly shows the Central Asian countries commitment to developing relations with the European Union. And the emphasized "pragmatic-oriented" core of the last joint document is fully supporting the countries' flexibility approach to the international engagements⁵⁹.

But the key research question remains open: who will be the parties to this cooperation. The results of the EU-CA relations are expected in the short and medium term, or there will be bilateral partnership formats for interest groups, where consolidated solutions will only be declarative in nature.

⁵⁹ Diplomatic Flexibility: The Strategy of Central Asian Countries. URL: <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/diplomatic-flexibility-the-strategy-of-central-asi/> (accessed 20.02.2026)

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Международная политика / исследовательская статья

СТРАТЕГИЯ ЕВРОПЕЙСКОГО СОЮЗА В ОТНОШЕНИИ ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ: ИЗМЕНЕНИЕ ПОЛИТИКИ В ПЕРИОД 2007-2025 ГГ.

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Аннотация: Европейский союз развивает тесные связи со странами Центральной Азии с 2007 года, когда была принята первая крупная стратегия ЕС для Центральной Азии. В течение этих лет наблюдается заметный сдвиг в отношениях между Европой и странами Центральной Азии, главным образом по геополитическим и региональным причинам. Данная статья посвящена анализу изменений в стратегиях сотрудничества ЕС–Центральная Азия в 2007, 2019 и 2023 годах, а также анализу совместной декларации, опубликованной после первой встречи ЕС–Центральная Азия в 2025 году. Авторы сосредотачиваются на основных целях политики ЕС в Центральной Азии и средствах их достижения, изложенных в вышеупомянутых документах, а также на эволюции их отношений. На основе анализа официальных стратегических документов, дипломатических контактов и совместной декларации в статье определены основные современные цели ЕС в регионе Центральной Азии.

Ключевые слова: Европейский союз, региональная политика, стратегии сотрудничества, Центральная Азия, Казахстан, Кыргызстан, Таджикистан, Туркменистан, Узбекистан

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