



UNISCI Discussion Papers

ISSN: 1696-2206

[unisci@cps.ucm.es](mailto:unisci@cps.ucm.es)

Universidad Complutense de Madrid  
España

Simão, Lícínia

AN IMPROBABLE PARTNERSHIP: SPANISH AND KAZAKH EFFORTS TO BRING CENTRAL ASIA  
TO THE FORE OF EUROPEAN POLITICS

UNISCI Discussion Papers, núm. 23, mayo, 2010, pp. 225-233

Universidad Complutense de Madrid  
Madrid, España

Available in: <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=76715004014>

- How to cite
- Complete issue
- More information about this article
- Journal's homepage in [redalyc.org](http://www.redalyc.org)

[redalyc.org](http://www.redalyc.org)

Scientific Information System

Network of Scientific Journals from Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal

Non-profit academic project, developed under the open access initiative



## AN IMPROBABLE PARTNERSHIP: SPANISH AND KAZAKH EFFORTS TO BRING CENTRAL ASIA TO THE FORE OF EUROPEAN POLITICS

Licinia Simão<sup>1</sup>

University of Coimbra

### Abstract:

The paper addresses the potential for the current Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU and the Kazakh Chairmanship of the OSCE to coordinate efforts in turning Central Asia into a more prominent area of interest in European politics. It provides an analysis of the interests and major areas of interaction of the two organisations in Central Asia and puts forward a reflection on the impact that such an improbable partnership can have in shifting mutual perspectives and in developing a long-term outlook for the EU and the OSCE in Central Asia.

**Keywords:** EU, OSCE, Central Asia.

### Resumen:

*El artículo discute sobre el potencial de la actual Presidencia española del Consejo de la UE y la Presidencia kazaja de la OSCE para coordinar esfuerzos en convertir a Asia Central en un área de interés más prominente para la política europea. Aporta un análisis de los intereses y de las principales áreas de interacción de las dos organizaciones en Asia Central y propone una reflexión sobre el impacto que tan improbable asociación podría tener en cambiar las perspectivas mutuas y en desarrollar una visión a largo plazo para la UE y la OSCE en Asia Central.*

**Palabras clave:** UE, OSCE, Asia Central.

Copyright © UNISCI, 2010.

Las opiniones expresadas en estos artículos son propias de sus autores, y no reflejan necesariamente la opinión de UNISCI. *The views expressed in these articles are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of UNISCI.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Licinia Simão is a PhD Candidate in International Relations at the University of Coimbra and a Teaching and Research Fellow at the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Email: [liciniasimao@gmail.com](mailto:liciniasimao@gmail.com).



## 1. Introduction

During much of 2010, the chances that the remote region of Central Asia will make it to the agenda of European politics are high. As Kazakhstan takes the Chairmanship of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) during 2010, Spain will lead the foreign policy of the European Union (EU), under the new rules of the Lisbon Treaty, providing the opportunity for both institutions to deepen cooperation on this strategic region. Moreover, the ongoing political crisis, which surfaced in Kyrgyzstan last April, has only added concern and urgency to such cooperation.<sup>2</sup> This improbable alignment of interests began to develop in 2007, when the decision to award Kazakhstan with the 2010 Chairmanship of the OSCE was taken, at the Madrid Ministerial Conference. Since then, Madrid has sought to increase its bilateral presence in the region and deepen economic and political ties with Central Asia, and it has announced that one of its priorities for the first semester of 2010 will be to conduct an assessment and revision of the EU's Strategy for Central Asia, approved in 2007.<sup>3</sup> This partnership promises to increase Central Asian chances of being an important topic in European politics, particularly considering the security concerns linked to Afghanistan and the political instability in Kyrgyzstan. However, although there is great potential for cooperation, not only between the two countries, but also between the two organisations in addressing the urgent and long-term challenges of Central Asia, the risk remains that neither Astana nor Madrid will have the necessary strength to push the agendas of these two complex organisations towards long-term engagement with the region.

The OSCE has been under intense critique over the last years, especially due to what has been perceived in Moscow as an unbalanced approach to the organisation's so-called three baskets.<sup>4</sup> The human dimension dealing with democracy, human rights and rule of law has been advanced much more clearly than the politico-military and economic-environmental ones. This has been most visible in the election observation activities conducted by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). Following the war in Georgia in 2008, the organisation lost even more credibility as the central arena for cooperation on security issues in Europe. Russia vetoed the extension of the OSCE mandate in Georgia, leaving the EU as the only international presence to monitor and report on the existing cease-fire agreement, between Georgia and Russia.<sup>5</sup>

Responding to the new challenges of the post-cold war context in Europe, the EU has undergone profound reforms aimed both at domestic consolidation and external projection.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Simão, Lúcia: "Democracia a ferro e fogo? Relato e análise dos acontecimentos no Quirguistão", *IPRI Occasional Paper*, no. 45 (12 April 2010); Trilling, David: "Letter from Bishkek", *Foreign Affairs* (12 April 2010); Reeves, Madeleine: "Breaking point: Why the Kyrgyz lost their patience", *Open Democracy* (19 April 2010).

<sup>3</sup> "Inovating Europe, Programme for the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 1 January - 30 June 2010". Available at [http://www.eu2010.es/export/sites/presidencia/comun/descargas/Spanish\\_Presidency\\_Program.pdf](http://www.eu2010.es/export/sites/presidencia/comun/descargas/Spanish_Presidency_Program.pdf). See also "Spain and Kazakhstan in the chair", *EUCAM Watch*, no. 7 (December 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Ghebali, Victor-Yves: "Growing Pains at the OSCE: The Rise and Fall of Russia's Pan-European Expectations", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, vol. 18, no. 3 (October 2005), pp. 375-388.

<sup>5</sup> Popescu, Nicu: "Europe's Unrecognised Neighbours: The EU in Abkhazia and South Ossetia", *CEPS Working Documents*, no. 260 (March 2007), pp. 10-11.

<sup>6</sup> Bretherton, Charlotte and Vogler, John (2006): *The European Union as a global actor*, New York, Routledge; Schneider, Gerard (2002): "A never ending success story. The dynamics of widening and deepening European integration" in Steunenbergh, Bernard (ed.) *Widening the European Union. The politics of institutional change and reform*, New York, Routledge, pp. 183-201. Best, Edward (2008): "Widening, deepening ...and diversifying: has enlargement shaped new forms of EU governance?" in Best, Edward; Christiansen, Thomas and Settembri,



Several initiatives stand out as pushing the EU towards a global role in international affairs and particularly in promoting regional stability. The definition of a common foreign policy, with the Maastricht Treaty, provided the tools and institutional rearrangements necessary to establish common priorities and common positions. The 2004 “big bang” enlargement, which included most of the countries from Central and Eastern Europe, was another major drive to consolidate the EU’s role as a fundamental actor in European politics. Finally the European Neighbourhood Policy, established in 2003, provided a more coherent framework for relations with the direct neighbours of the enlarged EU, thus placing the Union as a fundamental piece in the pan-European security.<sup>7</sup>

The EU’s (and NATO’s) enlargements and new roles pose, nevertheless, a dilemma for the OSCE, as well as for Moscow. Thus, both the Finish and the Greek Chairmanships of the OSCE put in motion a process of approximation and trust-building – the Corfu Process –, aiming to address the issues of purpose and method of the OSCE, the largest existing pan-European organisation. Although the outcomes of this process are long-term, positive signs have emerged, suggesting that not only might the organisation overcome the difficulties of political dialogue and trust among its member states, but also that the organisation will strive to remain central in any efforts at revising the existing European security order.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, Kazakhstan’s Chairmanship is most timely in diffusing fears of new division lines in the OSCE area. This will mean more careful attention at the needs of all its member states, not least Central Asia, something Kazakhstan has indicated as a central concern for 2010.<sup>9</sup>

How much Astana will be able to deliver during this year has been a concern of the OSCE participating states. The country has little experience in steering such a large and complex organisation, particularly at this unstable period. Moreover, the financial crisis of 2008 also made less financial resources available in Kazakhstan. This has not prevented Astana from promoting the idea of organizing an OSCE summit in Astana; the first that the organisation will have in 10 years. This ambitious proposal seems to be supported by several member states, not least Russia, but also Spain, which has been very active in assisting Kazakhstan in its preparations to take over the leadership of the OSCE.

## **2. Kazakh-Spanish Cooperation**

Traditionally, member states holding the EU Presidency tend to put forward their particular agendas, seeking to capitalize on the visibility and resources at their disposal. However, Spain faces a particular challenge, having taken the first Presidency of the Council of Ministers to be exercised under the new rules of the Lisbon Treaty. This new division of powers in the EU’s foreign policy is still to be translated into operational details, but so far the permanence

---

Pierpaolo (ed.) (2008): *The Institutions of the Enlarged European Union*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., pp. 222-242.

<sup>7</sup> Stefanova, Boyka: “The European Union as a Security Actor. Security provision through enlargement”, *World Affairs*, vol. 168, no. 2 (Fall 2005), pp. 51-66. Dannreuther, Roland: “Developing the alternative to enlargement: the European Neighbourhood Policy”, *European Foreign Affairs Review*, no. 11 (2006), pp. 183-201.

<sup>8</sup> “Foreign Minister and OSCE Chairperson Ms. Dora Bakoyannis, opening remarks at the Corfu Meeting with OSCE Foreign Ministers”, *Organization of Security and Cooperation of Europe (OSCE)* (28th June 2009), available at: [http://www.mfa.gr/www.mfa.gr/Articles/en-US/280609\\_K\\_2122.htm](http://www.mfa.gr/www.mfa.gr/Articles/en-US/280609_K_2122.htm).

<sup>9</sup> “Statement by Mr. Kanat Saudabayev, chairman-in-office of the OSCE and Secretary of State and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, at the 789<sup>th</sup> meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council”, *Organization of Security and Cooperation of Europe (OSCE)*, Vienna, (14 January 2010), available at [http://www.osce.org/documents/cio/2010/01/42290\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/cio/2010/01/42290_en.pdf).



of the rotating Presidency has had the advantage of allowing some level of preparation and continuity in the EU's foreign policy, at this moment of transition. Therefore, seeking to take on a new more comprehensive view of the EU's priorities, Madrid has announced Central Asia as one of its priorities for the first semester of 2010.

As acknowledged by Spanish officials, the current security situation surrounding Afghanistan and the EU's interests in Central Asian energy give the motto for a reassessment of the EU's strategy and provide the opportunity for Spain to take the lead.<sup>10</sup> Spain, like other EU countries, has cooperated closely with Kazakhstan in its preparations for the 2010 OSCE Chairmanship, promoting bilateral meetings at the Foreign Ministry level, but also in Vienna at the OSCE Headquarters. The political crisis in Kyrgyzstan only added urgency to such interactions, and both the EU and the OSCE sent their Special Representatives to Bishkek, while Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Ángel Moratinos, discussed the issue with the Kazakh Foreign Minister at the EU-Central Asia ministerial meeting, in Brussels, at the end of April.

Moreover, Madrid has also started to develop close economic cooperation with the region, supported by sustained political interaction. The year of 1999 marked an important departure from the previous lack of cooperation, with the reciprocal opening of embassies in Madrid and Almaty. Moreover, the Spanish King, Juan Carlos I, visited the region in the summer of 2001 and has developed close and personal relations with President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan. As Álex González argues, Spanish foreign policy towards the region evolved closely with the EU's, at first marked by a strong economic dimension, but becoming more comprehensive after September 11 and the war in Afghanistan, to include security concerns as well.<sup>11</sup> The Spanish OSCE Chairmanship in 2007 was another fundamental stepping stone to bring Central Asia to the fore of Spanish priorities. Plans for the opening of a second embassy in Central Asia, most likely in Uzbekistan are under way, as well as an expansion of cultural diplomatic ties. Naturally, such contacts have produced dividends for the Spanish companies looking to take part in Kazakhstan's fast economic development (namely Repsol and the Spanish train builder Talgo). Illustrating this attempt to bring Central Asia to the fore, Madrid has also set up an Observatory for Central Asia, gathering experts on the region, which can provide insight on the priorities which should be undertaken towards the region.

Nevertheless, the fast deteriorating political climate in Central Asia must be addressed and poses a challenge to European relations with the region. After the expectations that the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan, in 2005, would positively influence the democratization processes in the region, a backlash on democracy, human rights and rule of law, strengthened by efforts to curb radical Islam in the region, has left the Central Asian societies further constrained by the current regimes. Moreover, as the financial crisis limited resources available, these societies have also been hampered in their economic perspectives, including civil society actors, largely dependent of external assistance to maintain their activities. The attribution of the OSCE Chairmanship to Kazakhstan was particularly controversial in this regard.<sup>12</sup> Although Kazakhstan has experienced some level of liberalization, mainly in the economic sphere, and the Kazakh leaders made specific commitments to improving political

<sup>10</sup> "Interview with Luis Felipe de la Peña, Director General for Europe & North America, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Cooperation", *EUCAM Watch*, no. 2 (January 2010).

<sup>11</sup> González, Álex: "España, ¿nuevo motor europeo de las relaciones con Asia Central?" *Monografías del Observatorio de Política Exterior Europea*, no. 4 (February 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Pannier, Bruce: "Doubts Rise as Kazakhstan Prepares for OSCE Chairmanship", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Press Room*, 5 December 2009, at <http://www.rferl.org/content/feature/1895964.html>.



and civic liberties in the country, in the run-up to their Chairmanship,<sup>13</sup> the highly centralized political authority in the hands of President Nazarbayev has left the parliament controlled by his party, while a personality cult of the President is taking shape. Civil society and journalists are among the most endangered professional classes, not only in Kazakhstan but through most of Central Asia and the former-Soviet space.<sup>14</sup> Recent reports on the deaths of two prominent Kyrgyz journalists in Almaty, Kazakhstan, raised concern not only with the increasingly repressive nature of the previous Kyrgyz regime, but also with the possible involvement of Kazakh authorities in these events.<sup>15</sup> This is certainly a major setback in political freedoms in Central Asia, which both Spain, in its position as spokesperson for the European Union, and the remaining OSCE participating states will have to address.

### **3. Overlapping Agendas and Mismatched Approaches**

The definition of the agendas of large organisations, such as the EU and the OSCE, is a highly constrained process. Countries leading them at a certain moment can only in a limited way influence the direction they take. Nevertheless, the promotion of major events or the public commitment to certain priorities represents an opportunity to make a lasting impression in the institutional history of these organisations and eventually to decisively influence substantive discussions. This process is fairly well documented for the European Union<sup>16</sup>, and similar dynamics take place in the OSCE. Kazakhstan has sought to promote a very specific view of what the priorities should be for the organisation, during 2010. Both President Nazarbayev and Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabaev have underlined the importance of the Kazakh Chairmanship to “bring the countries to the East and West of Vienna closer together” and to move the OSCE beyond an approach “segmented into blocs, where the West remains aloof from the space ‘east of Vienna’”.<sup>17</sup> This means not only a renovated attention to the problems facing the countries in the CIS, and Central Asia in particular, but also a shift towards security issues in these regions and eventually away from electoral observation and democracy promotion.

In this respect, and as initiated by the Corfu Process, the OSCE is well positioned to host the debate on the security in Europe, including here a revision of the organisation’s legal status, a debate on the Russian President’s proposal on a Treaty for European Security, and the enforcement of the Agreement on Adoption of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe. Moreover, transnational threats such as drug trafficking, nuclear proliferation and counter-terrorism are also part of an agenda, largely shared both in the West and among Central Asian states. This has been framed in the context of the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, where Kazakhstan has been particularly active through assistance, and where the

<sup>13</sup> Freedom House and OSCE-2010 Kazakhstan NGOs Coalition (2009): *The OSCE and Kazakhstan: Reform Commitments remain unfulfilled*. Available at

[http://oscemonitor.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/The\\_OSCE\\_Chairmanship\\_and\\_Kazakhstan\\_FINAL.pdf](http://oscemonitor.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/The_OSCE_Chairmanship_and_Kazakhstan_FINAL.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> J.G. Cefalo: “Journalists In Central Asia Struggle In ‘Atmosphere Of Hopelessness And Fear’”, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 13 January 2010, at

[http://www.rferl.org/content/Journalists\\_In\\_Central\\_Asia\\_Struggle/1928436.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/Journalists_In_Central_Asia_Struggle/1928436.html).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Schalk, Jelmer; Torenvlied, René; Weesie, Jeroen; Stokman, Frans: “The Power of the Presidency in EU Council Decision-Making”, *European Union Politics*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2007), pp. 229-250. Elgström, O. (ed.) (2003): *European Union Council Presidencies. A Comparative Perspective*, London, Routledge.

<sup>17</sup> “Statement by Mr. Kanat Saudabayev” *op cit.*. “Text of the video address by President Nursultan Nazarbayev on the occasion of Kazakhstan’s assumption of the Chairmanship of the OSCE”, 14 January 2010. Available at [http://www.osce.org/documents/pc/2010/01/42333\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/pc/2010/01/42333_en.pdf).





West and Russia also share a common interest. Finally, the role of the OSCE on the protracted conflicts in Eurasia (Georgia, Moldova and Azerbaijan) could also be enhanced by the Kazakh Chairmanship, renewing the contribution of the organisation to security in Europe.

On the other hand, the priorities of the Chairmanship for the human dimension have been shifted toward “politically safe” areas, such as inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue, summed under the idea of “tolerance”. However, it is not likely that Kazakhstan will be able to completely dismiss the traditional importance, which the organisation attributes to democracy, namely election monitoring and human rights. Recognising this much, the Kazakh Foreign Minister underlined rule of law and independence of the judiciary as concrete issues the Chairmanship will promote. This illustrates the underlying tension within the OSCE between the views sponsored by Moscow and those of the Western European and North American countries, which Kazakhstan will have to address.

The EU’s official response to the listed Kazakh priorities underlined this concrete view that, although the EU “appreciates the Chairmanship’s engagement in the field of tolerance and non-discrimination” it believes “we [the OSCE] must focus our work this year on other human dimension commitments, including those concerning human rights, fundamental freedoms, democratic institutions and the rule of law”.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the EU statement clearly underlines the importance of cooperation between civil society organisations, namely Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and OSCE institutions and participating states. Such a position can be read as a direct response to Russia’s statements that a focus on enhancing transparency within the organisation’s work should be seen as a priority, namely in its collaboration with NGOs.<sup>19</sup>

For the European Union the strengthening of the OSCE is a fundamental aspect in the stabilisation of the European continent and a crucial forum to engage in constructive dialogue with Russia, and its partners in Eurasia. The organisation provides a powerful forum for exchange and dialogue that could prove crucial to address some of the challenges in the Eurasian space. Nevertheless, over the last decade, the EU and NATO have taken on more security tasks, affecting the delicate balance between the three dimensions of the OSCE, as mentioned above.<sup>20</sup> The EU has been fully supportive of the Corfu Process, and it is therefore expected that the Spanish Presidency will look for ways to build bridges with the OSCE and support its work in different areas, not least in Central Asia. There is certainly room for mutual exchanges between the two organisations, with large learning potential for both. The EU, despite its ability to influence the agenda of the OSCE, could aim at better coordinating with the OSCE in an area where its knowledge and interest are limited and where the OSCE has large expertise.

<sup>18</sup> “EU statement in response to the address by the Chairperson-in-Office, Secretary of State and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, H.E. Kanat Saudabayev”, *Spanish Presidency of the European Union*, Vienna, 14 January 2010, available at [http://www.osce.org/documents/pc/2010/01/42336\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/pc/2010/01/42336_en.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> “Statement by Mr. Anvar Azimov, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation, at the Special Meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council”, *Delegation of the Russian Federation*, Vienna, 14 January 2010, at [http://www.osce.org/documents/pc/2010/01/42338\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/pc/2010/01/42338_en.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> Peters, Ingo (2004): “The OSCE, NATO and EU within the ‘network of interlocking European Security Institutions’: Hierarchization, Flexibilization, Marginalization” in *OSCE Yearbook 2003, Yearbook on the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe*, Baden-Baden, Nomos Verlag, pp. 381- 402. Bailes, Alyson J. K.; Haine, Jean-Yves; Lachowski, Zdzislaw (2008): “Reflections on the OSCE-EU Relationship”, in *OSCE Yearbook 2007, Yearbook on the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe*, Baden-Baden, Nomos Verlag, pp. 65-77.



EU engagement in Central Asian politics has been rather limited. The adoption in 2007 of a EU Strategy for Central Asia sought to streamline EU policies towards the region and to consolidate political relations. The strategy strengthens relations in all areas of cooperation, including through the reinforcement of EU-Central Asia political dialogue with regular meetings of EU and Central Asian Foreign Ministers, reinforcement of dialogue on human rights, cooperation in the areas of education, rule of law, energy and transport, environment and water, common threats and challenges (including border management and combating drug trafficking), and trade and economic relations. The strategy is also supported by a significant increase in EU assistance.<sup>21</sup>

Kazakhstan is a priority partner in EU relations with the region, having been one of the first Central Asian states to sign a Political and Cooperation Agreement with the EU and maintaining the biggest trade volumes with the EU (accounts for almost 85% of the EU's overall trade with the region). Over the last five years, EU trade with Central Asia has grown and the EU is now the main trading partner of the region, accounting for almost a third of its overall external trade (29.1% in 2007).<sup>22</sup> Following the political upheavals of 2005, in Kyrgyzstan, the European Council appointed an EU Special Representative (EUSR) to the region. The EUSR's principal mission is interpreted as enhancing EU visibility and effectiveness in the region and "addressing key threats, especially specific problems with direct implications for Europe".<sup>23</sup>

Central Asian security concerns, linked to the instability in neighbouring Afghanistan and Pakistan, have risen to the fore in the agenda of the OSCE and of the EU. Common interests have developed in making Central Asian borders safer and better equipped to deal with transnational flows of drugs, weapons and people. This has been a central aspect of the EU's Strategy for Central Asia, namely through the BOMCA programme, and there is now potential for coordination with the OSCE, as the organisation looks at border issues as a priority under the Kazakh Chairmanship. Environmental cooperation might also emerge as an area where the two organisations could cooperate, especially in providing continuous stimulus for regional cooperation on water management and energy security. Here the experience of the OSCE is vast, with regional offices throughout Central Asia dealing with national and regional issues, whereas the EU is a newcomer and could develop synergies if it decided to work closely with the Vienna-based organisation.<sup>24</sup> This is all the more important as Kazakhstan is taking the lead of the organisation and has played a mediating role in water and energy issues among its neighbours. EU support to this role, while developing its bilateral relations with the other Central Asian countries, could overcome suspicions of Kazakh regional hegemony dreams, often feared in Uzbekistan.

Overall, and despite the renewed engagement, the EU remains a donor organisation in the region, maintaining a low political profile, owing not only to the lack of legitimacy, but mainly due to the lack of personnel in its delegations in Central Asia.<sup>25</sup> Although there were

<sup>21</sup> Information available at: "EU's relations with Central Asia", *European Union (EU), European Commission, External Relations*, at [http://ec.europa.eu/external\\_relations/central\\_asia/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/central_asia/index_en.htm).

<sup>22</sup> Information available at: "Central Asia", *European Union (EU), European Commission, Trade*, at <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/creating-opportunities/bilateral-relations/regions/central-asia/>

<sup>23</sup> Information available at: "Mission statement of Pierre Morel for Central Asia", Pierre Morel, EU Special Representative for Central Asia, *European Union (EU), European Council*, at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/showPage.aspx?id=1153&lang=en>.

<sup>24</sup> Simão, Licínia: "EU-OSCE inter-institutional interaction: preventing water-related conflict in Central Asia?", paper presented at the *OSCE Academy*, Bishkek (7 May 2010).

<sup>25</sup> Author's meeting with EU Delegation Officials, Bishkek, 29 April 2010.





expectations that the Lisbon Treaty would improve the ability of the EU to act politically in regions where its energy and security concerns are high, the current crisis with the Euro has created wide spread concern that the political project in Europe might be under too much pressure, with clear implications for its external relations. A reinforcement of EU and OSCE approaches, both through the current Chairmanships, but also on a more operational level could reinforce both organisations' ability to strengthen their human dimension. This means that democracy, human rights and rule of law could be enhanced in bilateral dialogues with the region, at a time when the West is perceived by local civil society as uncritical toward regional regimes, due to its security and energy interests. By working together, the Spanish and Kazakh Chairmanships could establish a much needed partnership for comprehensive dialogue between these two regions.

#### 4. The Odds of Central Asia

Central Asian countries have never made it to the top of the agenda of western states or institutions. Their concerns and priorities have often been addressed at the national and regional level, with little help from the outside world. Their transitions from communism have been managed by the old communist bureaucracies, who built their way to power based on the idea of national consolidation. Although no major conflicts erupted (besides the Tajik civil war), the region's potential for violent conflict is high, either due to regional and bilateral disputes on energy and water management, or the fragile and repressive nature of regional regimes. It was particularly after the 9/11 attacks in the US that Central Asia's strategic importance increased, due to its proximity to Afghanistan, but also due to the long tradition of secular states, which regarded Islam as a threat. The US reinforced its military presence in the region, with Russian consent, and slowly the EU also sought to make its way into the region, upgrading relations and establishing a platform for dialogue, balancing its normative value-based approach with a pragmatic interest in having access to the region's energy reserves.

In this regard, Kazakhstan has been regarded as a privileged partner. Astana's multi-vectored foreign policy, aimed at avoiding dependence on one external partner has been praised in Brussels<sup>26</sup>, and close relations between European leaders and President Nazarbayev have helped to consolidate a European presence in Kazakhstan, which the OSCE Chairmanship will certainly reinforce. At the diplomatic level there will certainly be a raise in awareness of the region, but how much of it will be translated into concrete policies is another issue. While the OSCE remains fairly unknown to most of the Central Asian societies, the EU is even more distant. Its presence in the region is too centred on the governmental level, making it closely associated with the existing regimes. Although the overall objective of such close cooperation is often to promote reforms in line with the OSCE commitments, in practice economic and security interests have superseded normative goals. The cases of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are illustrative of this trend. Under German pressure, the EU lifted its sanctions on the Uzbek leaders, following the violent and repressive response of the regime to the demonstrations in Andijan, in 2005.<sup>27</sup> Kazakhstan's regime is also of a repressive nature

<sup>26</sup> "Remarks by Javier Solana, EU High Representative for CFSP at the end of his trip in Central Asia" *European Union (EU)*, Astana (10 October 2007), at [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/discours/96433.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/discours/96433.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> "EU Easing of Uzbek Sanctions 'Absurd'", *IWPR Report News Central Asia*, no. 513 (30 October 2007), at <http://www.iwpr.net/report-news/eu-easing-uzbek-sanctions-%E2%80%9Cabsurd%E2%80%9D>. *Marcus Bensmann*: "Andijan, Germany and Europe", *Open Democracy*, 13 May 2008, at <http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/andijan-germany-and-europe>.



and much of the reforms to which Astana agreed to, leading to the current Chairmanship of the OSCE, have not been fulfilled. Nevertheless, the country has been an important partner in supplying Europe with energy and allowing European companies to invest, in a relatively liberalised and competitive market.

Both organisations face the challenge of supporting normative approaches in a region which is suspicious of intrusive diplomacy. Security concerns with radical Islam have also been often subverted by local regimes to enforce control over dissidents, making these societies less pluralistic and eventually creating pressures that can become quite violent. Balancing between engagement with authoritarian regimes, the provision of security and stability and a genuine and pro-active commitment to human rights, democracy and the rule of law would make these organisations stronger and better suited to address regional concerns. Therefore, over this year of 2010, the opportunity exists for a more comprehensive view of Central Asia to develop in western capitals, but also for the EU and the OSCE to engage in a committed dialogue, aimed at creating synergies instead of duplicating efforts. Central Asian societies would certainly benefit from such changes as would the organisations' reputations in the region.