



*European Economic and Social Committee*

**REX/421**  
**The review of the EU-  
Central Asia Strategy – a  
civil society contribution**

Brussels, 21 January 2015

**OPINION**

of the  
European Economic and Social Committee  
on the  
**Civil society contribution to the review of the EU-Central Asia Strategy**  
(exploratory opinion)

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In a letter dated 25 September 2014, Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs-Minister of Interior of the Republic of Latvia, Rihards Kozlovskis, asked the European Economic and Social Committee to draw up an exploratory opinion on the

*Civil society contribution to the review of the EU-Central Asia Strategy.*

The Section for External Relations, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 17 December 2014.

At its 504th plenary session, held on 21 and 22 January 2015 (meeting of 21 January), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 180 votes to 2 with 180 abstentions.

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## 1. **Conclusions and recommendations**

1.1 The Committee warmly welcomes the incoming Latvian EU presidency's request for an exploratory opinion on the upcoming biennial review of the EU Strategy for a New Partnership with Central Asia<sup>1</sup> and, in particular, its proposal to deepen EU relations with the five Central Asian countries<sup>2</sup> into an effective partnership as one of its main foreign policy priorities.

1.1.1 In so doing, the Committee would again draw attention to the conclusions and recommendations set out in its 2011 opinion on Central Asia<sup>3</sup>, which remain valid.

1.2 The Committee notes the Council conclusion adopted during the previous review that the EU Strategy has proved itself and remains valid<sup>4</sup>. Any attempt by the EU to deepen its relations with the five Central Asian countries must remain on a pragmatic basis and adapted to the changing political, economic and social realities of the region, whilst not neglecting key human rights values and principles, and with sufficient flexibility where possible to facilitate the development of mutually beneficial relationships.

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1 European Union and Central Asia: A Strategy for a New Partnership, Council QC-79.07.222.29C, October 2007.

2 Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

3 CESE 1010/2011, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52011IE1010>.

4 See press release Council Conclusion on Central Asia, June 2012.

- 1.2.1 Above all, the EU will not need reminding that, unlike Europe, there is no real sense of regional affinity between these countries, which must be dealt with individually, and that any deepening or widening of its involvement here will inevitably affect the EU's wider relations with Russia. The EU must take into account existing power structures in the region, whilst reserving the right to act independently. As these five countries were part of the former Soviet Union, Russia considers them, like Ukraine, to be in its own sphere of influence. As a result, it is essential for this review to be mutually informed with the overall EU approach to Russia and its relations with Russia.
- 1.3 The Committee notes that the strategic location of Central Asia has increased in importance since 2011, especially in the light of the Ukraine crisis. It also notes that Chinese involvement in the region is growing exponentially. The region is therefore important for EU-China relations and presents a key opportunity to strengthen the EU-China Strategic Partnership, especially through greater cooperation in the areas of energy and transport. We recommend that this be fully investigated.
- 1.3.1 The Partnership Strategy recognises energy and transport as a priority area. The Committee repeats its 2011 recommendation that the viability of EU links with Central Asia's considerable potential energy reserves must be based on practical and economic considerations. The EU is right to participate in the development of the energy sector in these countries, not least because their reserves offer Europe additional and complementary (as opposed to alternative) sources of energy, albeit complicated by issues of transit and transport. However, it will be important to avoid any potential misunderstanding with China in the context of our mutual interest to increase energy supplies from Central Asia.
- 1.3.2 We strongly recommend that the EU's considerable expertise in enhancing cooperation to improve energy efficiency and deploy renewable energy sources be deployed, as there is significant untapped potential in the region; widening regional cooperation with the EITI<sup>5</sup> is also a key objective.
- 1.3.3 The Committee also repeats its 2011 recommendation that China's and the EU's proposed transport corridors need to become fully aligned, not least where possible in rail infrastructure. We also recommend putting greater effort into getting results from the IGC TRACECA<sup>6</sup> (Intergovernmental Commission for the Europe-Caucasus-Asia transport corridor) to speed up the development of a sustainable infrastructure chain, ensuring multi-modal transport (notably rail and road infrastructure) through linking the corridor with the Trans-European Transport Networks (TENs).
- 1.4 However, the EU will not win hearts and minds in Central Asia by only pursuing economic goals. The partnership strategy also places emphasis on human rights, the rule of law, good

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<sup>5</sup> Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.traceca-org.org/en/traceca/>.

governance and democratisation. It must encourage confidence building within the existing power structures. Here the region still faces difficult challenges due to the painful transition from command to national market-oriented economies, hampered by endemic periods of ethnic, environmental and economic turbulence.

- 1.4.1 The partnership strategy underlines, in particular, the EU's ability to offer "experience in regional integration leading to political stability and prosperity", with specific reference to Member States which joined the EU in 2004 or later. The Committee therefore strongly urges the Latvian presidency to encourage its fellow Member States to share their experiences in handling the transition from command economies, in developing e-governance (and in particular the "e-silk-highway") and other areas of support that could offer added value, especially if connected with efforts to strengthen the rule of law.
- 1.4.2 The recommendations of the Committee's Opinion on "Sustainable change in transition societies"<sup>7</sup> are also important here. In addition, we would point out that business and unions, both separately and as social partners, also have a key role to play, using their existing links and not least in encouraging Central Asian governments to recognise more fully the positive role played by civil society. To promote this and to promote investment we recommend that an EESC delegation visit Central Asia at an early opportunity.
- 1.4.3 The Committee is particularly concerned at reports that the role of the EU Special Representative has not been renewed, and strongly recommends that this post be reinstated as soon as possible.
- 1.5 Youth and Education are particularly important. Here the Committee welcomes the revised, highly sought after EU ERASMUS + programme, which helps develop even deeper educational ties and mobility at tertiary level, to be accompanied by visa facilitation and fee waivers for the region's most gifted students.
  - 1.5.1 Half the population of Central Asia is under 25. Secondary level education is therefore at least as important as tertiary level. The Committee urges increased EU activity and support here, not least through the provision of textbooks (where there is a shortage at secondary level) and wider EU information in local languages. Greater support for teachers, perhaps as part of the wider rural development programme, and a greater outreach to involve parents should also be considered. Increasing the general level of education should also help decrease possible radicalism among local youth.
  - 1.5.2 The Committee also recommends both a greater emphasis on providing support for teaching science in Central Asia, where historically it has been important and where there have been links with the Baltic States in particular, as well as the provision of an enhanced media

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CES 4534/2013, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=OJ:C:2014:067:TOC>.

presence in the region through European television and radio networks, such as Euronews or Euranet, with programmes in local languages.

- 1.6 Nevertheless, the Committee strongly believes that human rights can best be promoted by developing and promoting contact with local civil society and enhancing its capacity to develop into an effective partner and interlocutor with governments, thereby also strengthening the rule of law alongside an independent judiciary.
  - 1.6.1 The encouragement of a non partisan civil service and a greater role for local civil society remains critical, especially as there is little real tradition of either. The engagement of the EU itself with local civil society at wider and deeper levels as part of the human rights dialogue is essential and needs to be strengthened, not least through greater use of the internet and relevant websites.
  - 1.6.2 One of the first results of the EU's Central Asia Strategy in 2007 was the setting up of the EU Human Rights Dialogue Process. On average, some six rounds of such dialogues have been conducted with each country. Whilst the Committee warmly welcomes the EEAS briefings for civil society organisations (CSOs) in Brussels, we nevertheless urge a significant increase in meetings with Central Asian CSOs on the ground. These appear to have been held only on an ad hoc basis, and, in most cases, only before the dialogue, and do not always cover the issues that CSOs see as most important.
  - 1.6.3 The Committee regrets that the role of the traditional, more rural *ashar/hashar* forms of community/self-help associations, which are deeply rooted in both nomadic and settled areas of Central Asia, have so far been largely overlooked by the EU, which would appear only to provide funding to well-established professional NGOs. This also needs urgent rectification.
- 1.7 This opinion does not have enough space for the Committee to comment on many specific areas covered by the partnership strategy, but environmental sustainability and water remain fundamentally important. The Committee would urge greater emphasis on energy efficiency, food security and food safety, but above all on water efficiency, and a concentrated effort to reduce the extremely high rate of water wastage. Water is a vital commodity in the region and should form the basis for whatever support the EU is able to offer to local agriculture.
  - 1.7.1 The Committee reiterates its 2011 recommendation covering the linked but difficult issues of food security, water security and energy supply. Once again, it urges the EU to play a greater role in encouraging the five states to work together to tackle these problems holistically, not least due to the practical experience the EU already has in helping others in this area, and to encourage greater mutual trade in agri-food products.

## 2. **Background**

- 2.1 The incoming Latvian EU presidency has made the deepening of EU relations with the five Central Asian countries one of its main foreign policy priorities. In early 2015, Council conclusions will be adopted following the EEAS's biennial review of the EU's Central Asia Strategy. The Committee has been asked, in particular, to cover the key issues arising from the current geopolitical and strategic situation, especially where there is a clear potential for developing a real partnership between the EU and amongst the Central Asian countries.
- 2.1.1 These issues include security; education; energy; transport; environmental issues, including rural development; the wider aspects of sustainable development; and the business environment, including SMEs, trade and investment.
- 2.1.2 It is not necessary to repeat many of the background details in the 2011 opinion here. However, it is important to recall that although the five countries cover a very large area, the total population (2013) is only some 66 million. These comparatively new states are still taking shape. Only independent since 1991, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, none had any previous national liberation movement. Most have tense relationships with their neighbours, not least due to borders that often bear little relation to ethnic boundaries and this can spill over into violence. What little sense of cohesion remains, however, can also be a negative factor since it is a reminder of Soviet times. Difficult challenges also remain due to the painful transition to national market-oriented economies. The mind-set of ruling elites has not changed much either: the old Soviet nomenklatura administrative structures have transformed into oligarchic, clan or family bureaucracies.
- 2.1.3 The five countries are also at very different stages of development. Kazakhstan is emerging as a key player in the region, with whom EU relations are progressing strongly. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are much poorer, but are relatively open with some civil society involvement. The EU relationship is also growing with Uzbekistan, but Turkmenistan remains the most closed country in the region, with no effective independent civil society.

## 3. **Strategic crossroads**

- 3.1 Despite its inhospitable terrain, Central Asia's importance as a strategic crossroads has increased since 2011. Its location also makes the region highly dependent on neighbouring countries for transport access routes to international markets.
- 3.1.1 Russian influence is strong and has become subject to even greater regional and international attention following the crisis in Ukraine and Russia's repudiation of international treaties. Russia's president is widely perceived as wishing to restore its former spheres of influence. This in turn is leading to heightened concerns about a return to Cold War days and an increase in the potential threat not only to other former Soviet countries, but also to wider interests. In addition it is important not to underestimate the prominent role of Russian "soft power"

through radio and television, aided by the fact that Russian is the region's main means of communication and the high proportion of migrants from the region now working in Russia.

- 3.1.2 In particular, international focus and attention on energy (and natural resources) has increased, although Chinese involvement in the region was already very high. In addition, the prospect of an end to the Afghan war and diminishing US involvement may encourage militant Islamism, and the rise of the so-called Islamic State.
- 3.2 Many see Central Asia as the main arena for renewed Sino-Russian rivalry, with the EU as a bystander. The 2008 financial crisis boosted China at the expense of Russia. In energy terms, the two countries have not enjoyed an easy partnership and, by playing a more active role in Central Asia, China has effectively challenged Russian dominance here. This might in time be sufficient to make Russia seek closer links with the EU despite current tensions. For its part, China (like India) has been noticeably silent about the Ukraine crisis, with many not fully accepting European concerns.
- 3.2.1 China is also the driving force behind the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), which includes Central Asia, Russia and Iran. Originally created to settle border issues, it has been helpful to China both in promoting itself with the new states and in boosting its own position in Xinjiang, on its side of the border. For Russia, the SCO has been important for maintaining its own influence against China's, but it also offers common ground to discuss security matters, including terrorism, extremism and separatism (the "three evil forces").
- 3.2.2 China's increasingly important role in the region was shown in 2013, when President Xi launched his "Silk Road Economic Belt" initiative, backed by a fund of USD 16.3 billion aimed at building closer links with Europe but also involving the countries *en route*. China's economic activity in the region has been spurred by its need for energy; it has been building both roads and pipelines, with heavy investment in particular in Turkmenistan gas, possibly more than that country is currently able to extract but in line with their vast reserves. Whereas Russia's "Novosti" news agency reported<sup>8</sup> that Russia has offered Tajikistan USD 6.7 million in aid for rural restructuring, a Tajik Minister has since told the Financial Times that China will be investing at least USD 6 billion there by 2017 (nearly 70% of Tajikistan's 2013 GDP, and over 40 times its annual FDI<sup>9</sup>).
- 3.2.3 As in Africa, however, China's input includes the mass importation of Chinese labour and civil engineering skills, which has led to some unpopularity, perhaps exacerbated in Tajikistan by the absence of so many local men working in Russia.
- 3.3 On 1 January 2015, led by Russia, the Eurasian Economic Union will come into being, arising out of the previous Customs Union. Kazakhstan will be part of this, as most likely will

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<sup>8</sup> 7 February 2014.

<sup>9</sup> 22 October 2014, quoted in "The Diplomat" 11 November 2014.

Kyrgyzstan, although that may lead to problems over its flourishing trade as an intermediary for exports from China. Tajikistan may also have no alternative but to join, not least because 52% of its GDP is made up of remittances sent home by Tajiks working in Russia. As before, however, both Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan remain more wary of rebuilding ties with Russia.

3.3.1 However Kazakhstan sees this Union as essentially economic rather than political. It is anxious to maintain a balance between the various outside international interests. Kazakhstan is keen to initial its recently concluded Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU as soon as possible and it has joined the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)<sup>10</sup>, the first Central Asian country to do so. It is regrettable that Kazakhstan's application to join the WTO was not finalised by the WTO Ministerial meeting in 2013, which many blame on delays brought about by its large Eurasian neighbour.

3.4 Although Islamist militancy is a minority phenomenon (religious fervour was a major factor in the 1990s Tajik civil war), each regime pursues aggressive secularist policies, which is counter-productive given the increasing demand for Muslim education, including from women. Most of the population is Sunni, and fighters from the region have been found in Syria. Iran is interested in strengthening its ties in the region, not only in terms of transport and energy infrastructure (and linkage with China), but also in the realm of culture and language. The Tajiks and significant parts of Uzbekistan (e.g. Samarkand, Bokhara) speak Farsi. Turkic being the other main local language, Turkey also has key interests in the region.

#### 4. **The potential for developing a stronger EU-Central Asia partnership**

4.1 The Committee's 2011 opinion recognised a comparatively weak EU role in the region. The EU launched its own Central Asia Strategy in July 2007, now again due for regular review. Although the trade levels are low, the EU is a major trading partner with each country, especially Kazakhstan. In 2013, the EU accounted for 38% of overall Kazakh trade, taking two thirds of its exports (mainly energy). However total EU imports from the region only reached EUR 24.9 billion and exports EUR 10.6 billion, 1% of total EU trade.

4.1.1 Every opportunity must be taken to increase the levels of trade with and investment in each country, and to develop the role and activity of the social partners as key civil society actors.

4.1.2 Kyrgyzstan is eligible for GSP<sup>11</sup>, but Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have not yet applied for GSP+, undoubtedly due to the conditions attached. In 2016 Turkmenistan will lose its eligibility for GSP due to its reclassification as a "middle-income" country. As only Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are WTO Members, FTAs, particularly along the lines of those the EU has concluded with Ukraine, Georgia or Moldova, are not in prospect. Nevertheless,

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<sup>10</sup> A key forum for dialogue and cooperation attended at Head of State and Government level – 51 in October 2014.

<sup>11</sup> The EU's Generalised System of Preferences?



wherever possible, the EU needs to look at Central Asia much more closely in connection with its Eastern Partnership and Black Sea Strategies.

- 4.2 Central Asia presents a key opportunity to strengthen the EU-China Strategic Partnership through greater cooperation, especially in the areas of energy and transport. This needs to be investigated in depth since both parties aim to increase their energy supplies from the region.
- 4.2.1 Given the vast hydrocarbon resources of Central Asia, notably in natural gas, at present these objectives are not perceived to be in fierce competition. Population and economic growth in the region will of course increase internal energy needs, but here there is also significant untapped potential for improving energy efficiency and deploying renewable energy sources. There is a very strong case for enhancing cooperation in these areas, since the EU has developed considerable policy expertise and a strong sustainable energy industry, as well as in widening cooperation in the region with the EITI<sup>12</sup>, which includes greater transparency over government revenues from energy sources and strengthens the role of civil society.
- 4.3 For the EU, TRACECA remains an important initiative. It is an international programme to strengthen economic relations, trade and transport communication from the Black Sea basin to the South Caucasus and Central Asia based on existing transport systems, through the political will and common aspirations of its 13 Member States, including the relevant former Soviet and Central Asian countries (except Turkmenistan), Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania.
- 4.3.1 Building a modern and interoperable road and strategic railway infrastructure along the Silk Road route is a key interest for China, the EU and Russia as well. The successful integration of this region through modern and reliable infrastructure should offer a major opportunity not just for greater regional economic integration but also to promote the mobility of people and multicultural exchange, in turn producing a better environment for advancing the rule of law and democracy. The Committee therefore applauds the Latvian presidency's special emphasis on the development of multimodal transport links in Eurasia.
- 4.4 Kazakhstan has vast reserves of natural resources and fossil fuels, much of which is untapped; although in production terms its mining industry is far from realising its full potential<sup>13</sup>. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan enjoy rich oil and gas resources, whereas Turkmenistan alone holds over 9% of natural gas reserves worldwide<sup>14</sup>. On the other hand, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have yet to develop their hydropower potential and valuable mineral resources<sup>15</sup>. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are among the world's top 10 cotton producing countries, although they lack sufficient water resources for this very thirsty crop.

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12 The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative.

13 [http://www.gecf.org/gecfmembers/kazakhstan\(observer\)](http://www.gecf.org/gecfmembers/kazakhstan(observer)).

14 BP Statistical Review of World Energy, June 2014.

15 Kyrgyzstan's iron ore deposits are estimated at 5 billion tons, most containing about 30 percent iron. Also, Kyrgyzstan has one of the largest proven gold reserves in the world.

4.5 However, the EU will not win hearts and minds in Central Asia by only pursuing economic goals. One third of the population of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan live below the poverty line. In Kyrgyzstan more than two thirds of the working-age population is employed in the informal sector. Over a million Tajiks and half as many Kyrgyz work abroad, mainly in Russia or Kazakhstan, not least because of youth unemployment at home. Despite legal equality for women, persistent gender imbalances in wages are partly related to low levels of employment of women, and then in low-paid professions. Women also face diminishing educational opportunities.

4.6 This opinion therefore makes a series of key recommendations covering energy and water efficiency, together with food security (which remains a key issue in Tajikistan), water security and energy supply, echoing those made in the 2011 opinion.

## 5. **The role of civil society**

5.1 A core belief of the EESC is that developing contact with local civil society is one of the best ways for the EU to be most effective. It is important too that this is done in a positive way, not least to try and combat increased governmental concern in the region about the role of civil society<sup>16</sup>. Fostering wider youth contact and exchanges should help facilitate this. The Committee warmly welcomes the high level of support sought in Central Asia under the widened EU ERASMUS+ programme fostering deeper education links and mobility at tertiary level, ideally accompanied by visa facilitation and fee waivers for the region's most gifted students.

5.1.1 Secondary level education offers another key area for increased EU activity and support, not least through the provision of wider EU information in local languages, and greater outreach to involve parents. In some states the education system is deteriorating; there is a shortage of textbooks at secondary level and good education is generally seen as elitist, not least due to the high cost of universities. Investing in teacher promotion at grass root level could also be beneficial, perhaps as part of wider rural development. The provision of an enhanced media presence in the region through European television and radio networks, such as Euronews or Euranet, with programmes in local languages should also be seriously considered.

5.2 In its 2011 opinion, the Committee looked at the role and activity of wider independently organised civil society in Central Asia. Since then, regrettably, its situation does not appear to have markedly improved in any of the five countries. Increased governmental concerns have resulted in increased pressure on NGOs, media and opposition figures. In Kazakhstan in late 2011, oil worker protests left 14 dead and many injured. This led to increased government suspicion of independent trade unions, the jailing of a key opposition leader and the banning of several media outlets.

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<sup>16</sup> Not least due to the "Arab Spring", the recent Russian "foreign agents law" and then the Euromaidan movement in Ukraine.

- 5.2.1 Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, countries with a more vibrant civil society, set out to tighten their grip on international NGOs. Kazakhstan set up a study into the experience of "other countries" (i.e. Russia) whilst Kyrgyz MPs re-initiated a draft law inspired by that legislation.
- 5.3 The 2011 opinion also paid specific attention to the traditional, more rural *ashar/hashar* forms of community/self-help associations (e.g. for improving community infrastructure), deeply rooted in both nomadic and settled areas of Central Asia. Their revival in the 1990s followed the collapse of the socialist system, notably in the social sector. While *ashar* commonly lack formal structures, some have been institutionalised and registered as NGOs. For international donors, these groups offer a foundation for projects that empower rural communities.
- 5.3.1 We regret that the EU only tends to fund well-established NGOs, but note that *ashar/hashar* rely on pre-soviet traditions that are often incompatible with donors' values, not least when decisions are made by "*aksakals*", ("wise elders"). When they deem a project to be unnecessary, that is followed strictly by the community, hampering implementation.
- 5.4 The EU's Central Asia Strategy in 2007 was followed by the setting up of the EU Human Rights Dialogue Process, with six rounds of such dialogues since conducted with most countries (eight with Uzbekistan, five with Kyrgyzstan).
- 5.4.1 Before and after each dialogue round, the EEAS holds briefings for CSOs in Brussels. However, meetings with Central Asian CSOs on the ground have only been held on an ad hoc basis, in most cases before the dialogue. These local seminars offer a forum for Central Asian and European civil society to discuss country-specific human rights issues with EU representatives and government officials, who decide the agenda between them. Civil society recommendations drawn up at these seminars need to be fully incorporated into the human rights dialogues.
- 5.4.2 The relevance and impact of the human rights dialogues and the accompanying civil society seminars differ. Only in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have the seminars had some relevance to the actual human rights situation and to the dialogue with the governments, being followed by a few concrete legislative changes<sup>17</sup>, notably over the use of torture. However, in both instances the EU-initiated dialogues played a complementary, facilitating role as the issues had been previously raised within UN fora. Sadly, impact elsewhere has been very limited with just one civil society seminar held in Uzbekistan, in 2008, and none in Turkmenistan.
- 5.4.3 However civil society in Kazakhstan was excluded from the selection of topics for the 2011 civil society seminar, which covered the rights of disabled people and gender issues, but not

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The Kyrgyz parliament adopted a law against torture in June 2012 following the recommendation of the civil society seminar four months earlier, whilst in Tajikistan a law was adopted that same year that classified torture as a criminal offence.

the ongoing oil workers' strike in western Kazakhstan. The 2012 seminar focused on the "Contribution of Civil Society to Judicial Reforms in Kazakhstan", but the Kazakh government took no interest in the event, and nor is it clear whether its recommendations were then included in the human rights dialogues.

- 5.5 The five countries have much in common on the labour front despite differing economic situations: decent work is lacking throughout, the informal economy plays a considerable role, there are high levels of corruption - an environment not conducive to freedom of association.
- 5.5.1 In each country, there are restrictive legal provisions affecting industrial conflicts and in particular the right to strike. Governments often interfere, notably through favoured candidates for trade union office and legal restrictions on union structures, procedures and activities. In Kazakhstan a new law could lead to trade union monopolism, already the case in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. National level (tripartite) social dialogue systems are strongly dominated by the government: the role of social partners is mostly consultative and leading trade unionists are close to the authorities.
- 5.5.2 The 2011 opinion looked closely at the situation with regard to the core ILO Conventions. For many years Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have cooperated with the ILO not least on the Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCP), which Uzbekistan signed in April 2014. The ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour is notably working in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, whilst the EU has also recognised the positive steps taken by Uzbekistan on this issue<sup>18</sup>. Full implementation of these Conventions remains an essential goal.

Brussels, 21 January 2015

The President  
of the  
European Economic and Social Committee

Henry Malosse

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<sup>18</sup> EEAS press release 19 November 2014.