

**No. 15: The 2019 EU Strategy on Central Asia: SEnECA
recommendations for implementation ; Part II**

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POLICY PAPER

No. 15

The 2019 EU Strategy on Central Asia: SEnECA recommendations for implementation Part II

September 2019



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Executive Summary

This policy paper provides recommendations for the implementation of the 2019 EU Strategy on Central Asia with regard to the first and second parts of the Strategy – “Partnering for resilience” and “Partnering for prosperity”. It follows the first part of recommendations (paper No 14) which gave a general assessment of the new Strategy and the recommendations on the tasks provided in the third part of the Strategy “Working better together”.

This paper provides a set of recommendations to the EU on the implementation of the tasks from the new Strategy ranked the highest in the SEnECA scorecard (discussed in detail in Paper No. 14). Among those are the tasks aimed at “Partnering for resilience” – border management, strengthening cooperative mechanisms on the environment, water management and climate change, as well as support in legal and judicial issues, human rights, labour standards, governance, electoral process, reform and women's rights. Tasks related to scientific aspects of climate and water issues, as well as high-level political and security dialogue also scored high among the experts. These recommendations are expected to bring the EU’s experience in the respective fields to Central Asia while also expanding the EU’s normative power in the region.

Among the tasks aimed at “Partnering for prosperity”, those related to the promotion of business and investment environment and support to the private sector in Central Asia scored the highest in the SEnECA scorecard, followed by the tasks devoted to development of transport corridors, supporting mobility of students and tutors, participation in science programs, as well as standardisation and quality issues for trade facilitation.

SEnECA experts came forth with multiple recommendations for the implementation of the aforementioned tasks. In general, these recommendations suggest that the EU should focus on the direct counterparts (paying less attention to intermediaries) in Central Asia, pay particular attention to the different needs and situations in each of the Central Asian countries, make the communication with the relevant subjects more efficient, use assistance of other external like-minded actors and take particular note and lessons from similar actions of not like-minded actors.

List of abbreviations

2019 EU Strategy on Central Asia; or Strategy – Joint Communication of the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign and Security Policy to the European Parliament and the Council “The EU and Central Asia: New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership,” Brussels, 15 May 2019, JOIN(2019) 9 final

BOMCA – Border management programme in Central Asia

C5 – all five Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan)

DCFTA – Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area

EAEU – the Eurasian Economic Union

EBRD – the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

EFTA – the European Free Trade Association

EHEA – the European Higher Education Area

EPCA – Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement

EU – the European Union

GDPR – the General Data Protection Regulation

GPA – Government Procurement Agreement of the World Trade Organization

GSP – the Generalised Scheme of Preferences

GSP+ – the Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus

IEC – the International Electrotechnical Commission

IMF – the International Monetary Fund

ISO – the International Organization for Standardisation

OSCE – the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

P4R – “Partnering for resilience” chapter of the 2019 EU Strategy on Central Asia

P4P – “Partnering for prosperity” chapter of the 2019 EU Strategy on Central Asia

SCO – the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

SMEs – small and medium enterprises

TEN-T – the Trans-European Transport Network

UNGA – the General Assembly of the United Nations

WB – the World Bank

WTO – the World Trade Organization

1. Introduction

The new EU Strategy for Central Asia² was announced by the European External Action Service on 15 May 2019.³ It aims at setting the EU policy towards Central Asia for the next decade. The strategy covers a variety of areas and levels of engagement. In order to support effective implementation of the new strategy, SEnECA hereby provides the second part of recommendations.

This paper is based on experts' opinions, notably semi-structured interviews with experts from the SEnECA network, including all five Central Asian countries, as well as discussions of the three working groups among SEnECA and other Central Asian experts gathered together at the SEnECA Recommendation Workshop "Central Asia in 2030 and beyond: with or without the European Union" held on 11 July 2019 in Brussels, Belgium.⁴

The SEnECA project is comprised of three phases – mapping, analysis and recommendations. This policy brief is a part of the final phase. The three papers of the recommendations phase are based on and serve as a succession to a mapping and analysis exercise on the political and security relations, economic relations and trade, as well as cultural and other relations between the EU and Central Asia.⁵ The first of the three recommendation papers – No 13 "Central Asia in 2030: SEnECA forecasts for the region and the role of the European Union" – provided a set of scenarios on how Central Asia and its cooperation with the EU could develop by 2030. The previous paper, No 14, gave a general assessment of the new Strategy and recommendations on the tasks provided in the third part of the Strategy – "Working better together".

This paper focuses on the first and second parts of the 2019 EU Strategy on Central Asia, "Partnering for resilience" (P4R) and "Partnering for prosperity" (P4P). The first chapter of this paper is devoted to assessment and detailed recommendations on the implementation of the first part of the Strategy, which oversee political, security as well as economic dimensions. The second chapter provides suggestions on how to better implement the tasks under the "Partnering for prosperity" bloc.

Together with the conclusions, the paper contributes with a structured set of proposals that could assist in strengthening and energising the EU and Central Asian relations in the upcoming decade.

² Joint Communication of the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign and Security Policy to the European Parliament and the Council "The EU and Central Asia: New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership," Brussels, 15.05.2019, JOIN(2019) 9 final, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/joint_communication_-_the_eu_and_central_asia_-_new_opportunities_for_a_stronger_partnership.pdf

³ "New EU Strategy on Central Asia," European External Action Service, 15 May 2019, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/62412/new-eu-strategy-central-asia_en

⁴ Agenda of the event is available here: SEnECA Recommendation Workshop "Central Asia in 2030 and beyond: with or without the European Union?" 11 July 2019, Brussels, <http://www.tepsa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/here-1.pdf>

⁵ All SEnECA policy papers are available here: "Policy Papers & Briefs," SEnECA, <https://www.seneca-eu.net/policy-papers-briefs/> and https://duepublico2.uni-due.de/receive/duepublico_mods_00047232?q=SEnECA

2. Recommendations for the EU and Central Asia “Partnering for resilience”

In the upcoming decade, the EU will strengthen its relations with the Central Asian countries to support them, as the Strategy states, to “overcome domestic and external challenges and perform reforms”⁶. The Strategy should be seen not as Central Asia-centric, but rather in the context of the EU’s other strategies for external engagement, such as those for global outreach and connectivity.

Table 1 below represents the top three SEnECA scores for the tasks under the “Partnering for resilience” (P4R) part of the Strategy. These tasks received no less than 4.4 points out of 5 (Appendix II contains a full list with the content of each task). Border management (Task No 9) received 4.7 points out of 5, inter- and intra-regional cooperation in the field of environment, water and climate change (Task No 11) scored at 4.6; whereas renewable energy, rule of law, including good governance, human rights, labour standards, women empowerment, legal reform (Task No 1) was given an average score of 4.4. These tasks constitute the top priorities to concentrate on for the EU.

Table 1: Scores of the top three P4R tasks of the 2019 EU Strategy on Central Asia (see Appendix I for the full list of the scores of tasks for “Partnering for resilience”).

Task No.	Task as of the 2019 EU Strategy on Central Asia	Score
9.	Strengthening cooperation on modern integrated border management, building upon longstanding EU-Central Asia and EU-Afghanistan cooperation	4.7
11.	Strengthening inter-regional and intra-regional cooperation fora and mechanisms in the field of the environment, water and climate change	4.6
1.	Using regional programmes to support the sharing of experience in legal and judicial reform, human rights, international labour standards, good governance, electoral reform and women’s empowerment between the EU and Central Asia, among Central Asians themselves, and with countries of the Eastern Partnership	4.4

At the same time, sharing expertise on cyber security, enhancing cooperation with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Regional Central Asia received the lowest score of 3.1 out of 5. While rated lower, these aforementioned activities should be by no means underestimated. Cooperation with other organisations has to be enhanced, however, the EU’s own efforts should prevail among the priorities. Also, expertise in such spheres as cyber security has to be shared. But the EU should take note that approaches in the region may differ from those of the EU, conditioned in part by the interaction of the Central Asian countries with other power centres that profess a different approach to cyber security based on strong control of cyber space.

Border management and cross-border cooperation have been of utmost importance both for the EU and Central Asia, considering both security and economic aspects of the issue. Still, major actions and improvements need to take place in the upcoming years. As far as the rule of law and human rights are concerned, some Central Asian countries, namely Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, are currently experiencing political transition. Increased cooperation with the EU could lead to a better understanding and support of the current political processes with an emphasis on the rule of law and economic prosperity.

Both the EU and the Central Asian countries have to be realistic and not expect significant and, more importantly, vivid results with regards to the implementation of the top three tasks of the “partnering

⁶ Joint Communication of the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign and Security Policy to the European Parliament and the Council “The EU and Central Asia: New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership,” Brussels, 15.05.2019, JOIN(2019) 9 final, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/joint_communication_-_the_eu_and_central_asia_-_new_opportunities_for_a_stronger_partnership.pdf

for resilience". On the one hand, as previously discussed in SEnECA Paper No.13, a "one-size-fits-all" approach is not working in the region. On the other hand, the Central Asian countries do not want the EU member states to "teach them democracy and introduce the European ideas" that they do not acknowledge/accept. However, a shift in narratives or a message in the EU communication towards Central Asia could be strengthened by emphasising the rule of law and the fight against corruption. In this case, both issues (while less sensitive in comparison to human rights and democratisation) are of utmost importance for the political elites to maintain their legitimacy and address the social grievances of the societies on the ground.

Task 9 "Strengthening cooperation on modern integrated border management, building upon longstanding EU-Central Asia and EU-Afghanistan cooperation"

Border management is a crucial area which will show whether the EU has long-term success in Central Asia, therefore, it is important to continue and adapt the existing projects such as the Border management programme in Central Asia (BOMCA). With regard to creating sustainable connectivity, the cooperation should put an increasing emphasis on customs controls, in particular by providing technical assistance to the Central Asian governments. Supporting customs regulation through increased funding, capacity building and professional training is an important step to bring the Central Asian countries in line with the World Trade Organization (WTO) standards and to facilitate trade.

With regard to task 9, we suggest:

- To facilitate the establishment of a non-governmental and entrepreneurial advisory board in border management issues that could consult the relevant authorities from the perspective of the civil societies and entrepreneurs.
- To facilitate sharing of the best practices and lessons learnt among the Eastern Partnership countries, and among interested EU member states that possess a similar transition experience as the Central Asian countries.
- To facilitate the process of the EU member states becoming lead nations in certain border management and customs control sectors such as digitalisation, anti-corruption, counterterrorism through introducing proper training and standards.
- To hold high-level annual summits, including "EU-CA-Afghanistan" summits, to contribute to better border protection and more effective regional cooperation, in particular when it comes to counter-terrorism operations.
- To share expertise on customs control and standards with the Central Asian countries and increase national and regional capacity, including database training and workshops with EU participation.
- To explore the EU cooperation and/or dialogue options with the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) on border training and information sharing, where possible and appropriate.

Quantitative indicators could be based on the number of meetings, workshops and dialogues of the different partnership formations, while the qualitative indicators for measurement could be based on the progress of reforms of the customs standards, while the.

Task 11 "Strengthening inter-regional and intra-regional cooperation fora and mechanisms in the field of the environment, water and climate change"

In the field of environment, the water-security nexus and climate change are vital for the regional development in the long run. The best way to tackle those issues is to address the challenges via a regional approach. The existing water dialogue should be continued beyond its scheduled end in 2019. Establishing such fora is an excellent means to build trust between the five Central Asian states. Therefore, more emphasis should be put on the intra-regional dialogue which should take

place on all administrative levels. The EU's role could evolve into that of an external facilitator in the mid-term perspective.

With regard to task 11, we suggest:

- To increase dialogue with and among the Central Asian states, notably on different administrative levels. This should not be limited to the Aral Sea, respective ministries and agencies, but include non-state actors, businesses and civil society representatives via the implementation of small-scale projects.
- To facilitate cooperation between the governments instead of establishing new institutions. Since little progress has been made so far due to the absence of the political will among the Central Asian elites, a better way to approach the issue is through a dedicated cooperation agreement between respective countries followed by an action plan with concrete steps to be implemented, monitored and assessed with the assistance or support of the EU member states.
- To further involve the Central Asian researchers in European research projects on the subject matter, incl. Horizon 2020 type and others.
- To utilise the expertise and technologies the EU and its member states have on the efficiency of irrigation, waste-free recycling, and melting glaciers, but also to exchange experience from both regions.
- To expand the policy dialogues, and if possible, also the twinning operations, to include other like-minded external actors as participants – the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries, the US, Japan, South Korea.

Quantitative indicators for measurement could be based on the number of projects with regional participants, exchange programs and visits that will take place, while qualitative indicators could be based on the legal and/or habitual change of the Central Asian societies towards more eco-friendly ones.

Task 1 “Using regional programmes to support the sharing of experience in legal and judicial reform, human rights, international labour standards, good governance, electoral reform and women's empowerment between the EU and Central Asia, among Central Asians themselves, and with countries of the Eastern Partnership”

The implementation of the activities presented in this task has already somewhat started in all Central Asian countries, signalling towards their sustainability in the long run. The EU and its member states have invested in these vital areas of political development and will continue with their commitments.

With regard to task 1, we suggest:

- To promote labour standards and women's empowerment in the framework of the small-scale (pilot) projects from which citizens directly benefit, while ensuring sustainability on a regional basis without further financial support.
- To establish a Women's League in Central Asia (plus Afghanistan) to address issues of protection against violence, inequality, child marriage, and to promote equal representation of women in public service through training programmes.
- To foster cooperation in the sphere of human rights bilaterally and in close cooperation with such international organisations as the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, as they have higher credibility and no perceived political agenda in the region.
- To provide funding to support peer-learning activities and exchange between civil society actors/activists as a potential way to avoid political tensions. The new “Justice, Rights and Values Fund” that will be established under the next Multiannual Financial Framework could provide examples on how to design the funding instruments. A network (coalition, association) of human rights defenders and lawyers at the national and regional level would meet the objectives of this aspect.

- To promote “democratic narratives” in Kyrgyzstan; to further support citizens participation projects which are already in motion in Kazakhstan, while considering the government’s hostility to democratic progress in general – as recent events with protests throughout the country showed.
- To expand cooperation with the EU Eastern Partnership countries on this matter. Both project implementation actors and administration officials should exchange their experience with the Central Asians. This could be done via capacity development training or by the means of twinning programmes. However, it is also crucial to learn from the mistakes made by the Eastern Partnership countries, some of which do not fully share EU values.
- To develop an awareness-raising strategy to, first of all, demonstrate in local languages and regional lingua franca Russian, where appropriate, what the EU is doing on the ground and what it stands for when it comes to the rule of law, human rights, women empowerment, and, secondly, to increase the basic knowledge about Central Asia in the EU.

Quantitative indicators could be based on the number of civil servants taking part in twinning programmes or workshops, the number of released political prisoners, an increase in the number of acquittals, the female representation in leading positions, the number of campaigns and research within the human rights domain. Qualitative indicators for measurement could be based on the reform progress with regard to labour standards, rule of law and good governance.

3. Recommendations for the EU and Central Asia “Partnering for prosperity”

With regard to the Part II of the 2019 Strategy, SEnECA experts have come up with the priority tasks that they believe should be of a primary focus (see Table 2).

While the highest-rated tasks are discussed below, the lowest ranking P4P tasks (ranked from below) are related to statistical systems (Task No 19), dialogues on energy cooperation (Task No 29), regional research and innovation cooperation on water, food and environment (Task No 33), experience sharing on geographical inclinations for agricultural production diversification (Task No 26), and supporting sustainable connectivity projects (Task No 31).

The aforementioned activities should be by no means underestimated. Rather, this scorecard exercise suggests that cooperation and support in spheres with more immediate effect and more practical deliverables are more welcome in Central Asia at this moment.

Table 2: Scores of the top five P4P tasks of the 2019 EU Strategy on Central Asia (see Appendix II for the full list of the scores of tasks for “Partnering for resilience”).

Task No.	Task as of the 2019 EU Strategy on Central Asia	Score
17.	Promoting improvements in the business and investment environment and supporting private sector development, in particular small and medium size enterprises, through EU Central Asia business-to-business dialogue and cooperation, sectoral dialogue and technical assistance	4.7
28.	Contributing to the development of transport corridors between the EU and Central Asia, based on the extension of the TEN-T networks	4.7
34. ⁷	Stimulating intra-regional and international mobility of students, staff and researchers, as well as learners and trainers in vocational education and training	4.6
32. ⁸	Increasing the number and diversifying the profile of Central Asian beneficiaries of the Horizon, Erasmus+ and Marie Skłodowska-Curie programmes	4.4
23.	Sharing experience regarding standardisation and quality infrastructure to facilitate intraregional trade and trade with the EU	4.4

In the paragraphs below, SEnECA experts propose their assessment, recommendations and indicators for the top five tasks (which received no less than 4.4 out of 5 points) from the 2019 EU’s Central Asia Strategy that they believe are of most importance and relevance for Central Asia in the next decade.

Task 17 “Promoting improvements in the business and investment environment and supporting private sector development, in particular small and medium size enterprises, through EU Central Asia business-to-business dialogue and cooperation, sectoral dialogue and technical assistance”

Promotion of business and investment environment is seen as of utmost importance not only among Central Asian business circles but also among officials and society at large. The development of entire countries and societies and thus their resilience depends upon it. Therefore, the EU should focus much of its attention at “partnering for prosperity”. At the same time, the business environment in Central Asia is becoming more fractured and diverse as Central Asian countries not only cooperate with each other, but are also encompassed in other external constraints, the Eurasian Economic

⁷ This task is developed in the SEnECA Agenda for Future Research Cooperation for the research and higher education sector.

⁸ This task is developed in the SEnECA Agenda for Future Research Cooperation for the research and higher education sector.

Union (EAEU) and China's lending-and-spending projects in particular. Therefore, the EU should particularly keep in mind the ongoing developments.

With regard to task 17, we suggest:

- To provide more support to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) directly instead of using the local governmental structures as intermediaries. While in some cases difficult to implement, such an approach would have the potential of having a higher added value to the enterprises.
- To persuade Central Asian Governments that economic development, especially the development of small and medium enterprises, would increase domestic stability rather than decrease it (more small and medium businesses make societies more stable and resilient).
- To provide more positive examples of economic cooperation instruments with the EU's southern and eastern neighbours as models to the Central Asian governments and businesses. Both benefits to the countries more open to the EU (those having established a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) with the EU), and to those more open to Russia (having enrolled in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), but still managing to deepen their cooperation with the EU, should be emphasised.
- To consider/introduce one-stop-support points of the EU on small and medium enterprises and investment issues in each of the Central Asian countries to reach a wider spectrum of businesses.
- To establish an EU-Central Asia Business Council and European chambers of commerce in all five Central Asian countries to allow permanent networking and interaction among European businesses in Central Asia and with the Central Asian businesses operating and/or willing to operate in the EU market. This would be of particular importance for smaller export-oriented businesses in Central Asia in order to better connect to the opportunities of the geographically distant EU.
- To promote regular industry exhibitions and fairs both in the EU and in Central Asia, thus raising mutual visibility and presenting the opportunities of each region.
- To launch specific training programmes for small and medium enterprises outside the Central Asian capitals and thus reach a wider spectrum of companies. In this respect, sharing of experience of companies from the EU's Eastern Partnership countries could be of particular importance. Particular emphasis should be put on explaining the rules of the EU and the underpinning thinking (i.e. the high level of standards and customs procedures).
- To further take efforts aimed at explaining GSP and GSP+ schemes in the relevant countries in general and in Kyrgyzstan in particular (using local languages). In the Kyrgyz case, sharing the experience of the best examples of the country or of the neighbouring Uzbekistan and Tajikistan could be of particular value.

Quantitative indicators could be based on the number of participants and events that will take place with regards to business interaction and the share of SMEs in countries' gross domestic product (GDP) and export. Qualitative indicators for measurement could be based on improving their "Doing Business" and "Index of Economic Freedom" rankings.

Task 28 "Contributing to the development of transport corridors between the EU and Central Asia, based on the extension of the TEN-T networks"

Transport corridors of various sorts, not only inland transportation but also of air and sea (in the case of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan), is a precondition not only for economic conduct of Central Asian countries with the EU, but also in the region itself and with other partners. Feasible transportation options are also instrumental in fostering people-to-people contacts and tourism.

Whereas inland routes will be feasible in most of the cargo transportation, with passenger traffic it is the opposite. Therefore, the latter should not be neglected. Also, as building new infrastructure requires resources beyond those that might be at the disposal for the EU's Central Asia policy (e.g. new rail lines or roads where the EU is not in the position to match offers from China), more should

be done to solve “soft” issues that hamper connectivity between the EU and the Central Asian countries. No vain hopes should be availed to new unaffordable inland surface infrastructure that could connect the EU and Central Asia.

With regard to task 28, we suggest:

- To assist the Central Asian countries with aviation safety and security management issues so that their airlines would not be subject to bans by the EU or other countries/unions, and, foremost, to raise the level of aviation safety and security in the region and make it safer both for the Central Asians and the EU citizens travelling to the region. For instance, specific aviation security programmes and workshops for the Central Asian air companies could be conducted.
- To assist the Central Asian countries with the liberalisation of their aviation markets, contributing to the opening of these markets to a wider spectrum of companies, possibly also low-cost airlines connecting the region with the EU, making travel to and from Central Asia more affordable.
- To continue assisting with border management issues and customs procedures to decrease the time trucks and trains spend on border-crossing points, which also translates into saving financial resources. Particular emphasis should be put on sharing know-how on information technology systems and their compatibility across the region, leading to a significant increase in effectiveness and transparency.
- To assist the Central Asian transportation and logistics companies with the best practices in the respective spheres to raise their levels of effectiveness and compatibility with those of the EU.

Quantitative indicators could be based on statistics of cargo and passenger traffic between Central Asia and the EU. Qualitative indicators for measurement could be based on the results of national or international assessments on transportation and logistics systems in the region.

Task 34 “Stimulating intra-regional and international mobility of students, staff and researchers, as well as learners and trainers in vocational education and training” and

Task 32 “Increasing the number and diversifying the profile of Central Asian beneficiaries of the Horizon, Erasmus+ and Marie Skłodowska-Curie programmes”

Given the similarities and mutual complementarity, assessment and recommendations for tasks 34 and 32 are merged here.

No doubt, prosperity and resilience of societies and countries are underpinned by modern education and research. These sectors can also serve as a driver to familiarise students, lecturers, researchers with the EU at large and thus provide a durable link in the times when many vectors in this sphere still lead to Russia and - increasingly — to China. Therefore, the EU’s support in these spheres is of utmost importance.

With regard to tasks 34 and 32, we suggest:

- To raise awareness and knowledge of the EU research and exchange programmes in Central Asia among individuals and organisations in English, local languages and, where appropriate, Russian as the region’s lingua franca. Activities in this field of countries like Russia and China tend to be better recognised than those of the EU.
- To raise awareness and knowledge on cooperation with the Central Asian students and researchers in the EU in the context of EU research and exchange programmes. It can be assumed that many in the EU do not apply the exchange of students and staff to Central Asia because the respective programmes are considered as mainly intra-EU cooperation mechanisms.
- To organise virtual “matchmaking” of the Central Asian and the EU education institutions to foster the establishment of new exchange and common research activities; this could be in

the form of a web database on educational establishments willing to cooperate. For instance, to start the exchange of students and staff as part of Erasmus+, the education institution in the EU has to submit a specific form (KA107) to propose exchange with a counterpart in Central Asia. Matchmaking could allow the EU and the Central Asian education institutions to find each other based on interests and willingness to engage, instead of individual searches.

- To provide online language courses to potential exchange students and staff so that they are qualified for the relevant activities and/or encouraged to be confident to choose primarily English-language based exchange programmes over Russian or Chinese language-based ones elsewhere.
- To enhance practicalities of potential exchange students and staff with preferential treatment, e.g. with facilitation of visa procedures and increased allowances (on many occasions, allowances of Erasmus+ are not generous enough to cover all costs of staying, while the options to support their own expenses for the Central Asians, in general, are lower in comparison with EU residents).
- To create more research grant calls that are specific to the cooperation of the EU and Central Asia. The grants should include various fields ranging from general policy issues (such as SEnECA) to specific policy issues (e.g. economic policies, agricultural policies, education policies) to specific fields (e.g. water management, agricultural practices, women's rights).

Quantitative indicators could be based on statistics of exchange students, staff, vocational learners, number of new education or research cooperation agreements, number of common publications, number of research projects on the EU-Central Asia relations etc. Qualitative indicators for measurement could be based on the results of national or international assessments on education quality and knowledge of the EU in this respect.

Task 23 “Sharing experience regarding standardisation and quality infrastructure to facilitate intraregional trade and trade with the EU”

Standardisation and quality assurance issues are incremental to conduct trade with the EU. Often, these issues are mentioned among the most problematic for the Central Asian countries' companies to enter the EU market. As shown in one of the previous SEnECA papers (No 11), the EU standards are often seen by the businesses as too strict. A lack of knowledge (and a misinterpretation) of the EU's regulatory framework persists. That tends to push Central Asian entrepreneurs towards other actors with lower or more understandable standards.⁹ This, in turn, is a reminder that the EU is not the only trend- and rules-setter in the region.

With regard to task 23, we suggest:

- To reach SMEs directly or through associations to avoid mishaps in communication if the messages are forwarded via intermediaries.
- To reach out to SMEs beyond the Central Asian capitals (in regions) and to use more local languages thus reaching more of the SMEs.
- To use representatives of SMEs from the EU's Eastern Partnership countries that have recently gone through similar experiences, i.e. understanding and applying the EU standards and rules on their export products. Recent experiences from countries with historical similarities could contribute to a better mutual understanding.
- To assist in introducing national quality standards in line with the international ones, which will allow improving the competitiveness of the local products both in domestic and foreign markets. This measure should be implemented through the improvement of the Central Asian countries' national systems of standardisation and certification. The relevant EU institutions could assist in bringing national standards in line with the standards of the International

⁹ “Economic relations and trade. Analysis of the EU's comparative advantages and Central Asian interests,” SEnECA, February 2019, https://www.seneca-eu.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/SEnECA_Policy_Paper_11_2019.pdf, p.17.-18.

Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC). In addition, it is important to ensure the implementation of the international quality management system ISO 9001 at the enterprises of Central Asian countries.

Quantitative indicators for measurement could be based on the number of enterprises in which the ISO 9001 quality assessment system is implemented. Qualitative indicators could be based on the progress in reduction of technical trade barriers between countries, and the success in developing common standards for infrastructure building.

4. Conclusions

SEnECA experts emphasize that economic prosperity and resilient societies are of foremost importance for Central Asia. At the same time, implementation of the tasks proposed by the 2019 EU Strategy on Central Asia will require an approach that considers the right balance of sensitive issues such as norms, values, standards and strategic cooperation of Central Asian countries with external actors, China and Russia in particular.

Sensitive issues such as human rights, counterterrorism, rule of law will be very unlikely to measure as little progress has been done so far during the previous 2007 Strategy. In many cases, the Central Asian countries have committed to cooperation in areas in which they do not show genuine political will to cooperate or deliver improvements for pragmatic reasons. For that reason, improvements will most probably not take place in areas which include political and judicial reform and human rights. However, without paying attention to basic norms and values, it will be difficult to achieve goals set in the Strategy and, more importantly, to achieve positive results beyond the economic field. Thus, the EU should continue to pursue its normative power towards Central Asia and aim for real changes and concrete solutions.

Additionally, no specific tools and mechanisms to measure the success and effectiveness of the projects within the first two parts of the Strategy have been developed so far. There is a need for an action plan or a feasibility study of what is needed and/or wanted in Central Asia with regard to quite broad areas, such as connectivity, infrastructure and green energy. This could be based on the SEnECA's approach of "mapping-analysis-recommendations" which would help to understand the situation, its challenges and opportunities, and explore the potential and limits when it comes to a certain project or initiative in each respective country. Such an approach could also increase the capacity of the interested EU member states in Central Asia to back up and support the EU-led regional projects.

Even though the EU and Central Asia are quite optimistic about the 2019 Strategy, both sides are also very realistic and pragmatic, which means they will require to understand what is negotiable and what is not when it comes to fulfilling the obligations within respective tasks. The implementation of each task is important, yet the EU should not limit itself to the easiest strikes such as investment, energy and environment. The EU should clearly understand and establish the rules of engagement and the metrics of how to deliver both qualitative and quantitative results within the tasks ranked the highest.

Appendix I – SEnECA Scorecard of the Part “1. Partnering for resilience” of the 2019 EU Strategy on Central Asia

Task No.	Task as of the 2019 EU Strategy on Central Asia	Score
9.	Strengthening cooperation on modern integrated border management, building upon longstanding EU-Central Asia and EU-Afghanistan cooperation	4.7
11.	Strengthening inter-regional and intra-regional cooperation fora and mechanisms in the field of the environment, water and climate change	4.6
1.	Using regional programmes to support the sharing of experience in legal and judicial reform, human rights, international labour standards, good governance, electoral reform and women's empowerment between the EU and Central Asia, among Central Asians themselves, and with countries of the Eastern Partnership	4.4
13.	Promoting scientific cooperation and research on water management as well as open access reliable data on climate and water that can inform effective policy	4.3
4.	Using the EU-Central Asia High-level Political and Security Dialogue and the newly established post of EU security and counterterrorism expert with regional competence for Central Asia to strengthen practical cooperation on a broader security agenda, including security sector reform and governance, hybrid threats and the water/security nexus	4.2
12.	Developing sharing of experience and innovative financing to promote renewable energy	4.2
7.	Continuing cooperation on drugs policy to further strengthen national policies in drug demand reduction and address illegal drugs supply and related organised crime	4.1
15.	Supporting the sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems and the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity and the future post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework	4.0
16.	Promoting sharing of experience and cooperation on the circular economy, in particular sustainable waste management systems and the fight against air pollution	4.0
5.	Holding ad hoc EU-Central Asia experts' meetings on the prevention of violent extremism and counterterrorism to promote sharing of best practices and strengthening of cross-border cooperation in line with relevant international commitments	3.9
10.	Enhancing dialogue and cooperation on migration and mobility in the framework of the EPCAs and of the United Nations	3.8
2.	Developing training opportunities on human rights and advocacy skills for civil society activists and human rights defenders and promoting cross-border contacts among them in the region, as well with their counterparts in the EU and Eastern Partnership countries	3.8
3.	Establishing a dedicated dialogue on labour standards and business and human rights	3.7
8.	Sharing expertise on cyber security and hybrid threats, including the opportunity for Central Asia to participate in the joint identification of hybrid threats as part of the EU's Hybrid Risk Survey	3.5
6.	Intensifying cooperation and synergies with the OSCE on preventing and countering transnational threats in Central Asia	3.4

Task No.	Task as of the 2019 EU Strategy on Central Asia	Score
14.	Strengthening cooperation with the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Regional Central Asia on the water and security nexus	3.1

Appendix II – SEnECA Scorecard of the Part “2. Partnering for prosperity” of the 2019 EU Strategy on Central Asia

Task No.	Task as of the 2019 EU Strategy on Central Asia	Score
17.	Promoting improvements in the business and investment environment and supporting private sector development, in particular small and medium size enterprises, through EU Central Asia business-to-business dialogue and cooperation, sectoral dialogue and technical assistance	4.7
28.	Contributing to the development of transport corridors between the EU and Central Asia, based on the extension of the TEN-T networks	4.7
34.	Stimulating intra-regional and international mobility of students, staff and researchers, as well as learners and trainers in vocational education and training	4.6
32.	Increasing the number and diversifying the profile of Central Asian beneficiaries of the Horizon, Erasmus+ and Marie Skłodowska-Curie programmes	4.4
23.	Sharing experience regarding standardisation and quality infrastructure to facilitate intraregional trade and trade with the EU	4.4
27.	Strengthening bilateral and inter-regional cooperation to ensure effective sustainable connectivity	4.4
30.	Using innovative financing and blending to further encourage green investment, in particular in renewable energy and energy efficiency	4.3
25.	Stepping up technical cooperation towards better use of the unilateral preferential access to the EU market provided by the GSP and GSP+	4.1
21.	Supporting accession to the WTO and to the GPA, including through technical assistance	4.1
37.	Promoting a stronger dialogue between EU, Central Asian authorities, business organisations and social partners on skills gaps and labour market modernisation	4.1
22.	Intensifying dialogue on sanitary and phytosanitary measures to strengthen food safety systems	4.1
36.	Establishing a dialogue and promoting exchange of best practices on youth employability, women empowerment and employment policies	4.1
18.	Promoting twinnings to share know-how and build the capacity of Central Asian administrations in key aspects of economic reforms	4.0
24.	Promoting the simplification and harmonisation of customs procedures and supporting the development of cross-border e-commerce	4.0
20.	Intensifying the sharing of EU experience and best practices on addressing non-tariff barriers to trade and promoting regulatory convergence and harmonisation	3.9
35.	Helping Central Asia to develop a regional cooperation scheme inspired from the EHEA	3.9
31.	Using EU instruments (such as grants, blending and guarantees) as well as intensifying consultations with international financial organisations and other relevant actors to underpin sustainable connectivity projects	3.9

Task No.	Task as of the 2019 EU Strategy on Central Asia	Score
26.	Sharing experience on Geographical Indications to help the diversification of agricultural production	3.8
33.	Increasing inter- and intra-regional research and innovation cooperation in the areas of water, food and the environment	3.7
29.	Intensifying bilateral dialogues under existing Memorandums of Understanding on Energy Cooperation and organising as appropriate ad hoc regional conferences on energy	3.4
19.	Sharing know-how on the development of statistical systems	3.3

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