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Long-term Central Asia Communication Strategy

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Executive Summary

This is a long-term Central Asia communication strategy for the future promotion of the region and its role for Europe beyond the lifetime of the SEnECA project. It presents recommendations for various stakeholders of EU-Central Asia relations on how to increase awareness of and knowledge on Central Asia in Europe, and how these activities can be supported on the political level. It is directed at the European Commission as well as at stakeholders in media, education and research, and business, which impart the image on Central Asia in Europe.

The paper proposes an overarching and comprehensive narrative of Central Asia in the EU that can serve as a common base for the communication activities through the different channels and by the different actors. The recommendations include, among others, the use of a comprehensive and consistent picture of the EU’s interest in Central Asia and its desired relationship with the region as well as a common wording for communicating that picture; the streamlining of the EU-Central Asia relations on the EU’s websites; the adherence of all EU member states to the developed common picture and wording; and the fostering of a balanced coverage of Central Asia in media, education and research.

1. Introduction

This document entails the long-term Central Asia communication strategy for the future promotion of the region and its role for Europe beyond the lifetime of the SEnECA project. It builds on the experience and observations in the course of the project's communication and dissemination activities and on SEnECA research results, in particular the Stakeholder Analysis (D3.2) and the background papers on the current state of affairs on Central Asian Studies in Europe and EU Studies in Central Asia (D1.2). Furthermore, stakeholders' descriptions of EU-Central Asia relations in academic and non-academic literature have been used. The strategy is directed at the European Commission as well as at stakeholders that impart the image on Central Asia in Europe.

The document first outlines the main features of a communication strategy (chapter 2). Building on that, chapter 3 displays the features of the long-term Central Asia communication strategy, in particular its purpose, target audience, and message (sub-chapter 3.1). It then explores the channels and means of Central Asia promotion in different fields such as politics, media, education, and further spheres of public life such as business (sup-chapter 3.2). Finally, the document discusses possible risks and obstacles of the outlined strategic communication (chapter 4). In the conclusion, the core recommendations are summarized at a glance (chapter 5).

2. Background: Definition and features of a communication strategy

This chapter outlines what a public communication strategy is, to whom it is addressed and what its main features are.

In the academic debate, the term "strategic communication" has a variety of meanings. We propose a definition retrieved from the Encyclopaedia of Political Communication stating that "strategic communication is the purposeful communication by a person or an organization designed to persuade audiences with the goal of increasing knowledge, changing attitudes, or inducing desired behaviour."¹ Message consistency and clarity are regarded as crucial to the success of a strategic communication campaign.² Another key feature for successful strategic communication is audience research that includes the assessment of the audience's beliefs and attitudes.³ The better the knowledge about the audience, the more effective the communication campaign. Audience research is relevant with regard to the message and the means of the planned strategic public communication.

In our case, the audience is predefined as the "wider European public". Sociology as well as communication and media studies provide various understandings of "the public" and of ways how to study public opinion.⁴ According to the Chicago school sociologists Hannah Arendt or Walter Lippman, publics are understood as "communities of people who realize a common interest, coalescing around a single issue".⁵ Taking into account that the "wider European public" is rather large, complex and only loosely merged as a community, and that the existence of a "European public" is widely questioned in academic literature,⁶ we propose a broader and more general understanding of the European public as a "public space in Europe" that is heavily shaped by EU politics.⁷ "Public opinion" shall therefore be understood as a set of prevailing perceptions among Europeans of a certain issue that can be directly ascertained through public opinion polls, and

¹ Colleen Connolly-Ahern, „Strategic Communication“, in *Encyclopedia of Political Communication, Volume 2*, ed. Lynda Lee Kaid and Christina Holtz-Bacha (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008), 764.

² Connolly-Ahern, „Strategic Communication“, 764.

³ Connolly-Ahern, „Strategic Communication“, 765.

⁴ For an overview, see Otfried Jarren, Patrick Donges, „Strukturen der Öffentlichkeit“, in *Politische Kommunikation in der Mediengesellschaft*, ed. Otfried Jarren and Patrick Donges (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2011), 95-117.

⁵ Philip Dalton, „Public Communication in Politics“, in *Encyclopedia of Political Communication, Volume 2*, ed. Lynda Lee Kaid and Christina Holtz-Bacha (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008), 668.

⁶ See Otfried Jarren, Patrick Donges, „Strukturen der Öffentlichkeit“, 107-110. Jarren and Donges explain that, instead of the emergence of a ‚European public‘, a ‚Europeanization of national publics‘ can be observed.

⁷ Even if the „wider European public“ mainly comprises EU citizens, the citizens from non-EU European countries are explicitly not excluded from this understanding.

indirectly by analysing the attitudes and beliefs of important gatekeepers that shape the public opinion.

Finally, the channels of strategic communication are traditional media such as newspapers, television and radio, but also - and increasingly important - non-traditional, internet-based media. Strategic communication uses traditional public relations (PR) methods and tactics as the distribution of press and video news releases, the staging of press conferences and town hall meetings, or personal interviews with key media representatives. It can also borrow methods and tactics from political advertising that is more insistent and persuasive.⁸

To sum up, the main features of a public communication strategy are the purpose to persuade audiences, a clear and consistent message, and that its requirement of knowledge about the target audience's beliefs and attitudes. In the next chapter, these general features will be applied to Central Asia and the EU's Central Asia communication.

3. Long-term Central Asia communication strategy

This chapter outlines the long-term Central Asia communication strategy. First, the features of the strategy regarding its purpose, the target audience and its message are outlined. Second, the current way of depicting Central Asia by different stakeholders ("channels") is described, along with propositions on future communication and how it can be supported.

3.1 Features of the long-term Central Asia communication strategy

Departing from the characteristics of strategic communication as outlined above, the long-term Central Asia communication strategy requires a purpose, knowledge about the beliefs and attitudes of the audience, and a clear and consistent message before giving concrete recommendations on different channels and means of Central Asia communication in Europe.

3.1.1 Purpose

The long-term Central Asia communication strategy aims to provide recommendations to the European Commission on how various stakeholders such as EU policy-makers, media and education could promote and explain Central Asia and its importance for Europe towards the wider public. Its ultimate goal is to improve the understanding of and awareness about Central Asia.⁹ This mission has been formulated in the light of an increased significance of the region for Europe during the past years, for instance with regard to energy and trade relations, geopolitics and security, and due to the limited knowledge and understanding of the region in Europe.

3.1.2 Target audience's beliefs and attitudes

The target audience of this communication strategy is the wider European public (see definition in chapter 2). To find out about its beliefs and attitudes towards Central Asia, one should seek for answers to the following questions: How much is Central Asia recognized in Europe? What do Europeans know about Central Asia? How much attention do Europeans pay to developments in Central Asia? Which importance do they ascribe to Central Asia and EU-Central Asian relations? To cover the qualitative perspective, one should add: How do Europeans perceive Central Asia? What characteristics and role for Europe in the region do they consider important?

In general, from observation and experience during the SEnECA project's lifetime and research, Central Asia seems to be perceived as a developing post-Soviet region that appears, if at all, as a gas and oil deliverer to Europe, and that is to some extent exotic and mysterious, especially with regard to the Silk route tourism and nomadic life. Overall, Central Asia seems to have only a low significance in the European perception. This shows in the fact that the region is not mentioned in any of the Eurobarometer polls dealing with foreign policy or international issues, meaning that no

⁸ Connolly-Ahern, „Strategic Communication“, 765.

⁹ Grant Agreement, Part A, pp. 17-19, and Grant Agreement, Part B, p. 5.

Eurobarometer poll or section of a respective poll is dedicated to Central Asia as a distinct region, and the region is not mentioned by the respondents of these polls when listing issues or regions of political significance for Europe. “Central Asia is seen as a ‘sleeping beauty’ and seems not yet on the radar of the European public”, as the authors of the Stakeholder Analysis have summarized the interviews that they conducted with stakeholders in the field of EU-Central Asia relations.¹⁰

Moreover, Central Asia not only receives limited attention in Europe compared to other parts of the world, it is predominantly presented negatively in media with a particular focus on issues related to authoritarianism, human rights abuses, radical Islam, and poverty.¹¹ Contradicting the fact that moderate Islam is the rule in Central Asia, the image of the region among Europeans is „a far-away, dark, and underdeveloped place that exports radicalism“, as Jos Boonstra of the EUCAM initiative has put it.¹²

In a study about Turkish citizens’ perceptions of Central Asian countries as tourist destinations, Kemal Kantarci revealed that, despite an overall perception of Central Asian countries characterised by „hospitable environment, authenticity of experience, richness in local attractions“, concerns about security and safety were a major impediment for potential traveller’s motivation to visit a Central Asian country.¹³ Kantarci presumes that the very small share of the Central Asian countries in international tourism might root in “the nature of ‘no-image’ or ,existing poor image‘ of Central Asian countries in the perceptions of world travellers“. He argues that the region is usually not well understood and represented little in media.¹⁴ Even if Kantarci’s study dates back to 2005 and was conducted in Turkey, it reflects important elements of Central Asia’s perception abroad, in particular the notion of instability that also dominates the European media and public discourse.

To date, no public opinion polls have been conducted in Europe on the questions raised above. Hence, a profound audience research turns out to be difficult. Apart from the study results depicted above, information on the audience’s beliefs and attitudes mainly has to be retrieved indirectly by examining the attitudes and beliefs of gatekeepers of public opinion in politics, media, education, and business. Their perception of Central Asia will be described below together with recommendations on a future Central Asia communication.

3.1.3. Message

Given the assumed limited attention to and selective knowledge about Central Asia in Europe, the goal of the Long-term Central Asia communication strategy should be to raise awareness and knowledge about the region and its significance for Europe. Therefore, the quantity and quality of communication on Central Asia shall in general be improved. In order to transmit a clear and consistent message, a look at existing pictures of Central Asia, which are transmitted by European stakeholders in politics and society (see chapter 3.2), helps to distract the essence: in all spheres of cooperation one reads or hears about **opportunities** that have to be taken or **potential** that has to be tapped. Furthermore, the notion of Central Asia as a “**bridge between Europe and Asia**” and the relevance of **connectivity** is widespread among Europeans dealing with Central Asia.

Seldom mentioned among Central Asia experts and stakeholders is the idea that European values and achievements in science, trade and arts have roots in the intellectual legacy of Central Asia’s “Golden Age”. The idea is that the heritage of this prosperous era (800 – 1200 AD) has been diffused through European philosophers, scientists and merchants during the Renaissance. As presented in

¹⁰ Julia Krebs, Tatjana Kuhn, „Stakeholder analysis: Analysis of policy-makers and stakeholders on the EU and member state level“ (SEnECA deliverable D3.2, TEPESA and CIFE, December 2018), 15, https://www.seneca-eu.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/D3_2_SenECA_Stakeholder_Analysis_v1_0.pdf.

¹¹ Jos Boonstra, „Opportunities for Central Asia“, *EUCAM Watch*, no. 17 (May 2017): 2, <https://eucentralasia.eu/2017/05/on-a-positive-note/>.

¹² Boonstra, „Opportunities for Central Asia“: 2. The EUCAM (“Europe – Central Asia monitoring”) initiative is a knowledge hub and a network on EU-Central Asia relations, see <https://eucentralasia.eu>.

¹³ Kemal Kantarci, „The image of Central Asia countries: Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan“, *Tourism Analysis*, no. 12 (2007): 307-318. Tajikistan was excluded from the study due to a lack of data.

¹⁴ Kantarci, „The image of Central Asia countries“: 307.

SEnECA Policy Paper No. 12¹⁵, the historic connections between the two regions are much deeper than many Europeans realize.

Taken the above mentioned points into consideration, an overarching and comprehensive narrative of Central Asia in the EU can be phrased as following:

Central Asia is an increasingly important partner for the EU and the EU's neighbouring countries with high potential for cooperation, in particular in terms of common security, trade, energy, and tourism. The region is an important bridge to the Asian continent. Furthermore, there are many historical links between Europe and Central Asia, especially with regard to cultural heritage of the "Golden Age" for the European Renaissance.

The channels and means of Central Asia promotion can, to different degrees and in different forms, contribute to transmitting that message on various levels.

3.2. Channels and means of Central Asia promotion

In this section, the paper will describe Central Asia imaging of stakeholders in Europe. As stakeholders this strategy regards representatives from politics, media, education and research, as well as business and civil society representatives, which act as gatekeepers of public opinion. How do they communicate on Central Asia so far, both from a quantitative and from a qualitative perspective? In a second step, this section gives recommendations for a future communication on Central Asia: How should these stakeholders communicate on Central Asia in Europe? How can they be supported in doing so?

3.2.1. Communicating about Central Asia on the political level

3.2.1.1. European level

On the European political level, Central Asia is acknowledged today as a significant region for Europe in terms of the high potential for (future) cooperation. In the new EU strategy for Central Asia, the EU's interests in the region are clearly stated: "Central Asia's strategic geographical location at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, its share in EU energy imports and the market potential of seventy million inhabitants, as well as the EU's interest in regional security, have made Central Asia an increasingly important partner for the EU."¹⁶ Thus, the region is perceived as relevant for Europe with regard to its geopolitical role, to energy supply, to trade and investments, and with regard to security.

The first of these four elements, Central Asia's character as a *gateway to or bridge between* Europe and Asia, is an overarching element that appears in most statements from EU representatives and that can serve as a general narrative of the EU's relations with the region (see section "message"). The reconnection of Central Asia with Europe began when the Soviet Union collapsed, and aimed not only at improving the connectivity of Europe and Central Asia, but also at "reducing the region's dependence from Russia, preventing Iran from becoming a regional economic hub, and [...] bolstering Turkey's role as a strategic partner for Europe".¹⁷ Since some years, economic relations with China certainly play an increasing role in that regard. Even if the motivations might have changed over time, connectivity with Central Asia remains a crucial concern on the European political agenda, serving not only as a current opportunity for businesses, but also as a precondition of a future tapping of the full potential of cooperation. The element of economic partnership is much

¹⁵ Anna Gussarova, Māris Andžāns, Adam Balcer, SEnECA Policy Paper No. 12 „Cultural relations. Analysis of the EU's comparative advantages and Central Asian interests" (February 2019) . <https://doi.org/10.17185/dupublico/48494>

¹⁶ „The EU and Central Asia: New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership. Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council", European Commission, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Brussels, May 15, 2019, 1, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/joint_communication_-_the_eu_and_central_asia_-_new_opportunities_for_a_stronger_partnership.pdf. Also see Peter Burian, „Connecting European and Central Asian potential", *EUCAM Watch*, no. 17 (May 2017): 4, <https://eucentralasia.eu/2017/05/on-a-positive-note/>.

¹⁷ Marlene Laruelle, „The European Union in a Reconnecting Eurasia", *Eurasia from the Outside In*, Center for Strategic & International Studies (April 2016): 17.

weaker, as the EU is an important commercial partner for Central Asia, but Central Asia is not crucial for the EU's economy to date, with the important exception of energy deliveries.

However, despite the eager proclamations at the European level, the EU does not seem to have the means or the internal consensus for high ambitions, as Peyrouse judges the current situation. For underlining the limited significance of Central Asia, he cites the modest budget allocation for the region of about \$1.2 billion for 2014 to 2020.¹⁸ Laruelle adds that "cacophony prevails" regarding international questions of concern to the EU, including its relations to the post-Soviet states as the Central Asian ones. The reason for this fragmentation is the expansion of diversity of views and of disagreement in Europe, Laruelle argues.¹⁹ One could amplify the limited coherence of the EU's policy towards Central Asia with regard to the sectoral policies, a deficit that the new Strategy aims to overcome.²⁰

In order to improve the depiction of Central Asia and the EU's relations with the region, actors on the European political level should

- use a **comprehensive and consistent picture** of the EU's interests in Central Asia and its desired relationship with the region which shall be oriented at the EU's proclaimed interests and historic links in the region (as formulated in fundamental documents, such as the Central Asia Strategy);
- develop a **common wording** for communicating this picture which then shall be used by all EU bodies and representatives, including representatives of the EU member states;
- **streamline and harmonize the presentation of the EU's relations to Central Asia** on the different internet pages of the European Union²¹, for example by merging information on the EEAS page and by linking other relevant pages and publications on it;
- **clearly and consistently communicate this picture** both within Europe and towards the Central Asian partners. In particular, the transparency and visibility of EU interests and efforts in Central Asia has to be improved;²² and
- **be careful / mind terms set by Russia or China** which have certain connotations of their interests and rely on the EU's own visions.

3.2.1.2. EU member state level

National political elites influence public opinion on a certain topic by setting agendas, priorities, terms and discourses, and through their political actions. As one might expect, the national perceptions with regard to Central Asia vary among the EU member states. Whereas „Germany in particular, but also Italy and to a lesser degree France, have advocated for a clearly utilitarian view of Central Asia, promoting economic cooperation and energy-centred projects, [...] the UK and the Nordic countries lean toward emphasizing a values agenda“, Peyrouse observes.²³

¹⁸ Sebastien Peyrouse, „A donor without influence. The European Union in Central Asia“, *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo*, no. 478 (June 2017): 1, <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/donor-without-influence-european-union-central-asia>.

¹⁹ Marlene Laruelle, „The European Union in a Reconnecting Eurasia“, *Eurasia from the Outside In*, Center for Strategic & International Studies (April 2016): 1.

²⁰ „The EU and Central Asia: New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership. Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council“, European Commission, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Brussels, May 15, 2019, 14, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/joint_communication_-_the_eu_and_central_asia_-_new_opportunities_for_a_stronger_partnership.pdf.

²¹ The presentation of EU-Central Asia relations is currently not coherent, pages are not always updated and linked to each other, which makes a fragmented overall picture, see <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/178/central-asia> (European Parliament on Central Asia), <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/06/17/central-asia-council-adopts-a-new-eu-strategy-for-the-region/> (a European Council press release), https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/regions/central-asia-0_en (the European Commission on Central Asia), and https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/2068/Central%20Asia as well as https://eeas.europa.eu/regions/europe-and-central-asia_en (two different sites of the EEAS on Central Asia).

²² As claimed also by several stakeholders of EU-Central Asia relations, see Krebs, Kuhn, „Stakeholder analysis“, 15.

²³ Sébastien Peyrouse, „A Donor without influence: The European Union in Central Asia“, *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo*, no. 478 (June 2017): 2, <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/donor-without-influence-european-union-central-asia>.

This certainly has to do with the different scope and kind of interest of the respective states in the region. With regard to the EU's coherency and member states' policy towards Central Asia, Laruelle argues that, although there is no friction between EU representations and those of member states officially, there are cases when EU member states act independently of the EU. As an example, she quotes the negotiations of agreements to secure its military basis in Termez by the German delegation.²⁴ One could add situations when member states' action was not only independent from, but contradicting with EU policy towards the region, in particular when economic projects collide with concerns on human rights and rule of law. In general, the attention of the EU member states paid to the Central Asian region and its countries is rather limited.

For the future communication on Central Asia as a foreign policy partner, representatives of the national political level should

- **adhere to the common wording** for communicating a picture of the EU's interests in Central Asia and its desired relationship with the region **agreed on the European level**, apart from individual member states' interests and national emphases;
- **avoid open contradictions between national and European policy** towards the region and make potential conflicts subject of supranational dialogue;
- **actively fill the EU-Central Asia relations with concrete projects and activities**, for instances by taking a proactive stance on links between SMEs in the EU and in Central Asia, and
- **become more involved in the European debate** on EU-Central Asia relations and/or **back up the decisions taken** at the European level.

3.2.2. Communicating about Central Asia in the media

The media is an important gatekeeper for public opinion, as they select, shape and frame events and information that primary sources, such as politicians, disseminate. It must be ascertained that Central Asia is not too much on the radar of European media. Stakeholders of EU-Central Asia relations assess that there are very few mainstream national media channels reporting on Central Asia, and explain this with the fact that the region is politically quite stable.²⁵ This assessment can be confirmed by the observation that Central Asia, apart from travel documentaries, usually only appears in European mainstream media on the occasion of significant political incidents or natural disasters. Furthermore, in European media Central Asia is often linked with terrorism, and negative news are overrepresented in general.²⁶

This overall picture is only partly compensated by the existence of online portals, news platforms and blogs that focus on Central Asia, such as Novastan (<https://www.novastan.org/de/>), The Times of Central Asia (<https://www.timesca.com>), EUCAM (<https://eucentralasia.eu>), Eurasisches Magazin (<https://www.eurasischesmagazin.de>), or Eurasia News Online (<https://eurasia-news-online.com/>). They report on Central Asia in a rather comprehensive way and possess a broader network of journalists and sources from the region itself. However, the outreach of those niche media is very limited.

In order to raise awareness and increase knowledge on Central Asia, media representatives should

- **intensify the coverage of Central Asia** in general; and
- cover the region in a **more balanced way** by **reporting on the people's lives, cultural aspects or the environment** and not only on high-level politics and abstract issues.

²⁴ Marlene Laruelle, „The European Union in a Reconnecting Eurasia“, 5.

²⁵ Julia Krebs, Tatjana Kuhn, Giulia Bonacquisti „SEnECA Stakeholder Analysis (D3.2): Analysis of policy-makers and stakeholders on the EU and member state level“, 15. <https://doi.org/10.17185/dupublico/48713>

²⁶ Julia Krebs, Tatjana Kuhn, Giulia Bonacquisti „SEnECA Stakeholder Analysis (D3.2): Analysis of policy-makers and stakeholders on the EU and member state level“, 15, 17. <https://doi.org/10.17185/dupublico/48713>

Media can be supported by politics through

- generously **funding their networks of foreign correspondents** in the region and, thus, supporting broader and authentic reporting;
- financially and technically **supporting niche media** and platforms focusing on Central Asia; and
- encouraging and supporting **public diplomacy initiatives of Central Asian countries** to promote their nations/cultures in Europe, including visits of European media representatives in their countries and sending Central Asian ones to Europe.²⁷

3.2.3. Communicating about Central Asia in education and research

Actors in the education and research sector, such as universities and think tanks, influence public opinion as they contribute to shaping the priority of a certain topic and the knowledge and discourses about it.

In social science research, the significance of Central Asia for Europe is predominantly described in the context of security. The discourses are dominated by issues such as Central Asia's growing importance on the global energy market, its neighbourhood to Afghanistan and vulnerability for extremism and drug traffic, and its key role in maintaining the stability of the Eurasian continent. Country rankings, with regard to both political developments - as the *Bertelsmann Transformation Index*, *Freedom House indexes* or the *Fragile States Index* - and economic developments such as the *Index of Economic Freedom* or the *Human Development Index (HDI)*, play an important role in shaping Central Asia's image in European academia. These indexes usually reveal rather limited performances of the Central Asian countries.²⁸ Without denying the credibility of these indexes and the facts they display, the aspects they focus on contribute to shaping an unbalanced and biased view on the region.

A reason for the limited perception of Central Asia among European academics is the underdeveloped state of Central Asian studies in Europe. A SEnECA background paper on the topic found in particular that there are "very few research institutions exclusively dedicated to the research field", and that "Central Asian studies have not yet established a coherent research field".²⁹ As a consequence, the outreach of the academic stakeholders to the wider public is rather limited. However, the authors of the background paper state that the public attention to Central Asia has grown considerably in recent years. They ascribe this trend to three drivers that have increased public attention on the region: First, the crisis in Ukraine and the tensions with Russia; second, the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative; and third, the boosted position of EU-Central Asia relations in the EU foreign policy agenda since the drafting of the new EU Strategy on Central Asia.³⁰ Whereas Central Asia is a topic of growing interest at the higher education level, it plays almost no role at the primary and secondary education levels in Europe due to the lacking cultural affinity of Central Asia and Europe in modern history.

In order to raise awareness and increase knowledge on Central Asia, the respective representatives in the field of education and research should

- attempt to **develop and strengthen their research field** that is able to conduct interdisciplinary and comprehensive research on the subject;

²⁷Stakeholder assessments, retrieved from Julia Krebs, Tatjana Kuhn, Giulia Bonacquisti „SEnECA Stakeholder Analysis (D3.2): Analysis of policy-makers and stakeholders on the EU and member state level“, 15. <https://doi.org/10.17185/duerpublico/48713>

²⁸For an overview of Central Asian countries' performance in the most important politics related indexes, see Heiko Pleines, Katharina Fischer, „Zentralasien in politikbezogenen Länderrankings“, *Zentralasienanalysen*, no. 90 (26.06.2015): 9-46. For the economic indexes, see Heiko Pleines, Anastasia Stoll, „Zentralasien in wirtschaftsbezogenen Länderrankings“, *Zentralasienanalysen*, no. 69 (27.09.2013): 8-18.

²⁹Julian Plottka, Lydia Drews, "Background paper: The Current State of Affairs of Central Asian Studies in Europe" (SEnECA deliverable D1.2, Institut für Europäische Politik, June 2019), 2, 14-15, https://www.seneca-eu.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/SEnECA_D1.2_Two-background-papers_v1.0_2019-06-17.pdf.

³⁰Plottka, Drews, „Background paper“, 12.

- seek **higher outreach** of their knowledge and disseminate research results to policy-makers as well as to the wider public;
- aim at **increasing capacities of educating future experts** on the region;
- **intensify their networking activities** in order to create a stronger academic community; and
- **share knowledge, curricula, and resources** (such as databases, experts) in order to optimize the discipline's use of limited resources and, thus, increase the quality of its outcome.

Politicians can support stakeholders in education and research by

- **improving the financial and institutional basic conditions for Central Asia research** in Europe;
- **initiating and/or funding language support**, for instance for improving the capabilities of Central Asian researchers to publish in English, or for translating their papers from Russian/their mother tongues; and
- **supporting exchange** between Central Asian and European scholars on all levels.

3.2.4. Communicating about Central Asia through business interests

Finally, yet importantly, business interests can have an impact on public opinion as they can generate public attention on certain issues or regions, usually when communicating their interests towards political decision-makers regarding export regulations, foreign trade strategies, job security and the like. With their business activities and strategies, they can also directly shape perceptions and beliefs of employees and politicians. The same applies to other private actors in EU-Central Asian relations such as civil society agents.

For business representatives, Central Asia is not a priority destination to date: “[...] Central Asia is not a profitable area for European enterprises. The cost of labour is relatively high, the technical specializations developed in the Soviet era are in the process of disappearing, the investment climate is negative, and political contexts are fragile.”, so the assessment of Peyrouse.³¹ Yet, there is a niche of Central Asia business in Europe with a strong focus on Germany. The German Eastern Business Association “Ost-Ausschuss” (OAOEV) has for a long time considered Central Asia as a region with high investment potential which has been recently boosted through the launch of the Chinese ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ (BRI). Already in 2012, shortly before the official announcement of the BRI, the “Berlin Eurasian Club” was founded on a German-Kazakh initiative in order to support exchange and business development between German and Eurasian companies. “For the German economy, Central Asia is a region full of chances with various opportunities”, said Michael Harms, chairman of OAOEV at the time.³² In this discourse, it becomes clear that businesspeople perceive Central Asia mainly as a future transport and logistical hub that will create a better connection between Europe and Asia.

At the same time, German business is complaining about its disadvantages in the competition with Chinese companies in the region due to the high social and environmental standards set by the EU, and cites this as the main reason of its modest engagement in BRI projects.³³ Therefore, business is demanding support for its activities in Central Asia with concrete public funding and investment initiatives. Apart from these claims, large firms pursue their business interests and have an interest in good relations with local politicians and administrations in order to secure their investments, which is sometimes colliding with the EU's goals to promote EU values.³⁴

³¹ Sébastien Peyrouse, „A Donor without influence: The European Union in Central Asia,“ *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo* No. 478 (June 2017): 4-5, <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/donor-without-influence-european-union-central-asia>.

³² „Kasachstan und die neue Seidenstraße“, press release, October 29, 2018, Ost-Ausschuss – Osteuropaverein der Deutschen Wirtschaft (OAOEV), <https://www.oaev.de/index.php/de/effizienzbruecke-zwischen-asien-und-europa>.

³³ „Belt & Road darf keine Einbahnstraße werden“, press release, September 17, 2019, Ost-Ausschuss – Osteuropaverein der Deutschen Wirtschaft (OAOEV), <https://www.oaev.de/de/belt-road-darf-keine-einbahnstrasse-werden>.

³⁴ Peyrouse, „A Donor without Influence“, 4-5.

In order to raise awareness and increase knowledge on Central Asia, business representatives should:

- continue **promoting Central Asia as a business destination and sharing their knowledge and experience with the region** in Europe, in cooperation with Central Asian authorities who are willing to promote their markets; and
- seek **higher outreach** of their activities to a wider public.

Politicians can support private business stakeholders by

- **contributing to favourable legal and political circumstances** for business activities in bilateral and multilateral political negotiations; and
- **providing fora for European and Central Asian government and business representatives** where an exchange across different countries, regions, branches and about specific activities is facilitated.

4. Obstacles and risks

There are mainly four obstacles and risks for implementing the presented long-term Central Asia communication strategy in the different fields outlined above.

1. The European Union's interests in Central Asia and its policy towards the region might change over time. In that case, there is a necessity to adapt the narrative and communication on Central Asia accordingly.
2. Private stakeholders as business, media, or civil society, cannot be forced by the EU or national politicians to accomplish a political mission. They pursue their own interests, which might be congruent with political ones. Therefore, private interests and media shall be involved in the policy-making process on EU-Central Asia relations, in particular when it comes to its implementation.
3. EU member states maintain their own relations with Central Asian countries and are free to conduct policies that might not support the EU's foreign policy towards the region or occasionally even be opposed to it.
4. Risks from the Central Asian side might include changing political regimes and their political priorities, political instability, as well as competition and influence from Russia, China, or other countries, interfering with the EU's efforts of improving communication.

5. Conclusion

This document presented a long-term Central Asia communication strategy that can guide the European Commission and stakeholders of EU-Central Asia relations for the future promotion of Central Asia and its role for Europe beyond the lifetime of the SEnECA project.

The strategy proposes an overarching and comprehensive narrative of Central Asia that can be used by different stakeholders in Europe as a coherent message in order to raise awareness and knowledge about the region. It develops propositions on how stakeholders in politics, media, education and research, as well as in business, can promote Central Asia more intensely and comprehensively in the future, and how these activities can be supported by politics. In the following, the core recommendations for Central Asia promotion in different fields are summarized at a glance:

Table 1: Recommendations for Central Asia promotion in Europe

Stakeholder	Recommended actions	Possible political support
Politics / European level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ use a comprehensive and consistent picture of the EU's interests in Central Asia and its desired relationship with the region ▪ develop a common wording for communicating this picture ▪ streamline and harmonize the presentation of the EU's relations to Central Asia on the different websites of the European Union ▪ clearly and consistently communicate this picture both within Europe and towards the Central Asian partners ▪ mind/avoid terms set by Russia or China and rely on the EU's own vision 	
Politics / EU member state level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ adhere to the common wording agreed on the European level ▪ avoid open contradictions between national and European policy towards Central Asia and make potential conflicts subject of supranational dialogue ▪ actively fill the EU-Central Asia relations with concrete projects and activities ▪ become more involved in the European debate on EU-Central Asia relations and/or back up the decisions taken at the European level 	
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ intensify the coverage of Central Asia in general ▪ cover the region in a more balanced way by reporting on the people's lives, cultural aspects or the environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ generously fund networks of foreign media correspondents in the region ▪ financially and technically support niche media and platforms focusing on Central Asia ▪ encourage and support public diplomacy initiatives of Central Asian countries to promote their nations/cultures in Europe
Education and research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ develop and strengthen the research field of Central Asia studies in order to conduct interdisciplinary and comprehensive research ▪ seek higher outreach of the knowledge and disseminate research results to policy-makers as well as the wider public ▪ aim at increasing capacities of educating future experts on the region ▪ intensify networking activities in order to create a stronger academic community ▪ share knowledge, curricula, and resources (such as databases, experts) in order to optimize the use of limited resources of Central Asia studies, thus increasing the quality of its outcome 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ improve the financial and institutional basic conditions for Central Asia research in Europe ▪ initiate and/or fund language support for Central Asian researchers ▪ support exchange between Central Asian and European scholars on all levels

Stakeholder	Recommended actions	Possible political support
Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ continue promoting Central Asia as a business destination and sharing knowledge and experience with the region in Europe ▪ seek higher outreach of communication activities to a wider public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ contribute to favourable legal and political surroundings for business activities ▪ provide fora for European and Central Asian government and business representatives where countries, regions, branches or activities can be facilitated

The recommended actions shall be developed further, discussed and monitored together with the involved stakeholders. The implementation of the proposed measures highly depends on the willingness of the involved stakeholders for more engagement, as well as on political initiative and support.

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