

# EVOLUTION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION'S ENGAGEMENT WITH CENTRAL ASIA: RESULTS FROM THE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF 2007 AND 2019 EU STRATEGIES

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**Abstract.** The European Union (EU) is one of the most important partners for Central Asia, which includes five post-soviet Republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. For a long time, the EU has actively attempted to promote its standards and values across the area. This article investigates the evolution of the EU engagement with Central Asia, giving a document analysis of 2007 and 2019 EU Strategies for Central Asia.

The purpose of the article is to compare the main objectives of the 2007 and 2019 Strategies, tracing an evolution of the EU priorities in the texts of two documents, using a quantitative content analysis, conducted manually.

Theoretical framework of the article includes the external government concept in EU foreign policy, giving a literature review on the EU's Strategies for Central Asia, and highlighting the background on the EU-Central Asia relations. In result,

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according to the empirical method of the content analysis of two strategies, the article concludes the EU's priorities in Central Asia have been partially evolved revising European relationship with Central Asia from the focus on energy towards security issues.

*Keywords: European Union, Central Asia, 2007 Strategy, 2019 Strategy, content analysis.*

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## ЕУРОПАЛЫҚ ОДАҚТЫҢ ОРТАЛЫҚ АЗИЯМЕН ӨЗАРА ӘРЕКЕТІНІҢ ЭВОЛЮЦИЯСЫ: 2007 ЖӘНЕ 2019 ЖЫЛДАҒЫ ЕО СТРАТЕГИЯЛАРЫНЫҢ МАЗМҰНЫН ТАЛДАУ НӘТИЖЕЛЕРІ

**Зарина Мұқашева, Хайдар Эфе**

**Аңдатпа.** Еуропалық Одақ (ЕО) Орталық Азия үшін ең маңызды серіктестердің бірі болып табылады, оның құрамына бес посткеңестік республика – Қазақстан, Қырғызстан, Тәжікстан, Түркіменстан және Өзбекстан кіреді. Ұзақ уақыт бойы ЕО осы аймақта өз стандарттары мен құндылықтарын ілгерілетуге белсенді түрде тырысып келеді. Бұл мақалада ЕО-ның Орталық Азиямен өзара әрекеттесу эволюциясы қарастырылады, ЕО-ның 2007 және 2019 жылдардағы Орталық Азияға арналған стратегияларының құжаттарына талдау жасалған.

Мақаланың мақсаты - 2007 және 2019 Стратегияларының негізгі мақсаттарын салыстыру, сандық қолмен мазмұнды талдауды пайдалана отырып, екі құжат мәтіндеріндегі ЕО басымдықтары эволюциясын қадағалау.

Мақаланың теориялық негізіне ЕО-ның сыртқы саясатындағы сыртқы басқару тұжырымдамасы, ЕО-ның Орталық Азиядағы стратегиялары бойынша әдебиеттерге шолу, сондай-ақ ЕО-Орталық Азия қарым-қатынастарының тарихын көрсету кіреді. Нәтижесінде, екі стратегияны мазмұнды талдаудың эмпирикалық әдісіне сәйкес, мақалада Орталық Азиядағы ЕО басымдықтары ішінара өзгерді, Еуропаның Орталық Азиямен қарым-қатынастары энергетикаға назар аударудан қауіпсіздік мәселелеріне қарай қайта қаралды.

*Түйін сөздер: Еуропалық Одақ, Орталық Азия, Стратегия 2007, Стратегия 2019, мазмұнды талдау.*

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## ЭВОЛЮЦИЯ ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЯ ЕВРОПЕЙСКОГО СОЮЗА С ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИЕЙ: РЕЗУЛЬТАТЫ КОНТЕНТ-АНАЛИЗА СТРАТЕГИЙ ЕС 2007 И 2019 ГОДОВ

**Зарина Мукашева, Хайдар Эфе**

**Аннотация.** Европейский Союз (ЕС) является одним из важнейших партнеров для Центральной Азии, в которую входят пять постсоветских республик - Казахстан, Кыргызстан, Таджикистан, Туркменистан и Узбекистан. В течение длительного времени ЕС активно пытался продвигать свои стандарты и ценности в этом регионе. В данной статье исследуется эволюция взаимодействия ЕС с Центральной Азией, дается анализ документов Стратегий ЕС для Центральной Азии 2007 и 2019 годов.

Цель статьи - сравнить основные цели Стратегий 2007 и 2019 годов, проследить эволюцию приоритетов ЕС в текстах двух документов, используя количественный контент-анализ, проведенный вручную.

Теоретическая основа статьи включает концепцию внешнего управления во внешней политике ЕС, обзор литературы по Стратегиям ЕС для Центральной Азии, а также освещение истории отношений ЕС и Центральной Азии. В результате, согласно эмпирическому методу контент-анализа двух стратегий, в статье делается вывод о том, что приоритеты ЕС в Центральной Азии частично изменились, пересматривая отношения Европы с Центральной Азией с фокуса на энергетике в сторону вопросов безопасности.

**Ключевые слова:** Европейский Союз, Центральная Азия, Стратегия 2007 года, Стратегия 2019 года, контент-анализ.

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## Introduction

The European Union (EU) has become one of the important partners for independent post-Soviet Central Asia, which includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The region is of interest to the EU with its rich natural resources and great market potential [1]. Moreover, the EU is also important for all five Central Asian states that are landlocked, economically developing and bordering China and Russia [2].

Due to the geographic remoteness, the region of Central Asia is often described as the EU's "neighbor of neighbors" [3]. Nevertheless, the EU and the states of Central Asia extend transparent political, economic, energy, security, environmental and normative dialogue.

The EU-Central Asia relations are

based on the recent 2019 Strategy called "The EU and Central Asia: New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership", which renewed the previous the 2007 "Strategy for a New Partnership". The Strategy document is a legal basis for the EU's regional approach for Central Asia, which intends to assist Central Asia in becoming a more resilient, wealthy, and linked region [1].

After the adoption of the recent Strategy, the academic debates on the comparison of two strategies [4], 2007 Strategy inconsistency [2], and the EU's "out of game" approach for Central Asia [5] is still ranging over. According Dzhuraev, E., and N. Muratalieva [2], the 2007 Strategy's adoption was a consequence of European attention to the region of Central Asia after 9/11, and its implementation is considered

to be constrained by the role of third actors in the region such as Russia and China. From the other hand, Dzshuraev, E., and N. Muratalieva [2], and Winn and Gänzle [4] underline the recent strategy's improvements towards European pragmatism and resilience for Central Asia. However, the previous research is mostly concentrated on comparative analysis of the two strategies, mostly based on descriptive methods, which may be interpreted from both European and Central Asian benchmark in different ways, and perhaps may rely on the authors' biases, and also do not allow to trace the words' deep and hidden meanings.

This article fills the research gap, since we rely on the empirical study, applying the quantitative content analysis, based on word frequency query in the texts of two strategies. Particularly, the conducted content analysis demonstrates the most frequently appeared words, which are equaled to the fields, which are in the focus of the EU-Central Asia relations. Furthermore, we trace the following hypothesis whether the EU's priorities in Central Asia have been evolved from 2007 to 2019 revising European relationship with Central Asia by the shifts of the most frequently used words in the texts' analysis. Previously, there was no evidence of such kind empirical research in the academic debate on the two strategies' analysis.

The main aim of this article is to compare the results of the content analysis of two texts and explore the most areas the EU engaged with in Central Asia counting the most often appeared words. In result, we discovered the most instances of the term "regional cooperation" in both texts, and the

results of the phrase correlate not only between each other, but also with the EU's regionalism promotion agenda [6]. Thus, we may conclude the promotion of the Central Asian close regional ties is the priority for the EU over 2007-2019 period. In 2007 EU Strategy for Central Asia, energy sector was included in the top five the most frequently words, along with "human rights", "development", "help", "trade", and "education" in the top 20 list. Notably, the "security" word is one of the top 10 terms in the 2019 EU Strategy for Central Asia, and dominates, followed by words, such as "sustainable", "economic", "human rights", "trade", and "investment".

The structure of the article is as follows: the article's theoretical foundation comprises the external government idea in EU foreign policy, a literature assessment of the EU's Central Asia Strategies, and background on EU-Central Asia ties. Further, we move to the methodological approach of the article, the last sections are dedicated to the discussion of the manually conducted content analysis of the 2007 and 2019 EU Strategies for Central Asia.

### **Theoretical explanation on the external government concept in the EU foreign policy towards Central Asia**

The term of external governance has been utilized as an analytical tool for examining the processes of EU foreign policy as a global actor [4]. The EU foreign policy concept practically is multifaceted by comprising four main facets, such as Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), the EU External Action, and the External Dimension of Internal

Policies, which legally may justify the EU's involvement towards other regions and states [7]. However, according to Winn and Gänzle external governance “stands in sharp contrast to more actor-based approaches to EU external relations, rooted in traditional foreign policy analysis” [3] and starts from an extension for states beyond Europe [8]. This process is without the potential of admission, therefore the emphasis is on norm dissemination and policy transfer institutional procedures [9]. Arguably, the EU's approach to external governance has arguably been rebalanced to enhance resilience outside EU boundaries, emphasizing regional politics and the need of local internal capacity to deal with rising crises. Previously, some of these choices have been characterized as strategic or privileged relationships [4]. However, external governance models have not only retained a significant sectorial orientation, but also tend to decontextualize the bilateral relationship between the EU and the target nation from its larger geopolitical context [9].

Since geographic distance has an impact, which somehow limits the EU's ability to exercise external governance in Central Asia [4], but, it explains the EU's overall ambition is ‘to promote a ring of well governed countries’ in the EU's neighborhood in order to increase the security of the EU [10]. As a result, external good governance occupies a key place on the EU agenda for Central Asia [11]. The 2007 and 2019 Strategies were intended to be a comprehensive policy tool for the region, embracing and combining both value-based objectives and interest-driven stakes [4]. Several systems of negotiation and implementation are required for the promotion of ideals and the protection of

interests [11]. Therefore, the EU pursues political, economic and normative dialogue both with Central Asia on the bilateral and multilateral basis between the EU and each of the Central Asian republics [12].

### **Literature review on the EU's Strategies for Central Asia**

In literature the EU's status for Central Asia is determined as a “neighbor of neighbors” [13]. Indeed, the EU efforts lag behind the Chinese Belt and Road initiative and the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union, which are considered to be the new Great Games in Central Asia [4].

However, though geographic remoteness of two regions, the EU-Central Asia open dialogue continues due to the political, economic, energy and security ties. Arguably, the last is in the center of relevance, since the 9/11 terroristic attacks and still relevant threats coming from the neighboring Afghanistan.

The European Union Strategy, adopted in 2007, suggested seven areas of collaboration that are, formally at least, of equal importance. Along with softer value-based clusters like “human rights, rule of law, good governance and democratization”, “youth and education”, and “intercultural dialogue”, economic and security-related issues like promoting “economic development”, “trade and investment”, “energy and transport links”, and “combating common threats and challenges” are discussed [10].

Melvin outlines that despite “the general ‘strategic’ directions of the Strategy, the paper outlines a set of concrete commitments including strengthening political dialogue, establishing a Human Rights Dialogue an European Education Initiative, a EU Rule of Law Initiative, an “e-silk-highway”, projects

on environmental issues (water) and a regular energy dialogue” [14]. The author positively assessed the 2007 Strategy’s implementation during 2008, but called for national differentiation in the Strategy [14].

Hoffman contends that the 2007 strategy’s implementations were restricted to providing technical support and knowledge transfer through a seminar

format. Furthermore, actions rarely follow conditionalities, which reduce the effectiveness of the EU instruments. He also maintains that the EU’s emphasis on building stable, long-term economic ties with Central Asia is largely to blame for the current state of affairs [11].

Furthermore, Russell has displayed the fields of 2007 Strategy, which were implemented successfully and not [15].

Proposal in EU strategy, 2007		Current state of play
Establish a regular regional dialogue at foreign minister level	●	Since 2005, annual EU+5 ministerial meetings; since 2013, an annual <u>high-level political and security dialogue</u> , also at foreign minister level
Open EU delegations in each Central Asian country	●	Delegation in Turkmenistan (the only country that does not yet have one) to open mid-2019
Establish a human rights dialogue with each country	●	Annual human rights dialogues are now held with all five countries, enabling the EU to raise human rights issues behind the scenes without compromising relations.
Rule of Law Initiative	●	The general human rights situation remains very difficult, but there have been some positive changes (e.g. Kazakhstan's reform of its criminal justice system).
Education initiative	●	Erasmus+ exchanges and capacity building projects for universities; bilateral aid for Tajik and Kyrgyz schools; Torino Process supporting vocational education reforms.
To facilitate learning, connect Central Asia to Europe digitally, via an e-silk highway	●	Researchers from Tajik and Kyrgyz universities and hospitals can share data with one another and with EU counterparts via the <u>CAREN</u> network, but overall, the region has some of the worst internet connections in the world.
Help Central Asian countries join the WTO	●	With EU support, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan joined the WTO in 2015 and 2013 respectively; Uzbekistan has adopted a roadmap for its membership.
Help Central Asian countries pursue economic diversification	●	Central Asian countries remain predominantly commodity exporters. For example, in 2017 oil and gas accounted for <u>63 %</u> of Kazakhstan's exports, barely changed since 2007.
Support the development of an EU-Central Asia energy transport corridor	●	No new energy transport routes have been developed. Despite a recent agreement on the legal status of the Caspian Sea, a pipeline bringing Turkmen gas to Europe remains a <u>distant prospect</u> .
Help develop renewable energy	●	Excluding hydropower, renewable energy makes a <u>negligible</u> contribution to the region's energy mix. However, Kazakhstan has ambitious plans to generate more electricity from wind and solar power.
Promote transboundary river basin management	●	Competition for scarce water resources remains intense, although tensions between Uzbekistan and its upstream neighbours have eased since 2016.
Support efforts to facilitate trade through more efficient customs procedures	●	According to the World Bank's <u>Ease of Doing Business</u> ranking, Central Asian countries have improved their customs procedures, but are still among the most difficult countries in the world for cross-border trading.
Support anti-corruption efforts	●	Since 2007, Central Asian countries have only marginally improved their ranking on Transparency International's <u>Corruption Perceptions Index</u> , and remain among the world's most corrupt countries.

**Table 1.** 2007 EU-Central Asia Strategy scorecard (green circle=good progress, yellow circle=mixed results, red circle=little progress) [15].

According to the above results, Russell suggests the 2007 EU Strategy was more

successful towards political dialogue construction, rather than economic,

energy or normative objectives. Moreover, the unsuccessful implementations were mentioned as one of the reasons the EU renewed the document in 2019 [15].

After the 2019 Strategy adoption, the two documents were mostly criticized as reflecting each other, and nothing much changed [16]. However, according to Fawn, the EU 2019 Strategy acknowledges and reacts to competition from other geopolitical actors such as Russia and China, and attempts to maximize its comparative advantages against other countries' regional aspirations [17]. Moreover, Fawn argues that the EU itself is a geopolitical player in Central Asia, but the 2019 Strategy does not exclude other geopolitical approaches in Central

Asia and does not contradict them [17].

Moreover, Arynov considers that the 2019 EU Strategy for Central Asia opens a new page in the EU-Central Asia relations, since one of the main distinguishing features is that experts from Central Asia were involved in creating the recent one, indicating that the voice from the region does matter to the EU [18].

We share the view that the EU has carefully revised its foreign policy approach towards Central Asia for regional resilience and stability [4], and the table below illustrates the key changed characteristics between the two Strategies from assumptions of Dzhuraev, E., and N. Muratalieva [2].

Similarity in the spheres of cooperation	Difference		
		2007	2019
-human rights	<b>Emphasis on</b>	partnership	strengthening partnership
-democratization	<b>Structure</b>	general and blurry	detailed and specific
-education	<b>Character</b>	descriptive	analytical
-economic development	<b>Means of implementation</b>	general	concrete/ specific
- regional security -intercultural dialogue	<b>Main security issue</b>	Afghanistan	New security threats including ISIS and cybersecurity
- ecology and water management - energy and transport	<b>Budget</b>	detailed and mostly aimed to the bilateral cooperation	without details

**Table 2.** Comparative analysis on the EU strategies of 2007 and 2019 towards Central Asia based on [2].

According to the table Dzhuraev, E. and N. Muratalieva argue the 2007 Strategy's unsuccessful implementation was dependent on the factors such as "the politics and relations among the Central Asian states, as well as the role of other external actors in the region, such as Russia and, later, China". Moreover,

the authors insist the complemented global policy of the US and the EU was "prioritized efforts in Afghanistan" until 2010s.

One of the most recent researches by Winn and Gänzle examines how the EU has rebalanced its relationship with Central Asia throughout the course of

its two EU-Central Asia Strategies. The authors call the process as “recalibrating” from the Brussels-leading cooperation towards prioritized local resilience, which is defined as stability in the EU’s neighborhood. According to Winn and Gänzle’s comparative assumptions, which summarize the views from previous researches, mentioning characteristic features of the two Strategies as high degree of continuity (the 2019 Strategy continue the ideas of the 2007 Strategy), the non-exclusive character of the relationship towards the EEU and SCO, balancing the EU’s bilateral and regional approaches, the EU’s local orientation for the region and others.

As it has been argued above, the previous academic results on the EU strategies for Central Asia differ, because there is a lack of empirical research on two documents. Mostly, the previous assumptions are based on the authors’ personal judgments, opinions and biases, since the texts of the documents were interpreted by their own understandings. Therefore, we try to incorporate quantitative content analysis, which allow trace evidence of the hidden meanings by words counting and use word frequency technique to explain the main hints.

### **The EU-Central Asian relations**

The European Union began establishing diplomatic relations with the five Central Asian states, all of which were Soviet Republics, in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and relations have improved significantly since the early 1990’s [19]. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the EU has defined its position towards Central Asia and has adopted its first TACIS (Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States) program for

the period of 1991-2006. European Commission adopted the program of financial and technical assistance for twelve states of CIS countries including Central Asia, covering such spheres as agriculture, energy, transport, public administration, private sector, enterprise restructuring, etc. TACIS targeted the new independent states of former Soviet Union with common history, but different strategies for further development. Arguably, one of the key results of TACIS for Central Asia is Partnership and Cooperation Agreements between the EU and each state of the CA, except Turkmenistan. The EU has progressed to the next stage of developing Central Asian partnerships and cooperation agreements. In December 2015, it signed a new EPCA (Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement) with Kazakhstan, which has been in effect since 2019 [20]. The EPCAs with Kyrgyzstan [21] and Uzbekistan [22] were signed in 2019 and 2022, respectively, and are not yet in force. Since 1999, the two latter nations have had a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU [1]. Tajikistan, whose PCA has been in operation since 2010, has also indicated interest in joining the EPCA [23]. Since 2010 the EU and Turkmenistan established ties via temporary trade and trade-related agreements [1].

After the September 11 terrorist attacks against the USA and the international intervention in Afghanistan, the first Central Asian Strategy of the European Union, which was adopted in 2007 and determined the changing strategic value of the Central Asian region, is a turning point in relations. Twelve years after the publication of its first strategy for the region, the European Union prepared a new strategy to replace its strategy for the region in 2019.



There have been regular political dialogue between EU and Central Asian countries on the ministerial level [1], and the first October 2022 the EU-Central Asia summit held in Astana. The EU has diplomatic representation in all Central Asian nations, with the most recent opening in the capital city of Turkmenistan, Ashgabat, in July 2019 [1]. Moreover, the EU is one of the most significant trade partners for Central Asia [1]. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are energy suppliers in oil and gas sector for the EU's import [5].

During 2014-2020 the EU has allocated support for 1,028 million EUR, and 750 million EUR between 2007 and 2013 based on bilateral agreements, as well as on regional programs, targeting education, regional security, sustainable handling of natural resources and socio-economic development in Central Asia [1]. Perhaps, BOMCA (Border Management Programme in Central Asia), CADAP (Central Asia Drug Action Program), ERASMUS +, CAWEP (Central Asia Water Energy Programme), EIDHR (European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights) are the most popular regional programs for Central Asia, funded by the EU, not counting the EU programs for each individual Republic.

In addition, the EU provides financial assistance to Central Asia through loans from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the European Investment Bank (EIB), which have invested a total of €11.3 billion in the region. Loans from the EBRD and EIB support projects such as improving municipal water supply and waste water systems, constructing solar and wind farms, financing SME expansion, and developing transportation and energy infrastructure [15].

Moreover, the EU combines grants and loans for Central Asia through Investment

Facility for Central Asia (IFCA) provides funding in a variety of ways, such as investment grants or loan guarantees that reduce the amount of capital that partner nations must raise independently in order to help Central Asian governments secure financing. A total of €143 million in development aid and €970 million in loans were leveraged between 2010 (the year the IFCA was founded) and 2016 [15].

### **Methodological approach**

This article is based on the empirical research method of quantitative content analysis of the texts of 2007 and 2019 EU Strategies for Central Asia to trace the evolution of the European policy objectives towards target region. The most frequently occurring terms in the papers were tracked manually. Full copies of the EU papers were obtained in English from the European Commission website and printed. The notes with word counting were left in the paper versions of two documents. The results are displayed in the tables below to show the proportion and quantity of those words repeated in the papers the most often.

### **Main findings and discussion of the results**

The previous 2007 and recent 2019 EU Strategies for Central Asia are the fundamental framework for the EU-Central Asian bilateral and interregional cooperation, and express the EU's documented and legal position towards the region. Each document was downloaded from the official website of the European Commission and printed to trace the word frequency manually.

According to the 2007 Strategy's text content analysis, the most frequent words in the 2007 European Strategy are the "EU", "Central Asia", "cooperation", "regional" which are on the top of the

most often used words' list, with the 141, 134, 53, and 49 times of repetition respectively. The following most often appeared word is “energy” with the amount of 52 times repetition. Based on those hints we suppose promotion of the regional cooperation among the Republics of Central Asia, and the energy sector were the main targeting directions of the EU for Central Asia in 2007. Also, together with that the words as “support”, “human rights”, “development”, “assistance”, “trade”, and “education” are in the list of top 20 repeating words, see the Table 3 below.

No	Word	Time of Repetition
1	EU	141
2	Central Asia(n)	134
3	States	60
4	<b>Cooperation</b>	<b>53</b>
5	<b>Energy</b>	<b>52</b>
6	<b>Regional</b>	<b>49</b>
7	Support	41
8	Development	40
9	Human Rights	33
10	Countries	29
11	Assistance	22
12	Dialogue	22
13	International	20
14	Trade	20
15	Strategy	19
16	Economic	18
17	Region	18
18	Education	17
19	Management	17
20	Initiative	16

**Table 3.** Top 20 frequent words in the 2007 EU Strategy for Central Asia.

*Source: author's elaboration.*

Upon the outcome of the 2019 EU Strategy's content analysis, the most frequent words in the text are “EU”, “Central Asia”, “cooperation”, and “regional”, with the amount of 207, 155, 93, 57 times of repetition respectively. Taking into account theorized the EU regionalism promotion agenda in the EU foreign policy towards Central Asia [17], we may conclude the support of closer regional ties in Central Asia is the EU's one of the main priorities in the region, according to the texts of two strategies, since the analysis has shown almost an equal result. Also, together with the phrase “regional cooperation” we see security agenda is one of the most important aspect of cooperation in the EU-CA relations, since the word “security” is included in the list of 10 the most frequently words in 2019. Furthermore, the words such as “sustainable”, “economic”, “human rights”, “trade”, and “investment” are in the list of top 20 repeating words, see the Table 4 below.

No	Word	Time of Repetition
1	EU	207
2	Central Asia(n)	155
3	<b>Cooperation</b>	<b>93</b>
4	<b>Regional</b>	<b>57</b>
5	Region	51
6	Development	49
7	Countries	43
8	Promote	42
9	<b>Security</b>	<b>36</b>
10	Sustainable	34
11	Economic	29
12	International	29
13	Dialogue	28
14	Connectivity	25
15	Human Rights	25
16	Trade	24

17	European	23
18	Investment	23
19	Energy	22
20	Water	22

**Table 4.** Top 20 frequent words in the 2019 EU Strategy for Central Asia.

*Source: author's elaboration.*

In result, we can conclude that the above document analysis has illustrated the slight differences in the priorities of 2007 and 2019 Strategies. Notably, the European regionalism support within the target region correlates with the texts of two Strategies, as the phrase “regional cooperation” is on the top of the most frequently used words in both cases. Moreover, the Union continues its policy towards the region and sets out how the EU and Central Asian states will work together on welfare and regional cooperation [16]. Thus, we agree with Winn and Gänzle’s assumptions on the EU policy’s continuance in two documents.

Despite the EU’s security focus, which has been argued by Dzhuraev and Murataliyeva [2] and explained as a relevant one due to the 9/11 threats coming from neighboring Afghanistan, the analysis has shown the absence of the word “security” in the top 20 the most frequently used words in the text of 2007 Strategy. However, the “security” word is included to the most often appeared words’ list in the text of 2019 Strategy, since it occupies the 9th position and has been repeated 36 times. This situation can be explained as follows: as a result of the economic and political instability, terroristic and security threats coming from Afghanistan, the migration of hundreds of thousands of immigrants

to Europe has directed the attention of the EU to the region. The EU prioritizes cooperation to ensure stability in the region on many issues, especially the tightening of border controls in order to stop or slow down the influx of migrants to Europe [24].

Furthermore, it should be mentioned that the EU’s priority for Central Asia was an energy sector in 2007, according to the content analysis of the 2007’s document, and the “energy” word is almost in the bottom of the list in the 2019 Stratgy’s text. In this context, we may insist, the 2007 Strategy’s was switched from the energy, as it is not in the priority of the 2019 document.

Last but not least, the European Union emphasizes that it is essential for Central Asian states to have a stable and open society that adheres to international norms in the partnership relationship between the Central Asian states and the European Union which was created in last three decades. Therefore, the European Union aims to share its experience and expertise in the fields of democratization, rule of law, and human rights with Central Asian states [19]. But the phrase “human rights” was prioritized in 2007, according to the above content analysis, as the phrase occupies the 9th position in the list of the most frequently words in the text of the 2007 Strategy. Moreover, this result correlates with Hoffman’s assumptions, who insisted the democratization of Central Asia and human rights support was a main course of the 2007 Strategy. Notably, “human rights” moved to 15th position in the text of 2019 Strategy, which evidences the EU slightly revised its normative agenda.

In result, we partially accept our hypothesis on the EU’s approach for Central Asia has been evolved, revising

European relationship with Central Asia from the focus on energy towards security issues, but European support for Central Asian regional cooperation stays to be a priority in both texts.

### **Conclusion**

This study intended to explore the way how the EU priorities in the texts of 2007 and 2019 Strategies for Central Asia have changed over the period. The results have been applied from the manually conducted empirical method of the content analysis of the 2007 and 2019 EU Strategies for Central Asia respectively.

This article initially aimed to help address the lack of empirical research on the EU legal base for republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. This research has intended to contribute filling this research gap through an empirical methodological tool allowing explore the EU engagement with Central Asia.

During the content analysis of the texts of the 2007 EU Strategy for Central Asia we found frequent repetition of the words “regional” and “cooperation”, together with words such as “human rights”, “development”, “assistance”, “trade”, and “education” in the top 20 list of the most frequently appeared words. However, the security word was absent, and the word “energy” is in the top five often used words.

Thus, on the contrary the word “security” is in the top ten list of the most frequently words in the text of the 2019 EU Strategy for Central Asia. Furthermore, the phrase “regional cooperation” is the most often used, based on the 2019 EU strategy content analysis, ranging over to “sustainable”, “economic”, “human rights”, “trade”, and “investment” are in

the list of top 20 repeating words.

Overall, the results of the content analysis allowed us to test the hypothesis about whether the EU’s engagement with Central Asia switched the priority, and we partially accept our hypothesis that they were definitely switched, since the EU does changed its focus from energy sector to the security issues. In this context, we reject the assumptions of Dzhuraev and Murataliyeva [2] on the main EU scope for Central Asia in 2007 was security issues connected to the neighboring Afghanistan.

However, the document analysis has shown that EU’s priority of promoting regional cooperation within the Central Asian states has not changed over the 2007-2019 period. The phrase “regional cooperation” is on the top of the list in both cases together with the words as the “EU” and “Central Asia”.

Foreign officials in the EU and Central Asian nations may be particularly interested in this kind of study. More scholarly discussion is required concerning the EU’s position in the Central Asian region, including its political, economic, security, and normative responsibilities. In general, we advocate for additional study on EU-Central Asia ties due to a lack of analysis on the issue in general, as well as a lack of information created by researchers.

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