Conflict resolution, post-conflict reconstruction … and beyond.

Tajikistan in the context of the EU’s Central Asia Strategy and the broader implications for engaging the post-Soviet periphery

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Abstract

The paper examines the shifting role of the European Union in post-Soviet Tajikistan and the potential for the EU to turn from the country’s largest donor to a key actor effecting positive change in a post-conflict region. For large part of the post-independence period, European attention in Tajikistan has focused on (to a small extent) conflict resolution and mostly on post-conflict reconstruction. This should not surprise, given the extent to which the 1992-97 civil war brought the country on the brink of collapse. Institutional breakdown, the collapse of law and order, the dissolution of the social fabric (with up to 100,000 deaths and one million displaced, with many more leaving the country to work as labour migrants abroad) made Tajikistan resemble a failed state.

While it was Russia that played a greater role in bringing the hostilities to an end, European assistance focused on two important areas: providing the republic with crucial financial assistance and assisting the process of post-conflict reconstruction (and conflict prevention) through the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The EU soon turned into the country’s largest donor. By no means flawless, the process of state reconstruction has been relatively stable and Tajikistan has embarked on a remarkable economic recovery (at least at macroeconomic level). Less affected by popular discontent and less threatened by Islamist militancy, Tajikistan now offers the EU the opportunity to think creatively about how to engage post-conflict states and societies in its neighbours’ neighbourhood. Action in the EU’s neighbourhood has often been hampered by the ambivalent role played by the Russian Federation which tends to perceive the former Soviet periphery as an area of exclusive influence. Competition over influence (real or imagined) has meant that little progress has been made in bringing such conflicts to a solution. In many respects the situation in Central Asia is analogous. However, the case of Tajikistan offers an opportunity to rethink not only the engagement of the more or less proximate neighbourhood with little or no prospect of EU accession but also the possibility to develop new, less antagonistic and more cooperative ties, with local actors, including Russia, as well as China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in the Central Asian region, with whom shared interests exist.

In particular the paper pays attention to two issues: border security and the development of the hydro-electric potential of the country. Since 2000, European assistance to enhance border security and combat drugs trafficking has come through two related programmes: the ‘Border Management Programmes for Central Asia’ (BOMCA) and the ‘Central Asia Drug Action Programme’ (CADAP). Plans to develop Tajikistan’s hydropower resources demand that Tajikistan’s infrastructure undergoes serious upgrading. There is therefore a large potential for investing in developing Tajikistan’s hydroelectric power, either independently or in coordination with Russian companies, as well as Chinese and Kazakh.

The way in which the EU-Tajikistan relationship evolves can help redefine the way in which the EU engages in particularly difficult regions, where EU action has often been of limited efficacy. The paper focuses less on the EU’s capabilities in conflict resolution, and more on the contribution that the EU can offer in the following stage. As a result, the paper contributes to the debates on the EU’s global role as a security actor by shedding light on the development and redefinition of its role outside its traditional region of action.
Introduction

For the European Union, the development of closer ties with Tajikistan within the context of the recently launched Strategy for Central Asia represents a significant opportunity. Tajikistan’s location outside the limelight – away from the Caspian region, therefore less subject to the pressures of geopolitics and the struggle for energy resources that shapes much of the politics of the rest of the region – could allow the EU to foster new forms of cooperation with the local authorities. This should be aimed at devising policies aimed at strengthening the Tajik state’s capacities and stability, thereby significantly assisting reform and development in the country. At the same time this would mean building on the encouraging developments taking place in bilateral relations and taking additional steps aimed at achieving the goals above in a more effective way.

The international community, including the EU, has typically looked at Tajikistan through the lenses of conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction. This has led bilateral relations to become routinised, and ‘stasis’ (out of fear that any form of criticism would destabilise the government and possible stir up new tensions) rather than critical engagement has been the defining element of international strategies towards the country. It is argued here that it is now time to dispose of this framework and to begin to deal with Tajikistan as a ‘normal country’[^1]. Such a ‘paradigm change’ would offer the European Union key opportunities, namely operating in a country that after the war has experienced relative stability (unlike neighbouring Uzbekistan[^2] and Kyrgyzstan[^3]) and where, as a result, there is now the possibility to concentrate on advancing reform. Further, progress in key areas in Tajikistan would offer the opportunity to promote similar policies elsewhere in the Central Asian region.


[^2]: After an initial period of relative order and stability (until the late 1990s) Uzbekistan has been witness to a number of clashes between the government and the opposition. The most significant episodes include the 1998 assassination attempt against President Islam Karimov, the March-April and July-august 2004 bombings across the country and the 13 May 2005 Andijan events where state security forces reacted with extreme brutality to an uprising killing an undefined number of protestors and ordinary civilians. On Andijan see Fumagalli, 2006.

[^3]: Kyrgyzstan has experienced periodical turmoil (including incursions in its territory from both Islamic militants and Uzbek security forces) and popular uprisings against the authorities (from the March 2002 Aksy events to the more well-known so-called ‘Tulip Revolution’) which ousted the then President Askar Akaev in March-April 2005. For more on Kyrgyzstan see Radnitz (2004, 2006).
and provide important lessons for other regions in the post-Soviet periphery (now part of the European Neighbourhood Policy).

The paper is structured as follows. After briefly reviewing how the EU has engaged with conflict resolution in its neighbourhood, I turn to the neighbourhood’s neighbourhood, post-Soviet Central Asia, which for a number of reasons (energy and security, primarily) has emerged as an area of concern for the EU, after more than a decade of mutual neglect. Next, I introduce the case of Tajikistan-EU relations because the case presents an number of particularly complex challenges for the EU as it seeks to engage ‘out of area’ (in regions where the prospect of eventual membership is off the table). I then focus on two issues where the EU could make an innovative contribution by disposing of the lenses of conflict resolution/post-conflict reconstruction and thinking creatively about how it can promote reform and effect change: the question of border management and the politics of water. Final remarks on the broader Central Asian and post-Soviet context conclude.

**Beyond the enlargement: Effecting change without conditionality? The EU in the post-Soviet periphery**

As Tocci notes, ‘the European Union’s raison d’être as a peace project ending centuries of warfare in Europe has fundamentally shaped its external mission’ (2007, p. xi). Conflict resolution has been flagged as a fundamental objective of EU foreign policy. At its eastern as well as southern borders the EU has been preoccupied with and involved in conflict prevention, management, resolution and transformation (ibid.). In particular, the EU has been concerned with ethnopolitical conflicts in its immediate neighbourhood. The West Balkans, since Europe’s deafening silence of the early 1990s, have kept it focused on that part of the world. Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia have been at the forefront of international attention. It is only since the 2004 wave of enlargement, when the borders of the EU shifted significantly eastwards, that areas traditionally not of primary concern, such as the post-Soviet periphery, began to matter. For obvious reasons attention fell on those countries bordering the EU, namely Belarus’, Ukraine and Moldova. Of these it was Moldova that captured attention

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4 Central Asia is not part of the ENP. The three South Caucasus republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia were included at a later stage.
because of conflict opposing the secessionist Transdnistrian Republic (PMR, Pridnestrovkskaia Moldavskaia Republika) and the Republic of Moldova. This unresolved conflict is one of the four frozen conflicts across the post-Soviet space and now close (or closer) to the EU borders (the others being that in Nagornyi Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan; and in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, self-proclaimed republics claiming independence from Georgia).

If the repeated crises in the Western Balkans brought the gap between ‘capabilities and expectations’ (Kamov, 2006) in the EU to the fore, the new eastern enlargement has brought a new number of hotspots closer to European borders. Besides the question of the potential spill-over of a number of threats (various types of trafficking, as well as the destabilising presence of unresolved conflicts), the presence of new neighbours poses a number of challenges to the EU. Neil Melvin has correctly noted that the EU is currently ‘facing a strategic challenge in its external policies’ (2007, p. 1). The rise of international actors such as Russia and China, he continues, are ‘creating the EU a serious threat’ to ‘its ambition to apply external policies that reflect European values’ (ibid.). A democracy promotion agenda as developed in East-Central Europe in the 1990s seems unfeasible: it simply cannot compete with actors such as Russia (and China) who offer greater carrots with no strings attached. Similarly presenting itself as a status quo power (thereby emphasising security and stability, over other issues) runs against the values the EU claims to promote. The major difficulty that the EU encounters when seeking to play a role in its new neighbourhood is determined by the fact that unlike earlier relations with then non EU countries (e.g. Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, the Baltic states), in the cases of Ukraine and Moldova EU membership is still eons away, where in the case of Belarus and the South Caucasus it is simply not on the agenda. The question then becomes: how to promote change in a context where conditionality (effecting change & offering the final prospect of EU membership) where prospect of membership really exists?

In fact the problem is two-fold. On the one hand is the clear absence of the ultimate carrot (membership); the EU has in most cases only been able to offer some form of partnership (trade agreements, partnerships), which falls very short of expectations (especially in the

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5 Despite the important issue of minority rights in Estonia and Latvia (with regard to the conditions of the Russian-speaking population) the Baltic republics were never counted as hotbeds of conflicts. At the same time the presence of a European minority rights regime significantly contributed to improve the legislation in those countries.
The second issue, which becomes evident in the case of Belarus, Armenia and the Central Asian republics is that some of the new neighbours have options other than close relations with the EU. As shown elsewhere (Fumagalli, 2007b), the Central Asian republics have been keen on adopting a multi-vector foreign policy where they balanced relations with the West with relations with other countries, such as Russia and China.

As result, the key question the EU faces in such contexts is promoting an effective foreign policy which addresses key challenges while remaining true to its values as a normative power. To do so, the EU has developed a number of initiatives, strategies, mechanisms which have been deployed across regions, from the West Balkans to the Caucasus and the Western part of the former Soviet Union. A number of instruments have been deployed to more recently the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) has been extended to include those countries such as Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus, and the three South Caucasian republics.

When it comes to Central Asia the EU has traditionally played a marginal role in the region. Despite the presence of significant energy reserves and the presence of the largest and bloodiest post-Soviet conflict (Tajikistan) and the proximity to Afghanistan the EU has been remarkably inactive, if one excludes the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCA, formerly TCA) signed with all the countries of the region. It is only under the initiative of the German presidency in 2006 that devising a new strategy for the region became a matter of urgency (the strategy is examined below).

There is no downplaying of the many challenges that the EU faces here. As Melvin put it, ‘advancing the EU’s interests in Central Asia while also remaining true to the Union’s values will clearly be a tall order’ (2007, p. 1). Particularly problematic (and in this the challenges are similar in the South Caucasus and the South Mediterranean), the mixture of sticks and carrots seems limited at best. This forces the EU to rethink its strategic approach in a creative way. Before expanding on this, I briefly introduce the case of Tajikistan as understanding how the EU proposes to engage this Central Asian republic offers a particularly interesting vantage point to examine the opportunities and challenges that renewed and closer EU-Central Asian relations offer and present. The second part of the next section focuses on two key areas where the EU can effectively make a contribution to the stability, prosperity and development of the country while also strengthening its position and role in the region.
TAJIKISTAN

Tajikistan is a small mountainous republic, bordering China, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, currently the most impoverished of all the post-Soviet republics and ranked among the world’s 20 poorest. The five-year civil war which ravaged the isolated mountain republic which extends from the western part of the Fergana Valley in the north to the Pamir peaks in the east – and which also shares a long border with Afghanistan – delayed post-Soviet transformation and reform, both economically and politically.
The making of Soviet Tajikistan (1924-1991)

The formation of Tajikistan was the consequence of the Soviet process of national delimitation (natsional’noe razmeshevanie) and the territorial-administrative re-organisation of Central Asia (1924-36). Home to sedentary and nomadic communities until the Russian conquest in the late 19th century, the populations of Central Asia largely lacked experience of modern statehood. Instead, several forms of allegiance co-existed and overlapped: at the supra-national level (Islam) and at the local level (city and regional affiliations). National loyalties had also hardly developed among the peoples of the region. The Soviet effort to introduce new forms of political organisations and identity in Central Asia, therefore, played a formative role in shaping the Tajik state and the Tajik nation.

As a result of the process of national-territorial delimitation in Central Asia during the 1920s and 1930s – which established five entities (Union Republics) each of which bore the semblances of a state (with constitutions, flags, anthems, parliaments), but remained deprived of sovereignty, which rested with the Soviet state – Tajikistan was created in 1929 as the last piece in the regional puzzle. Tajikistan had previously been part of the Uzbek Union Republic (SSR), endowed with a lower degree of autonomy (Autonomous Republic).

With no history of previous independent statehood and no sense of political, institutional or even cultural coherence, different portions of territory were assembled to create a Tajik Republic. Historical centres of Persian/Tajik culture, such as the cities of Bukhara and Samarkand, were assigned to the Uzbek SSR. The Tajik Republic comprised the south-western part of the Ferghana Valley (around Khujand), the Pamir areas (later to become Gorno-Badakhshan), the Hissar and Gharm valleys and the southern regions of Khatlon and Qurghonteppa along the Afghan border. A modus vivendi was established during the Soviet period, which allowed different regions to occupy distinct niches in the political and economic system of the country. At the same time, the division of the region left many in Tajikistan with a strong sense of historical injustice in terms of the loss of the ‘heartland’ of Tajik culture and the creation of a substantial number of co-ethnics concentrated in the Uzbek Republic. The process of national-delimitation left sizeable Uzbek communities within

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Tajikistan’s borders. Uzbeks constitute the largest non Tajik group in Tajikistan (ca. 15-25% depending on the census considered). The decision to include strongly Uzbekified areas such as the western Ferghana Valley, but to leave cities like Bukhara and Samarkand – where Persian language and culture were dominant - within Uzbekistan were highly controversial and ultimately made Tajikistan an ‘incomplete country’, strongly dependent on its stronger western neighbour, and Russia. Furthermore the unofficial balance of power assigned the northern province of Leninabad, home to a significant Uzbek population, a hegemonic role in the republic’s life.7

However, even towards the end of the Soviet era when nationalist sentiments began to emerge and occasional clashes sparked, the position of minority groups rarely seemed threatened. In fact, Muriel Atkin observes that ‘the late Soviet regime in Tajikistan made several conciliatory gestures towards the republic’s Uzbek minority’ (1997, p. 299). Bookstores offering Uzbek language publications were opened in the south of the country, a new Uzbek weekly launched, alongside two other newspapers already publishing in Uzbek language and Uzbek broadcasts on the radio. Schools provided Uzbek-language tuition in areas of compact Uzbek settlement (1997, p. 299).

This relatively positive environment, alongside Leninabad’s traditionally close links with Tashkent, contributes to explain Uzbek behaviour during the civil war, where they primarily sided the with pro-government faction. The roots of the civil war are complex and multi-faceted, and a mono-causal explanation fails to capture the different dynamics operating at different levels. Though the war never took ethnic tones, it was also about defining what being Tajik meant. Overall, a critical reason for the outbreak of hostilities lay in the failure of government and opposition to moderate and accommodate their respective demands. Gretsky (1995), in particular, is adamant that Soviet Tajikistan remained for large part of its history deprived of autonomous agency. He argues that Soviet Tajikistan acted as

7 Leninabad elite’s hegemonic role in Soviet Tajikistan can be ascribed to economic, socio-cultural and geographic reasons, including the fact that the region was the only industrialized area in an otherwise rural or inhospitable land. Its geographic location, integrated in the Ferghana Valley region and with Uzbekistan, made Tajikistan’s economic system viable, though in the end the country depended on Moscow’s subsidies. The north was also culturally more exposed to contacts with Russia and the rest of the Soviet Union, compared to the more provincial areas in the south. It should be pointed out nonetheless that ‘regions’ should not be reified as if they were discrete units and that internal differences and competition existed (e.g. between Khujand, Leninabad’s administrative province and the areas around Istaravshan and Penjikent).
Tashkent’s appendix through the action of the Leninabadi faction. Khujand/Leninabad remained outside of Dushanbe’s writ for several months in 1992, though some point to the lack of political will to seek outright secession (Human Rights Watch, 1998; Martin, 1997). Overall, Akiner notes, Uzbeks have sided with the ‘pro-government’ forces\(^8\) and in the southern areas have joined the Popular Front, a pro-government militia. The motivation lay in the attempt by ruling elite to protect its existing privileges from the perceived threat coming from the Islamic and democratic opposition. Tajikistan Uzbeks have thereafter predominantly supported the incumbent in Tajikistan and President Emomali Rakhmonov since 1994 for his role in stabilising the country\(^9\).

**The civil war (1992-1997) and the Peace Agreement**

In the early 1990s, social and political order collapsed in Tajikistan when the liberalisation initiated by former Soviet President Gorbachev led to a sudden shift in power relations in the republic\(^10\). As a result of these changes, the precarious political balance put in place by the Soviets to rule the diverse regions of the republic was shattered and the country virtually imploded. A sudden and particularly brutal civil war erupted in 1992, which eventually left

\(^8\) To be sure, there were Uzbeks among the ranks of the opposition, particularly within the ranks of the exiled Islamic opposition that had found refuge and some degree of support when fleeing Uzbekistan in the early 1990s. Elements of the IMU (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan) closely co-operated with factions of the Tajik opposition, though this tactical alliance (anti-government and anti-Uzbekistani) between them waned in the aftermath of the 1997 Peace Accords leading to power-sharing between government and opposition. However the ethnic dimension in the war was negligible. More appropriately the Tajik conflict is to be explained as a result of inter-regional tensions (Roy, 2001), the balance of power between which had been shaken by the economic collapse followed by the Soviet implosion and the withdrawal of Moscow’s political support for the then dominant faction (the northern part of the country, the so-called Leninabadi).

\(^9\) Emomali Rakhmonov, originally head of a state farm (sovkhzo) in the province in Kulyab, was little known until 1992 when he was first named Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Kulob province, and later named Chairman of the country’s Supreme soviet in 1992. He was elected president in 1994 (the presidency had been abolished between 1992 and 1994) (Nourzhanov, 2005, p. 129, fn. 57). Though he owed his sudden rise in national politics to his patron, Sanjak Safarov, he later tried to consolidate his grip on power by curtailing the influence of local warlords on Tajikistan’s politics.

more than 50,000 dead\textsuperscript{11} and at least a million people displaced. Although the bloodiest phase of the hostilities was over by 1993, the conflict continued until 1997, when a peace agreement was signed by representatives of the government forces and opposition factions.

Out of exhaustion of the various factions with the hostilities and under the pressure of outside actors (primarily Russia and Iran) the government-backed forces and the opposition came to an agreement to end the hostilities and begin a process of reconciliation. The Peace Agreement set in place a power-sharing agreement where, at least formally, the government conceded to the opposition a role in the power structure and institutions.

The peace agreement comprises the following documents\textsuperscript{12}:

- Protocol on Military issues: the agreement aimed at the demobilization of the opposition forces (United Tajik Opposition, UTO) and their progressive reintegration in a unified military (Tajik Army). By 1998 the UTO had announced the closure of its camps in Afghanistan.

- Protocol on Refugees: the civil war made about a million Tajik citizens refugees, either internationally in neighbouring Uzbekistan and Afghanistan (!), or internally displaced. Within four months of signing of the Protocol tens of thousands of refugees made return to their region of origin. Where this was not possible they were resettled and provided with shelter. UNMOT, UNHCR and the CIS/PKF (CIS Peacekeeping Forces) played a key role in assisting the speedy progress of this stage.

- Political Protocol: The driving principle was the sharing of power between the former combatants on the basis of a 70% to the government - 30% to the opposition distribution of government posts. The Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (one of the main political subjects within the opposition) was allowed to contest power and continued – a unique case in the region – to exist as an autonomous political party. Although the leader of the government faction Imomali Rakhmonov (president of the republic) and the former opposition leader Said Abdullo Nuri exercised considerable restraint, a number of difficulties arose, including the question of the return of opposition leaders from exile (including UTO deputy leader Hoja Akbar Turajonzoda), and more crucially the reluctance of the government faction to actually

\textsuperscript{11} Some put figures to a much higher 100,000.

\textsuperscript{12} (http://www.c-r.org/our-work/accord/tajikistan/key-elements.php)
share power. The monopolization of power by the government became even more apparent in the following years.

The key institution set in place to ensure the implementation of the accord was the Commission for National Reconciliation (CNR). The CNR included representatives of both the government and the United Tajik Opposition.

After the war: Post-conflict reconstruction (1997-present)

More than ten years later, Tajikistan has slowly, but steadily emerged from the abyss of the civil war to a process of state formation and integration with the regional and international system. For the larger part of the past decade, analysts and policy-makers have tended to look at Tajikistan’s post-war course through the lenses of conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction. While this frame is not incorrect per se, this brought with it an implicit assumption that because Tajikistan was on a course of precarious recovery from the war, criticism of failed progress should be kept to a minimum to avoid the risk of derailing the post-conflict course, altering the fragile agreement and, in the end, plunging the country back into bloodshed. Though moderate encouragement was sensible, continuing to look at Tajikistan through the lenses of post-conflict reconstruction is turning post-war dynamics into stasis (perhaps even allowing the emergence of authoritarian politics).

Faced with this situation, the new approach to Central Asia developed by the EU offers the opportunity to re-engage with Tajikistan at a vital stage in its post-independence history and, in particular, to introduce new policies that can assist the development of the country and avert the drift into authoritarianism. In this section I concentrate on three main issues which the EU has identified as its priority areas in the region:

- security and stability;
- economic transformation;
- democratisation and political reform.

Security and stability

Tajikistan has come a long way from the abyss of the civil war. In the early post-war period, occasional episodes of unrest and insurgencies have continued even after the peace accord.
Former warlords, disgruntled political figures and factions, or even renegade elements of the Tajik army have periodically challenged the authority of the centre. Former Tajik army Colonel Makhmud Khudoberdiev’s occasional insurgencies in the late 1990s are typical of the type of challenges that persisted in the aftermath of the peace accord. Allegedly with the backing of neighbouring Uzbekistan, Khudoberdiev attempted a mutiny in southern Tajikistan 1997 and later attacked government buildings in the northern province in what appeared as a failed coup in 1998. The turbulent period continued, and former field commanders and warlords (such as Yoqub Solimov) plotted against the authorities.

After years of confrontation with former allies challenging his authority, President Emomali Rahmon has been able to consolidate his position and that of the ruling People’s Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDPT). This has brought the marginalisation of former warlords previously associated with the administration, but consolidation of power has come to the expense of legitimate dissent, as will be discussed later on. The country has remained overall stable and has not experienced the convulsions and unrest that have taken place in neighbouring Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in recent years. As the occasional rebellions of former warlords decreased, another thorn in the authorities’ side is now represented by the question of border security. Tajik authorities have faced the accusation of connivance or ineptitude with respect to control over the country’s borders, as Islamic militants have been reported to have infiltrated Uzbek and Kyrgyz territory from the Tajik side of the border. The summer 1999 and 2000 militant incursions as well as the more recent clashes between criminal groups and border guards on the Tajik-Kyrgyz border in May 2006 well illustrate the authorities’ deficiencies in this area.

13 Actually the ruling circles seem to come all from the President’s village of Dunghara in the southern Kulob region, causing wider resentment among the excluded groups from other parts of the country or even elsewhere in Kulob.

14 This includes the removal from official posts of former field commanders Saidsho Shamolov and the Cholov brothers (Varorud, 21 January 2002).

The EU Strategy for Central Asia\textsuperscript{16} identifies security and stability in the region as its key strategic interests in the region. This builds on extant European efforts in this direction: since 2000, European assistance to enhance border security and combat drugs trafficking has come through two related programmes: the ‘Border Management Programmes for Central Asia’ (BOMCA) and the ‘Central Asia Drug Action Programme’ (CADAP). These programmes cover a number of areas (legal assistance, assistance at the customs, intelligence, human resources, drug abuse prevention) designed to improve security in the Central Asian region. Security at borders has in fact improved in recent years, but the above-mentioned 2006 clashes are a reminder that more should be done in this area. In particular, since Tajik troops have recently replaced their Russian predecessors on the Afghan border, border management appears a critical area where cooperation between the Tajik authorities and their international partners (including the EU and Russia) could be enhanced. I return to the BOMCA/CADAP program later in the paper.

\textit{Economic transformation}

The Tajik economy has grown significantly in recent years. Industrial production has expanded, and so has agricultural output. Domestic consumption also grew as a result of a rise in salaries and especially of the remittances of Tajik migrants abroad. Poverty reduction measures have helped to decrease the poverty rate from 81\% in 1999 to about 65\% of the population in 2007. EC assistance to Tajikistan has played a critical role in enabling the local population to cope with the economic hardship of post-Soviet transition\textsuperscript{17}.

Since 1999 the country has reported a robust growth, due primarily to expanding cotton, gold and aluminium exports\textsuperscript{18}. The government has also pledged to undertake serious reforms in a number of areas, mostly to alleviate poverty, still widespread, land reform, and address the question of public administration reform. The announced ‘National Development Strategy until 2015’ as a comprehensive strategy to ensure sustained economic growth and reduce


\textsuperscript{17} Total EC assistance to Tajikistan for the period 1991-2006 amounts to €499.7. Of this €109.8m were allocated to food security and €165.1m to humanitarian assistance (ECHO).

\textsuperscript{18} World Bank, \textit{World Bank Indicators} (2001-2005), Washington, D.C.
poverty\(^{19}\) is an important step in this direction and this is an area where the EU, along with other states and international institutions can assist. If macro-economic results have been positive, however, the Tajik economy has been dependent on three main sources of revenue, none of which bodes well for the long-term viability of the country’s economy: remittances from Tajik migrants abroad, trafficking of narcotics and international aid. The paradoxical situation here is that all three converge to make Tajikistan a rentier state\(^{20}\), which is a state whose revenue depends on a small number of resources. The trafficking of narcotics risks turning the country into a ‘narcostate’\(^{21}\) and while some progress has been made and drug seizure levels have increased significantly in recent years, the administration has sent mixed signals. On the one hand attempts to curb corruption among border guards and the severing of ties with former warlords involved in narco-trafficking is a welcome development. On the other, this process appears selective, as the (brief\(^ {22}\)) appointment of former General Ghaффor Mirzoev, a former PFT commander\(^{23}\), to head the State Drugs Control Agency raised doubts over the seriousness of the Rahmon administration in this regard.\(^{24}\) Two other sources of revenue have enabled the population to cope with post-war hardship: remittances from labour migrants and poverty-alleviation measures. It is difficult to imagine how the growing Tajik population would have survived without remittances and international aid\(^{25}\). It is estimated that the annual remittances from labour migrants amount to $1.2bn in 2005 (17% of the country’s GDP), up from $0.6bn in 2005 (12% of GDP)\(^ {26}\). At the same time, however, there

\[^{19}\text{Available at http://www.untj.org/files/reports/NDS_(English).pdf}\]


\[^{22}\text{Mirzoev was later removed in 2006 and jailed against accusations of profiting from the narcobusiness.}\]

\[^{23}\text{The PFT (Popular Front of Tajikistan) was one of the militias that fought in the civil war on the side of the ‘government faction’.}\]

\[^{24}\text{Analogous situations occurred in the cases of Mirzokhujo Nizomov, Hokim Kalandarov and Salamsho Muhabbatshoev, who were also elevated to key positions in official institutions (K. Nourzhanov, “Saviours of the nation or robber barons? Warlord politics in Tajikistan”, Central Asian Survey, 24(2), 2005, p. 124).}\]

\[^{25}\text{See note 9.}\]

\[^{26}\text{EIU Tajikistan Country Profile (June 2007). Marat suggests that the figure may in fact be much higher, at about $6-8 billion, approximately the size of the country’s GDP (Marat, op. cit., p. 105).}\]
are limits to the benefits these measures bring to economic development; they are palliatives, not solutions.

**Democratisation and political reform**

Progress has been made in the areas of security/stability and economic development (with all the caveats outlined above). It is in the area of political reform that the country is lagging behind. The political opposition as well as the media have been subject to tighter restrictions in what appears to be a decisive turn towards authoritarian policies. President Emomali Rahmon won re-election in November 2006 (until 2013). The opposition was weak, divided and often harassed. Moreover the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) is still in the process of redefining its role in national politics under the new leadership of Muhiddin Kabiri. Kabiri succeed the historic leader Said Abdullo Nuri who died in 2006. The IRP decided not to field a candidate, and the opposition Democratic Party and the Social-Democratic Party boycotted the elections on the grounds that harassment and frauds would make them neither free or fair. Isolated protests against the elections were reported in some areas of the country, but none of these posed a challenge similar to those that led to the overthrow of the government in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan or other post-Soviet countries. Challengers, real, potential or imagined, have progressively been sidelined, ensuring Rahmon’s dominant status. The two main challenges here are the criminalisation of political life and the overall institutional weakness of the Tajik state. Warlordism has been successfully contained since the end of the civil war and warlords have either been jailed, pushed out of political life or killed. As President Rahmon’s authority in the country has consolidated, potential challenges by former warlords and allies have been gradually sidelined. Consolidation of central authority has not, however, decreased the influence of criminal groups in the country’s political and economic life. Tajikistan stands out as one of the most corrupt countries of the world. According to the organization Transparency International, the republic ranks 150 out of 157 according to its Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). The emphasis in the EU

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27 Democratic Party leader Mahmadruz Iskandarov was imprisoned in October 2005. The party later suffered from an allegedly government-induced split that undermined its position.

28 E. Marat, *Organized Crime, and Corruption in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan*, Silk Road Papers, Johns Hopkins University (Baltimore, MD) and Uppsala University (Uppsala, Sweden), October 2006.

Strategy for Central Asia on the importance of rule of law, human rights, good governance and the presence of transparent political institutions for the ‘development of a stable political framework and functioning economic structures’ is to be welcomed, and a strategy of critical engagement (combining encouragement with criticism, when appropriate) should help shape reform, despite the region’s many recalcitrant actors. In particular the EU Rule of Law Initiative should identify clear ways of monitoring and rewarding progress, training personnel and but should also be firm in highlighting areas where implementation does not follow (or where legislative change is taking place slowly).

At a more general level the consolidation of formal institutions is taking place only gradually (if at all) and much of the politics in Tajikistan occurs through informal institutions. Patron-client networks dominate both the politics of the centre and the regions. The interplay between formal and informal institutions, however, need not be seen as necessarily conflictual.\(^{30}\) While warlordism is certainly detrimental to the process of political reform in the country, working alongside local authority figures can contribute to make formal and informal institutions convergent towards the goal of initiating political reform. This should not be understood as suggesting that the EU should work with people outside the law. Rather, it should attempt to work along with traditional institutions such as the avlod (an institution comprising community elders and regulating relations among community members with shared kinship ties\(^ {31}\)) and the mahalla (neighbourhood community) to ensure that local community leaders have a stake in the system and particularly in the functioning of the system. This is an area that has thus far not received sufficient attention from the European Union, which has preferred to emphasise the role of formal institutions.

Having reviewed the main dynamics that have shaped Tajikistan’s post-soviet history, I now turn to the EU Central Asian Strategy, launched in June 2007. I review its main goals and the mechanisms through which the EU (and the EC in particular) seek to advance them. Next, I focus on two main areas where a significant space for close cooperation between Tajikistan

\(^{30}\) A similar point (at a more general level, and not specific to the case in question) has been in G. Helmke and S. Levitsky, “Informal Institutions and Comparative Politics: A Research Agenda”, Perspectives on Politics, 2(4), 2004, pp. 725-739.

and the EU exists: border management (with a focus on both border security and drug trafficking), and the politics of water.

**EU-Central Asian relations before and after the strategy**

The Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are not included in the European Neighbourhood Policy and are better referred to, if anything, as the ‘neighbourhood’s neighbourhood’. The very same issues that make the Caucasus important to Europe (energy resources, international crime in the form of arms smuggling, human and drugs trafficking) apply to Central Asia, with the notable addendum of the region’s proximity to Afghanistan (with possible mutual spill-over of instability), as well as the risk of state failure induced by resilient authoritarianism and growing social and economic frustration in the region. This notwithstanding until 2007 the EU paid scant attention to the region. Cooperation was limited to a restricted number of areas (examined below), showing little concern for issues such as democratization and political reform, but also the way in which the region’s reserves may be not only a resource to meet Europe’s energy needs, but also turn to be an asset for the long term well-being of local communities.

*Technical Assistance.* TACIS (Technical Aid to the Commonwealth of Independent States) was launched in 1991 to provide technical assistance to 12 countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. TACIS covered a number of areas of cooperation, including the support for legislative, institutional and legal reform, support to the private sector and assistance for economic development; development of infrastructure networks; development of the rural economy, support for nuclear safety (external relations website). The TACIS programme expired in 2006 and a new concept of assistance and regulation has been incorporated in the EC Regional Strategy Paper for Assistance which accompanied the EU strategy in 2007 (which sets the funding strategy for 2007-2013).

*Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA).* For large part of the post-Soviet period the Trade and Cooperation Agreement has regulated relations between the European Communities and Tajikistan. It will be replaced by the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), which represents the framework within which the European Union has dealt with the individual Central Asian states. The PCA with Tajikistan, signed in 2004, is awaiting ratification by the EU members, and pending that, an Interim Agreement on Trade and Trade-related Matters signed on 1 May 2005, provides the implementation of trade-related provisions of the PCA. The PCA covers a number of traditional policy areas
(including political dialogue, economic cooperation, democracy and human rights, prevention of illegal activities, cultural and financial cooperation), as well as new areas of common interest, such as weapons of mass destruction (WMD), migration and terrorism reflecting the changes in the post-cold war international system. The importance of establishing rule of law, democracy and continuing political reform occupies a somewhat more peripheral place in the PCA and it is only in the recent EC Regional Strategy Paper for Assistance to Central Asia for the period 2007-2013 and the EU Strategy, that these issues are addressed at length.

**Humanitarian aid.** In light of the fact that the 1992-1997 civil war brought the country to the brink of collapse, it is no surprise that Tajikistan was the region’s largest recipient of European humanitarian aid (through the ECHO program). Total EC assistance to Tajikistan for the period 1991-2006 amounts to €499.7m. Of this €109.8m were allocated to food security and €165.1m to humanitarian assistance (ECHO), making the country the region’s largest recipient of aid.

**International involvement in the Tajik peace process.** The Tajik peace process brought together a wide range of international actors, including the UN, several NGOs, the CIS peacekeeping forces and the OSCE. The OSCE (then still CSCE) participated for the first time in the talks at the Teheran meeting in 1994. The OSCE clarified its role with the UN so that there would be no clash in the mandate of each. The UN would continue its lead role in the process, while the OSCE would keep its role in promoting democratic institutions (organising elections, monitoring human rights, helping drafting the constitution). Dushanbe’s office was the first mission office the organization established in the region, which was then followed by other regional offices in Kurganteppa, Sharituz and Dusti in 1995 and Khujand and Gharm in 1998. The main focus lay on practical issues such as the proper treatment of prisoners and army draftees, ownership or occupation of lands and houses, and equal distribution of aid by local authorities (Ghebali, 2004 p. 4). Following the signature of the Peace Accord in 1997 the OSCE continued its cooperation with the UN in the coordination of the post-conflict reconstruction phase. It must be recalled however that the greater role in bringing the Tajik conflict to an end was played by the Russian Federation, both politically by bringing the parties of the conflict together and militarily through its presence across the country (201st Division)
Overview of EC Assistance to Central Asia, 1991-2006 (mln EUR)

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<td>168,95</td>
<td>168,5</td>
<td>107,95</td>
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<td>28,4</td>
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<td>193,5</td>
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<tr>
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<td>109,8</td>
<td>1,2</td>
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<td>121,2</td>
<td>2,1</td>
<td>234,3</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2,0</td>
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<td>7,5</td>
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<td><strong>Financial aid</strong></td>
<td>149,5</td>
<td>58,7</td>
<td>24,9</td>
<td>22,7</td>
<td>44,9</td>
<td>300,7</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total funding</strong></td>
<td>499,75</td>
<td>228,85</td>
<td>193,4</td>
<td>282,25</td>
<td>111,35</td>
<td>1387</td>
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After the Strategy

The last couple of years have seen noticeable activity from the EU side to enhance dialogue and cooperation with the Central Asian region, which stands in strong contrast with the overall low profile kept during the previous fifteen years, where ‘European presence’ primarily referred to the activities of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The strategy, promoted under the auspices of the German presidency, was finally launched in June 2007, along with a Regional Strategy Paper For Assistance to Central Asia to outline the (financial) instruments to support the strategy for the period 2007-2013. The EU has also appointed a Special Representative to Central Asia.

In the strategy the EU identifies ‘security and stability’ as its key strategic interests (p. 3). The EU, the strategy notes, ‘has a strong interest in a peaceful, democratic, and economically prosperous Central Asia’. At present, neither of the Central Asian republics is any close to
achieving those aims than it was a decade ago. In fact, some countries have been dangerously drifting towards even tougher authoritarianism. Central Asia matters in itself, it is said in the strategy, but it also matters because of two other reasons: because of Central Asia’s closer proximity to Europe following the EU’s eastern enlargement (p.1), and because a stable and peaceful Central Asia can contribute to safeguarding peace and prosperity in the neighbouring countries (Afghanistan in primis). Moreover, challenges such as border management, trans-national migration, the fight against organised crime and terrorism, human, drugs and arms trafficking require a close cooperation between Europe and Central Asia. In the areas of ‘governance, rule of law, human rights, democratization, education and training’, the strategy observes, ‘the EU is willing to share experience and expertise’ (p.1).

While the aims read relatively unproblematic the key question is how the EU intends to achieve the stated objectives in an environment which is particularly complex. In this regard the strategy points to the fact that it aims to build on the PCA and EU assistance programmes to further its objectives. The strategy identifies the Commission, each individual member state and a Special Representative to Central Asia (EUSR) as all playing a key role in implementing the strategy. A crucial aspect of the strategy is the document that accompanied the strategy, namely the strategy paper which outlines the financial aspects of EU assistance to the region. The strategy outlines ‘a balanced bilateral and regional approach’ (p.5). The emphasis is a on combination of regional and country-specific agreements and programmes, reflecting the diversity of the countries as well as the presence of common challenges which demand a regional approach (‘organised crime, human, drugs and arms trafficking, terrorism and non proliferation issues, inter-cultural dialogue, energy, environmental pollution, water management, migration, border management and transport infrastructure’, p.5). Among the more specific aims the EU identifies the following: promoting the respect for the rule of law, human rights, good governance and the development of transparent, democratic political structures (p.5); investing in youth and education (p. 8); promoting economic development, trade and investment (p. 9); strengthening energy and transport links (p. 10); enhancing the focus on environmental sustainability and water (p. 12).

The rest of the section focuses on two issues (border management and water) which figure prominently in the second part of the strategy and where the EU could make a significant contribution to the development of Tajikistan and by extension of the Central Asian region.
1) Border management: Enhancing security

Following the booming in opium and opiates production in neighbouring Afghanistan in recent years, estimates put the amount of heroin passing through Tajikistan at a staggering 100 tonnes per year. Most of this is directed to Russia and Europe. In this respect the EU Border Management Programme and the Drugs Action Programme (now merged in the BOMCA/CADAP), endorsed by all five Central Asian countries is particularly important not only to tackle the drug trafficking problem, but more generally at enhancing border security while ensuring that this does not block transit and trade. EU assistance in this sector will provide support for regional border and migration management initiatives. The EU has a particularly important role to play here as all the republics have tended to look at borders as barriers, insulating themselves as if fortresses under the siege of a number of external threats. While this is not entirely incorrect per se (Islamic militants have conducted cross-border incursions over the years, most notably in the summers of 1999 and 2000; drugs trafficking is endemic and so is corruption among officials), the EU should emphasise that cross-border activities and cooperation present an important resource to the livelihoods of the border dwellers and the local economies.

CADAP

The EU Central Asia Drug Action Program (CADAP) aims to foster a regional development-oriented drug control strategy that ensures a sustained reduction drug control strategy and trafficking in line with EU laws and practices. Its sister programmes are BUMAD and SCAD (in Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova; and Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia respectively). Originally implemented in 2001, CADAP has gone through 3 phases. Phase 1 (2001-2004) supported – among other things - airport control (procurement of drug control equipment); the development of a new drug control authority in Tajikistan; phases 2 and 3 support legal assistance to reform drug legislation in the region, the strengthening of law enforcement capabilities, and the establishment of a prison regime for drug-addicted prisoners to avoid transmission of HIV/AIDS. Phase 4 aims at promoting the adoption by local authorities of EU good practices in the field of drug policies (in line with the EU Drugs Strategy 2005-2012). The specific goals of the CADAP include reinforcing drug control capacities at border crossings, strengthening regional forensic capabilities, raising public awareness to the danger of drug consumption, and strengthening regional cooperation and donor coordination. Among the planned outputs are the refurbishment of facilities at some selected border points, the
training of frontline staff at borders, the strengthening of dog capacities in pilot regions. While most of these objectives were regional in their focus, some country-specific plans were also set in place for Tajikistan:

- drug control at airports (sub-contracted to UNODC): A drug profiling unit is to be established at Dushanbe airport;

- drug control at land borders: this is conducted in cooperation with the EU BOMCA programme (see below). Equipment is provided to law enforcement agencies at the Afghan-Tajik border;

- police intelligence: equipment and software were provided to the Ministry of Interior and the Drug Control Agency;

- drug abuse monitoring: The Drug Abuse monitoring centre was established in Dushanbe within the Ministry of Health.

**BOMCA**

The question of combating cross-border drug-trafficking takes us to a cognate issue: enhancing border security, both between Afghanistan and the Central Asian republics and within the region itself. BOMCA (Border Management Programme)’s two major objectives are enhancing border security and facilitating legal trade and transit through the gradual adoption of modern border management methods in Central Asia\(^\text{32}\). BOMCA grew out of the Central Asia Border Service Initiative (CABSI) of the Austrian Government (supported by other EU states). CABSI initial focus on training was broadened to include legal assistance and the strengthening of border control. Its successor, BOMCA, has – similarly to CADAP – gone through several phases from 2003 to the present. BOMCA 1 (April – August 2003) simply undertook an initial assessment of border guards capabilities in the region; BOMCA 2 (July- December 2003) launched the first phase of training of border guard officers, whereas BOMCA 3 (December 2003- July 2004) represented a stage of assessment of the current situation. BOMCA 4 and 5 represent the major roll-out of activities, including assistance to legal and institutional reform, the strengthening of national training capacities, infrastructure, equipment and training provision at pilot sites and airports. Again, similarly to the CADAP,

BOMCA has a regional approach, but also contains some specific provisions for Tajikistan, including legal assistance, training infrastructures (a training centre for officer cadets of the Tajik border force is under construction in Dushanbe), training for border staff, control at airports (sub-contracted to IOM, focused on Khujand Airport in the north), the creation of local dog units in pilot border regions, and computer-based training.

The issues of border security and the fight against various types of trafficking are only two where the interests of the EU converge with those of the other external actors. Combating drugs trafficking and arms smuggling, as well as enhancing border security are common goals at the state, regional, and international levels. The waning of US influence in the region has opened a space that has been filled by the swift return of Russia and a growing Chinese economic presence, as exemplified by the formation and consolidation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), a regional organisation created in 2001, involving Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Russian and Tajik forces have cooperated on issues of border security and drug control for more than a decade. These are projects that other actors, including the EU, should build on. While Russia may not have been keen on sharing the provision of Tajikistan’s security to other powers, the EU could encourage the SCO to become a stronger regional organisation that could actually undertake operations in its member states, for example on the Tajik-Afghan border, where joint activities could be conducted with the EU in a way that would make the EU less intrusive and thus less menacing to Russia and other local actors.

2) Developing Tajikistan’s hydro-electric potential

Alongside gas and oil, water also occupies an important place in the EU strategy. Water management is ‘a decisive aspect of energy cooperation’ between regions (Europe and Central Asia, that is, p. 10). Tajikistan figures nowhere in the journalistic, academic and

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33 Established as an intergovernmental organisation whose main goal was to establish mutual confidence between the member states and increase cooperation in border regions, the SCO has grown to become one of – if not the – most important regional organisation in Central Asia. It is the only one whose membership includes Russia and China. All the Central Asian republics, barring Turkmenistan, are also members. The SCO’s main strategic objective is the fight against terrorism, separatism and religious extremism. In light of the recurrent calls for US withdrawal from the region, however, one may also add to these the reduction of the US presence and influence in Central Asia.
policy talks on the alleged new great game under way in Central Asia, where today’s big prize is constituted by oil and gas. There is some kind of an irony in Tajikistan’s status as a resource-poor country. The small mountainous republic holds no oil and very little natural gas. However, as Daly put in a recent brief recently (2007), Tajikistan may be ‘having the last laugh, as it sits on top of immense water resources’\(^\text{34}\). The challenge there is to properly utilise them, generate enough energy for domestic consumption and export the rest to water-hungry neighbours (all of them, except to Kyrgyzstan, also a water-rich country). This turns out not to be an easy task as the country, and the region as a whole are still coming to terms with the Soviet legacy in terms of management of water resources (Weinthal, Horsman, O’Hara). In Soviet times Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, home to ca. 90% of the region’s water provided the crucial resources for the cotton plants in neighbouring Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Poor management, pesticides, canal diversion and finally desertification meant that now very little water reaches the Aral Sea (which is now in fact split in two smaller lakes, the southern part in Uzbekistan and the northern one in Kazakhstan).

Since independence Tajikistan has dealt with its energy needs through barter, namely by trading hydropower sold over the summer with coal and gas bought over the winter. The agreements were imperfect as Tajikistan occasionally released water flooding border villages in Uzbekistan (the same happened on the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan border) as it needed electricity due to energy import shortfalls. In return (often for political retaliation) Uzbekistan would cut off gas supplies leaving Tajikistan to freeze in the winter.

In recent years, Tajikistan had begun developing its hydropower potential. Alongside the massive Soviet-era Nurek dam on the Vakhsh river (western Tajikistan, but east of the capital Dushanbe) built between the 1961-80, which still supplies 70% of the country’s electricity (Daly, 2007)\(^\text{35}\), a number of deals for building new hydropower plants have been struck and work has begun across the country, funded by a number of foreign players, including Russia,

\(^{34}\) Central Asia’s two most important rivers, the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya originate from the Pamir (eastern Tajikistan) and the Tien Shan (Kyrgyzstan). Flowing north-westwards to the Aral Sea, they bring water to Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, southern Kazakhstan and potentially Afghanistan too. Alongside river waters, Tajikistan is also home to the largest glacier in the world except for polar regions, the 270 sqm. Fedenko glacier (Daly, 2007).

\(^{35}\) Nurek has a capacity of about 10.5 km\(^3\). Nurek’s reservoir cover 38 sqm and is about 40 miles long. The reservoir’s reserves are said to be shrinking at about 1-3 feet per day which means that the plant may face closure some day.
China, and Iran. Here interest soon translated into action with promises of investment soon delivered and new power stations being built. This includes the following:

- 670MW Sangtuda-I hydroelectric power station, a joint venture of the Tajikistan government and the Russian Unified Energy Systems Company, due to be operational in 2009;
- 600m MW Zeravshan (Yava) plant in northern Tajikistan, funded Barki Tojik and China’s Sinohydro;
- A 4,000MW Shurob power plant to be funded by Iran’s Farab company, scheduled for completion in 2011;
- The Dashtidjuma powerplant in Pyanj, on the Afghan border, funded by the United States.

Should all the project head to completion the country would not only be self-sufficient, but would become a major exporter. Where does this leave the European Union? Following the point made in the previous section with regard to the lack of diversification of the Tajik economy and its reliance on migrants’ remittances and foreign aid, European action should be directed to help the Tajik economy to diversify and, thereby, to rely less on the fluctuations of global commodity prices. Tajikistan should also be more effectively integrated into the international economic system: the energy sector is an area where the country’s potential has not yet been adequately developed. Plans to channel Central Asian hydropower resources southwards would demand that Tajikistan’s infrastructure undergoes serious upgrading if the country is to benefit from transit trade.36 An obvious area here is the investment in the country’s hydro-electric potential. Despite a potential output of about 300,000bn KW a year, the country currently generates a mere 5% of that37. There is a large potential for investing in

36 This is an area that has been recently explored by the United States as well. The United States Trade and Development Agency (USTDA) in particular has commissioned feasibility studies in relation to the rehabilitation of existing power projects (Qayraqqum and Varzob) and the possibility to channel Tajikistan’s resources southwards to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

developing Tajikistan’s hydroelectric power, either independently or in coordination with Russian companies.\(^{38}\)

Russia’s recent difficulties as regards the Rogun dam project shows that there is a space for non-Russian companies to play a role in the local economy. The Rogun dam (also on the Vakhsh river, but in southern Tajikistan this time) began construction in 1976, but the project came to a halt. Works seemed to approach resurrection in 2007 when Tajikistan and Russian parties announced a partnership and a deal, which was eventually torn up by the Tajik authorities\(^{39}\). All this means that first of all Russian companies are not all-powerful and also that the country is keen on avoiding relying on one economic partner only. Here the EU’s Water Initiative (EUWI), also mentioned in the 2007 EU Central Asian Strategy, constitutes an important comprehensive initiative which acknowledges the importance of the country’s hydroelectric power while also highlighting the question of safe water supply and integrated water resources management.

That the EU has a ‘paramount interest in enhancing Energy Security’ is beyond dispute and achieving this constitutes one of the pillar of the EU strategy. As highlighted in the strategy, ‘hydropower production and distribution are crucial to promoting stability and prosperity in Central Asia and beyond, including Afghanistan and Pakistan’ (p.10). The whole of Central Asia (with the exclusion of northern Kazakhstan, not part of the Amu Darya/Syr Darya basin) is dependent on water coming from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and the fact that poor management aside only a fraction of the potential output is actually flowing, means that the region is hungry for more water. At present Afghanistan is not integrated in the system and should it be (as the US project would aim to), the key challenge would be to ensure that enough water flows both westwards (to Central Asia) and southwards, to Afghanistan and Pakistan. This is not an impossible task, providing that sufficient investment is made to upgrade the current decaying infrastructure and new power stations are built to exploit the current water resources.

Developing hydroelectric power is an area that is crucial for achieving long-term viability of the Tajik economy and is fundamental for the whole region’s economy too. Russian and other foreign companies have begun investing in rehabilitating and upgrading existing hydropower

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\(^{38}\) Kazakhstan has pledged $100m to develop Tajikistan’s electric power plants\(^{38}\). Iran and Russia are currently investing in the upgrading of the power plants Sangtuda-1 and Sangtuda-2 respectively. (E. Marat, “Iran, Tajikistan strengthen cooperation in the energy sector”, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 1 February 2006).

plants. The EU should work in concert with other actors to favour the development of Tajikistan’s unfulfilled potential in hydro-electric power in the region. The EU should also concentrate its efforts on facilitating bilateral and multilateral approaches to deal with disputes over water use and management as well as to develop water infrastructure (working in cooperation with local authorities to prevent potential environmental disasters resulting from the poor security of existing structures).

Conclusion

Europe (with the small exception of the OSCE which maintained an observer status in the peace negotiations) has played a remarkably little role in the conflict resolution phase in post-Soviet Tajikistan. Much more important has been its role in the reconstruction phase. There European assistance (in the form of food and humanitarian aid, as well as technical aid) has provided the population with essential help which has enabled them to cope with the hardship of both the Soviet collapse and the break-up of infrastructure and institutions during the war. However, at a political level, the EU has maintained a systematically low profile. This is primarily due to three reasons. First is the desire not to upset Russia which has long considered Tajikistan as falling within its sphere of influence (Russia did in fact play a much bigger role in bringing the war to an end). Secondly, is the concern that any criticism to the increasingly authoritarian administration of Emomali Rahmon would revive old tensions, possibly destabilising the country. The Tajik population still acknowledge and appreciate Rahmon’s role as a guarantor of stability, despite all the government’s shortcomings. Thirdly, Tajikistan’s distant position (from the EU) has meant, and inevitably so, that the EU would focus on those conflicts which are much closer to its borders.

There is no doubt that Tajikistan’s distance from Europe has made it less a matter of urgency to be dealt with. At the same time there are a number of observations that have validity beyond the Tajik case which suggest more attention be paid to this specific case. The key issue here is that the EU is seeking for a breakthrough in an area (the post-Soviet periphery) where – since membership is no option – it has little leverage and thus finds it difficult to effect change within those countries. In addition, one has to note that Tajikistan has developed since its very inception and pursued systematically since independence a very close relationship with Russia. For many post-soviet republics, including Armenia, Azerbaijan, as well as all the Central Asian republics, Moscow remains an important actor of reference.
Noticeable progress has been achieved in EU-Tajikistan relations in the past, with humanitarian relief, poverty alleviation, border management and drug control among the areas on which the EU has focused its relations with Tajikistan. The PCA and more recently the EU Strategy for Central Asia and the EC Regional Strategy Paper for Assistance to Central Asia show a will to develop relations further on both sides, provided that the key priorities outlined in the documents are not diluted in a myriad of other issues. The EU has to move away from reluctance to highlight areas in which progress is not being made, and begin setting clear instruments to monitor and reward progress. Consequently, lack of progress should be clearly identified and pressure exerted to effect change. One first opportunity for developing closer relations is offered by the dramatic proportions assumed by the drugs problem in the region. Afghanistan’s record opium harvest in 2007 demands that various international actors, including the EU through its relevant instruments (BOMCA/CADAP), closely cooperate with the Tajik authorities (especially the Drugs Control Agency) to ensure border security and the reduction of corruption of officials both at local and national level. It is therefore a pity that the EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana did not visit the country during his brief tour of the region in October 2007. Drugs, along with energy issues, figured high among the EU priorities highlighted in the talks, but Tajikistan’s central role as both part of the problem and possibly of the solution too was apparently missed.

To conclude, the approach that has informed international, including EU, action in the country, namely the focus on Tajikistan as a post-conflict country, has outlived its initial purpose. Unlike Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan has not experience analogous domestic turmoil in recent years. Relations between Tajikistan and the EU have intensified over the years, but the extent of opportunities has not yet been fully captured. By developing Tajikistan’s hydro-electric potential the EU can help solve the energy deficit of the country and alleviate the water management problems of the region. Given the large sums involved in the upgrading of the infrastructure the EU can also operate in coordination with other external actors such as Russia, China and Kazakhstan, who are often deterred from the high costs involved in each project and therefore tend to focus on a few large-capacity hydropower plants neglecting the smaller ones in rural areas (this means that eventually Tajikistan’s energy would be all made for export with, yet again, little for domestic consumption). On the border security question, the EU could seek Russian cooperation in sharing the experience of

guarding the Tajik-Afghan border instead of presenting itself as an alternative to it. Starting to work with the Russian Federation, in areas where this is feasible and in ways that do not run against the value the EU seeks to promote, could have beneficial effects (as confidence-building measures) in other parts of the post-Soviet periphery.

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