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Thinking Further about EU-Russia Cooperation: Drug Trafficking and Related Issues in Central Asia

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About the Author

Nathan Dufour holds an MA in European Studies from the Institute for European Studies of the *Université Libre de Bruxelles* (2010) and an MA in EU International Relations and Diplomacy Studies from the College of Europe in Bruges, Belgium (2011). In 2009-2010, he carried out traineeships at the Representation of the European Commission in Belgium and at the Directorate-General E (External and Politico-Military Affairs) of the Council of the EU in Brussels, where he assisted in the organisation and follow-up of the Political and Security Committee, Coreper II and Foreign Affairs Council meetings. In 2011, he was in charge of foreign delegations for the French Chair of the G20 as a freelance Liaison Officer. This paper is a shortened and updated version of his Master's thesis submitted at the College of Europe (Albert Einstein Promotion).

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Abstract

This paper analyses to what extent the development of cooperation between Russia and the European Union (EU) to respond to the common threat of increasing drug trafficking in Central Asia is desirable and feasible. First, it considers the growing overlap between Russian and EU security interests in Central Asia and provides an understanding of the two sides' mutual perceptions in this strategic region. Even though the current mind-set is one of general mistrust, for instance in fields such as energy or human rights, both actors now recognise the imperative of regional and international cooperation to tackle terrorist threats and increasing drug flows. Second, the relevance of a joint Russia-EU involvement is analysed by considering the evolving trends in drug trafficking since the US-led coalition intervened in Afghanistan. The paper demonstrates the shortcomings and inadequacy of the current counter-narcotics policies as well as their responsibility in hampering regional cooperation and international efforts. Third, the respective Russian and EU anti-drug strategies and instruments are analysed in order to better assess the possibilities of developing synergies on the ground instead of maintaining competing and detrimental standalone visions. Although the feasibility of setting up a pragmatic and de-politicised cooperation between the EU and Russia is challenging in many regards, this paper shows that it is highly desirable as it would contribute to diminish strong risks of instability in the region and would address the security concerns of both actors. On the basis of the findings, policy recommendations are formulated for the EU.

1. Introduction

Since the collapse of the USSR, the five Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) that emerged at the crossroad between Europe and Asia have faced challenging questions of governance which have been further reinforced by the post-9/11 US-led intervention in Afghanistan. As explained by Alain Délotroz of the International Crisis Group, the Central Asian states face four major security issues, making the region the central nerve of Eurasia:¹ First, the proximity of the Afghan conflict, which has two main consequences: the increase of drug flows since the withdrawal of Russian troops and the eased travelling of fundamentalist groups linked to the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban. The second challenge are the autocratic and kleptocratic political nature of the Central Asian regimes and their uncertain political future. The third factor is the constant unwillingness of the republics to cooperate among themselves. The fourth factor is the competing mind-set for influence existing between the Russians, the Americans, the Chinese and the Europeans.

Among these challenges, the importance of the security concerns related to drug flows (in particular organised crime, financing of terrorist groups) and of their economic and societal costs has been gradually recognised by the Russian and the EU authorities in several joint statements. In 2003, for instance, they noted that:

Taking into account that this acute problem has spread far beyond the region and acquired a global nature, [they] reiterated their commitment to playing their part in international efforts to combat poppy and cannabis cultivation and drug production both on the territory of Afghanistan and in its neighbouring States.²

Despite such statements, both sides have mainly continued to develop separate anti-drug strategies and instruments without setting up genuine cooperation mechanisms.

Focusing on the growing threat of drug trafficking coming from Afghanistan through Central Asia, this paper aims at analysing the EU-Russia interactions in this region on a highly relevant transnational security, societal and economic threat. It raises the question to what extent the development of Russia-EU cooperation on tackling the common threat of narcotics in Central Asia is desirable and feasible. The approach chosen in this paper aims to take distance from those advocating a “new Great game”,³ which makes the region essentially appear as a zone over which great powers struggle for influence.

¹ A. Délotroz, “Les quatre défis des républiques d’Asie centrale”, *Le Temps*, 29 June 2010.

² “Joint Statement: EU-Russia Summit”, St. Petersburg, 31 May 2003.

³ See also R.M. Freire and E.R. Kanet (eds.), *Key Players and Regional Dynamics in Eurasia: The Return of the ‘Great Game’*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

In order to provide an answer to the research question, three interrelated guiding hypotheses are formulated:

1. Due to its still low and accommodative role in Central Asia, the EU appears to be a suitable partner for Russia which, on its side, acknowledges the imperative to share increasing costs related to the combat of drug flows.
2. The Central Asian countries would welcome this, as it could strengthen their own internal political control and contribute to respond to their security preoccupations through further securitisation.
3. The current competitive mind-set between the Russian and the European security interests is of higher security, societal and economic costs for both actors than investing in pragmatic cooperation mechanisms.

To establish the basis on which Russia-EU cooperation can be built, the first argument stresses the growing overlap between the Russian and European security interests and provides an understanding of their mutual perceptions in the evolving security context of Central Asia. The second argument explains the different aspects calling for EU-Russia joint efforts to tackle narcotics trafficking coming from Afghanistan and Central Asia. It illustrates the changes that occurred in drug trafficking since the US-led coalition intervened in Afghanistan and the (in)adequacy of the responses provided by the Central Asian states to the multi-faceted consequences of increasing drug flows. Finally, the deep impact of Central Asian domestic characteristics on regional and international cooperation is demonstrated. The third argument analyses the respective Russian and EU counter-narcotics strategies and instruments at three levels – the domestic level, the respective actions undertaken in Central Asia and the initiatives promoting international cooperation – in order to facilitate comparison and to assess the possibilities of developing synergies on the ground. Overall, the paper argues that the setting up of a pragmatic and de-politicised cooperation between the EU and Russia appears to be very challenging while being desirable, as it would contribute to diminish strong risks of instability in the region and would address the security concerns of both actors. Based on the findings, policy recommendations for the EU are formulated in the conclusions.

2. Russia-EU interactions regarding Central Asia: overlapping security interests and mutual perceptions

In comparison with Russia, Iran, Turkey or the US, the European Union is a distant actor that can be qualified as a "late comer"⁴ in Central Asia, despite its economic assistance to the region through the TACIS funds in the 1990s. Central Asia is, moreover, relatively new on the EU's foreign policy agenda, but its importance has been growing since the 9/11 events and the military or logistical participation of some of the EU member states in the war efforts in Afghanistan.

Notwithstanding a clear historical and political asymmetry of the roles of Russia and the EU in Central Asia, the growing security interests of the latter in this strategic region have undoubtedly led to rising interactions with Russia, which still considers the region as its natural sphere of influence. The first common interest that has provoked a diplomatic, political and economic (re-)investment of the two actors in the region is related to oil and gas resources, mainly in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and, to a lesser extent, Uzbekistan. For Russia, the important hydrocarbon reserves and related pipeline networks, mostly inherited from the USSR, constitute important levers to project its power at the regional and global levels. For the EU, it is essentially a matter of energy security, as those resources could help diversify its gas and oil imports and would contribute to reduce its dependency on Russia. Therefore, the current mind-set is clearly one of competitiveness, which has important implications not only in Central Asia, but also across the whole Eurasian continent. Thus, a short- or medium-term step towards cooperation appears difficult to achieve.

The second common security interest is directly related to the international efforts to stabilise Afghanistan and to avoid spreading effects in neighbouring countries. This security threat is perceived as such by the whole 'international community', and many countries, among which Russia and the Central Asian states themselves, have started to support the efforts of the US-led coalition notably through logistical and diplomatic support.⁵ In this respect, the Central Asian region has become increasingly important from a strategic point of view, both for the Russians and the Europeans. Nonetheless, their respective understanding of how to stabilise the region differs. While Russia considers it mostly as a buffer zone in which stability can only be reached through the promotion of strong and stable regimes, the Europeans apprehend it mostly through development and democratisation. If

⁴ G. Wiegand, Director for the EU's relations with Russia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Directorate-General External Relations, European Commission, speech at the closing conference of the EU-Central Asia Monitoring (EUCAM) project, Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), Brussels, 22 February 2010.

⁵ One notable example is the US initiative to set up a 'Northern Distribution Network' to face growing difficulties in the Pakistani supply routes. This initiative, aiming at facilitating the transportation of non-lethal materials now encompasses Latvia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

secured Southern borders have always been important to the Kremlin, the war in Afghanistan and an increased Western presence in Central Asia since 2001 have contributed to a renewed Russian perception of the threats coming from the region and of the imperative to act upstream for security. Furthermore, the securitisation of the 7000 km long Russo-Kazakh border would be far too expensive and, if done, would also entail a high risk of unwanted political consequences.⁶ Hence, in “the prevailing official Russian view, the ruling authoritarians are unlikely to be succeeded by enlightened democrats; rather, they are more likely to be replaced by Islamist radicals”.⁷ From an EU perspective, the security issues in Central Asia are

embedded in a regional context that creates additional difficulties for engagement. Namely, while the Central Asian states may share a common understanding of ‘security challenges’, that understanding differs considerably from accepted definitions within the EU.⁸

Indeed, it seems that in the region “Russia has once more become the primary political model for the Central Asian regimes, which are attracted neither to Western parliamentary systems nor to Chinese monopartyism”.⁹ Nevertheless, an opposition between a Russian *status quo*-centred approach (through bilateral and multilateral cooperation) and a European value-centred one (through development policies and political dialogue) does not allow a proper assessment of the situation. Despite regular emphasis put on democratisation and human rights in Central Asia,

[t]he EU with its normative-civilian approach to foreign policy is hardly a serious concern here for Russia. This is especially true as the EU has always shown much sensitivity to the Kremlin’s geo-strategic concerns. For example, it was European pressure that drew up NATO’s Partnership for Peace programme with the Central Asian republics in such a way that would not give rise to significant Russian suspicion.¹⁰

Moreover, the war in Afghanistan and its consequences in Central Asia have progressively contributed to reducing initial strong divergences on the method to adopt. Hence, in practical terms scholars noted a progressive reshaping of the EU’s Central Asian strategy towards a more *realpolitik* approach, focusing

⁶ D. Trofimov, “Russian foreign-policy objectives in Central Asia”, *Russian Regional Perspectives Journal*, vol. 1, no. 2, p. 15.

⁷ D. Trenin, “Russia and Central Asia. Interests, Policies, and Prospects”, in E.B. Rumer, D. Trenin and H. Zhao (eds.), *Central Asia: views from Washington, Moscow, and Beijing*, Armonk, New York, M.E. Sharpe, 2007, p. 84.

⁸ D. Kimmage, “Security Challenges in Central Asia: Implications for the EU’s Engagement Strategy”, in N.J. Melvin (ed.), *Engaging Central Asia: The European Union’s New Strategy in the Heart of Eurasia*, Brussels, Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), 2008, p. 9.

⁹ M. Laruelle, “Russia in Central Asia: Old History, New Challenges?”, *EUCAM Working Paper*, no. 3, September 2009, p. 5.

¹⁰ A. Warkotsch, “The EU and Central Asian geopolitics”, in A. Warkotsch (ed.), *The European Union and Central Asia*, London, Routledge, 2011, p. 65.

on securing access to the region's energy supplies and to ensuring that the states of Central Asia assist western countries involved in the conflict in Afghanistan rather than promoting genuine long-term stability built on the emergence of civil society, rule of law and forms of democratic politics.¹¹

On the Russian side, the growing threats coming from Afghanistan through Central Asia have progressively encouraged Moscow to 'share costs' with external actors – provided that its strategic interests are considered. In this regard, the tensions experienced by Russia and the EU in the 'common neighbourhood' or in the Caucasus can be qualified in the case of Central Asia, with the notable exception of hydrocarbons. Marlène Laruelle stresses that the EU is not perceived as a threat to the Russian interests in Central Asia, as appears to be the case for the US, and now also for China:

Ce que j'ai vu du côté russe, c'est une perception plutôt positive, l'UE n'étant pas perçue comme un concurrent direct. Le vrai enjeu stratégique est soit, évidemment, l'obsession américaine au sens géopolitique, [...] aidée par les révolutions, les think tanks etc., soit la peur montante de la Chine. L'UE arrive par un biais qui est différent et moins visible que les autres.¹²

The EU, indeed, does not seek to become a monopolistic actor in the region (and probably does not have the means to do so). It has rather put strong emphasis on the importance of developing regional and international cooperation with all relevant actors on the ground. From that perspective, Russia cannot be ignored in implementing the EU's policies in Central Asia, but this is not the case the other way around. Nevertheless, the European authorities have, so far, demonstrated "a tendency to view all previous developments in Central Asia as a waste [...], a belief that Russia is irrelevant and has no role in the region, and an inclination to see Russia's initiatives as potentially ineffective and doomed to failure".¹³

Furthermore, the EU Special Representative (EUSR) for Central Asia expresses more clearly the fragile equilibrium of the EU's position towards Russia in the region, aiming, on the one hand, at balancing the Russian geostrategic interests and, on the other, at developing its own path in its relations with the Central Asian states:

Certes, la Russie est un pays majeur dans la région. Nous prenons le temps de leur expliquer afin qu'ils comprennent notre démarche. [...] Il ne faut tout de même pas aller trop loin, dans une espèce de verrouillage avec les russes. Nous gardons notre logique propre, nos critères n'étant pas les leurs, les droits de l'homme, etc.¹⁴

¹¹ N. Melvin and J. Boonstra, "The EU Strategy for Central Asia @ Year One", *EUCAM Policy Brief*, no. 1, October 2008, p. 3.

¹² Interview with Marlène Laruelle, Senior Research Fellow with the Central Asia and Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Programme, Brussels, 22 February 2010.

¹³ A. Matveeva, "EU stakes in Central Asia", *Chaillot Paper*, no. 91, July 2006, Paris, European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), pp. 118-119.

¹⁴ Interview with Pierre Morel, EU Special Representative for Central Asia and the Crisis in Georgia, Brussels, 2 February 2010.

While Russia still does not seem to consider the EU as a genuine foreign policy actor in Central Asia, Alexander Nikitin from the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) esteems that Russia is asking for more EU involvement in the region:

If the EU feels that the Caucasus and Moldova have become its 'close neighbourhood', and if the EU has interests in DRC Congo, Indonesia and the Middle East, why then is Central Asia (which is a serious crisis area) not considered by the EU as requiring European action?¹⁵

Beyond mutual EU-Russian perceptions, the Central Asian states now play a central role, as they have gradually been able to enhance their political autonomy by using competition between external actors, both for their resources and their geopolitical situation. Indeed, since the mid-1990s, the Central Asian states have tried, with varying success, to diversify their security policies and form new partnerships outside the context of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) or of bilateral agreements with Russia. The Central Asian leaders have gradually developed multi-directional foreign policies to be able to pursue their national and personal interests.¹⁶ From this point of view, the war in Afghanistan has helped these republics to increase their diversification strategies, with Uzbekistan, for example, using its geopolitical situation for Western operations in Afghanistan.

Despite a relative recovery under Putin, this situation has strengthened two main factors that have led to a progressive questioning of Russia's influence in the region. First, the Kremlin has steadily been pushed to share the management of the regional security burden and to coordinate its policies with external powers or within regional for a, such as the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Indeed, the Russian policy for Central Asia has been characterised "by a desire to retain its hegemonic position, in particular in the security sphere, but also by both an initial reluctance to engage actively in the region and a post-soviet decline in economic and military capabilities".¹⁷ This, in turn, has "contributed to the uneven character of Russian influence in the region and the inability to prevent growing engagement in the region by 'external' actors".¹⁸

Second, the strategic and security interests of other powers (like the EU, Japan, Turkey, Iran) have presented Central Asian elites with opportunities for a

¹⁵ A. Nikitin, "Russian Perceptions and Approaches to Cooperation in ESDP", *Analysis*, Paris, European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), 29 May 2006, p. 2.

¹⁶ E. Azarkan, "The interests of the Central Asian states and the Shanghai cooperation organization", *Ege Academic Review*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2010, p. 415.

¹⁷ R. Deyermond, "Matrioshka hegemony? Multi-levelled hegemonic competition and security in post-Soviet Central Asia", *Review of International Studies*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2009, p. 160.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

further strengthening of their room of manoeuvre. The outcome has therefore been twofold: reinforcement of a competing mind-set as for energy security, but also growing recognition of the potential gains from developing regional and/or international cooperation in security matters to respond to domestic securitisation problems.¹⁹

3. The war in Afghanistan and the 'Northern route'

Before the breakdown of the USSR, the Western markets were essentially reached through Iran and Pakistan, which constituted the traditional drug routes. With the withdrawal of the Soviet troops, "new routes began appearing into and through the former Soviet Central Asian republics. This new drug trade made its strongest initial inroads into Tajikistan, where the situation was exacerbated by the civil war between 1992-97".²⁰ Therefore, Central Asia has increasingly constituted a crucial corridor for smugglers to reach the extremely lucrative European and Russian markets. At the beginning of the 1990s, the

Kharog-Osh road became one of the first focuses of regional and international anti-drug efforts. As it is common with smuggling, however, as soon as one route became more difficult, others opened up. While Afghanistan's poppy crop probably doubled over the next two years, new smuggling routes appeared at other parts of its borders.²¹

In 2010, the United Nations office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) pointed out that Afghanistan was the world leading producer of opiates (opium, heroine, morphine and other derivatives) accounting for 93 per cent of all poppy cultivation.²² Out of this, "[a]bout 80 per cent of the drugs derived from Afghan opium poppies are smuggled out by transnational organized criminal groups through the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan; the rest flows through Central Asia".²³

As shown by the map in Figure 1, the so-called 'Northern route' is now constituted of a multiplicity of routes that smugglers use to transport opiates.

¹⁹ N. Dufour, "Les défis d'une coopération entre Moscou et Bruxelles en Asie central. Une asymétrie réelle ou fantasmée ?", Université Libre de Bruxelles, Institute for European Studies, 2010, pp. 43-44.

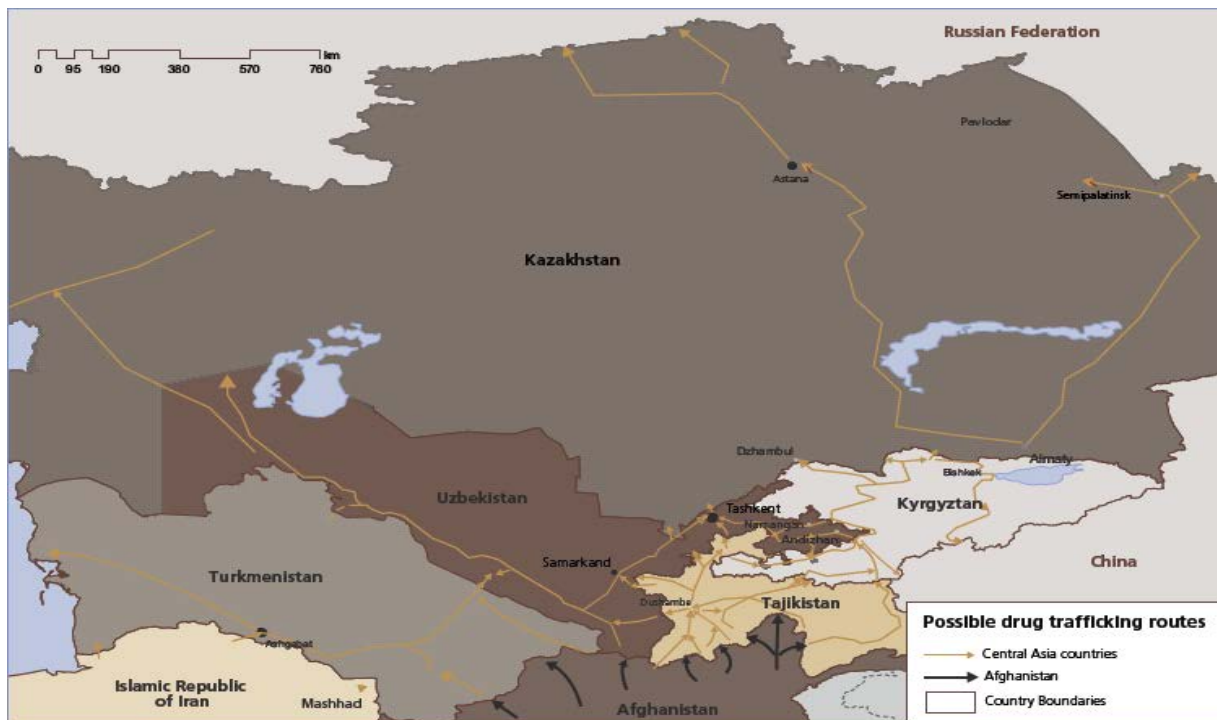
²⁰ International Crisis Group, "Central Asia drugs and conflict", *ICG Asia Report*, no. 25, 26 November 2001, p. 2.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), "World Drug Report 2010", Vienna, 2010, p. 32.

²³ *Ibid.*

Figure 1: Opiates trafficking routes in Central Asia



Source: UNODC, *op.cit.*, 2009, p. 65.

Drug traffickers transport opiates across the three bordering Central Asian states and, if not by air routes, have to cross Kazakhstan to reach Russia. Notwithstanding a clear lack of reliable data,²⁴ increasing drug seizures “reported in Tajikistan confirm this country’s status as the gateway for drugs entering Central Asia in Afghanistan”.²⁵

One of the most visible impacts of increasing amounts of drugs crossing the Afghan borders has been a sharp rise of drug abuse rates in the five republics. Indeed, aside “from being transit zones for drug trafficking, the region has also become an active consumer of the most dangerous drug of modernity – heroin”.²⁶ In comparison with the 1990s, the “easy availability of cheap heroin has changed the pattern of abuse and led to growing intravenous use of heroin [...], creating serious problems with HIV/AIDS due to unsafe injecting practices”.²⁷ Currently, heroin is the main illegal drug seized in Central Asia (together with Trans-Caucasian countries), with an increase from 144 kilos in 1996 to 3,688 kilos in 2006, representing a change of

²⁴ This problem is still particularly relevant in the case of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. These two republics are clearly refractory to share information, be it with their neighbours or with international organisations.

²⁵ UNODC, “Illicit Drug Trends in Central Asia”, Regional Office for Central Asia, April 2008, p. 13.

²⁶ K. Osmonaliev, “Developing Counter-Narcotics Policy in Central Asia. Legal and Political Dimensions”, *Silk Road Paper*, Central Asia–Caucasus Institute, Silk Road Studies Programme, January 2005, p. 15.

²⁷ UNODC, “Illicit Drug Trends in Central Asia”, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

2,461 per cent.²⁸ From that perspective, it is quite clear that “Afghan drug trafficking to a great extent [... will continue to influence] the drug situation in Central Asia and the populations of the region hostages of this world’s fastest-growing drug producer”.²⁹

Comparing the different routes used by smugglers from Afghanistan to reach the Russian and European markets is crucial to understand the political significance of counter-narcotics actions in Central Asia from both perspectives. From the Russian perspective, the ‘Northern route’ is by far the most important one. Indeed, UNODC reveals that an estimated 75-80 tons of heroin flow to Russia via the Central Asian countries, crossing the borders of Afghanistan with Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and particularly Tajikistan.³⁰ Indeed,

Russia consumes only slightly less heroin each year than does the rest of Europe combined (70 tons versus 88 tons). Out of about 100,000 drug addicts dying each year worldwide, between 30,000 and 40,000 are Russians. Russian officials point out that the production of narcotics in Afghanistan has grown exponentially [...] since the fall of the Taliban and the arrival of the coalition forces.³¹

From a European perspective, the ‘Northern route’ represents ‘only’ one of the routes used by drug smugglers to supply the European markets, among which the most important one is the ‘Balkan route’. In total, 30 per cent of the Afghan heroin production (about 110 tons) is smuggled into Europe, of which 80 per cent reaches the European markets through the Balkans, after crossing the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey. The rest, still representing important quantities, “comes via the Russian Federation (Central Asia-Russia), the Black Sea route (Iran-Azerbaijan-Georgia-Black Sea), Pakistan (by air), Africa (by air and sea) and South-East Asia (by air)”.³² Moreover, the ‘Black Sea route’ through the Caucasus seems to be increasingly used, probably because of instability elsewhere in recent years.³³

Altogether, the European and Russian markets account for 46 per cent of the global opiate market value, estimated at between 60 and 65 billion US dollars.³⁴ In comparison with the about one billion US dollars per year of income for Afghan farmers, opiate trafficking appears much more lucrative outside the Afghan borders than within. Therefore, the fight against illicit opiate traffic undoubtedly “requires a

²⁸ UNODC, “Addiction, crime and insurgency: The transnational threat of Afghan opium”, Vienna, October, 2009, p. 33.

²⁹ Osmonaliev, *op.cit.*, p. 25.

³⁰ UNODC, “Addiction, Crime and Insurgency”, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

³¹ D. Trenin and A. Malashenko, “Afghanistan – A view from Moscow”, Moscow, Carnegie Endowment for Peace, April 2010, p. 14.

³² UNODC, “Addiction, Crime and Insurgency”, *op.cit.*, p. 11.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

concerted effort, not just from Afghanistan, but also its neighbours with support of the international community".³⁵

3.1 *Drug-trafficking as an endemic and multi-faceted problem: insufficiency and inadequacy of the local responses*

Since the beginning of the Afghan campaign, each of Afghanistan's neighbours has been put under tight pressure. Widespread corruption, including at the highest level of the states' apparatuses, financing of organised crime networks (related or not to religious extremists and terrorists), worsening of already poor living conditions and growing health problems related to drug consumption appear as the many detrimental factors resulting from narcotic flows crossing the Afghan borders. In short, it is regularly emphasised by numerous reports that drug trafficking "threatens security and development by enriching and empowering organized criminal groups, creating instability and feeding corruption".³⁶

On the one hand, it is impossible to comprehend properly the endemic problems of instability and corruption existing in Central Asia without acknowledging the magnitude of the drug trade.³⁷ On the other hand, however, it is also impossible to properly assess the impact of drug trafficking in the region without bearing in mind the political nature of the Central Asian states, notably when it comes to the efficiency of counter-narcotics policies. Both factors are reinforcing each other and lead to a highly insecure and unstable politico-economic environment in the Central Asian states and societies.

Even if some variations exist, the Central Asian states can be apprehended as neo-patrimonial regimes³⁸ which have experienced a gradual or rapid closure of their political systems and a significant tightening of authoritarian practices in the 1990s. All of this has contributed to a drift towards a cult of personality more or less marked in each republic.³⁹ *Freedom House's* 2010 survey on political rights and civil liberties puts further emphasis on the repressive nature of the regimes. All five Central Asian republics are ranked in the *non-free* category (out of 47 countries), while Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are said to be among the 'worst of the worst' countries

³⁵ UNODC, "Briefing Note", 3 March 2011, p. 1.

³⁶ UNODC, "World Drug Report", *op.cit.*, p. 32.

³⁷ R. McDermott, "Border Security in Tajikistan: Countering the Narcotics Trade?", London, Defense Academy of the United Kingdom, 2002, p. 1.

³⁸ See J. Ishiyama, "Neopatrimonialism and the prospects for democratization in the Central Asian republics", in N.S. Cummings (ed.), *Power and Change in Central Asia*, London, Routledge, 2002, p. 43.

³⁹ M. Laruelle and S. Peyrouse, "Asie centrale, la dérive autoritaire. Cinq républiques entre héritage soviétique, dictature et islam", Paris, Éditions Autrement, collection CERI/AUTREMENT, 2006, p. 31.

on earth (with North Korea, Sudan, Somalia, Burma, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea and Libya).⁴⁰

Thus, the Central Asian states' neo-patrimonial authority and power structures constitute undeniable factors explaining the difficulties in establishing efficient counter-narcotic policies at the domestic level. The main element is the dependence on personalism and presidential clans which rely on corruption practices and are being further reinforced by the increasing amounts of drug flows and a general worsening of the living conditions. Indeed, "all indicators point to an association between patrimonial authoritarian regimes and a highly corrupt political and economic climate in Central Asia".⁴¹ This climate makes the fight against drug trafficking extremely difficult, particularly in unstable countries like Tajikistan and its porous borders or Kyrgyzstan, where the southern part is now believed to be under the control of mafias. As explained by Alain Déléroz,

Ce qui est arrivé au Kirghizistan risque fortement de se produire au Tadjikistan, à moins qu'il n'y ait pas besoin de le faire. En effet, les mafieux liés aux trafics de drogue n'ont peut-être pas besoin de se lancer directement dans des opérations de déstabilisation au Tadjikistan parce que les autorités-mêmes du pays sont mêlées à ces trafics et que les routes y sont déjà bien implantées. On pardonne aux Tadjiks de ne pas arriver à contrôler le Pamir, mais lorsqu'ils n'arrivent pas à contrôler l'aéroport de Douchanbé nous rencontrons un sérieux problème.⁴²

Indeed, the

drug business generates enormous profits and the temptation to grab a cut creates favourable conditions for corruption in law enforcement agencies. Corruption as a form of social pathology related to patronage and cooperation with criminals, promotes a significant increase in drug trafficking. Drug-related corruption includes not only basic bribery of public officials but also any actions assisting and developing drug businesses, such as officers covering sales of heroin on the streets and in drug dens in return for remuneration.⁴³

The growing recognition of drug trafficking as a threat has been slow to emerge while a sharp rise in drug addiction took place already in the 1990s, after the Soviet withdrawal.⁴⁴ This was partly due to

a political culture in which it was not considered acceptable to advertise a drug problem. Partly it was because the states had no resources, or obvious incentive, in the immediate post-Soviet period to set up agencies that could track the problem. [...] Above all, the economic and political clout of the drug trade made it difficult for the state to crack down.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ See Press release of the Freedom House report, "Freedom in the World 2010: Global Erosion of Freedom", Washington, D.C., 12 January 2010.

⁴¹ K. Collins, "Economic and Security Regionalism among Patrimonial Authoritarian Regimes: The Case of Central Asia", *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 61, no. 2, March 2009, p. 267.

⁴² Interview with Alain Déléroz, *op.cit.*

⁴³ Osmonaliev, *op.cit.*, p. 22.

⁴⁴ International Crisis Group, *op.cit.*, p. 1.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

By the end of the 1990s, Central Asian states nevertheless began to express their alert about negative impacts of drug trafficking on their national security, and they started to develop national counter-narcotic policies as well as setting up committees to implement them. All five neo-patrimonial states, however, “generally cling to restrictive counter-narcotics policies, although there are some differences among them in their legal and administrative nuances”.⁴⁶ On this point, the final declaration of the ‘Paris Pact Initiative’ in 2003 reiterated that

[i]n the countries affected by the drug routes, strategies to fight drug trafficking and drug addiction should correspond to a balanced approach between repression of traffickers, prevention of drug addiction and treatment of drug addicts, in compliance with the United Nations recommendations.⁴⁷

By considering the current trends in drug trafficking and related security, societal and health issues in Central Asia, Osmonaliev stresses that the following developments can be forecast with a certain degree of confidence:

- The trend of continuously increasing demand for drugs in the countries of Europe, CIS and Central Asia in particular will persist;
- As a result, [there is a high possibility of an increase in] the transit of drugs of Afghan origin [...]. This is likely because of a range of factors – a huge amount of opium cultivation in Afghanistan; continuous increase of heroin production; and a probable escalation of international terrorists’ activity on the territories of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan [...];
- Growth of criminal activity, especially more sophisticated crimes in Central Asia [...];
- Concurrently, the number of drug addicts will increase, particularly intravenous drug users;
- [...]he level of corruption in law enforcement agencies [...] will also increase;
- [Finally,] the potential pervasiveness, due to its dormant character, of criminal activity is steadily increasing given the re-orientation of significant layers of the population toward criminal-type relations, and behaviour in the conscience of citizens. This is being expressed in the form of legal nihilism and a more tolerant attitude towards drug addiction as well as towards narcotic-related criminal activities.⁴⁸

3.2 *Limits to regional and international cooperation: the distrust factor*

Considering the influence of the Afghan factor and the incapacity of the Central Asian republics to deal alone with this situation, it appears crucial to support them through the establishment of cooperation mechanisms at both regional and international levels.

⁴⁶ Osmonaliev, *op.cit.*, p. 6.

⁴⁷ Ministerial Conference on drug routes from Central Asia to Europe, “Paris Statement”, Paris, 21-22 May 2003, p. 3.

⁴⁸ Osmonaliev, *op.cit.*, pp. 23-24.

Trying to understand why most attempts to create regional cooperation failed to produce results in Central Asia, Kathleen Collins stresses that there is a causal link between regionalism⁴⁹ and the patrimonial nature of these regimes. She emphasises that “patrimonial authoritarian regimes act to ensure their survival and maximise their personal enrichment; doing so negatively affects economic regionalism, but security-oriented regionalism may be possible if the member states agree on a common threat”.⁵⁰ In her opinion, Central Asian authoritarian leaders therefore “are more likely to pursue regionalism in security affairs when it promotes their overarching goal, political survival, without threatening rent-seeking”.⁵¹ In this regard, the most noticeable examples are those of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, which have both contributed to create a common perception of security issues, notably through the ‘non-interference’ principle in internal affairs.

In spite of growing awareness of drug-related threats on national security, no adequate cooperation in the field of counter-narcotics has been set-up so far. In Alain Déléroz’s view,

Outre les trafics de drogue, les Etats d’Asie centrale rencontrent un énorme problème de coopération régionale dans tous les domaines. La question des trafics de drogue est d’autant plus affligeante que celle-ci touche à la sécurité. Tous ces services de sécurité, ou du moins leurs dirigeants, sont issus de la même école [en référence au KGB] [...] mais se méfient ‘comme de la peste’ les uns des autres. [...] Ce climat de méfiance génère de graves répercussions à l’heure actuelle. Cela sera d’autant plus le cas le jour où l’OTAN quittera l’Afghanistan car il ne fait aucun doute que les Talibans reviendront sur le devant de la scène. [...] Pour ces pays, cela constituera un défi sécuritaire énorme.⁵²

This general distrust among Central Asian states plays not only a crucial role at the regional level but also carries a high responsibility in hampering the successful quest for international efforts. Thus, broadening

international cooperation in counter-narcotics is impossible without effective domestic legislation. It should be aimed at preserving and developing business contacts and encouraging multilateral cooperation between law enforcement agencies, including relevant international organizations.⁵³

As explained by UNODC, the trust-building factor is central for combating illicit drug trafficking, but it also requires “well-organized systems of information collection,

⁴⁹ Based on previous literature, Collins explains that regionalism “refers not just to a concentration of economic activity, but to a ‘political process’ characterized by policy cooperation, coordination, and possibly institutionalisation in any of several issue areas: economic, political, social, environmental and security”. See Collins, *op.cit.*, p. 251.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 256-257.

⁵² Interview with Alain Déléroz, *op.cit.*

⁵³ Osmonaliev, *op.cit.*, p. 49.

processing and analysis, as well as the exchange of the final information product among agencies involved at national and regional levels".⁵⁴ In the case of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, both states face increasing domestic difficulties to keep control over their territories and, therefore, to implement their counter-narcotics policies. In April 2010, "violent rebellion swept into the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek [...], sparked by anger at painful utility price increases and the corruption that was the defining characteristic of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev's rule".⁵⁵ In Délétroz's analysis, the pogroms of last year can be perceived as the result of a reshaping in the drug trafficking dividends in Central Asia. The Osh-Jalal-Abad route is still out of the Bishkek government's control and the new owners refuse to implement the decrees coming from the Kyrgyz capital.⁵⁶ The importance of this route for drug flows coming from Afghanistan and the relation with the pogroms is supported by the data available on drug seizures carried out in 2006 in the Osh province, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Heroin seizures by province in Kyrgyzstan, 2006



Source: UNODC, 2008, p.12.

In Tajikistan, the whole system is severely hit by endemic corruption, including in the law enforcement agencies, and faces additional poverty and under-development problems, as it is the poorer country of the CIS. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan maintain, so far, a high level of control on the states' apparatuses and have more economic resources than Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to ensure a more effective patrolling of their borders.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ UNODC, "Briefing Note", *op.cit.*, p. 1.

⁵⁵ International Crisis Group, "Kyrgyzstan: A Hollow Regime Collapses", *Policy Briefing, Asia Briefing*, no. 102, Bishkek/Brussels, April 2010, p. 1.

⁵⁶ Interview with Alain Délétroz, *op.cit.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

On top of the still strong Soviet-style component in the management of borders by the Central Asian states, there are variations between their institutional arrangements to ensure border security. This makes it even more difficult to coordinate at the regional level. For instance, “in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, border management is performed by ‘border service’ (*pogranichnaya sluzhba*), [while] Uzbekistan and Tajikistan continue the Soviet tradition of employing ‘border troops’ (*pogranichnyye voyska*) to perform border security tasks”.⁵⁸ Despite this general distrust and differences between them, all Central Asian states (except for Turkmenistan)

give high priority to the development and strengthening of international relations and cooperation within the framework of the UN, the OSCE, the ECO, and through other bilateral and multilateral mechanisms as well as with external powers such as the European Union and the United States.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, it can also be noted that the multiplicity of donors, and their different understandings, contribute to the difficulties in developing efficient anti-drug policies in the region.

4. The Russian and EU counter-narcotics approaches and instruments

4.1 The approach of the Russian Federation: the primacy of security

As mentioned, Russia perceives itself directly threatened by the drug situation in Afghanistan and its spreading in Central Asia. As a result, Russia has shown growing commitment to fight against drugs both through the adoption of domestic instruments and by actively calling for regional and international cooperation.

4.1.1 The new Russian anti-drug policy strategy and its implementation

The Russian government recently adopted two fundamental documents defining its approach towards drug flows and related problems: the “State Anti-Drug Policy Strategy of the Russian Federation in the Period until 2020”, adopted by a presidential decree in June 2010; and the “Plan for the Implementation of the State Anti-Drug Policy Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020”, following a decision of the State Anti-Drug Committee in September 2010.

As defined in the Strategy, the Russian Federation’s main counter-narcotics objective is “the substantial reduction of illicit trade and non-medical use of drugs, [and the reduction of the] impact of illicit trade on the safety and health of the

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Osmonaliev, *op.cit.*, p. 64.

person, the society and the state".⁶⁰ In order to reach this objective, the Strategy aims to balance three main measures in accordance with the UN recommendations: reducing the supply of drugs; reducing the demand of drugs and enhancing international cooperation in drug control.⁶¹

An important aspect defining the Russian approach to tackle drug supply from Afghanistan and Central Asia is the aim to develop an 'anti-drug smuggling system'. Article 14 of the Implementation Plan mentions two important measures: the enhancement of border control and the establishment of international cooperation "with a view to increase the potential for the disruption of cultivation of drug-containing plants, production of drugs in Afghanistan and drug trafficking in transit countries".⁶²

Moreover, the document enumerates Russia's top priorities in the international cooperation on drug control.⁶³ Apart from a clear focus on Afghanistan and the 'Northern route', two objectives express in particular the Russian understanding of drug threats coming from Central Asia. The Kremlin aims to develop regional cooperation in drug control, mentioning the main regional organisations responsible for security in the region, such as the CSTO and the SCO. By doing so, the explicit aim is to establish and strengthen financial and anti-drug 'security belts' around Afghanistan, in order to contain the proliferation of threats in the region. Finally, Russia also considers developing 'joint efforts' with representatives of NATO, the US and the EU.

In the views of the *International Drug Policy Consortium*,⁶⁴ however, the Strategy and its implementation clearly "overemphasise drug control at the expense of drug demand reduction and measures to reduce health-related harms of drugs".⁶⁵ It was also noted in the Consortium's report that the objectives set for reduction of drug demand do not comply with Russia's commitments in the 2009 Political Declaration and its Plan of Action adopted during the 52nd session of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs, and potentially contain counter-productive measures. Therefore, the Russian drug policy should reject the repressive approach and focus on human rights, protection of dignity and health and ensuring the

⁶⁰ For more details, see Russian Federation, "Plan for the Implementation of the State Anti-Drug Policy Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020", article 4.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, article 5.

⁶² *Ibid.*, article 14.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, article 40.

⁶⁴ The International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC) is a global network of 75 NGOs and professional networks that specialise in issues related to the production and use of controlled drugs. For more information, see: <http://idpc.net/about>

⁶⁵ International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC), "Report on the course of implementation by the Russian Federation of the Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem", Moscow, 2011, p. 2.

meaningful involvement of civil society, including active drug users, in the development, adoption, implementation and evaluation of the policy.⁶⁶

As a result, the way the Kremlin deals with drug problems domestically has a strong influence on its regional and bilateral actions in Central Asia.

4.1.2 *The promotion of regional security organisations*

In recent years, the Russian approach towards security issues has evolved towards a more pragmatic stance. While throughout the 1990s "Russian efforts to coordinate the security agenda in Central Asia were managed through bilateral agreements, since 2001 the responsibility for regional security has shifted to multilateral frameworks".⁶⁷ Two major regional organisations are devoted to the management of security issues and to the development of a common security agenda in Central Asia: the Collective Security Treaty Organisation,⁶⁸ a Russian-led politico-military organisation including four of the Central Asian states (without Turkmenistan), Armenia and Belarus; and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation,⁶⁹ a rather Chinese-led organisation including Russia and the same four Central Asian states.

The forms of multilateral cooperation developed by these two organisations can be summarised as follow:

- elaboration of common concepts and strategic approaches to national and international security [...];
- carrying out multilateral training exercises by units of the armed forces to establish practical procedures to be adopted in case of the emergence of a real threat to national or regional security;
- multilateral cooperation by the countries' security structures in existing international anti-terrorist organisations to counter international terrorism and extremism, drug trafficking, and other trans-national threats;
- taking the first steps towards multilateral cooperation in preserving and expanding the links between industrial organisations involved in the manufacture of military hardware.⁷⁰

From a Russian perspective, the promotion of these regional organisations is beneficial for three main reasons: firstly, because it allows the Kremlin to promote its

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁶⁷ A. Frost, "The CSTO, the SCO and Russia's Strategic Goals in Central Asia", *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Programme, vol. 7, no. 3, 2009, p. 83.

⁶⁸ The CSTO was created in 2002 following a reform of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

⁶⁹ The SCO was created in 2001 and is the successor of the Shanghai Group that was established in 1996.

⁷⁰ V. Paramonov and O. Stolpovski, "Russia And Central Asia: Multilateral Security Cooperation", Advanced Research and Assessment Group, Central Asian Series, March 2008, p. 2.

security preoccupations and appears to be an important vector for maintaining military and political influence, particularly through the CSTO.⁷¹ Secondly, Russia – as well as China and the Central Asian states – consider the repeated Western calls for democratisation as a destabilising factor and Moscow has adopted a discourse promoting ‘non-interference’ in domestic affairs to deal with security issues. The emphasis has, therefore, been put on secured and militarised borders or joint military manoeuvres, for which one of the most recent emblematic examples was the setting up of a CSTO’s rapid-reaction force in 2009.⁷² Finally, it can be argued that this strategy constitutes an incentive for Central Asian states to combine their forces and, by extent, to reduce security costs for Russia.

From the perspectives of the four Central Asian states, the development of these two regional frameworks fits with their respective domestic interests, as it allows them to “continue the multidirectional policy towards the major powers that have expressed willingness to develop and secure Central Asia”.⁷³ Moreover, it can be noted that the principle of ‘non-interference’ and the repeated commitment to respect the political and social particularities of the members have permitted the Central Asian leaders to take part in multilateral fora without being criticised for their regimes’ characteristics.⁷⁴

Yet, despite a ‘natural’ inclination for security regionalism, as it is the case for counter-terrorism⁷⁵ and border disputes resolution, these two regional organisations have not been able so far to promote comprehensive responses to the multi-faceted nature of the drug problem. If the most important achievement of those two organisations in Central Asia has been the development of common discourses on security threats, the current developments and the focus on repressive aspects clearly hamper the successful quest to establish efficient international cooperation. After the Kyrgyz events in 2010, some observers have further deplored the incapacity of both the CSTO and the SCO to provide quick and genuine responses to a serious crisis happening on the territory of one of the organisations’ members.⁷⁶

⁷¹ M. Laruelle and S. Peyrouse, "Recomposition géopolitique sur le vieux continent ?", in L. Delcour *et al.*, "Vers un nouveau partage du monde ?", *IRIS - La revue internationale et stratégique*, Paris, Éditions Dalloz, no. 72, hiver 2008/2009, p. 187.

⁷² See "CSTO leaders sign rapid-reaction force deal without Belarus", *Rianovosti*, 14 June 2009.

⁷³ Azarkan, *op.cit.*, p. 415.

⁷⁴ I. Qoraboyev, "L'ordre régional en Asie central. L'émergence des organisations régionales dans l'espace post-soviétique", Thèse présentée en vue de l'obtention du doctorat de l'Université de Toulouse, Toulouse, 2010, p. 131.

⁷⁵ A Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure was launched in Tashkent in 2004 by the SCO members. It is designed to elaborate common methods to fight against terrorist movements. Nevertheless, important problems have hindered its operational capacity: strong lack of coordination among the member states, restricted willingness to share information, reduced budget and low bureaucratic structure. See Laruelle and Peyrouse, "Recomposition géopolitique sur le vieux continent ?", *op.cit.*, p. 189.

⁷⁶ S. Tisdall, "Kyrgyzstan unrest gives big powers cause for concern", *The Guardian*, June 2010.

4.1.3 *The promotion of international cooperation and initiatives*

In line with its anti-drug strategy, and as a complement to its regional approach, the Russian Federation has pushed for a growing involvement of the international community through several initiatives. In 2009, it proposed to the UN the so-called 'Rainbow 2' Plan⁷⁷ involving Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan, thus clearly reiterating Russia's wariness and perception about increasing drug flows and consumption on its territory. In point five, the Plan expresses Russia's anger with regard to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan because of the refusal of several NATO members to launch systematic eradication operations on poppy crops.⁷⁸ This refusal is recurrently justified by the risk of provoking hostilities from Afghan farmers which would further complicate the work of the coalition on the ground. This frustration has to be understood in the context of the ambiguity of the Russian approach towards Afghanistan. Indeed, Russia has on many occasions expressed the importance of stabilising the country for its own security but, in the meantime, the 'Afghan trauma', which followed the Soviet invasion, still constitutes a strong psychological barrier for further engagement. On this point, Dmitri Rogozin, the Russian Permanent Representative to NATO, clearly stated that no Russian soldiers will be sent to Afghanistan.⁷⁹

Another important initiative characterising Russia's readiness to work on the drug problems has been the reinforcement of Russia-NATO relations despite historical distrust and tensions, including over Central Asia. The NATO-Russia Council has launched a training programme for Afghan and Central Asian law enforcement personnel for the period 2006-2011 that "includes on-site examination, search, disclosure and shutting down of illegal laboratories, and other essential counter-narcotics strategies and techniques".⁸⁰ Following training sessions by UNODC experts, it was said that the biggest drug seizure ever was carried out by Uzbek officers: an amount of 568 kg of heroin.⁸¹

Furthermore, increasing cooperation with the US was also launched through the Drug Trafficking Working Group of the Russia-US Bilateral Presidential Commission.

⁷⁷ Available at: www.unodc.org/documents/afghanistan//Events/Russian_Plan_Rainbow_2.pdf

⁷⁸ P.F.P. Nopens, "Countering Afghan narcotics: a litmus test for effective NATO and Russia cooperation?", *Security Policy Brief*, no. 14, Brussels, Egmont Institute, September 2010, p. 6.

⁷⁹ "No Russian soldiers in Afghanistan – Rogozin", *The Voice of Russia*, 27 October 2010.

⁸⁰ "NATO-Russia News", no. 3, 2006.

⁸¹ UNODC, "World Drug Report", *op.cit.*, p. 33.

4.2 *The approach of the European Union: focus on coordination and cooperation*

The development of counter-narcotics policies at the European Union level has to be seen in the context of the geographical situation of the EU, which makes it extremely vulnerable to drug flows coming from the West (Americas), from the East (mainly Afghanistan) but also from the South (Africa). With the progressive removal of internal borders, the EU has become

an ever more attractive market for illegal drugs and the diversion of precursors. Once inside the Union's borders, illegal products can be traded more or less freely without attracting the attention of customs or nationally-oriented law enforcement authorities.⁸²

Consequently, the authorities of the EU member states have progressively acknowledged the need to develop common strategies and instruments to properly respond to these transnational threats. Indeed, the "drugs problem is experienced primarily at local and national level, but it is a global issue that needs to be addressed in a transnational context".⁸³

This increasing interdependence between internal and external security is, furthermore, to be understood in the context of broader efforts within the EU to establish "closer coordination and cooperation between the institutions and actors chiefly concerned with internal security and those dealing with external security".⁸⁴

4.2.1 *The EU Drugs Strategy (2005-2012) and its Action Plan: the challenge of coordinating internal and external policies*

Two main documents have to be considered when looking at the current EU counter-narcotics policy: the EU Drugs Strategy (2005-2012), adopted by the European Council in December 2004; and the EU Drugs Action Plan (2009-2012), adopted in February 2005. Within this framework, the information on the drug situation in the EU is provided by the annual reports of Europol and of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction's (EMCDDA),⁸⁵ while the Commission is responsible, with the support of the member states, for the overall and continuous evaluation of the Strategy and Action Plan.⁸⁶ Bearing in mind the multi-level nature of the EU's system of governance, it is essential to mention here that the aim of this

⁸² Council of the European Union, "EU Drug Strategy (2005-2012)", 15074/04, Brussels, 22 November 2004, p. 15.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁸⁴ F. Trauner, "The internal-external security nexus: more coherence under Lisbon?", *Occasional Paper*, no. 89, Paris, European Union Institute for Security Studies, March 2011, p. 7.

⁸⁵ Council of the European Union, *op.cit.*, p. 4.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

Strategy "is to add value to national strategies while respecting the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality set out in the Treaties".⁸⁷ At the EU domestic level, the Strategy calls for:

a balanced and integrated approach to the drugs problem. It concentrates on the two major aspects of drug policy, demand reduction and supply reduction, and also covers a number of cross-cutting themes: international cooperation, research, information and evaluation.⁸⁸

Moreover, the Strategy strongly emphasises the need for coordination and cooperation among EU member states. It stresses the horizontal nature of drug problems and states that

this cooperation and coordination will need to be further developed not only in numerous sectors, including welfare, health, education and justice and home affairs, but also in relations with non-Member States and relevant international fora.⁸⁹

For the purpose of enhancing the overall coherence of the Strategy, the Horizontal Working Party on Drugs (HDG) was set-up in order to monitor "the implementation of the actions set out in the future EU Action Plans on Drugs, as well as having a leading role in coordinating the work of the other Council working groups on drug issues".⁹⁰ Furthermore, "the HDG should regularly devote attention to external aspects of drugs policy. It should provide for the exchange of information and prepare EU common positions on the external relations elements of the EU's drug policy".⁹¹ On the external relations aspects, the Strategy mentions the imperative to adopt a comprehensive and balanced approach

that includes law enforcement, eradication, demand reduction and alternative livelihoods and alternative development initiatives backed by local communities. Third country drug programmes are unlikely to succeed unless all four elements are tackled together, with increased commitment of the European Union and the Member States.⁹²

The EU's Strategy defines, in its article 30, several priorities for international drug control cooperation.⁹³ The third priority is crucial to understand the EU's involvement towards drug trafficking in Central Asia. Indeed, the Strategy clearly stresses that the

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁸⁸ European Commission, "The Action Plan - A translation of EU Drugs Strategy into concrete terms", retrieved on 7 September 2011, http://ec.europa.eu/justice/policies/drugs/strategy/policies_drugs_strategy_en.htm.

⁸⁹ Council of the European Union, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

“efforts of the EU should be based both on the relevance of the particular country or region to the drugs problem in the Union and on the impact of the drugs problem on sustainable development in that country or region”.⁹⁴

As already explained, the ‘Northern route’ appears as an increasingly important drug route coming from Afghanistan and reaching the European markets, but it is not the main one, as it is the case for the Russian Federation. This has a clear impact on the EU’s involvement in Central Asia for counter-narcotics. Indeed, the geopolitical position of the EU makes it extremely attractive for drug trafficking coming from many places in the world, notably for transatlantic cocaine traffics:

It is clear that any policy can only be effective if it establishes clear priorities. The EU Drugs Action Plans and mechanisms with other regions, notably the EU/LAC high-level mechanism on drugs, should remain a cornerstone of the Union’s drugs cooperation with them.⁹⁵

The EU, therefore, intends to develop a balanced approach between Western, Eastern and Southern drug flows according to its member states’ preoccupations. As part of the law enforcement aspect of the Strategy and its Action Plan, the Council noted in 2010, in a document called “The European pact to combat international drug trafficking – disrupting cocaine and heroin routes”, that:

We [the member states] shall ‘share our tasks’ within the European Union. In this way, groups of Member States and the Commission can unite their efforts and give priority use of their resources to the kind of combat they are best equipped for, while benefiting from the actions carried out by their partners against other forms of trafficking. For example, the experience of Member States in tackling the trafficking in cocaine in the Western route and the equivalent for those Member States in tackling the trafficking in heroin on the Eastern route should be capitalised upon.⁹⁶

In parallel to the Drugs Strategy (2005-2012), the EU has also experienced a substantial institutional change with the Lisbon Treaty which entered into force on 1 December 2009. Among the changes related to counter-narcotics,

the trafficking of illicit drugs is addressed in the area of freedom, security and justice (Article 83), which provides for the establishment of minimum rules concerning the definition of criminal offences and sanctions. The Treaty [also] allows for the establishment of a European Public Prosecutor’s Office, with the possibility of expanding its power to include serious crime having a cross-border dimension (Article 86). This could, eventually, lead to certain drug trafficking offences being prosecuted at EU level.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Council of the European Union, “European pact to combat international drug trafficking – disrupting cocaine and heroin routes”, 3018th Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting, Luxembourg, 3 June 2010, p. 2.

⁹⁷ European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), “Annual Report 2010: The State of the Drugs Problem in Europe”, Brussels, 2010, p. 20.

4.2.2 Limits of the EU's regional approach in Central Asia

Two main documents now define the EU's approach towards Central Asia: the Strategy for a New Partnership and the Regional Strategy paper 2007-2013, both adopted by the Council in 2007. Despite a general shift towards a more bilateral approach to respond to the specific needs of each Central Asian state, the Strategy clearly stresses the need for a regional approach in

tackling common regional challenges such as organised crime, human, drugs and arms trafficking, terrorism and non-proliferation issues, inter-cultural dialogue, energy, environmental pollution, water management, migration as well as border management and transport infrastructure. In this regard the EU will cooperate with international financial institutions, multilateral and regional organisations and institutions.⁹⁸

Moreover, two interrelated EU regional programmes are specifically devoted to border management and drug trafficking in Central Asia, "whose long term strategic goal is the gradual adoption of EU standards and good practices":⁹⁹ the Central Asia Drugs Assistance Programme (CADAP) and the Border Management for Central Asia programme (BOMCA). Their organisations were merged in May 2004 although their objectives remained separate.¹⁰⁰ In practical terms, given "that many activities in the area of drug supply reduction are border-related and thus to be covered under BOMCA, [...] [CADAP] mainly focus[es] on activities in the area of drug demand reduction".¹⁰¹ After the 9/11 events, the EU started focusing on the security sector and more particularly on the issue of border management. This initiative has notably contributed to a strengthening of CADAP, "which had been launched in the late 1990s but had found it hard to have a significant impact on the ground".¹⁰²

Despite the relative success of BOMCA, notably by including Turkmen authorities and developing 'good practices' in the region, the programme has experienced several important difficulties. The first relevant issue is related to the still politicised character of counter-narcotics policies and funds and to the perceptions

⁹⁸ Council of the European Union, "The European Union and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership", Brussels, 2007, p. 11.

⁹⁹ Note from the Presidency to COREPER/Council, "2009-2013 Action plan on Drugs between the EU and Central Asian states", 9961/09, 2009, p. 17.

¹⁰⁰ K. Czerniecka and J. Heathershaw, "Security assistance and border management", in A. Warkotsch (ed.), *The European Union and Central Asia*, London, Routledge, p. 85.

¹⁰¹ Central Asia Drug Action Programme (CADAP), "A European Union assistance programme For Central Asia. Inception Report", Bishkek, June 2010, p. 5.

¹⁰² N.J. Melvin, "Introduction", in N.J. Melvin (ed.), *Engaging Central Asia: The European Union's Strategy in the Heart of Eurasia*, Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), Brussels, 2008, p. 4.

of the different actors involved. As part of the international cooperation component of the EU Drug Strategy (2005-2012), the "2009-2013 Action Plan on Drugs between the EU and Central Asian States"¹⁰³ provides the EU with a comprehensive document on its counter-narcotics involvement in Central Asia. The document clearly states that the current competing climate is extremely challenging to develop efficient counter-narcotics policies in the region. Among others, it mentions the limited "cooperation between Central Asian countries, insufficient domestic inter-agency co-ordination in the region, and limited co-ordination among the major international donors, as well as between the donors and the states in the region".¹⁰⁴

The second difficulty is related to the different conceptions of border security issues that exist between the European and the Central Asian states. In practice, it seems indeed that

the EU has neglected the characteristic features of the situation on the ground, such as the Soviet-type militarized approach to border security, which differs markedly from the European model, and the limits to cooperation between the region's states.¹⁰⁵

Most significantly, one can argue that BOMCA, which is the only genuine practical cooperation between the EU and Central Asian states, somehow reinforces the Central Asian states' neo-patrimonial authority and power structures when focusing on the securitisation of states' borders. This "fortifies Central Asian regimes' domination of their societies and, in turn, may increase the clandestine resistance which they face".¹⁰⁶ This, in turn, presents the EU's programmes with a clear coherency dilemma, notably when it comes to the promotion of a balanced approach in counter-narcotics (border management with supply and demand reduction), as stated in the EU Drugs Strategy. This observation can be more broadly linked to the overall difficulties to define the EU's Central Asian policy. But it also shows the EU's readiness to play a more pragmatic role in counter-narcotics as a way to engage with local and regional actors on the ground. Nevertheless, the current trends show that

EU security assistance programmes at best remain limited and at worst have unintended outcomes which hinder the achievement of broader EU development and security goals such as the strengthening of human rights, the emergence of democratic politics and the development of the rule of law. EU security assistance has the effect of providing material and symbolic resources to the region's authoritarian regimes without addressing the fundamental political issues which create corruption and confrontation at Central Asia's borders.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Note from the Presidency to COREPER/Council, *op.cit.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁰⁵ Czerniecka and Heathershaw, *op.cit.*, p. 94.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

4.2.3 The promotion of international cooperation and initiatives

Besides the BOMCA/CADAP programmes, the EU's involvement in counter-narcotics transiting through the 'Northern route' has, as such, been poor in comparison with the Russian engagement. This can be related to the current incapacity and/or lack of willingness of the EU to reinforce its role in this region, which is distant and 'unfriendly' to EU values.

Instead, the EU member states have decided to engage in counter-narcotics actions within other frameworks, like NATO, more suitable to their political objectives. Indeed, when Russia accepted to cooperate with Westerners on counter-narcotics in Central Asia through the NATO-Russia Council, one should not forget that 21 member states out of the 27 in the EU are NATO members. This, in turn, reminds us that the EU's Central Asian policy remains a difficult process, highly dependent on the willingness of the member states to promote EU action when other possibilities sometimes seem more suitable to the 'hard' Central Asian security context. In the Russian perception, NATO appears much more as a genuine security player than the EU.

Nevertheless, some noticeable initiatives have been undertaken to promote a common understanding of drug trafficking issues and to engage with other external actors and organisations. As for NATO, the EU member states have appeared divided and reluctant to develop cooperation with the two main security organisations in the region that address, though imperfectly, the drugs problem. Indeed, the EU interactions with the CSTO and the SCO have so far been based on *ad hoc* contacts, as stated in the EU's Strategy for Central Asia.¹⁰⁸

For this purpose, ministerial meetings have been organised on an annual basis to discuss security issues with all five Central Asian republics. International and regional organisations were also invited to these meetings. During the first 'EU-Central Asia Forum on Security Issues'¹⁰⁹ held in Paris, the SCO and CSTO were among the invitees. Following this first timid step, the EU was invited back to "the special Conference on Afghanistan convened under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization",¹¹⁰ which was organised by the Russian presidency of the SCO in 2009.

¹⁰⁸ Council of the European Union, "The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership", *op.cit.*

¹⁰⁹ The "Joint Declaration of the Participants in the EU-Central Asia Forum on Security Issues in Paris" is available at: www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files_156/central-asia_1964/the-eu-and-central-asia_6524/joint-declaration-of-the-participants-in-the-eu-central-asia-forum-on-security-issues-in-paris_11903.html

¹¹⁰ The "Declaration of the special Conference on Afghanistan convened under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization" is available at: www.sectsco.org/EN/show.asp?id=98

It can, therefore, be noted that the EU's engagement in counter-narcotics and border management is further hindered by the lack of agreement among its member states on the approach to adopt towards other regional actors or organisations concerned, such as the CSTO and the SCO, or even towards Russia.

5. Conclusions

This paper has examined the extent to which the development of cooperation between Russia and the EU to respond to the common threat of increasing drug trafficking in Central Asia is desirable and feasible. It argued that Russian and European security interests are clearly overlapping and can potentially lead both to competition and to cooperation in the region. In many regards, the feasibility of developing Russia-EU cooperation for counter-narcotics in Central Asia is challenging, although highly desirable in order to break with the current and detrimental competing mind-set among actors involved in the region. In recent years, their discourses have progressively converged and demonstrated awareness that drug flows coming from Afghanistan through the 'Northern route' constitute a multi-dimensional phenomenon that has to be tackled through regional and international cooperation.

Although the energy issues have led to strong competition, some nuances can, nevertheless, be highlighted. Despite a general mistrust among actors, the war in Afghanistan and the common perception of a high risk of contamination in the neighbourhood have led to important initiatives, such as the 'Northern Distribution Network'. The drugs problem also appears to be among the top priorities of the political agenda of both actors. Therefore, it can be expected that, faced with increasing transnational drug flows and porous borders, both the EU and Russia, as well as the Central Asian states, will increasingly be open to a 'cost sharing' or, at best, to the progressive development of cooperation mechanisms on the ground.

However, the nature of their presence in Central Asia and their perceptions of threat differ. For historical and political reasons, their interactions are still asymmetrical in many respects, thus having important repercussions on the way each actor conceptualises its own involvement and perceives the involvement of the others. The EU possesses a lower and more accommodative geopolitical profile in Central Asia than other major actors. The analysis of mutual EU-Russia perceptions in the region shows that the EU is not, at the moment, considering Russia as a suitable partner for cooperation. From a Russian perspective, the EU in itself still does not represent a credible and coherent foreign policy actor for cooperation on 'hard' security issues in the Central Asian security context.

The second point showed that the war in Afghanistan and the subsequent strengthening of its opium-based economy has further deepened tormenting trends

that already existed in the neighbouring countries of Central Asia in the 1990s. It was expected that the inclination of these countries to repressive policies would offer possibilities for cooperation on 'hard' security issues, including on counter narcotics, as it would reinforce their domestic control. Nevertheless, the in-depth analysis showed that the neo-patrimonial functioning of the Central Asian states rather constitutes an obstacle to efficient counter-narcotic policies. The crucial importance of the distrust factor, coupled with a clear lack of transparency and reliability of data plays a key role in this failure. As a result, several tendencies are being reinforced such as a more and more propitious environment for transnational smuggling, a growing number of drug addicts and an increased general level of corruption. Last but not least, this functioning hampers, rather than facilitates, regional and international initiatives to develop efficient anti-drug policies.

Hence, the EU and Russia, among others, now have to adapt their security concerns to a more complex and unpredictable reality than in the 1990s. Indeed, the Central Asian states have progressively proven their ability to use their key positions – as Afghan neighbours and through their natural resources – to adopt short-term interest-based strategies with all the risks related to them. Although the definition of a common vision of security and stability in the region is still largely influenced by Russia, both the EU and Russia have to deal with five different, and often unclear, foreign policies when seeking to promote cooperation mechanisms. Thus, no EU-Russia cooperation on security aspects in Central Asia is feasible without preliminary and close consultations with the Central Asian authorities.

Finally, several observations can be pointed out when comparing the Russian and EU counter-narcotics instruments and actions. In accordance with the UN recommendations, the anti-drug strategies and implementation plans of both actors emphasise three milestones in order to establish efficient anti-drug strategies and policies: reduction of drug supply, reduction of drug demand and promotion of international cooperation. This constitutes, at least in the official discourses, an interesting basis for developing common discourses and cooperation mechanisms.

The recent Russian initiatives at the domestic, regional and international level demonstrate a certain readiness to pragmatically cooperate with 'everyone' in Central Asia as well as a strong commitment to tackle the impact of drug flows on the Russian territory itself. Indeed, interactions between Russia and other partners (the US, China, the EU and the Central Asian states) are growing. Despite the apparent willingness of Russia to depoliticise the issue and its proactive role in setting up international cooperation schemes, the current actions undertaken and the Russian efforts to erect 'security belts' around Afghanistan are counter-productive. Moreover, some apprehensions were formulated about a clear overemphasis put on drugs control and repressive measures.

Notwithstanding a seemingly more balanced and comprehensive EU approach towards the reduction of drugs demand and development issues, the outcomes have been insufficient. As in the cases of Russia and the Central Asian states, the EU has so far focused its attention on the securitisation of borders and the reduction of drug supply; efforts which are deemed to be fruitless if used alone. However, growing attention has been devoted to Central Asia as one of the main drug routes reaching the old continent, and significant efforts are provided to strengthen the coordination between internal and external security policies and actors within the EU.

Finally, it was noted that the EU still underestimates the potential of a reinforced coordination with other regional initiatives seeking (even though imperfectly) to cooperate on security and drug trafficking. As a consequence, the EU clearly lacks leverage in the region and is not perceived as a genuine and reliable partner on what is still considered as a 'hard' security issue by regional actors.

Considering the current trends and the magnitude of the problem, the fight against drug trafficking coming from Afghanistan cannot be won in the short or medium run. Even though international cooperation is on the rise, important complementary actions can still be undertaken to reduce the negative impacts of drugs in Central Asia in the long run. In this respect, enhanced cooperation between the EU and Russia, both increasingly hit by drug flows transiting by the 'Northern route', could promote a positive-sum game in close coordination with the Central Asian states. Consequently, the following policy recommendations are formulated for strengthened cooperation at the international, regional and bilateral levels:

1. *Promoting a de-politicisation of drug trafficking issues in international fora*

The current competing mind-set about how to deal with drug trafficking coming from Afghanistan is of high cost for both Russia and the EU. Prior to every international forum meeting related to international drug trafficking, the EU should reinforce the current consultation mechanisms with Russia (Common Space of Freedom, Security and Justice) and reiterate the added-value of a depoliticised approach to drugs in the long-term.

2. *Depoliticising drug trafficking through pragmatic cooperation*

By fully supporting the newly established Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre (CARICC), in which the Central Asian states and Russia participate, the EU would show its readiness to work for genuine regional solutions, and it would gain in credibility.

3. *Emphasising the importance of reducing drug demand and prevention*

The EU and its member states have acquired a solid experience in the quest for reducing the demand of drugs and in the field of prevention. This know-how should clearly be emphasised during EU-Russia meetings, at all levels, as it could contribute to balance the Russian anti-drug strategy and promote long-term perspectives.

4. *Enhancing cooperation with regional initiatives*

So far, the Russian Federation has shown reluctance to effectively cooperate with the EU on cross-border issues as this cooperation would essentially address flows (organised crime, drug trafficking, illegal immigration) coming from Russia and not the other way around. By showing willingness to cooperate upstream in Central Asia, particularly through closer links with the SCO and CSTO, the EU could enhance its visibility and reliability towards the Central Asian states and Russia, and it could actively work to build trust.

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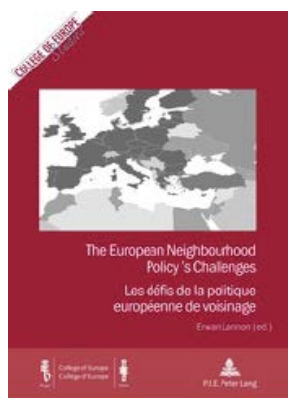
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