



Compass 2020

Germany in international relations
Aims, instruments, prospects



Central Asia The Struggle for Power, Energy and Human Rights

Reinhard Krumm

January 2007

**FRIEDRICH
EBERT** 
STIFTUNG



Compass 2020

Germany in international relations
Aims, instruments, prospects

The Compass 2020 project represents the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's contribution to a debate on Germany's aims, role and strategies in international relations. Compass 2020 will organise events and issue publications in the course of 2007, the year in which German foreign policy will be very much in the limelight due to the country's presidency of the EU Council and the G 8. Some 30 articles written for this project will provide an overview of the topics and regions that are most important for German foreign relations. All the articles will be structured in the same way. Firstly, they will provide information about the most significant developments, the toughest challenges and the key players in the respective political fields and regions. The second section will analyse the role played hitherto by German / European foreign policy, the strategies it pursues and the way in which it is perceived. In the next section, plausible alternative scenarios will be mapped out illustrating the potential development of a political field or region over the next 15 years. The closing section will formulate possible points of departure for German and European policy.

Jochen Steinhilber
Katrien Klüver

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
Dept. for Development Policy
Hiroshimastraße 17
D - 10785 Berlin

Tel. +49-30-26935-972
Fax +49-30-26935-959
kompass2020@fes.de
www.fes.de/kompass2020

Central Asia

The Struggle for Power, Energy and Human Rights

Reinhard Krumm



Abstract	2
I. 1. Fundamental Conditions – “Authoritarian Modernization”	3
I.1 The Common Destiny of Central Asia	3
I.2 The Struggle against Terror	4
I.3 Between Openness and Isolation	5
I.4 The Search for Identity	7
II. Germany’s Policy – “Stability at the Forefront”	9
III. Scenarios – Thaw or Ice Age.....	11
III.1 Scenario 1 – Springtime on the Silk Road.....	12
III.2 Scenario 2 – Ice Age in Central Asia.....	13
IV. Options for Action – “Change through Role Model”	14

Abstract

After 15 years of independence, the five Central Asian republics are still in the process of transforming their systems from a Soviet planned economy to a kind of market economy, from totalitarianism to guided democracy. Such transformation meets with varying degrees of success: either there is no active civilian society to support the frequently inefficient state bureaucracies; or else the governments are keen that such influence should remain minimal. Instead, the states of the region – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan und Uzbekistan – rely on “authoritarian modernization”. The state initiates reforms which in many cases preserve the power of the elite rather than serve the needs of the people.

Germany is the only European country represented by an ambassador in every country of Central Asia. The main interest initially was in the German-Russian population. Since 2001, when German soldiers arrived in Uzbekistan as part of the international military force sent to the region to help establish peace in Afghanistan, Germany has been supporting the struggle against international terrorism. Germany is endeavoring to bring permanent stability to the region. This objective is stated in the German federal government’s Central Asia Concept drawn up in 2002.

The political and economic transition in the republics of Central Asia may well develop along very different lines in the future. Many scenarios are conceivable, and they could even vary within the region. Roughly speaking however, two scenarios can be formulated: either the region will push forward with the frequently touted democratic transformation, or the countries will create a façade democracy, which supposedly takes into account the peculiarities of the mentality and of the historical process in the region. An ice age or a thaw. Some states may collapse completely.

Germany has selected Central Asia as a core foreign policy theme for its presidency of the European Council during the first six months of 2007. An EU Central Asia Concept is to be drawn up during this period. Furthermore, German foreign policy has the opportunity to assist Kazakhstan in its bid for chairmanship of the OSCE, for which Kazakhstan is striving. Germany should set a good example in its foreign policy and name areas which are advantageous for the development of the region and the EU. The distribution of water resources and the export of energy are prime examples, with natural gas and crude oil being of great interest to the EU and Germany. Regional cooperation, democracy and constitutional legality are the objectives to aim for locally in Central Asia.

I. Fundamental Conditions – “Authoritarian Modernization”

Central Asia was once a focus of international interest and activity. In this region, trade was conducted with goods from all over the world, borders were negotiated and humanity first globalized. It is no mere coincidence that the prefix “central” or “middle” is an integral part of the region’s name. Not only goods but also thoughts and theories were exchanged. The renowned scholar Avicenna acted as an intermediary between the concepts of Greek antiquity and Islam, restoring the works of Aristotle to a Europe which had forgotten them.

One thousand years later, this enormous region, which covers more than ten times the area of Germany and extends from the Caspian Sea to the Pamir mountain range, and from Afghanistan in the south to Siberia in the north, was divided up into five sovereign states. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan obtained their independence for the first time in history. The borders drawn by the Soviets in the 1920’s remained almost unaltered. In spite of their common history, neither Afghanistan nor the Western Chinese province of Xinjiang are included by most political thinkers in the region of Central Asia.

All five republics of this region staggered rather apathetically into independence. It came more as a surprise and unexpected gift than as a result of political revolution or civil discontent. For decades, the Central Asian periphery had received payments from the capital of the Soviet empire on a scale which enabled an almost European-standard infrastructure. In return, the region – rich in such raw materials as cotton, gold and uranium – was exploited and contaminated, with nuclear experiments conducted in Semipalatinsk in Kazakhstan, radioactive waste deposited in Mailuu-Suu in Kyrgyzstan and the dried-up Aral Sea in Uzbekistan becoming an ecological catastrophe. The majority of the population accepted this with indifference.

I.1 The Common Destiny of Central Asia

The first stage of independence prior to 2001 took place in the region without any great interest on the part of foreign states. Russia was fully preoccupied with its own affairs, the USA with the new world order and Europe with its sudden undivided status. There was hardly a country which paid any attention to the activity of the five governments which, with the exception of Kyrgyzstan, were led initially by former Communist princes. Nevertheless, the roots of the different development of the five states can be found in this period.

Central Asia shares a common destiny stemming from the order imposed by the Soviet government in the 1920’s. The region is definitely not an economic community, let alone a community of values. Each government pursues its own interests, rarely taking into account the effect on the region. This clearly distinguishes it from the EU. Nevertheless, it is united by almost seventy years of common history and the resultant infrastructure, which was created regionally and not nationally. Above all, this includes facilities for the exploitation of water resources, as well energy supplies and trade routes. All Central Asian republics are inland countries. Uzbekistan is one of only two double-landlocked countries in the world (the other is Lichtenstein).

Both the Turkmen President Saparmurad Niyazov and his Uzbek colleague Islam Karimov avoided a course of shock therapy. Initially this seemed a successful strategy, since both

countries managed to avoid the social protest and unrest that afflicted Russia. Tajikistan, meanwhile, became bogged down in civil war. President Emomali Rakhmonov was unable to introduce any changes until after 1997. The countries of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan handled the reforms most successfully. Kazakhstan, the ninth largest country in the world, was helped in particular by its reserves of oil around the Caspian Sea. Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev allowed considerable freedom and scope for development to entrepreneurs, who made full use of the opportunity. And with Askar Akayev, Kyrgyzstan benefited from a President who began to restructure the state with unexpected speed.

1.2 The Struggle against Terror

Then the terrorist attack of 11th September 2001, and the subsequent war in Afghanistan, wrenched the countries of Central Asia into the glaring light of the international press. The second phase of independence commenced. Suddenly, these neighboring states became strategically important in the war against terror. The USA sent troops to Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, and within the context of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) the German Army stationed around 300 soldiers in Termez in Southern Uzbekistan. In 2002 the United States President George Bush met Islam Karimov at the White House in Washington.

For a moment it seemed as if there would be a chance to clear up some of the classic misunderstandings between East and West in Central Asia: “Western democracy means chaos” or “Islamic states are incapable of democracy”. The war in Afghanistan was also intended as something of a catalyst, a means of helping these states and their societies – with a population of around 60 million citizens – to shake off the heavy burden of the Soviet inheritance. A stable and free Central Asia could provide a model for strife-torn Afghanistan.

By this time not only the international community of states, but also international NGOs (non-governmental organizations) were keen to lend firm support to the difficult transformation of systems, a process akin to “changing the traffic system from driving on the left to driving on the right, while traffic is in full flow”.¹ Here economic and political reforms shared priority status. An example of this was the annual conference of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development held in May 2003 in the capital of Uzbekistan, Tashkent. The topic of the first panel was human rights.

The period of mutual trust was short-lived, however. When the headlines of the color revolutions in Georgia and in the Ukraine reached Central Asia, the mood changed dramatically. While the regime in Turkmenistan under President Niyazov – president-for-life and self-styled Turkmenbashi, or father of all Turkmens – opted for dictatorship for its internal politics and neutrality with regard to foreign policy, the government of President Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan felt betrayed. How could the USA on the one hand strive for a strategic partnership with a military base in Uzbekistan and on the other hand seek to overthrow his regime with the help of NGOs?

Criticism of the USA’s double strategy also grew in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and was generalized into fundamental criticism of the West. When political reform stagnated, the revolutionary wave also reached the small country of Kyrgyzstan. In March 2005, citizens’ protests against rigged parliamentary elections spelled the end of Akayev’s presidency of Kyrgyzstan. He fled the country in the direction of Russia.

1] Jerzy Mackow, *Totalitarismus und danach*, Baden-Baden 2005, p. 109.

About two months later, armed rebels stormed a jail in the town of Andijan, located in the Fergana valley in Uzbekistan, in order to free some businessmen who had been – illegally in their eyes – imprisoned there. Other people were shot in the process. A demonstration on the main square of the town was terminated forcibly and brutally by armed intervention. According to government information, about 200 people died; reports issued by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and Human Rights Watch (HRW) put the number of deaths significantly higher.

Western observers have meanwhile started to differentiate and criticize both the violent liberation of the prisoners on the one hand and the unreasonable use of weapons against mainly innocent demonstrators on the other hand. President Karimov, who had accepted full responsibility, spoke of crushing a religiously motivated attempt to overthrow his government. He claimed that foreign powers – in other words, the United States – were also involved. No evidence of this has ever been presented to the public.

The British news magazine *The Economist* published a leading article demanding punishment for Uzbekistan. After the government in Tashkent rejected an international investigation, this is exactly what occurred: the EU decreed sanctions which had, chiefly, more of a symbolic effect.

1.3 Between Openness and Isolation

The year 2005, following the events in Bishkek and Andijan, thus marks the beginning of the third period since the independence of the Central Asian states. For the events in Andijan have influenced not only the politics of Uzbekistan, but those of the entire region. This provisionally final phase in the still-young history of Central Asia is characterized by a loss of faith in the West, which is accused of double standards.

The crushing of the demonstration in Andijan is seen by the governments in the region as the end of the color revolutions, i.e. it is viewed in a positive light. Two months after those events, at a meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) held in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, the member states signed a resolution in which they demanded that all foreign states close their military bases in Central Asia.

This was not very surprising, since the membership of the SCO includes, in addition to the republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the two great powers Russia and China. In their opinion, the presence of the American troops was not only negative, but indeed a growing security risk. Furthermore, they insisted, Afghanistan did not require further military support to the extent that troops had to be stationed in Central Asia. All this is reminiscent of the "Great Game" of the last years of the 19th century, when Russia and England fought for influence in Central Asia. With two great differences: today the USA, China and the EU are involved as well and, much more decisively, the countries of the region are themselves sovereign states.

Not only the USA (bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan), but also Russia (bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) and the ISAF contingent under German leadership (Uzbekistan) should have been affected by the SCO's decision to get rid of foreign bases. In fact, however, tangible measures were directed only against the USA. As a consequence of Uzbekistan's ultimatums, Washington withdrew its soldiers (numbering approximately 1000) from the country by the end of December 2005. The troops in Kyrgyzstan remained.

Thus Uzbekistan, in particular, executed an about-face in foreign policy. Following years of uneasy relations with Russia and a short strategic partnership with the USA, the leadership in Tashkent turned to Moscow again following the events in Andijan and the harsh criticism from the USA and Europe. And President Karimov was received in the Kremlin with open arms. The other countries of the region adopted a wait-and-see policy and are paying very precise attention to the counter-balance of Russian influence.

Whereas the first Russian President, Boris Yeltsin, was considered to be the destroyer of the Russian empire, his successor Vladimir Putin wants to go down in history as the founder of a new powerful Russia. In order to realize this ambition, the only remaining republics of the former Soviet Union to which he can turn are those of Central Asia and Belarus.

In a spirit of anticipatory obedience, the Kyrgyz Opposition politician Kurmanbek Bakiyev had already obtained support from Putin for a possible change of government prior to the tulip revolution. The hands of the Tajik President Rakhmonov are also tied. About a sixth of his six million citizens work in the Muscovite empire and earn remittances which enable the country at the Hindu Kush to continue to exist.

Meanwhile, in the recent past, Putin travelled regularly to Kazakhstan, to meet with the Kazakh President Nazarbayev. And the Turkmenbashi, although he often snubbed his Russian partner, also knew that he could only direct his plethora of raw materials to Europe via the Russian pipeline system. His successor will have a similar view of the situation.

Crucially, as noted by the reputable American magazine *Foreign Affairs*, it is Russia under President Putin which most vehemently resists Western democracy models.² And this has a certain knock-on effect. Thus not only Russia, but almost all countries in Central Asia, have tightened laws restricting NGO activities. Behind this lies the deep mistrust among the post-Soviet elites against initiatives coming from citizens who can no longer be controlled by the state. It is an attempt to bureaucratize civil society. With the antagonism between an increasingly powerful elite and a powerless population, the danger of instability is increasing.

This is despite the fact that the countries depend on an active civil society in their transformation, in order to compensate for the weaknesses of the state. In addition, civil society could accelerate the transformation of the elites and provide the state with new energy – which is urgently required – in the form of reforms. Nevertheless, loyalty to the system continues to be far more important than competence, seriously restricting modernization.

The countries of the region have well-drafted constitutions which include all the ingredients of a democratic and modern state: an independent judiciary, observance of human rights, parliaments which check the executive, free elections, independence of the press and equality between man and woman. While civil rights activists speak of façades without any content, the governments are proud of “authoritarian modernization”³, of guided democracy and of their own Eastern approach to the introduction of democracy.

For they accuse Western societies of being individualist, whereas Eastern societies, on the other hand, have a collectivist orientation. Here the question arises concerning what

2] Thomas Carothers, Backlash against Democracy Promotion, in: *Foreign Affairs*, March 2006, Washington, p. 56.

3] Sultan Akimbekov, Zastojnyj Moment (Braking Moment), *Kontinent*, No. 22, Almaty 2005, pp. 17–19.

is actually hidden behind these terms. Who decides when the political elite will stop the pressure on the population, which is becoming harder and harder to bear? What reasons should there be for the elite to give up sinecures which they have obtained? There is a lack of public discussion, because the media actually practice self-censorship as a result of political pressure.

The search for a strong, constructive opposition is also in vain. The framework provided by the state is too narrow and the concept of a constructive opposition too unfamiliar. At the moment, only selected politicians who exercise criticism in small doses, if at all, manage to get into the parliament. In theory, the extra-parliamentary opposition should gain in significance. The state, however, uses all its power to prevent this. The dictatorship of the law à la Putin applies. There can be no talk of rights.

At present, an Islamic movement seems to be forming, predominantly in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, but also in the southern areas of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. This movement opposes the secular state. In response, the governments of all these secular states dramatize a threat which undoubtedly exists in the opinion of experts. But does this justify the brutal actions of the security services against suspected supporters of Islam? Human Rights Watch speaks of creating one's own enemies.

1.4 The Search for Identity

As far as domestic policy is concerned, the main feature in the third phase of the development of Central Asia is that the governments tend to react rather than act – with regard to political difficulties, economic problems and questions of identity. The greatest challenge is for a head of government to step down according to constitutional requirements, something which has not yet occurred in Central Asia. Political stability depends too much on the president because the state systems are weak, their employees are often badly trained and maintaining a balance among local clan structures is quite difficult.

The heads of state are afraid of relinquishing power because of their uncertain future. They still remember clearly how Akayev was forced to relinquish his position. Their successors would be in a position to carry out investigations, the results of which could lead to criminal charges. The proposal of Rakhat Aliyev, Deputy Foreign Secretary of Kazakhstan and son-in-law of the President, to introduce a constitutional monarchy shows how real this danger is.

"Somehow or other we always end up using the methods of the NKVD".⁴ This was said by no less a person than the Russian President Putin, who should know, since he himself served in the KGB, the successor to the NKVD. As in the past in some Central Asian republics, certain critical journalists are put under pressure, unwanted initiatives of civil society are subjected to harassment, and court proceedings are decided by so-called telephone laws – judges following the telephoned instructions of a high-ranking official. According to the criteria of the American organization Freedom House, the countries of Central Asia are deemed to be "not free".

At the same time, one cannot simply extrapolate from these conditions to conclude that the citizens of the region are miserable. According to a survey carried out by the World Bank in Washington, five per cent of the people of Central Asia are very content, and 51 per cent quite content.⁵ How can one explain this relative contentment or – to be more

4] Zitiert nach Michael Ludwig, Häuserkampf in Moscow, in: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 22. Juni 2006, p. 3.

5] UNDP, Central Asia Human Development Report, Bratislava 2005, p. 44.

precise – this ability to come to terms with a difficult human rights situation, not to mention a social security system which is often overstretched beyond its limits?

On the one hand, the answer lies in the fact that for the vast majority of the citizens, the factor of stability plays a predominant role. After losing their savings and security following the collapse of the Soviet Union, in some cases traumatically, the population does not expect much progress from radical reforms. Therefore its support for gradual changes in the fields of education and economy is all the greater. Independence from Russia is also highly valued, especially by the younger people – who make up over 50 per cent of the population in Central Asia.⁶

On the other hand, violations of human rights are not always perceived as such or are simply accepted as ensuing from an act of God. And citizens certainly no longer expect the state to involve them in decisions any more. Deceit and corruption have to be endured, though not necessarily in the case of economic problems. Here the sense of injustice is felt much more strongly – even triggering demonstrations. Nevertheless, the lack of state social security payments is cushioned by the power of the extended family. For this reason, some states can still afford to neglect their social security systems to a criminal extent.

So what unites the citizens since the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the idea of communism ceased to serve as a binding agent? First of all, there are the local identities, which define a citizen as a member of a town or an area. The identification with a country finds much less appeal in the population. For this reason also, the states depend on prospering economies. In this respect, the Central Asian economies vary considerably from each other.

Whereas Kazakhstan has enjoyed economic growth amounting to around ten per cent for some years now, and Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have also been doing well economically – the latter thanks to its massive gas reserves – the small countries of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan continue to struggle somewhat. Their economies are growing, but at a low level. Both countries have a gross national product of approx. 2.3 billion US dollars. This corresponds to the annual profit of the American global concern Exxon Mobil. Small wonder that the number of migrant workers from Central Asia to richer countries meanwhile amounts to several million people, particularly in Russia.

Meanwhile, Kazakhstan is booming: it is called the “cockpit” and “locomotive” of Central Asia. While the German Trade Representation closed its doors in Tashkent in autumn 2004 because of a lack of orders, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) withdrew its international representative from Kazakhstan for a completely different reason: the country had enough capital at its disposal.

Thus, “authoritarian modernization” progresses. Its speed varies considerably in the different countries. Sustained success is still endangered by political and economic instability and by corruption. Despite some impressive successes, the outcome of political change in Central Asia remains unclear even after 15 years.

6] Ibid., p. 42.

II. Germany's Policy – "Stability at the Forefront"

The Federal Republic of Germany became involved in Central Asia very quickly after independence. Only six days after Mikhail Gorbachev, the last President of the Soviet Union, made a televised resignation speech on Christmas Day, the Federal Republic of Germany recognized the five republics of the region as sovereign states on 31st December 1991. On the initiative of the then Foreign Secretary Hans-Dietrich Genscher, Bonn sent ambassadors to all countries within a short time. To this day no other European country can demonstrate such a strong political presence.

How can one explain Germany's interest in a region which is some 5,000 kilometres away? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to examine the three stages in the development of the region and their effect on German foreign policy. Despite a certain continuity, Germany pursued different interests in the three time periods. Here geo-political factors were decisive.

The first period was characterized by Germany's gratitude towards the former Soviet Union for support in re-unification. The 15 sovereign successor republics were to profit from German and European experience and values on their difficult path of change. This explains the unusually high density of German diplomats in Central Asia.

There was also another reason, however. Approximately one million German-Russians lived in the Central Asian region. After the beginning of the Second World War in 1941, they were deported from the area where they had settled along the Volga to Central Asia, and German Federal governments since the era of Konrad Adenauer as Chancellor had strongly pleaded their case. With the beginnings of independence among the states in the south of the former Soviet Union, the desire to emigrate to Germany was awakened in these German-Russians.

The largest proportion – almost a million – lived in Kazakhstan, followed by Kyrgyzstan with about 100,000 and Uzbekistan with almost 40,000 people. In Tajikistan and Turkmenistan there were many fewer German-Russians. In the intervening 15 years, over two thirds have since emigrated to Germany. The German state helped to overcome the bureaucratic hurdles in the difficult resettlement of the immigrants and offered support for the German minority in Central Asia. At the same time, the German Federal Government supported stability in the region, the rule of law and a social market economy.

However, this provided no answer to the question of what goals these interests should serve. The position paper of the SPD parliamentary party "Region of the Future: Caspian Sea"⁷ in 1998 formulated these more exactly. The paper declared that it was a German aim to make "contributions to European energy security". This related, above all, to the countries of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan with their reserves of natural gas and crude oil which, together with those of Azerbaijan, make up approximately 4.0 or 4.2 percent of proven world reserves.

With the start of the war on terror, which began with the war in Afghanistan at the end of 2001, German foreign policy objectives in Central Asia became much more concrete. Germany sent soldiers to Uzbekistan, in order to provide logistic support for the ISAF contingent in Afghanistan. In the Central Asia concept of the German Federal Government of March 2002⁸, which is still valid today, it is stated in addition that "a new orientation of our political priorities" is needed. These included primarily the "war on terror", "consolidation of

7] Zukunftsregion Kaspisches Meer, Position paper presented by the SPD government faction, Bonn 1998.

8] Central Asia Concept by the German Federal Government of 18th March 2002, Berlin 2002.

democratic structures”, “struggle against poverty”, “socially friendly and environmentally friendly development of the economy” und “non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction”. The German Minister of Defence at the time, Peter Struck, expressed it in vivid terms: “European security is defended at the Hindu Kush.”

Which meant in Central Asia as well. There were no longer to be lawless areas in countries which extremist groups could claim for themselves as bases for the preparation of terrorist attacks. For that would make it difficult, if not impossible, to fulfill a further guiding principle of the Central Asia concept: “to ensure unhindered energy transfer”.

On these points, German policy received support from the EU. In its strategy paper 2002–2006⁹ it lists three areas of concern: security, the reduction of political and social tension and trade and energy supply. To quote: “As a large energy consumer, the EU will be interested in the development of the Caspian’s energy resources and in safe transit routes, in order to guarantee a diversification of supply.”

Have those responsible for German and foreign policy really given full attention to this topic? Can such a demanding goal even be achieved, or are Berlin and Brussels overstressing themselves? Gas and crude oil are not brought directly to Europe from Central Asia, but via Russia. Almost all pipelines lead to this country, and were built in the Soviet era. At present there is no solution to Europe’s energy supply problems without Russia.

Up until now, the political will required for approaching this goal has been lacking in Germany and Europe. It was not until May 2006 that an EU Commissioner paid a visit to Central Asia. The Latvian Andris Piebalgs spoke in Kazakhstan about diversifying the EU’s demand for raw materials in order to reduce dependence on Russia. In December, Astana and Brussels signed a joint energy agreement.

The political status quo is complicated. Russia and China are precisely those countries which have the greatest interest in the raw materials of Central Asia. Naturally, however, this should not prevent Germany from paying close attention to Central Asia and seeking new solutions. For Berlin has an advantage in the region which should not be underestimated: its excellent reputation. Germany is considered to be a reliable partner acting without geo-political ambitions.

In addition to the Foreign Office, the committed action of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) is largely responsible for this and has, of course, other interests. The BMZ-Central Asia concept of 2005¹⁰ describes the fight against poverty as a “goal and cross-sectional task” which is to be accomplished by three priority approaches: support for democratization processes, rule of law and civil competition; support for socially acceptable and environmentally friendly economic reforms; and the securing of basic social services.

Within the EU, Germany is the largest bilateral donor in Central Asia. Organizations such as the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), the Deutsche Akademische Austauschdienst (DAAD), the Deutsche Volkshochschulverband (DVV), the Deutsche Entwicklungsdienst (DED), the Welthungerhilfe, the Goethe Institute, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) are active directly in the region. No other country can provide evidence of a similar network in all countries of the region.

9] Strategy Paper 2002–2006 & Indicative Program 2002–2004 for Central Asia, Brussels, 10 October 2002.

10] Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Central Asia Concept, Bonn 2005.

However, the color revolutions have since restricted access for them. Mistrust of the West has increased in the third phase since independence. The security situation in Afghanistan is deteriorating. Plans to transport Central Asia's raw materials to Europe via Afghanistan and Iran are politically unrealistic. The German government has resolved to give Central Asia priority treatment during its presidency of the European Council in the first six months of 2007 and to write a new EU concept.

Gernot Erler, Minister of State at the Foreign Office, held a keynote speech on this topic in Berlin in May 2006: "The goal of stability is at the forefront."¹¹ It is in Europe's interest, he said, "to create a peaceful, stable environment". There is a further need to focus on the "step-by-step realization of democracy and the rule of law" and "Germany's and the EU's energy security", for here "the countries of Central Asia are gaining increasingly in importance". But first, according to Minister of State Erler, "the goals and interests of both sides must be identified". And then a decision will be taken as to how real policies can develop from this.

Here Germany has succeeded in involving Uzbekistan in renewed dialogue. On the initiative of Berlin, the sanctions imposed on the country in 2005 were relaxed after one year. One of the reasons for this was Tashkent's willingness to allow an international group of experts to visit the country in December 2006, in order to examine the events in Andijan through interviews and the inspection of documents.

III. Scenarios – Thaw or Ice Age

It is difficult to set up plausible political scenarios for the region of Central Asia because they depend on an unusually large number of factors, on both domestic as well as foreign policy fronts. The states of the region have only been independent for 15 years and have only weak political institutions which are susceptible to crises. And because of the region's energy resources and the geo-political situation, China, Russia, the EU and the USA all show great interest in the region. Many states find it difficult to keep these competing powers in balance.

The interests of the actors vary somewhat depending on whether they are involved in domestic policy or foreign policy. The almost exclusively autocratic governments look towards stability in particular and take scrupulous care to ensure that they have the backing necessary for this. This goal unites the countries and alliances who are involved in the region. However, while China and Russia are concentrating solely on political stability and raw materials, the aims of the USA and the EU are for the states to achieve prosperity by means of the rule of law, pluralism and a social market economy, and to be able to survive political changes of power without chaos – which are values that the countries of the region should uphold as OSCE members anyway.

Thus the key question for the elaboration of two contradictory scenarios is: which factors influence democratization in Central Asia? The following are seen as decisive factors: (1) the strong or weak political will of the government, (2) a positive or negative social situation, (3) the high or low level of education, (4) the lesser or greater involvement of civil society and (5) an open or closed mentality.

11] Quoted from the text of the speech of 18th May 2006 on the website www.gernot-erler.de.

Many factors were not taken into consideration. In order not to overload the scenarios, however, the selection was restricted to the five factors stated above. And so as to identify the political scope of the region for the interested reader, two clearly distinct scenarios will be presented. Both the scenarios and the strategies have been kept brief and simple. A more detailed description is not possible within the context of this study.

III.1 Scenario 1 – Springtime on the Silk Road

1. In Central Asia, the political will of the governments to push ahead with reforms for the benefit of the country and the citizens is very strong. They are guided by interests which benefit the country and the region, without which medium-term survival is not possible. Stability, based on democratic structures and values, is the premise for prosperity and progress. A change of government thus does not become a high-risk gamble for the future of the state.

The reasons for the political will to implement reforms lie in the conviction that long-term stability can only be achieved by means of joint efforts by state and society. For this reason, more space is granted to civil society initiatives. Neither they nor a free press are viewed as a threat. Foreign states support the reforms with bilateral economic agreements and intensified development cooperation.

2. The social situation of the population improves. Through greater trust in the state and higher incomes for citizens, tax revenues increase. More money is being directed into social security funds. In this way the burden is removed from low-income families and more money is available for consumption. The economy begins to grow in real terms and foreign investors gain confidence again.

3. The state invests in education. This is based on surveys which have investigated the needs of the states. Universities of Applied Sciences and other universities train the specialists actually required according to the countries' programs for the future. In this way, well-educated experts are dissuaded from emigrating due to a lack of appropriate jobs with good salaries in their own country.

4. Civil society develops initiatives which can be initiated either jointly with the state or on their own responsibility. The aim is to create a state which can meet the requirements of a globalized world. The state and civilian society have understood that the intermediary organizations, the NGOs and the press, do not confront the state in a hostile way but criticize constructively in order to encourage improvement.

5. The mentality of the people in Central Asia is not restricted by the solely backward-looking search for one's own identity. Instead, the mentality is open and tries to unite the past with the present. Such aspirations can only succeed when state and society unite in a joint effort to move forward. Central Asia has a long tradition of tolerance. This should guide the political discourse.

The objection that a political spring does not appear to be very realistic along the entire Silk Road is more than justified under the present circumstances. But parts of the scenario at least are not impossible. Thus some countries invest in education, civil society is encouraged, if often under state control, and the mentality in some countries is directed more towards opening up than closing off.

The will of the governments is a very significant factor upon which much depends. It is influenced by well-educated citizens, by a favorable social situation and by a mentality which is willing to show openness. If these are strengthened, the political will to reform increases. Civil society, which has only a little direct influence, must therefore strengthen its effect on the three factors mentioned above in order to expand its area of influence and to become stronger.

III.2 Scenario 2 – Ice Age in Central Asia

1. The political will to tackle reforms courageously remains weak. The reasons for this are the rivalries in domestic politics and the controlling mentality on the part of the presidents. The only changes carried out are those which do not endanger the retention of power. The stability of a country is based on strong personalities, not on strong political structures. The government perceives an active civilian society as a predominantly hostile actor. The rule of law and a free press threaten their power.
2. The social situation is tense. Because of rigid domestic policies and the close entanglement of politics and economics, foreign investors stay away. Governments do not succeed in finding economic niches for their countries. Unemployment is high, and well-qualified, skilled workers emigrate to foreign countries. Tax income is in short supply, and social security payments are minimal.
3. The education system has almost collapsed. The state has neither the means nor the will to impart to future generations the knowledge which is urgently required to modernize a country. In order to retain their power, the ruling classes do not shy away from reducing the education system to a necessary minimum, so as to prevent highly-educated students from viewing the system too critically in the future.
4. Civil society has been swallowed up almost completely by the state. Strict rules on registration have taken away the voice of non-state initiatives. There is scarcely any desire for foreign cooperation any longer. Anyone who is not for the state is against it. Modernization of the state is only possible by the state itself – which is a contradiction in terms. Isolation threatens; in the worst case, the state will collapse.
5. The state offers historical reasons for a closed mentality shut off from other countries and other models of reform. Instead of openness, the state limits its horizons to the country's own identity, which is embedded exclusively in the past. The battery of threats used to justify such actions is that only under these conditions can the state survive. More openness would lead to undesired dependence and even pose a threat to sovereignty.

Against the background of this scenario, which for the most part is very realistic, it must be explained to the governments that a political system can indeed survive in isolation but cannot generate any prosperity and political stability on a permanent basis. This underlines even more strongly the need for a foreign policy partnership which does not serve solely to reproach states for their deficiencies and to humiliate them, but rather to involve them in future steps for the good of the country. Here, projects promising success already in the short term and offering a win-win situation should be conceived right at the outset.

Economic cooperation should be accompanied by constitutional reform. For this purpose, well-educated young people are required in the medium term. And, in turn, they can help create civilian initiatives. This one-dimensional chain reaction is unfortuna-

tely very susceptible to unpredictable factors. If a country becomes completely isolated, a political ice age in Central Asia is very probable. This could also jeopardize the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

IV. Options for Action – “Change through Role Model”

German politicians have decided to make Central Asia a core theme of foreign policy during Germany’s presidency of the European Council in the first half of 2007. For this reason Foreign Secretary Frank-Walter Steinmeier flew to the region in autumn 2006 in order to finalize the focal points of cooperation. In addition to security and stability, economic and energy interests and the rule of law, these could include the promotion of regional cooperation, initiatives to improve training and the intensification of the political dialogue at the highest level. At the next stage, the instruments for implementing these interests will have to be defined in precise terms. Central Asia is not a stable region. The country of Kyrgyzstan, following the color revolution, and the unclear future of Turkmenistan after the death of the despot Niyazov bear witness to this. In addition, Germany is confronted with the difficult task of integrating into the equation the strategies of three large powers along with its own and those of the EU.

Both the USA and Russia are grasping at the region with opposing interests. While Russia would like to use the republics as sources of energy in order to supply its own southern regions directly, and European neighbors indirectly, with energy, America is planning to bring Central Asia and Southern Asia closer together. A new section in the State Department is even called the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs. Washington’s aim is to open up Central Asia to the south, to supply South Asia with energy resources and to stabilize Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, the Central Asian states themselves are currently orienting themselves towards the North. In spite of all criticism of the former colonial power of Russia, they recognize that only the Russian pipeline network is operational. Mistrust of Afghanistan is also considerable. And America has lost influence in Central Asia to such an extent that it scarcely has any means available to convince the governments of the region to export energy southwards. At the same time, China’s influence is growing stronger.

Germany’s foreign policy thus seems to be faced with the choice of supporting either the Russian or the American approach. To formulate it in slightly exaggerated terms, the stabilization of Afghanistan is in opposition to German energy imports from Russia and Central Asia. Whether Germany and Europe can resolve this contradiction is questionable.

Meanwhile, Kazakhstan is taking the initiative. What would have been rejected as an absurd idea a few years ago now seems to be a realistic possibility: the member state Kazakhstan wishes to take over the chairmanship of the OSCE in 2009. The EU Neighborhood Program is also targeting Astana. The country offers the enticement of becoming a reliable, alternative energy supplier for Europe. Critical voices, above all Great Britain and the USA, point out that the country has a lot of catching up to do in the fields of democracy, rule of law and freedom of the press.

But it is precisely here that German politics has an opportunity which Minister of State Eler formulated as follows: “By taking on this role, Kazakhstan is demonstrating its will to accept responsibility and to champion the instruments and achievements of the OSCE.”

Subsequently he expressed the hope that “Kazakhstan’s presidency of the OSCE could have some influence within the region”¹². Not to the extent, of course, that political liberalization would be limited.

Kazakhstan as President of the OSCE could mean a win-win situation. Both sides could gain from the new political situation. And there is justifiable hope that this might also be a positive influence throughout the region as a whole.

Central Asian reformers do not need the West as a defender against authoritarian regimes (that is their own affair) or as a sponsor (too much foreign support is damaging for their self- image), but as a role model. The modified credo of Willy Brandt’s Eastern Europe policy could be: change through role model. The partnership and cooperation agreements of the EU also serve this purpose.¹³

Here the opportunities for action in German foreign policy in Central Asia are manifold. As Kazakhstan wishes to lead the OSCE on its own initiative for a limited period, the requirements for doing so should not be seen as unfairly imposed. The OSCE must ensure that this is the case – as well as ensuring that one of the countries of the region does not receive preferential treatment.

It is important that Germany and the EU should point out the advantages of regional cooperation. In the course of 2006, contacts among the Central Asian republics increased at the highest level. They are members of active regional alliances such as the SCO, the Euro-Asian Economic Community and the regional Economic Cooperation forum of Central Asia. Problems such as water distribution, drug trafficking, security, environment and transportation can only be solved regionally. For such purposes, talks within regional alliances are indispensable.

At the same time, contacts with China and Russia should be established, in order to discuss joint interests in Central Asia. Central Asia should not be viewed as an end region for European politics but as a bridge between Europe and Asia. The SCO, in which both China and Russia as well as the republics of Central Asia are members, can be used for this purpose. However, this does not preclude Germany – not least because of its presence in every republic – from directing its attention towards country-specific problems.¹⁴ Because, in addition to the common denominators which have so far tended to be more disruptive than unifying, there are considerable differences among the countries.

After the past few years of mutual mistrust, the time has come to formulate interests clearly. This applies to Germany, Europe and Central Asia. From the European side, the message must be conveyed that Berlin and Brussels are interested in a strong, sovereign and democratic Central Asia. This requires the long-term involvement of Europe, as the Special Representative of the EU, Ambassador Pierre Morel, demands.¹⁵

The capitals on the Silk Road must send the message that they truly wish to push ahead with reforms and modernization. A clear “no” must be expressed by Europe to the governments’ desire to enforce stability even at the cost of human rights. German political foundations can create publicity by means of seminars and round tables, and can also encourage negotiations between the state and civil society on the subject of basic political

12] Gernot Erler, Germany and OSCE Reform, CORE Working Paper, Hamburg 2006, p. 11.

13] The EU has signed partner agreements with all countries in the region. Since 1st July 1999 they have been in force in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

14] See Crisis Group, Central Asia: What Role For The European Union?, Bishkek/Brussels 2006, p. ii.

15] Lecture by Pierre Morel at the FES Conference “The future of regional cooperation: Central Asia in the year 2020” on 12th December 2006 in Berlin.

interests. This process makes political participation possible, so that one can speak about good governance and the observance of human rights. The promotion of democracy can only come from within, from the country itself.

Throughout its history, Europe has experienced – very painfully – the fact that stability which is imposed from above quickly ends in chaos. Such an outcome cannot yet be excluded in some countries of Central Asia.

On the author: Reinhard Krumm is Head of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's Regional Office for Central Asia in Tashkent, Uzbekistan



Compass 2020

Germany in international relations

Aims, instruments, prospects

- Reinhard Krumm, Central Asia – The Struggle for Power, Energy and Human Rights, January 2007
- Britta Joerißen, „The Balkans and the Long Road from War to Peace“, January 2007

- China
- European integration
- India
- Latin America
- Middle East
- Post-communist area
- Russia
- South-East Asia
- Sub-Saharan Africa
- Transatlantic relations
- Democracy promotion
- Demography and migration
- Energy security
- Environment
- Global health
- Human rights and social issues
- International assignments
- Multilateral institutions
- Organised crime
- Peace-building
- Proliferation / armament
- Religion and politics
- Shaping globalisation
- Terrorism
- World economy

