



# European Union and Central Asia



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External Relations

## EU human rights dialogues in Central Asia

The EU Strategy for Central Asia recognises that human rights, rule of law, good governance and democratisation underpin the long-term political stability and economic development of Central Asia.

Human rights dialogues have therefore been initiated by the EU with all five Central Asian countries. These dialogues constitute an essential part of the EU's overall strategy to promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, sustainable development, peace and stability. Human rights issues are systematically raised in all the political meetings with Central Asian states.

### An instrument of external policy

This strategy requires the EU to engage in human rights dialogues with Central Asian states. The dialogues are now an instrument of the EU's external policy and are designed to:

- discuss questions of mutual interest and enhance cooperation on human rights, *inter alia* in multilateral arena such as the United Nations and the OSCE;
- raise the concerns felt by the EU on human rights in the countries concerned, gather information and launch initiatives to improve the relevant human rights situation.

Human rights dialogues can lead to the development of programmes and projects in any of the five countries concerned so that countries can meet their international human rights obligations. In particular such support can be provided through financial and technical cooperation and through specific projects funded under the *European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights*.

The human rights dialogue with Uzbekistan was the first to be formally agreed in 2007 and is undertaken within the Sub-Committee on Justice and Home Affairs, Human Rights and related issues under the *Partnership and Cooperation Agreement*.

An *ad hoc* human rights dialogue with Turkmenistan has been undertaken since 2005 in the margins of the Joint Committee meeting under the *Trade and Cooperation Agreement*. This dialogue was expanded into a regular and structured dialogue in June 2008.

### Structured dialogue

The EU-Central Asia Ministerial meeting in Ashgabat in April 2008 marked an agreement to begin human rights dialogues with Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic. In line with this agreement, the EU held its first structured dialogues on human rights with Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan in October 2008. Annual bilateral human rights dialogues are planned with all five Central Asian countries.

In addition, the European Commission (EC) has launched a series of civil society seminars with the aim of opening up official dialogues to academic and NGO communities.

Seminars were held with Uzbekistan in October 2008 in Tashkent and with the Kyrgyz Republic in March 2009 in Bishkek. Further seminars with Tajikistan and Kazakhstan took place in June and July 2009 respectively.



## Other initiatives

In the context of the strategy, the *EU Rule of Law Initiative for Central Asia*, launched in November 2008 to support reforms and the sharing of experience between the EU and Central Asia in the area of legal and judicial reforms, also includes intensified policy dialogue at all levels and helps promote human rights in Central Asia.

Cooperation in this area is also supported by assistance projects undertaken by both the EC and by the EU's Member States. EC assistance includes projects such as the *European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights*, and the *Non-State Actors Programme*, as well as the *Institution Building Partnership Programme*, which also support the development of civil society.

Projects under these initiatives include:

- supporting people who have to adapt to the new circumstances that face them, such as people who want to establish new small scale businesses (women's economic empowerment, craft businesses, tourism); providing support for groups lobbying for legislative change;
- supporting vulnerable groups, such as work with people with disabilities, work with women's groups, work with street children and the elderly;
- involving grass-roots groups in sharing experiences, building networks, involving local people in decision making and building links between civil society groups and local authorities;
- building Central Asian human rights protection and education through the media;
- enhancing the cooperation between non state actors and local authorities;
- raising the capacity of human rights NGOs in monitoring human rights, in particular reporting to the UN treaty bodies;
- promotion of right to a fair trial and prevention of torture by strengthening the institute of public assessors;
- contributing to poverty reduction through strengthening the capacity of national policy-making institutions, empowerment of community based organisations, promotion of economic development of vulnerable families.

Bilateral EC and Member State assistance programmes are also designed to give support to this area.

