



# The role of the European Union in democracy-building in Central Asia and the South Caucasus

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# **THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN DEMOCRACY-BUILDING IN CENTRAL ASIA AND THE SOUTH CAUCASUS**

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*Nicklas Norling and Svante Cornell*

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International IDEA  
Strömsborg  
SE-103 34, STOCKHOLM  
SWEDEN  
Tel: +46 8 698 37 00, fax: +46 8 20 24 22  
Email: [info@idea.int](mailto:info@idea.int), website: [www.idea.int](http://www.idea.int)

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# CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION.....	4
1. FRAGILITY AND CONFLICT IN CENTRAL ASIA AND THE SOUTH CAUCASUS.....	6
2. OBSTACLES TO DEMOCRATIZATION IN THE POST-SOVIET SPACE.....	8
3. THE EUROPEAN UNION’S DEMOCRACY-ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES IN CENTRAL ASIA.....	10
4. THE EUROPEAN UNION’S DEMOCRACY-ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS.....	12
5. DEMOCRACY-ASSISTANCE AND STATE-BUILDING INSTRUMENTS .....	14
6. BUDGET ALLOCATIONS FOR DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE .....	17
7. INSTITUTIONS, ACTORS AND THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION .....	19
8. ALIGNING DEMOCRACY-ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES WITH LOCAL PRIORITIES .....	21
9. GRADUALISM AND SEQUENCING IN THE EUROPEAN UNION’S DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE .....	23
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	25
REFERENCES .....	27
ABOUT THE AUTHORS .....	30
ABOUT INTERNATIONAL IDEA .....	31
ABOUT THE INTER-REGIONAL DIALOGUE ON DEMOCRACY .....	32

## INTRODUCTION

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This paper examines the European Union's (EU) democracy assistance to Central Asia and the South Caucasus, focusing on the countries of Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. These countries are among the most fragile and conflict-affected in the post-Soviet space, but they are distinct in that they have made varying degrees of progress towards democratic governance: Georgia, located in the South Caucasus, has come furthest and is generally considered a semi-democracy in established rankings; Kyrgyzstan is the most democratic of the Central Asian countries and is often classified as a hybrid regime, combining democratic and authoritarian elements; Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, by contrast, are authoritarian and, together with Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia, are among the post-Soviet states whose political reform efforts have advanced the least. Thus, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan are classified as 'partly free' in Freedom House's democracy index, while Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are considered 'not free' (Freedom House 2013). Other established democracy rankings (e.g. EIU 2013) tend to categorize these states similarly, even if using slightly different terminologies.

While, in the past, democracy promotion tended to be the exclusive domain of high-income Western countries, the actors involved today are more varied, the kinds of activities more diverse, and the number of countries targeted for democracy assistance is steadily increasing. As such, EU democracy assistance can be seen as one part of a heightened global focus on democracy-building among international organizations, regional organizations and other new actors beyond Western nation states. A corollary to this diversity is that democracy assistance has moved away from a one-size-fits-all approach and is today increasingly tailored to the needs and conditions of specific countries (Carothers 2009: 5). Specifically, emphasis has lately been placed on state-building as a precondition for democratic governance in non-democratic, conflict-affected and fragile societies (Fukuyama 2004; Ghani and Lockhart 2009). Today, democracy assistance is often used interchangeably with the broader promotion of good governance, especially in the guiding documents of the EU.

Two approaches have informed this new context of democracy assistance. The first, a political approach, proceeds from a stricter interpretation of democracy and democratization with emphasis on electoral processes and political liberties. Democracy assistance targets elections, political parties and civil society groups, aiming to tip the balance in favour of democrats in non-democratic countries. The second, a developmental approach, views democratization as a broader process, involving equality, justice and socio-economic changes. In this interpretation, democratization is not solely related to the conduct of 'free and fair' elections but must involve a wider societal transformation involving state- and nation-building first and foremost. Conceived as such, democracy assistance should be incremental, sequenced and focused on state-building in a wide

range of spheres prior to embarking on any reform of domestic political processes (Carothers 2009: 5).

The EU has combined these approaches in Central Asia and the South Caucasus, with an emphasis on developmental support in both. Whereas the EU has focused primarily on stability, poverty reduction and economic development in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, it has pursued these in concert with support for democratic and electoral processes in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan. This approach adheres to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (OECD 2005), which specifies that the development priorities of donors should be aligned with the national development strategies of recipient countries. Thus, the political approach has been relaxed in Central Asia since the region's authoritarian governments typically view it as threatening.

This paper argues that, while the EU's approach has served its interests and those of recipient countries overall, its democracy assistance and development aid in general suffers from vaguely defined policy priorities. The instruments used are often conflicting—especially those of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI)—and similar terms in EU strategies, especially institution-building, seem to have different meanings depending on context. The complexities of EU instruments, delivery methods, actors involved and the lack of transparency in EU projects also render it difficult to distinguish how much the EU has spent on democracy assistance in the four countries in question. This problem is compounded by the lack of EU definitions of 'democracy assistance', 'good governance' and other concepts used and the absence of budget lines directly pertaining to these. These shortcomings are, perhaps, to be expected since the EU must bridge several irreconcilable 'wants'—those of recipients, member states and EU organs (e.g. the Commission, Council and Parliament)—and this impairs the EU's potential to act coherently.

# 1. FRAGILITY AND CONFLICT IN CENTRAL ASIA AND THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

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The post-Soviet states of Central Asia and the South Caucasus are, with few exceptions, fragile and weak. The countries in focus in this paper—Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan—are particularly vulnerable, and all rank in the bottom third in the Fragile State Index (Fund for Peace 2014). Even if economic development has picked up pace in all four countries since 2000, nominal per capita GDP in 2013 amounted to a mere USD 1,044 in Tajikistan, USD 1,280 in Kyrgyzstan, USD 1,878 in Uzbekistan and USD 3,597 in Georgia (IMF 2013). Together with Armenia and Moldova, these countries are the six poorest in the post-Soviet space.

Corruption is endemic in every country in Central Asia and is closely tied to prevailing poverty. Local officials are exposed to constant enticements from businesses, families and individual citizens to gain favours, and some exploit this as a form of rent-seeking (Starr 2007: 9). Some public offices are reportedly bought and sold, especially in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (Engvall 2014). In 2013 Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan were all in the bottom 20 per cent of the 177 countries surveyed. Georgia, however, following successful anti-corruption measures after the Rose Revolution in 2003, is now ranked 55th, ahead of some EU members such as the Czech Republic. This is a considerable advance from the 1990s, when it was as corrupt as its Central Asian counterparts (Transparency International 2013).

Since independence, all four countries have experienced outbursts of violence. Tajikistan endured a civil war between 1992 and 1997, and inter-ethnic conflicts have scarred Georgia and Kyrgyzstan. In Georgia, inter-ethnic tensions have been actively fomented by Russia, which has exploited ethnic grievances in Georgia's breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to thwart the country's West-leaning orientation. Likewise, Russia exerts intense pressure on the countries of Central Asia, and Western-oriented foreign policies come with a hefty price tag, either in the form of Russian economic sanctions or covert activities aimed at keeping Central Asian leaders on their heels (Starr and Cornell 2014). Unlike Georgia and Ukraine, however, none of the Central Asian states have been exposed to outright Russian invasions.

Revolutions in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, in 2004 and 2005, respectively, instilled some hope of democratization, but only in Georgia has this approached a degree of consolidation. Kurmanbek Bakiev, who replaced Askar Akaev as President of Kyrgyzstan in 2005, proved to be even more corrupt and inclined towards one-man rule than his predecessor, and Bakiev was himself toppled after popular protests in April 2010. A democratic change of government in Georgia through parliamentary elections in 2012 was a milestone, but the situation is fragile, and the country's Euro-Atlanticist orientation can no longer be taken for granted even if it is widely supported



by Georgian citizens (Cornell 2014). Uzbekistan has been more stable than the other three, but political reform has been excruciatingly slow.

The Central Asian countries lack the democratic pull that the EU exerted on its Eastern European neighbours and look out on a ring of non-democratic countries—China, Iran and Russia—which are hardly interested in having democratic, Western-oriented countries on their borders. China and Russia hold considerable economic leverage over the Central Asian states: 42.5 per cent of Uzbekistan’s foreign trade in 2013 was conducted with China and Russia, while the equivalent figures for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were 67 per cent and 52 per cent, respectively (IMF 2014: 237–39, 389–91 and 428–30).

Georgia’s proximity to Europe has been more advantageous in that it has benefited from economic links with Europe and greater EU attention. Nearly 30 per cent of Georgia’s foreign trade is with the EU (IMF 2014: 168–70), and the country has sought integration into the EU and NATO, although it has not been offered a concrete accession prospect by either. This has been a source of tension since Russia has been struggling to block Georgia’s Western and European integration. These tensions intensified after the EU’s adoption of its Eastern Partnership in 2009, which in part precipitated the invasion of Ukraine, as Moscow opposed Ukraine’s Association Agreement with the EU.

Relations between Kyrgyzstan and the EU were strengthened after the overthrow of the Bakiev regime in 2010. The EU opened a full-fledged Delegation in Bishkek the same year and has proclaimed that it is ‘committed to [supporting] the success of democratic and legal reforms’ and actions to ‘promote post-conflict reconciliation’ (European External Action Service 2012). The EU’s relations with Tajikistan were similarly upgraded with the entering into force of a partnership and cooperation agreement (PCA) in 2011 and the opening of an EU Delegation in Dushanbe. The EU opened a Delegation in Tashkent the same year, and relations with Uzbekistan have, in the EU’s words, ‘improved a great deal over the past five years’, with assistance now extending to the energy field and programmes in the area of rule of law (European External Action Service 2012: 10–11). The European Commission opened a delegation office in Georgia in 1995, and this partnership became stronger following the 2003 Rose Revolution (Paresashvili and Abashishvili 2013: 633). The adoption of the EU’s Eastern Partnership in 2009, which largely came about in response to Russia’s aggression in Georgia a year earlier, has bolstered relations and Georgian hopes of further Western integration. Georgia signed and ratified an association agreement with the EU in 2014.

## 2. OBSTACLES TO DEMOCRATIZATION IN THE POST-SOVIET SPACE

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Beginning as early as 1991, a number of observers predicted that the post-Soviet states would embark on democratic transitions. It was only a matter of time, they argued, before Soviet totalitarian legacies would be thrown off and democratic governance embraced. While not entirely unfounded, such optimism stemmed from the belief that the demise of communism formed part of the same democratic wave that had swept through Latin America and Southern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s. It is by now clear, however, that democratization in the post-Soviet space has been much slower and uneven than what was predicted, and it has differed considerably from processes that occurred in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. That democratization has advanced furthest in the westernmost republics of the former Soviet Union and least in the former empire's eastern territories indicate that structural factors, to some degree, are at play.

There are at least six unique obstacles to democratization in post-Soviet countries that can be identified and that donors must duly take into consideration.

First, nowhere has the challenge of economic reform and the introduction of market economies been greater than in the former Soviet Union. That they had to form market economies from scratch is, in some ways, incorrect since the change of economic systems was far more complex than merely starting from zero (Bunce 2001: 47–54). In particular, the wholesale transformation of property rights in these societies in conditions of crisis led to a significant merger of economic and political power.

Second, civil society was extraordinarily weak in societies under communist rule. Over a period of 70 years, the Soviet Union resolutely strove to eliminate any form of independent activity and supplant it with state-controlled organizations in which participation often was mandatory (Howard 2002: 161). Democratization in Southern Europe or South America, by contrast, proved easier since many independent groups in these regions survived under authoritarian rule (Linz and Stepan 1996: 377).

Third, few institutionalized democratic parties existed in the Soviet Union at the time of the founding elections in 1991-1992 (Linz and Stepan 1996: 381). This stood in contrast to the liberalizing states of Southern Europe, South America and parts of East-Central Europe, where institutionalized political parties and democratically minded elites were sufficiently influential to negotiate pacts with the old elite, allowing for democratic breakthroughs. Central Asia had nothing comparable to Poland's Solidarity (Solidarność) or Czechoslovakia's Civic Forum (Občanské fórum). The elite pacts in Central Asia and the South Caucasus were hammered out almost exclusively between the old elites, who generally had scant interest in democratization.

Fourth, Soviet political culture remains firmly entrenched. Elections, the most ritualized form of Soviet political participation, were a vehicle to legitimize the status quo during the Soviet era, and they perform a similar function in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan today, as populaces are engaged to ratify the respective president's general course (Laitin 2000: 138).

Fifth, the Catholic Church in Poland and Lithuania played supportive roles for democratization in those countries, and Protestantism performed a similar function in East Germany and Estonia. By contrast, it has been argued that the Orthodox Christian churches, which are state-supported national churches, and Islam have not been equally helpful for democratization in Central Asia and the South Caucasus (Linz and Stepan 1996: 453). In post-Soviet Georgia in particular, the Orthodox Church has been an important impediment to alignment with European social legislation and norms in the minority rights area, openly opposing Georgian ratification of important European legal instruments.

Sixth, the countries of the region face direct threats to their sovereignty that are impeding democratic development. In the past decade, Russian ambitions to establish a sphere of privileged interests in the post-Soviet space has included a policy of exploiting their openness and vulnerabilities to subvert their political systems. This has included support for the most corrupt and authoritarian forces in both government and society at large, and has undermined democratic institutions, as well as led leaders to forego liberal reform in order to safeguard sovereignty.

Democracy assistance and state-building must be designed with these obstacles in mind. While often considered a marginally influential actor in Central Asia, the EU has duly taken into consideration some of the obstacles to democracy promotion in Central Asia and the South Caucasus and focused on broader developmental processes, anticipating that programmes supported by the government stand a greater chance of success and favour democratization in the longer term.

### 3. THE EUROPEAN UNION'S DEMOCRACY-ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES IN CENTRAL ASIA

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The EU has adopted two strategies for Central Asia. The first encompassed the period from 2002 to 2006, and the second from 2007 to 2013. The 2000–2006 Strategy Paper declared that the core objective of the EU's assistance to the countries of Central Asia was to promote poverty reduction, stability and security, and economic development (European Union 2002: 3). To accomplish this, the EU worked along three specific tracks involving security and conflict prevention, countering sources of political and social tension, and improving the climate for trade and investment.

Democratization is not mentioned among these but forms part of track 2, that is, the elimination of sources of political and social tension. Thus, the EU stated that the promotion of democracy and human rights is the 'only means to ensure long-term stability in the region' (European Union 2002: 18), while it seems that its 2000–2006 strategy failed to recognize that the causal connection also works the other way around, that is to say that functioning sovereignty is a prerequisite for democratic development. Further, the EU Strategy Paper remarked that the 'overarching objectives of the EU's cooperation with the Central Asian countries are to foster respect for democratic principles and human rights' and to promote good governance (European Union 2002: 4–5). Moreover, it specified that the EU's core priorities could be followed up with a greater focus on 'institutional strengthening and capacity building' if progress were satisfactory (European Union 2002: 13).

Support for institutional, legal and administrative reform was identified as a priority area in all three countries under consideration—Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The development of rural economies figured into the EU's strategy in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and the development of infrastructure networks in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The unique focuses in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan were, respectively, private-sector/economic development and addressing the social consequences of transition (European Union 2002: 14). Democratization *per se* is not mentioned even if the support for institutional reform in each country could be conceived of in terms of state-building.

The priorities in the 2007–2013 strategy were similar to those of its predecessor, including in the area of democratization. The 2007–2013 strategy was, however, more explicit regarding the importance of good governance as a priority area. As much as 20–25 per cent of the budget was earmarked for this purpose (European Community 2007: 3), while the concept of 'democratization' was mentioned explicitly (European Community 2007: 27). According to the strategy, democratic development and good governance were to be promoted through the 'promotion of civil society and democratic processes', strengthening rule of law, human rights, judicial reform and by supporting independent mass media (European Community 2007: 31).

That democratization played a more prominent role in the 2007–2013 strategy for Central Asia than in its predecessor could be explained in part by the adoption of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the objective of which is to ‘promote a ring of well-governed countries to the East of the European Union’. With EU enlargement and the adoption of the ENP, the countries of Central Asia effectively became the neighbours in an ‘EU neighbourhood’ that mandate a stronger emphasis on the values guiding the ENP in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus, including democratization (European Community 2007: 7). This focus received added impetus following the adoption of the Eastern Partnership. Thus, the 2012 progress report on the EU’s Central Asia strategy noted that the EU would step up its support in the areas of ‘human rights promotion and protection, democratic reforms, and civil society building, including through building capabilities in civil society organizations and creation of fora for EU dialogue with civil society representatives’ (European External Action Service 2012: 2).

These priorities are to be addressed by making human rights dialogue more results-oriented, encouraging the development of national democratic reform agendas, enhancing support for constitutional reforms and reforms of electoral legislation, intensifying efforts to promote independent judiciaries and increased institutional capacities, modernizing penal systems, promoting accession of Central Asian countries to the Group of States against Corruption and strengthening the EU’s contribution to good governance, especially at the institutional level and in the area of public finance management (European External Action Service 2012: 19).

The EU’s strategy thus evolved from one with a more cautious ambition of state-building to one that places greater emphasis on democratization. The nuances are subtle, however, and the EU, at least up until 2012, tended to embed democratization into its broader efforts to promote stability, security and poverty reduction. In general, these two strategies and the 2012 progress report capture many of the paradoxes of the EU’s development aid to Central Asia. Despite often being presented as an overarching aim, insufficient resources are earmarked for democratization work, as we will discuss later in this paper. The EU’s developmental focus is rather aimed at various aspects of state-building, such as border management, social and economic development, water management and other related areas of activity. Conceivably, the EU’s cautiousness on democratization is owed in part to the multiple pressures exerted by EU member states and various EU agencies and also reflects the priorities of Central Asian governments themselves, which are generally hostile to external interference in their political processes.

## 4. THE EUROPEAN UNION'S DEMOCRACY-ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

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The EU's policy towards the South Caucasus, by contrast, is much more explicitly focused on democratization. In 2004, the EU adopted the ENP, which now encompasses Georgia, because 'the Union has a vital interest in promoting better governance and economic development through a determined engagement in its neighbourhood' (Commission of the European Communities 2008: 13). Upon its adoption, however, the ENP did not include the South Caucasus—the region was added to the policy only a year after its inception. When the ENP was first launched, the South Caucasus had been left out, reduced literally to a footnote in the document, on the grounds that the region was not technically a neighbour to the EU, sharing no land or sea border with a member state. However, this meant leaving three member states of the Council of Europe out of the ENP, while the new instrument included a host of North African and Middle Eastern states without a European identity. Several factors contributed to this initial decision being reversed within a year. One was the realization that the scheduled accession of Bulgaria and Romania would make the EU a Black Sea power, providing a direct geographical link to the South Caucasus. More importantly, however, was Georgia's Rose Revolution in late 2003. Indeed, prior to that event, the South Caucasus was viewed largely as a region with some strategic value and energy resources, but one of widespread corruption and intractable conflicts, implying that, at least intellectually, the region was not seen as European. The Rose Revolution changed these perceptions, showing that there was hope for democratic breakthroughs in the post-Soviet space. This in turn facilitated the region's inclusion in the ENP.

Before the Rose Revolution, EU aid to Georgia was mainly technical in nature, and governed by a partnership and cooperation agreement signed in 1996. It was relatively substantial, totalling EUR 505 million from 1991 to 2005 (European Commission 2007: 16). Following the revolution, the EU deployed a rule of law mission under the European Security and Defence Policy, EUJUST Themis, to support judicial reform. The EU took on an important role in efforts to reform state institutions in Georgia.

The Eastern Partnership adopted in 2009—also encompassing Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine—pledged 'to offer more concrete support than ever before to encourage reforms that are essential to [building] peace, prosperity, and security . . . and set out proposals for the most ambitious programme of institution building yet, reinforcing the European Neighbourhood Policy, going further than we have gone before with countries in transition short of offering a specific promise for membership' (Ferrero Waldner 2009: 1).

The Eastern Partnership is thus much more far-reaching than anything attempted in Central Asia, especially in the areas of institution-building and good governance. A comprehensive institution-building programme has been adopted in the South

Caucasus to this effect. This is accompanied by a programme of visa liberalization for Eastern Partnership members, a 'deep and comprehensive free trade area' and offering the 'maximum possible' support in each of these spheres (Commission of the European Communities 2008: 2–3). In practice, this has meant that the EU has offered the option of negotiating association agreements, including deep and comprehensive free-trade agreements. The association agreement is the EU's main instrument in bringing Eastern Partnership countries closer to European norms and standards, requiring members to adopt EU legislation. This was a revolutionary move compared with the ENP's earlier iterations: it provided Eastern Partners with the possibility to harmonize over 80 per cent of their legislation with the EU, in effect adopting the great majority of the *acquis communautaire*, the body of EU laws.

Georgia is the only country in the South Caucasus to have taken full advantage of this opportunity. Azerbaijan has been seeking a strategic partnership with the EU instead, and while Armenia negotiated an association agreement, it jettisoned that opportunity in late 2013 and instead opted for the Russia-led Eurasian Customs Union. On 1 January 2015 the Eurasian Customs Union became the Eurasian Economic Union, a political and economic union formed in May 2014 between Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia, to which Armenia has now acceded.

## 5. DEMOCRACY-ASSISTANCE AND STATE-BUILDING INSTRUMENTS

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The EU's relationships with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are conducted through partnership and cooperation agreements. Partnerships are designed to provide for 'close political and mutually beneficial relations', including to encourage these countries to implement democratic and market reforms. With the adoption of the Eastern Partnership, Georgia was offered an association agreement with the EU, which was signed in June 2014, superseding their PCA. A precondition for the association agreement was a sufficient level of progress on democratization, rule of law and human rights. The legislative framework for elections and electoral practices must also comply with the standards set by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR). Within these broader frameworks of cooperation, the EU has employed a number of financing instruments and delivery methods.

Up until 2007, the main financing instrument for EU development aid to Central Asia was the Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) programme. Complementary to this, support for civil society and local initiatives has been provided through the Institution Building Partnership Programme (IBPP) and more specific political democracy promotion through the above-mentioned EIDHR. The IBPP was established within the TACIS framework in 2001 to provide funding for smaller projects implemented by European NGOs, local authorities and Central Asian NGOs.

Since 2007, development assistance has been provided through a new Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI), consisting of thematic and geographical programmes, which pays 'due attention to the cross-cutting issues of support for democratic development, human rights, and good governance'. Programmes related to good governance are also contained in the EU's Instrument for Stability, although security-related assistance accounts for the majority of funds provided through this mechanism. The IBPP has been discontinued and phased out in four of the Central Asian states and operates today only in Uzbekistan (European Community 2007: 32). A new programme, Non-State Actors and Local Authorities in Development (NSA/LA), replaced the IBPP in 2007.

The EIDHR provides civil society support through projects related to democratization and human rights. The NSA/LA supports local participation in development and strives to improve governance through a bottom-up approach, focusing on capacity-building, poverty reduction and the provision of basic services (European Community 2007: 20). A main feature of the EIDHR, NSA/LA and IBPP is that they do not directly target and support the governments of the states in question but rely almost one-sidedly on civil society organizations (Axyonova 2012: 1). Both the IBPP and NSA/LA



require host-country consent, in contrast to the EIDHR, even if programme indicators endorse ‘participatory democracy . . . as part of the selection process for projects’ (Axyonova 2012: 2–3). The emphasis of IBPP programmes has been socially oriented projects. In 2008, for example, the EU provided a EUR 155,000 grant to Uzbekistan’s National Centre for Children’s Social Adaptation through this mechanism (Axyonova 2012: 2–3). Thus, even if the NSA/LA and IBPP refer explicitly to ‘local authorities in development’ and ‘institution-building’, they barely touch on political reform or governmental institution-building.

The EU declared that democratization would receive added emphasis following the adoption of the ENP. However, the EU’s cooperation with Central Asia has, as recognized by the Indicative Programme 2011–13, been embedded in the ENP mostly in the spheres of energy, transport, education and the environment—areas that operate ‘in synergy with those of the ENPI East Regional Strategy’ (European Commission 2010: 10)—rather than democratization.

EIDHR projects, in turn, are often jointly implemented with the OSCE or Council of Europe, with NGOs as implementing partners. Two joint EIDHR–OSCE programmes for advancing human rights and democratization were in place between 2002 and 2006. One example of an EIDHR project is the EU–Central Asia Rule of Law Initiative implemented by the Council of Europe, which ‘works to help [the Central Asian countries] develop democratic legislation and practices in the rule of law field’. Another EIDHR project was aimed at strengthening political parties in Tajikistan and modifying the country’s one-party-dominant system (EuropeAid 2011: 14).

The main delivery methods for EU assistance through these instruments are so-called contribution agreements with international organizations; budget support to eligible states, which accounts for a minor fraction of total assistance; grants to NGOs; and service contracts. Over the 2007–12 period, grants and service contracts constituted a larger proportion by number but a smaller proportion by value of the Commission’s aid to Central Asia (European Court of Auditors 2013: 19–20)

Georgia was accepted into the ENP in June 2004, and an EU–Georgia Action Plan was approved in November 2006. The action plan specified Georgia’s obligations for democratic reforms in return for deeper political cooperation on economic integration with the EU (Paresashvili and Abashishvili 2013: 634). To assist Georgia and other partners in meeting the democratic standards required by their respective association agreements and to improve administrative capacity, the EU launched a Comprehensive Institution Building (CIB) programme financed through the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). Another EU programme on Support for Partnership, Reforms and Inclusive Growth (SPRING), supporting the ‘democratic transition’ of Eastern Partnership countries, has been implemented (Commission of the European Communities 2008: 4 and 10).

In contrast to the IBPP in Central Asia, the CIB is directly ‘focused on reforming and strengthening capacity of governmental agencies’ (EaP Community 2014). The term ‘institution-building’ then has quite a different meaning in the Central Asian and South Caucasian contexts: in Central Asia, the term is a euphemism for capacity-building through civil society; in the South Caucasus, it means the strengthening and reform of governmental agencies. The instruments of democracy support and state-

building are thus somewhat misleading, which may reflect the need to formally have an institution-building instrument in Central Asia in name even if this does not directly promote the development of capable state institutions.

## 6. BUDGET ALLOCATIONS FOR DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE

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Gaining a comprehensive and accurate picture of EU budgetary allocations for democracy assistance or governance reforms in Central Asia and the South Caucasus is extraordinarily difficult. This is both because the EU provides no definition of ‘democracy assistance’, ‘good governance’ and related concepts and because there are no specific budget lines for these areas of assistance. The proliferation of financing instruments and delivery methods also renders it difficult to establish how much the EU has spent in each sector. The Commission’s RELEX Information System does not include funds spent under the EIDHR or the Instrument for Stability, and the Commission does not account for spending in Central Asia under programmes financed by the ENPI (European Court of Auditors 2013: 22).

From 1991 to 2013, the EU allocated more than EUR 2.1 billion for development and humanitarian assistance to Central Asia. Between 2007 and 2012, the Commission dispensed EUR 435 million for development assistance to Central Asia: Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were the main beneficiaries of this aid, with each country getting 25 per cent of total assistance. Uzbekistan received 5 per cent, and 31 per cent was spent on regional programmes (European Court of Auditors 2013: 10). About 75 per cent of development assistance in 2012 was channelled through the DCI, with TACIS, DCI thematic programmes, the EIDHR and the Instrument for Stability making up the remainder. The Instrument for Stability accounted for 12.5 per cent of the total, thus rendering the amounts expended through the EIDHR extremely small (European Court of Auditors 2013: 12).

EU development aid per capita by country follows, in general, that of other donors, with the partial exception of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, which have been accorded greater priority by other donors. Between 2007 and 2012, the EU spent, on average per capita per annum, USD 1.00 in Kazakhstan, USD 5.60 in Kyrgyzstan, USD 4.00 in Tajikistan, USD 1.90 in Turkmenistan and USD 0.40 in Uzbekistan. This should be compared with annual averages of all sources of per-capita official development assistance (ODA) flowing into these countries, which between 2008 and 2010 stood at USD 18.00 in Kazakhstan, USD 65.00 in Kyrgyzstan, USD 55.00 in Tajikistan and USD 7.00 in both Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (European Court of Auditors 2013: 35).

From 2007 to 2012 the EU provided Kyrgyzstan with EUR 106.15 million through the DCI. In addition, EUR 21.11 million was committed through DCI thematic programmes (food security, food facility and the NSA/LA), of which the NSA/LA accounted for roughly EUR 2 million. A total of EUR 2.7 million was channelled through the EIDHR and EUR 15.13 million through the Instrument for Stability. Kyrgyz projects financed through the Instrument for Stability included support for

judicial and constitutional reform, promotion of democracy and stabilization, legislative reform, 'political leadership for democratic transition', media reform, election support and other projects (Tsertsvadze and Boonstra 2013: 9–10). Tsertsvadze and Boonstra (2013: 9–10) estimate that 24 per cent of funds allocated to Kyrgyzstan was spent on good governance.

In Tajikistan, the EU disbursed an estimated EUR 100.2 million under the DCI between 2007 and 2012. Added to this should be EUR 21.65 million allocated through DCI thematic programmes, roughly EUR 2 million of which was allocated through the NSA/LA and a further EUR 2.7 million through the EIDHR. The proportion of funds apportioned for good governance was small, with no budget lines directly related to it (Tsertsvadze and Boonstra 2013: 10–11).

Turning to Uzbekistan, the EU allocated approximately EUR 38.6 million under the DCI in the same period; neither the EIDHR nor the NSA/LA have applied to Uzbekistan. However, Tsertsvadze and Boonstra (2013: 12) estimate that 37 per cent of funds spent were directly related to good governance (2013: 12). Funds expended included EUR 10 million in 2009 for criminal judicial reforms, EUR 2 million in 2010 to strengthen the bicameral parliamentary system and EUR 2.2 million for the IBPP the same year (Tsertsvadze and Boonstra 2013: 12).

In other words, the focus of the EU's assistance to Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan has not been democratization *per se*, at least not if considered from the perspective of the political approach. Some attention has been directed at rule of law and the judiciary in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan and some to governance in Uzbekistan, but practically nothing in these areas has applied to Tajikistan, with the partial exception of a minor grant for political party development (European Commission 2010: 16).

EU democracy promotion in Georgia through the EIDHR amounted to EUR 7.55 million from 1992 to 2004, and funding increased after implementation of the Eastern Partnership. As noted by the European Commission: 'One of the clearest signals the EU can give of a concrete commitment to its partners is to bring funding levels in line with the partnership's level of ambition ... These funds will be used to advance the EaP reform agenda through the implementation of CIB programmes' (Commission of the European Communities 2008: 13). From 2007 to 2013, Georgia received over EUR 450 million in assistance from the EU, focused on justice reform, agriculture and rural development, and public-sector reform. In 2014, Georgia signed and ratified its association agreement with the EU, which included a comprehensive free-trade agreement covering a wide variety of areas; however, whether they concern issues ranging from the phytosanitary to the judicial, they are all relevant for Georgia's democratization, as they mean that Georgia is essentially incorporating the vast majority of the EU *acquis communautaire*. From 2014 to 2017, Georgia's indicative financial allocation is EUR 335–410 million (European External Action Service 2014).

## 7. INSTITUTIONS, ACTORS AND THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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The main institutions involved in EU democracy assistance and good governance programmes are the European Commission, the European Council and the European External Action Service (EEAS). The Commission formulated the strategy paper for Central Asia in 2007, and the European Council endorsed the Commission's approach by adopting the paper (European Court of Auditors 2013: 9). The EEAS was established in 2009 following the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, when the external relations departments of the Council and the Commission merged. The Commission and the EEAS plan and manage assistance through the DCI (European Court of Auditors 2013: 7). The Commission's Directorate-General for Development and Cooperation (EuropeAid) and, since 2011, the EEAS are responsible for formulating EU development policy, the planning of external aid instruments and defining sectoral policies. These processes are mostly conducted from Brussels, even if EU delegations in Central Asia assist with local expertise (European Court of Auditors 2013: 12). In 2005 the Council appointed a special representative to Central Asia to enhance EU effectiveness and visibility.

Member states have often played the role of lead countries in EU programmes. For example, the EU Rule of Law Initiative has been led by Germany and France, 'supported by the cooperation programmes provided for by the Commission and a number of member states' (European External Action Service 2012: 7). Several different EU agencies are typically also involved in assistance programmes. For instance, the EU Delegation in Kyrgyzstan has liaised with EuropeAid's geographical unit for Central Asia, other units in EuropeAid, units in the EEAS, other EU delegations in Central Asia, and with the Commission's Directorates-General for Research and Innovation and Economic and Financial Affairs, among others (European Court of Auditors 2013: 22).

While the EU is a unitary actor, EU member states and different EU organs tend to have differing priorities. Among member states, two camps exist within the EU at present: those that prioritize development and those that emphasize human rights and democracy. The European Parliament, in turn, has tended to advocate the political approach much more than the developmental one, and in a 2011 report, the European Parliament underscored 'that partner countries must comply with international standards of democracy, governance, rule of law and human rights' (European Parliament 2011). The EU's strategy is inevitably a compromise between the political and developmental approaches, and the EU has strived to emphasize both, even if doing so is not always possible.

The EU is among the largest donors to Central Asia, with a total budget for development assistance averaging USD 89 million in the years 2010 and 2011, which should be

compared with the USD 175 million provided by the United States, USD 165 million by Turkey, USD 124 million by Japan and USD 109 million by Germany (European Court of Auditors 2013: 11). The Council has adopted a Concept on Complementarity with other donors to ensure added value (Council of the European Union 2007). For example, EU programmes supporting rule of law and judiciary reform in Uzbekistan have been coordinated with Germany's training of Uzbek judges and development of legislation (European Commission 2010).

The EU's role in Central Asia and its focus on poverty alleviation, rule of law and economic development complement those of other donors. International development banks—the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development—have focused primarily on agriculture/rural development, energy, education, the financial sector, health, border management, the private sector and transport; the UN on water/environment, justice/home affairs and private-sector development; Japan on transport, health, education and agriculture/rural development; and USAID on most of the above-mentioned areas (EU 2012: 15–16). In a review of development aid to Central Asia, the European Court of Auditors emphasized that 'The Commission took care to ensure that its spending allocations were satisfactorily in line with those of other donors, avoiding overlaps and contributing to donor coordination' (European Court of Auditors 2013: 16). EU complementarity and its adherence to the Paris Declaration in this respect stand out as a positive feature of assistance and attest to the fact that the EU has carved out its own role.

## 8. ALIGNING DEMOCRACY-ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES WITH LOCAL PRIORITIES

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EU strategies and programmes for Central Asia have been aligned, overall, with the national programmes implemented by Central Asian governments. Following the enactment of a new Central Asia strategy in 2007, the EU selected four sectors for assistance in Kyrgyzstan (governance, agriculture and rural development, education and social protection); five sectors in Tajikistan (governance, agriculture and rural development, social protection, private sector and health); and six in Uzbekistan (private sector, governance and rule of law, health, agriculture and rural development, environment and energy, and education) (European Court of Auditors 2013: 18). All of these are to varying degrees reflected in the priorities of the recipient countries.

Thus, Tajikistan's Poverty Reduction Strategy published in 2002 focused on public administration reform, social protection, education, health, agricultural development, privatization and infrastructure development (Respublika Tadjikistan 2002: 11–16). The subsequent National Development Strategy 2007–2015 reflects similar priorities, focusing also on institutional development, gender equality and sustainable development (Respublika Tadjikistan 2007). Kyrgyzstan's 2002 Poverty Reduction Strategy closely resembled the one adopted in Tajikistan, with a focus on all the areas contained therein, but with an added emphasis on direct investments and growth (Kyrgyzskaya Respublika 2003). Uzbekistan's Welfare Improvement Strategy for 2008–2010, in turn, stressed agricultural reform, industrial policy, social protection, health, education, service development and employment (Respublika Uzbekistan 2007: 16–39).

Since 2005, the Uzbek Government has taken several commendable steps in the area of judicial reforms, including abolition of the death penalty. In 2008, Uzbekistan set up a Research Centre for Democratization and the Liberalization of Judicial Legislation and Ensuring the Independence of the Judicial System under the Supreme Court whose mandate is to 'further improve and liberalize the judicial system'. In recognizing this, the EU deepened its support for reform processes in Uzbekistan in the area of rule of law and enhanced support for local government bodies 'to promote good governance'. The EU has also supported Uzbek programmes in the area of human rights and has an annual Human Rights Dialogue in place, which is pursued in conjunction with the EU Rule of Law Initiative (European Commission 2010: 55).

Democratization ranks higher on Georgia's agenda than on that of any of the Central Asian states, which in part explains the EU's greater focus on political processes in its assistance. Georgia's National Security Concept, adopted in 2011, stresses that 'Georgia is committed to universal democratic values and principles', separation of powers, independence of the judiciary, promotion of civil society and independence of the media (Ministerstvo Inostranykh Del Gruzii 2011). During the administration of former President Mikheil Saakashvili, from 2004 to 2012–13, the EU faced the

difficulty that Georgia was officially committed to EU integration, while its government was simultaneously implementing economic reforms of a libertarian nature, which often involved an extent of deregulation that was not compatible with EU norms. In negotiations with the EU in particular, the Georgian Government fought hard to minimize the extent to which it would incorporate regulations it deemed excessive. Following the 2008 war with Russia, however, the Georgian Government adjusted its policies and displayed a much more cooperative attitude towards the requirements of EU integration. The libertarian aspects of Georgian policies disappeared after the election of the Georgian Dream coalition in 2012, and its representatives were more amenable to following EU recommendations. This enabled the finalization of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) negotiations in 2013. By 2014, the government's rhetorical commitment to EU integration was strong; however, the main problem appeared to be the increasing use of judicial instruments for political prosecutions of opposition and dissident forces.



## 9. GRADUALISM AND SEQUENCING IN THE EUROPEAN UNION'S DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE

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Overall, EU democracy assistance for Central Asia has been guided by sequencing and a developmental approach, while that for Georgia in the South Caucasus has combined developmental and political approaches and has been aimed at gradualism. As noted in the EU's 2007–2013 strategy:

'It is the EU's firm belief that the first priority of assistance must be to help each of the five Republics to eradicate poverty, and to improve the living standards, education, and job opportunities of their respective populations. In this way the EU will enable the states of Central Asia to complete their political and economic transition and thus to consolidate broader values of democracy, the rule of law, good governance, and respect for human rights ...' (European Community 2007: 7).

This sequencing policy was perhaps even more clearly spelled out in the 2012 progress report, which notes that: 'Central Asian leaders have a stated policy of gradual transition to reform and democracy. The challenge is to find the right pace so as to ensure real societal reforms [and] prevent violent transitions that could have wider regional repercussions and high human, social and economic costs' (European External Action Service 2012: 3).

The EU's choice of sequencing in relation to Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and, to a lesser extent, Kyrgyzstan and gradualism in relation to Georgia was sound owing to the varying degrees of progress made in terms of democratization in each of these countries. A gradualist or political approach in relation to the Central Asian countries would be viewed as belligerent by the regimes and ultimately greatly reduce European influence. A gradualist approach in relation to Georgia makes sense since Georgia is committed to democratization and has actively reached out for help to achieve it.

That being said, EU aspirations to prevent violent transitions in Central Asia and to find the right pace of reform are not aligned with the EIDHR instrument. The EIDHR pursues policies that are contradictory to this pursuit of sequencing, in Central Asia and elsewhere. Thus, the EIDHR's 2012 report notes that:

'The "Jasmine revolution" means the EIDHR may now reveal its involvement in projects in Tunisia in 2010, where prior to transition, it supported the League of Human Rights (LTDH), the Association of Democrat Women (AFTD), Trade Unions (UGTT), Judges' and Lawyers' Associations and Reporters without Borders (RSF) for activities not authorised in the country. Lack of publicity for its involvement at the time could have been interpreted as abandonment or as a lack of responsiveness; EIDHR was in fact very active and ultimately successful' (EuropeAid 2011: 15).

In other words, the EIDHR is evidently covertly supporting the revolutionary transitions that were considered dangerous in the 2012 Progress Report on Central Asia. Such contradictory policies and actions are bound to negatively affect the EU's credibility in Central Asia and its trustworthiness.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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EU democracy assistance and support for state-building in Central Asia and the South Caucasus have in general been well targeted, tailored to the particular circumstances of each country and have complemented the programmes of other donors well (see also European Court of Auditors 2013: 7). However, three shortcomings can be noted in addition to the contradictions involved with the EIDHR instrument. First, EU policy priorities in Central Asia are often vague, in particular in the realm of democratization (see also European Parliament 2011). Democratization is stated as an explicit goal in the latest EU strategy for Central Asia, but this concept and the broader concept of good governance are often used interchangeably. The extent to which the EU is engaged in the promotion of more democratic political processes in Central Asia is, by all measures, limited. Furthermore, institution-building in the Central Asian context has quite a different meaning than in the South Caucasus. In the former, it relates to civil society support; in the latter, it denotes the building of capable state institutions.

That being said, this vagueness is to some degree to be expected given the different priorities of member states and also those of recipient governments. EU strategies in relation to Central Asia must reconcile competing agendas, and the result is almost inevitably a programme without a clear focus. Thus, in programmes such as the NSA/LA, which combines assistance for non-state actors and local authorities and uses a single budget, it is virtually impossible to distinguish how much is spent on capacity-building for civil society and on state institutions, respectively. This perhaps points to the limits of a regional organization's capacity to promote democratization and state-building coherently.

Second, EU development assistance and, in particular, that related to democratization has hitherto suffered from a lack of transparency. The websites of the EU delegations contain at most an overview of current projects, and it is often difficult to establish which budget lines provided the financing for these projects. Information about completed projects is equally scarce (see also Axyonova 2012: 3). Publicly available evaluations are few and far between even if the Commission produces two major annual reports on its development assistance with a chapter in each on assistance to Central Asia (European Court of Auditors 2013: 32). On a more positive note, there are indications that the EU is addressing this problem since it commissioned an extensive evaluation by the European Court of Auditors, published in 2013, and is presently preparing another major review of development aid to Central Asia to be published in 2016.

Third, in Georgia, the EU has to relate to problems of a political nature. Its focus on judiciary reform is correct, as this is the most pressing need in Georgia. EU assistance is mainly of a technical nature and is contributing significantly to the reform of Georgian institutions. However, there is an increasingly clear picture emerging of the Georgian

Dream Government's use of the Prosecutor-General's Office for political purposes, such as the targeting of leading former Georgian officials, while the many unresolved issues relating to alleged property rights violations from 2009–12 have barely been addressed. The EU's ability to handle the reality that it is supporting the reform of judicial institutions used for political purposes will depend largely on its level of political engagement.

On the basis of this brief review, the following recommendations are offered:

1. To the extent that it can, the EU should improve its definition of policy priorities in Central Asia and more clearly spell out how they advance democratization and state-building. A separation of the NSA/LA programme into its constituent components is warranted and would result in a clearer picture of how much is spent on civil society and state-building, respectively. The Comprehensive Institution Building programme implemented in the South Caucasus points the way and could be applied, at least in part, also in Central Asia.
2. The EU's focus on rule of law and judiciary reform in Central Asia is commendable. However, the areas of parliamentary practice and political party development have been almost entirely neglected, with the partial exception of a programme in Tajikistan referred to above. It is hard to see how democratization could advance without differentiated political parties and the establishment of real multiparty systems. Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have national programmes promoting this, even if they are taking place in an authoritarian context, and the EU could aim to engage the authorities and offer its assistance. Soviet legacies remain a major obstacle to the achievement of progress in this sphere, but it is nonetheless an obstacle that must be overcome.
3. Priority must be accorded to Uzbekistan in the EU's state-building assistance. At present, Turkmenistan receives nearly five times more per capita than Uzbekistan even if Turkmenistan's per capita income, USD 7,157 in 2013, was nearly four times higher than that of Uzbekistan. Both countries are equally authoritarian, if Turkmenistan is not more so, but for some reason the EU spends more per capita in Turkmenistan than in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan is the only Central Asian country that borders all of the others, and the EU's focus on stability in Central Asia must lend Uzbekistan greater significance, if for no other reason than that developments in Uzbekistan will positively or negatively affect the rest of the region.
4. In Georgia, EU technical assistance must be closely coordinated with political advice and pressure, as the success of EU-supported reforms will depend on the Georgian Government's political will. In particular, the issue of the Prosecutor-General's Office is salient. In late 2012 the new government effectively decoupled the Prosecutor-General's Office from the Justice Ministry—it is still technically part of the ministry but no longer under the purview of the minister of justice, meaning that the Prosecutor-General's Office entirely lacks political accountability. As this office is increasingly becoming a tool for the blatant political prosecution of the adversaries of the prime minister and his grouping, this risks undermining the EU's efforts substantially. The EU has the potential to be influential in addressing these problems. More broadly, as the Georgian Dream coalition gradually weakens, the EU will likely face the difficulty of adjusting to a weaker government as regards the implementation of reforms.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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**Nicklas Norling** is a Research Fellow at the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center. He holds a PhD from the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, and an MA in political science from Stockholm University. His articles have appeared in *Asian Survey*, *Central Asian Survey* and other journals and his comments on regional events in Asia frequently appear in both national broadcasts and the international print media. He specializes in Central Asia, and his main areas of expertise are in the fields of foreign policy, infrastructure, trade, and energy issues.

**Svante E. Cornell** is the Director of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center, and a co-founder of the Institute for Security and Development Policy, Stockholm. His main areas of expertise are security issues, statebuilding, and transnational crime in south-west Asia and Central Asia, with a specific focus on the Caucasus and Turkey. He is an Associate Research Professor at Johns Hopkins University's Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies. He was educated at the Middle East Technical University, received his PhD in peace and conflict studies from Uppsala University, and holds an honorary degree from the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan. He is a member of the Swedish Royal Academy of Military Science, and a Research Associate with the W. Martens Centre for European Studies in Brussels. Previously, he served as Associate Professor of Government at Uppsala University.



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1. providing comparative knowledge derived from practical experience on democracy building processes from diverse contexts around the world;
2. assisting political actors in reforming democratic institutions and processes, and engaging in political processes when invited to do so; and
3. influencing democracy building policies through the provision of our comparative knowledge resources and assistance to political actors.

### *Where does International IDEA work?*

International IDEA works worldwide. Based in Stockholm, it has offices in Africa, the Asia-Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean. International IDEA is a Permanent Observer to the United Nations.

<<http://www.idea.int>>

## ABOUT THE INTER-REGIONAL DIALOGUE ON DEMOCRACY

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The Inter-Regional Dialogue on Democracy (IRDD) is a platform for engagement among regional organizations on democracy, and is facilitated by International IDEA.

Regional organizations participating in the IRDD include the African Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Council of Europe, the European Union, the League of Arab States, the Organization of American States, the Pacific Islands Forum and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation.

International IDEA acts as the IRDD Secretariat and also hosts the Inter-Regional Democracy Resource Centre, a virtual resource for democracy at the regional and inter-regional level.

<http://www.idea.int/democracydialog/>



International IDEA  
SE -103 34 Stockholm  
Sweden  
Phone + 46 8 698 37 00  
Fax + 46 8 20 24 22  
E-mail: [info@idea.int](mailto:info@idea.int)  
Website: <http://www.idea.int>