

## **EU Environmental Policy in Central Asia**

By

**Galimova Eleonora Alfredovna**

Kazan Federal University, Institute of International Relations, Kazan, Russia

Contact: +79270310840

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6924-1350>

Email: [ell22gal84@gmail.com](mailto:ell22gal84@gmail.com)

**Tsiunchuk Rustem Arkad'ewich**

Kazan Federal University, Institute of International Relations, Kazan, Russia

Contact: +79178875137

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9976-5692>

Email: [rciunchuk@mail.ru](mailto:rciunchuk@mail.ru)

### **Abstract**

The European Union, showing interest in Central Asia due to its resource and transit potential, is increasingly turning to the environmental situation in the region. On the one hand, the EU implements projects based on the Central Asia Strategy — WECCOP project, the Working Group, SPECA. On the other hand, the projects of European countries at the bilateral level — for example, the German initiative «Green Central Asia». In the modern world, it is necessary to unite efforts for the sake of the future, discuss and propose solutions to climate change, water problems, and desertification, therefore the initiatives of the European Union, as an important and experienced actor in this field, were analyzed in this article.

**Keywords:** Central Asia; EU; European Union; ecology; environmental policy.

### **1. Introduction**

The relevance of the research topic is resulted from the fact that the Central Asia region attracts significant attention of world powers at the present stage. A wide variety of natural resources, large reserves of gas and oil, as well as its strategic position determines the importance of the region in modern world politics. And the above-mentioned issues, in turn, touch upon the problems of environmental pollution, climate change and the environmental situation in general. First of all, it is worth clarifying that the term "Central Asia" was introduced by Alexander von Humboldt, a German geographer of the 19th century, who described this region in his work (<https://cesdrr.org>). Russian and Soviet researchers defined the region as "Central Asia and Kazakhstan", but in the 1990s, the concept of the Central Asia Region, which includes five republics, took shape in Russia as well, while it began to be perceived as a single geopolitical subject of international relations.

Central Asia is of significant interest, being a strategically important region with large reserves of natural resources, hydrocarbon resources, and transit potential. On the other hand, the interaction of two such different regions - the European Union as a single supranational institution pursuing an independent domestic and foreign policy and Central Asia as a region that combines different countries within cultural, economic development and their openness. That is why, it is necessary to take into account this interaction, highlight trends and trace the development of the independent foreign policy of the Central Asia republics.

The object of the research is the environmental policy of the European Union in Central Asia in the 21st century, the subject is the regulatory and legal framework, initiatives and directions within the implementation of its environmental policy in the region.

To achieve the purpose of the identification of the features of the EU environmental policy in the CAR, it was necessary to solve a number of related tasks:

- To build a picture of the formation of the EU's environmental policy in Central Asia since the formation of the new republics.
- To trace the evolution of the EU's foreign policy strategies in the region, establish patterns and key points in the cooperation between EU and the CAR countries.
- To reveal the intensity of interaction with regional and global players in resolving the environmental problems of the Central Asia region.
- To systematize the interests and steps of the EU in the region, examining joint projects and initiatives both at the regional and bilateral levels.
- To present the trends in the development of the EU environmental policy in the region.

The official publications and documents in Russian and English, speeches by politicians, resolutions, summaries with data, reports, official documents, memoirs, articles from the media and online resources considering specific EU projects (TACIS, 2020; TRACECA, 2020; INOGATE, 2020) in the region during the corresponding period became the main sources for writing this article.

First of all, the source base was the European Union's Strategy for Central Asia, the Regional Environmental Program, statistical information of DAAD. In addition, documents reflecting the positions of international organizations in the region, statistical and factual data on the official websites of the European programs in the CAR were used.

## **2. Methodological Framework**

The research methodology consists of the theoretical principles on which the authors relied within the framework of the research - objectivity, consistency, historical approach and political science analysis.

The research methods were driven by the need to solve the assigned tasks, therefore, required an interdisciplinary approach. First of all, these are general scientific methods - analysis, synthesis, generalization, induction, deduction, as well as special ones - content analysis, event analysis, the method of studying documents and the method of historical and sociological observation. The retrospective method made it possible to trace chronologically the dynamics and sequence of the development of environmental policy, in turn, the comparative historical method allowed us to compare the steps and priorities of the EU countries in the framework of projects implemented in the Central Asian republics.

## **3. Results**

The EU Strategy on Central Asia is the foundation for cooperation between the European Union and Central Asia, since the independence of the Central Asian republics. For the first time such a document was adopted in 2007, with the initiative of Germany, during its presidency in the European Union, created taking into account the characteristics of each individual country in the region and their readiness for dialogue and integration. The current

version, adopted in June 2019, which is in force now - "The EU and Central Asia: New Opportunities for Stronger Partnerships" - a 17-page document on key elements, principles of cooperation and areas of interaction in general (Chebotaryova, 2013; Dube & Yuqiong, 2022; Duc, 2021).

Within the framework of the Strategy, in addition to the identified priorities - partnership for sustainable development (socio-economic problems of the CAR), partnership for prosperity (innovation, investment, youth, culture) and partnership for the development of civil society and political dialogue - special attention is paid to environmental problems. In areas such as water resources management, climate change and related environmental issues, the European Union aims to cooperate at the regional level.

First of all, as before, the EU raises such topics as regional and global security, the promotion of democracy and human rights, economic reforms, transport corridors, energy links and, of course, environmental protection. A distinctive feature of the Strategy-2019 is an emphasis on cultural and humanitarian cooperation - first of all, investments in talented youth, exchange of experience at the level of educational systems, student and cultural exchanges, as well as interaction within the framework of environmental protection and sustainable development, response to climate change and proper use of natural resources.

The Central Asia republics, soon after gaining independence, joined the OSCE, signed the UN Millennium Declaration and showed their interest in such economic structures as the WTO — all these points are the indicators that the CAR countries are open and similar in their priorities in the cultural and humanitarian sphere to European countries. Depending on the characteristics of every single CA country and their degree of openness and initiative, the European Union strives for balanced bilateral and regional cooperation. And as for interaction in the field of ecology, the EU focuses on a regional approach, since this is a common problem, therefore, a constant constructive dialogue with organizations in the CAR is their first priority. Thus, contacts are developing with the EAEU (Eurasian Economic Union), SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization), CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization), CICA (Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia), CARICC (Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center). Consequently, dialogue and partnership in this area is a necessity, and the EU countries can share valuable experience with the Asian republics, initiate and finance joint projects and ensure control over progress or problem situations.

An important point is that most of the current environmental problems in Central Asia are associated with access to resources, as well as with the protection, distribution and quality of water resources in particular. This issue is closely related to the economic development of the countries, and to security on a regional and global scale. Thus, the European Union proposes to gradually integrate the region into the EU Water Initiative, wishing to help in the availability and quality of water, as well as to develop interregional cooperation within the framework of the Environmental Convention on the Caspian Sea, focusing on the balanced and environmentally friendly use of the river basin along the borders by supporting dialogue and proposals for innovative technologies (<https://unece.org>).

Logically, the issue of using water resources flows into hydropower - in particular, individual EU countries share with the CAR states their best practices and successful projects in the field of renewable energy (Germany, Italy, France). Climate change is also an extremely relevant point of interaction, and European partners insist on adapting and implementing the measures and mechanisms of the Kyoto Protocol in the CAR

(<https://www.pv-magazine.com>). It is also impossible to ignore the management of other natural resources - in particular, forests, and here the parties interact through the process of regional Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (FLEG).

Probably, the activation of the EU environmental policy in the region is dictated, first of all, by the perception for several decades of the CA region as a supplier of energy resources and a transport corridor, therefore, there is a desire to stop such an exploitation of natural resources and a sense of responsibility to the planet. In addition, ecological consciousness is progressing year after year at the level of all mankind, the influence of which is primarily felt precisely on the example of the actions of developed European states (Ilikova & Venidiktova, 2019). On the other hand, the member states of the European Union, considering the prospects for mankind, strive to support local initiatives in the CAR and engage in environmental education “on the scene of action”, share their experience in the field of renewable energy (for example, the international exhibition EXPO-2017 in Kazakhstan, where Italy had a large area to present its renewable energy initiatives).

Moreover, we note that the main priorities and goals of the European Union by 2050 are a course towards a “green economy”, “carbon-neutral growth from 2020” and “climate-neutral products in the EU and outwards” (Jos Delbeke, 2019). So, even in the New EU Strategy 2019, the priorities of which were outlined above, specific goals were included to “improve the sustainability of the environment, water resources and in relation to climate change”. Another important Initiative - established in 2009 and led by Italy — the EU-Central Asia Environment and Water Cooperation Platform as a framework for EU-Central Asian cooperation on the environment, water and climate change. The EU relaunched the project « European Union - Central Asia: Cooperation on Water, Environment and Climate Change » (WECOOP) in October 2019. The third phase of the WECOOP project is now in operation and will last for three years (Launch of Green Central Asia: Regional cooperation to tackle the impact of climate change, 2020).

The Platform's priorities were first agreed at the EU-Central Asia High-level Conference in Rome in 2009 and subsequently reaffirmed at the High-level Conferences in Bishkek (2013), Milan (2015) and Tashkent (2019). The EU-CA Working Group on Environment and Climate Change, chaired by the Italian Ministry of Environment, Land and Marine Resources, assists in identifying priority actions in the area of EU-CA regional cooperation.

The meeting of the Working Group is the first meeting after the 6th EU-CA High Level Conference on Cooperation in the Field of Environment and Water Resources, held in Tashkent (Uzbekistan) in January 2019. It was organized within the framework of the EU-Central Asia Cooperation Platform in the field of environment and water resources on the following issues - environmental management, circular economy, sustainable production and consumption, climate change (Li et al., 2020), water resources management and related topics (EU-CA Working Group on Environment and Climate Change, 2020).

One of the potential areas of cooperation is to support the development of the Strategy on Water, Energy and Environment under the UN Special Program for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) (Paramonov et al., 2017). In addition, we can give an example of initiatives from individual European states - in January 2020, the Federal Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany launched a regional initiative on climate and security in Central Asia and Afghanistan — “Green Central Asia”. Its aim is to intensify dialogue in the region on climate change and related risks with a view to promoting regional integration

between the 6 participating countries, as well as to provide European partners with access to information for environmental safety.

## **4. Discussions**

Thus, among Russian researchers' valuable sources for analysis were the articles by S.V. Pogorelskaya about the FRG's policy in Central Asia [13], the works of D. B. Malysheva about the strategy of the European Union in the new states of Eurasia (Maly`sheva).

In addition, the research works of E.S.Alekseenkova, a researcher at MGIMO, dealing with the problems and priorities of the policy of European countries, including German foreign policy, became a significant support (Alekseenkova, 2017), and also, to compare the degree of EU cooperation with the policy of Russia and China in the region, scientific articles of A. V. Beloglazov (2011).

In addition, the authors turned to the works of foreign researchers, in particular, authors—representatives of post-Soviet countries, including U. Normatov (2019), M. T. Laumulin (2009), analytical work by V. V. Paramonov, A. V. Strokova, Z. A. Abduganieva (2017).

## **5. Summary**

As part of the study, the following inferences were made:

- The European Union supports positive changes in the environmental policy of the CAR countries.
- The EU focuses on the educational environment and raising environmental awareness as professionals and civil society.
- Many projects are being implemented at the regional and bilateral level.
- The EU initiates project proposals through the reports to the Central Asia republics, on the one hand, and through the briefs to the international organizations and financial institutions in order to attract investments, on the other hand.

## **6. Conclusions**

Thus, summing up all of the above, it should be noted that for the sake of prosperity and sustainable development of all mankind, such advanced developed countries as the member states of the European Union should not only share experience and support developing countries, but they themselves realize the need for unification efforts in the face of a common threat.

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**Galimova Eleonora Alfredovna**

1. Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Russia
2. 2nd year Master's student of Institute of International Relations
3. ell22gal84@gmail.com, +79270310840
4. ORSID 0000-0002-6924-1350
6. A brief biography Galimova

Galimova Eleonora — 2nd year master's student of the Kazan Federal University. Has been studying International Relations for the 6th year, speaks 6 languages (foreign languages: from A2 in Italian and German to B2 in French and English). Member of the national committee of European Youth Parliament, active participant of the different all-Russian and international forums, models and round tables. Part of the Academy of Youth diplomacy in Kazan.

**Tsiunchuk Rustem Arkadyevich**

1. Kazan Federal University
2. Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor, Institute of International Relations
3. rciunchuk@mail.ru, +79178875137
4. Id scopus 56162716300
5. ORSID 0000-0001-9976-5692
- 6 A brief biography Rustem Tsiunchuk - graduated from Kazan University, here he defended his Ph.D. and doctoral dissertations. Author of four individual and three collective monographs on political processes and the history of parliamentarism. Specialist in the history of international relations, the history of parliamentarism, imperiology, international relations in the field of ecology.