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Executive Summary

In this Policy Paper, the current issues of cultural ties between the five countries of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) and the European Union (EU) are gradually analysed. It covers such spheres as cooperation in the field of culture, a description of the manifestation of identity, and orientation values of the people of Central Asia. The mapping also considers the problems of the establishment and functioning of civil society institutions in the states of Central Asia through the disclosure of the specific activities of strong NGOs in the region, their cooperation with international governmental and non-governmental organizations (especially with European organizations), including the financial sphere. It also provides an analysis of tourism statistics in the countries of the region, and addresses the people-to-people aspect of the relations.

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to outline the cultural relationship between the Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan) and the EU. The mapping of this relationship has been undertaken in a variety of categories: education (foreign cultural institutions, foreign universities, university links, think-tank links, foreign languages linguistic departments, available scholarships, exchange of students, financial aid to education), culture and identity issues (shared identity and values across the region, leadership links, foreign cultural and identity influence and ethnic overlapping) of all Central Asian countries; civil society (main NGOs, their structure and activities, cooperation of NGOs internationally, foreign aid to NGOs), tourism statistics and people-to-people relations.

Information collected as part of this paper was found through open sources, largely online. Desk-based research was conducted primarily in English. The time period examined for this paper is 2007-2017, so as to capture the most recent developments in the region.

This paper tries to identify key trends between Central Asian and European Union countries in the cultural and educational sphere. The findings of this mapping exercise will provide a comprehensive basis for the following analysis of the EU cultural relations with Central Asian countries and policy recommendations for future priorities for European policy-making vis-à-vis Central Asia to be elaborated in the course of the H2020 project “SEnECA – Strengthening and Energizing EU-Central Asia Relations”.

2. Mapping education, culture and identity, civil society and P2P

2.1. Education

In addition to the delegation of the European External Action Service, there are National Erasmus+ Offices providing information about funding opportunities for research and higher education and representing the Erasmus+ programme in the region. They are located in Almaty,² Bishkek,³ Dushanbe,⁴ Ashgabat,⁵ and Tashkent.⁶ Due to the limited competences of the Union in the policy area of culture, the EU has no cultural institutes of its own. However, EU member states have a number of foreign cultural institutions, which also organise foreign language courses. The Goethe-Institut has offices in Almaty and Tashkent,⁷ the British Council has offices in Astana, Almaty and Tashkent,⁸ and the Institut Français has offices in Ashgabat and Tashkent.⁹

Following the end of the Soviet university system, a high number of private universities was established in the Central Asian countries. One example is the University of Central Asia, which is funded by a number of foundations, Central Asian and Western governments, as well as development aid providers. Within the public education sector, a number of flagship universities, offering university degrees of international standards, were founded. Two examples are the Nazarbayev University and the KIMEP University in Kazakhstan, which were established outside the traditional Kazakh higher education and research sector. Even though offering dual-degree programmes, they have not established an exclusive partnership with a Western university lending its reputation but rely on staff

² “Home,” National Erasmus+ Office in Kazakhstan, accessed May 7, 2018, <http://www.erasmusplus.kz>

³ “Home” National Erasmus+ Office in Kyrgyzstan, accessed May 7, 2018, <http://erasmusplus.kg>

⁴ “Home” Erasmus+ in Tajikistan, accessed May 7, 2018, <http://erasmusplus.tj>

⁵ “Home” National Erasmus+ Office in Turkmenistan, accessed May 7, 2018, <http://www.erasmusplus.org.tm>

⁶ “Home” National Erasmus+ Office in Uzbekistan, accessed May 7, 2018, <http://www.erasmusplus.uz>

⁷ “Locations,” Goethe Institut, accessed May 7, 2018, <https://www.goethe.de/en/wwt.html>

⁸ “Annual Report and Accounts. 2016-2017,” British Council, accessed May 7, 2018, <https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/annual-report-2016-17.pdf>

⁹ “Les Instituts Français dans le monde,” Institut Français, accessed May 7, 2018, <http://www.ifmapp.institutfrancais.com/les-if-dans-le-monde>

from abroad. In Kazakhstan, for example, 7,000 researchers from abroad worked between 2010 and 2014.¹⁰ The third model has been followed by the Westminster International University in Tashkent and the American University of Central Asia. Both were funded by the respective country's leader. Partnerships with the Westminster University London and the Bard College guarantee the quality of higher education at the universities. A fourth model is the funding of universities by Western countries or international organizations, like the German-Kazakh University in Almaty or the OSCE Academy in Bishkek.

The framework for cooperation between universities in Europe is the European Higher Education Area. Kazakhstan, as the most advanced Central Asian country with regard to university education, joined the Bologna Process in 2010.¹¹ Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have ratified the "Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region", but are not members of the European Higher Education Area.¹² Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have shown no interest in joining the European Higher Education Area. However, the Uzbek government has initiated a reform of the curriculums of the first and second tier of higher education in 2016 and a reform of the third tier came into force in July 2017.¹³ With regard to Kazakhstan, a number of 2,704 international education agreements was recorded in 2013. However, the OECD concluded that most of them merely exist on paper and have not been put into practice.¹⁴ This problem is arguably more serious in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan due to the structural deficiency of both countries' higher education systems. In Kyrgyzstan, the national system is characterized by a lack of research output and a low quality of education,¹⁵ while the main problem for the higher education and research sector in Tajikistan is the lack of funding and underpaid staff.¹⁶

There are a few research institutions exclusively dedicated to Central Asian studies in Europe, such as the "Zentralasien-Institut" at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Some of the centres face a reduction of resources or have even been closed. What is true for universities, which receive public funding, is even more true for private think tanks – very few of them have a focus on Central Asia. The most prominent exceptions are "Europe-Central Asia Monitoring", which is not a classical think-tank, but a project linking Central Asia researchers from different institutions, and "Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and the Silk Road Studies Program", which is a transatlantic research and policy centre. While researchers in Europe working on Central Asia are based at multiple research institutions and universities scattered across Europe, the concept of independent think-tanks is very new to the research sector in Central Asia. The sector is mostly dominated by public universities and academies of sciences as well as private universities, which were founded in response to the increasing demand for university education in the 1990s. Therefore, the latter often lack a clear research profile.

Due to the fact that Central Asian studies are not a traditional discipline, like, for example, Oriental Studies, no linguistic departments focusing on Central Asia exist at European universities. Central Asian studies in Europe are part of regional studies and therefore cover not just linguistics, but have

¹⁰ Ibid, 164.

¹¹ "National Report regarding the Bologna Process implementation 2012-2015. Kazakhstan," European Higher Education Area, accessed May 7, 2018, http://media.ehea.info/file/Kazakhstan/14/8/National_Report_Kazakhstan_2015_568148.pdf

¹² "Members," European Higher Education Area, accessed May 7, 2018, <http://www.ehea.info/pid34249/members.html>

¹³ "Higher education in Uzbekistan," Sphere Support and Promotion for Higher Education Reform Experts, accessed May 7, 2018, <http://supporthere.org/page/higher-education-uzbekistan>

¹⁴ *Reviews of National Policies for Education. Higher Education in Kazakhstan 2017* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2017), 168-169, https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/higher-education-in-kazakhstan-2017_9789264268531-en#page169

¹⁵ Asian Development Bank, *Assessment of Higher Education. Kyrgyz Republic* (Manila: Asian Development Bank, 2015), available at: <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/175940/higher-education-kqz.pdf> [accessed June 30, 2018] and Emma Sabzalieva, "Challenges in contemporary higher education in Kyrgyzstan, Central Asia," *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education* 19, no.2 (2015): 50-51.

¹⁶ Asian Development Bank, *Assessment of Higher Education. Tajikistan* (Manila: Asian Development Bank, 2015), 6, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/175952/higher-education-taj.pdf>

a multi-disciplinary approach to study Central Asia. They cover anthropology, social sciences, economics, history and other disciplines depending on the institute's profile. Students willing to learn a Central Asian language have to study at one of these institutes, but they will receive a broader education than just learning the language. A second effect of the missing tradition of Central Asian studies in Europe is a lack of coherence with regard to the definition of what Central Asia is. Language courses in Mongolian and Pashtu are quite common course offers at Central Asian institutes, while Uzbek is sometimes also offered at institutes for Middle Eastern Studies. In general, Central Asia is a niche topic, very seldom offered at European Universities. With regard to European languages in Central Asia, the situation is very different. While Central Asian languages are not covered by traditionally established linguistic disciplines at European universities, English, German and Romance studies have much longer traditions and are better established. Therefore, they are comparatively much more often taught at universities in Central Asia. Furthermore, speaking English is a professional skill that is more frequently required than speaking a Central Asian language, where Russian is a more beneficial skill.

The EU Education Initiative (EUEI) with Central Asia has created close ties with the European Education Area and is contributing to a common higher education area in Europe. Under the EUEI, the programme "Central Asian Education Platform" (CAEP) began in February 2012 with the aim to expand the realm for EU-Central Asia policy dialogue and cooperation in the field. The aim of the CAEP project is "to strengthen education reforms through a process of dialogue, exchange and discussion between Central Asian and European Union countries to improve the capacity of individuals and institutions to contribute to the modernisation and adaptation of the education sector in Central Asia so that it can better meet the needs of the globalised world".¹⁷ The main activities carried out within CAEP to meet this objective are dialogue fora (meetings, conferences, workshops, and seminars), mapping (database of activities in the area of education carried out by EU Member States and other major international partners and donors), communication (e.g. setting up a website to host information, including mapping information) and studies to complement these activities.¹⁸ There are three most important EU-funded higher education programmes with Central Asian countries: 1) Tempus promoted institutional cooperation for the reform and modernisation of higher education systems in countries neighbouring the EU,¹⁹ 2) Erasmus Mundus Partnerships (Action 2) and its follow-up Erasmus+ finance the mobility of students, teachers and researchers, including those from Central Asia,²⁰ 3) Central Asia Research and Education Network (CAREN) is a network dedicated to establish a high-performance broadband internet for research and education.²¹

Tempus was an EU programme supporting the modernization of higher education in the EU's surrounding area, including Central Asia.²² However, the programme's presence in Central Asia was very limited. Tempus was funded on an annual basis by the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and by the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI, for proposals involving Tempus Partner Countries in Central Asia). The DCI budget for Tempus in Central Asia was doubled from the usual EUR 5 million per year to EUR 10 million for 2010.²³

¹⁷ "Central Asia – Education and Research," European Commission, accessed May 29, 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/regions/central-asia/eu-support-education-and-research-cooperation-central-asia_en

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Tempus IV (2007-2013): Overview of the programme," Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, accessed May 29, 2018, https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/2007-2013/tempus-programme_en

²⁰ "Action 2: Partnerships with Third Country Higher Education Institutions and scholarships for mobility," Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, accessed May 29, 2018, https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/2007-2013/erasmus-mundus-programme_en

²¹ "The CAREN Project," CAREN, accessed May 29, 2018, <https://caren.geant.org/Project/Pages/Home.aspx>

²² "Tempus," Central Asia Education Platform, accessed May 29, 2018, <http://www.caep-project.org/tempus/>

²³ "EU cooperation in education in Central Asia," European Commission, accessed May 29, 2018, http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/central_asia/docs/factsheet_education_en.pdf

Erasmus Mundus belongs to the previous generation of EU cooperation and mobility programmes in the field of higher education which aimed at enhancing the quality of European higher education and to promote dialogue and understanding between people and cultures through cooperation with third countries. It included the Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window scheme launched in 2006 as a complement to the original programme. The objectives and provisions of the External Cooperation Window were incorporated into the second phase of the Erasmus Mundus programme (2009-2013) as Action 2, Strand 1. The first Call for Proposals under Action 2 resulted in the selection of 30 partnerships in 2010, including all five Central Asian countries.²⁴ Following Erasmus Mundus, the European Union's Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020) is a funding scheme to support activities in the fields of education, training, youth and sport.²⁵ The programme is made up of three so-called "Key Actions" (1. Mobility, 2. Cooperation and 3. Policy) and two additional actions (1. Jean Monnet and 2. Sport). They are managed partly at the national level by national agencies and partly at the European level by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). In comparison to other regions, the cooperation between the EU and Central Asia within the framework of Erasmus remained rather negligible.

Launched in January 2009, CAREN set out to establish a high-performance broadband internet for research and education (R&E), facilitating communication, information exchange and collaboration between universities, teaching hospitals and research centres within Central Asia and providing access to the European and global research community through interconnection to GÉANT, its European counterpart.²⁶ CAREN is creating networks between EU and Central Asia higher education institutions in the areas of telemedicine, distance learning, disaster risk management, a regional monitoring network on water resource management and remote sensing of the geo-hazard potential of retreating glaciers. The project is coordinated by DANTE (Delivery of Advanced Technologies to Europe) and partnered by the national research and education networks (NRENs) in the four participating Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.²⁷

Each EU member state has a wide range of national institutions (incl. ministries, political and independent foundations, non-governmental associations, research organisations, public and private universities, non-university research institutes, think tanks and others) which offer funding to international students. On the EU level, the above-mentioned Erasmus+ programme (former Erasmus Mundus) is the premier scheme for students from all over the world.²⁸

2.2. Culture and identity issues

2.2.1. Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is considered to be the country which is located in the centre of the Eurasian continent with a mixture of different cultures and religions. It is often mentioned that the nomadic way of life of the Kazakhs is the core of their identity. Based on this fact, the idea of Eurasian unity as an association of the West and the East was put forward by President Nazarbayev. In Central Asia, Kazakhstan wants to act as a regional leader, however, it pays more attention to its international position rather than its regional policy. Great attention is paid to the development of the state language. In

²⁴ "Selected projects for Action 2 and External Cooperation Window," Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, accessed May 29, 2018, http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus_mundus/results_compendia/selected_projects_action_2_en.php

²⁵ "What is Erasmus+ and how is it managed?," Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, accessed May 29, 2018, https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus_en

²⁶ "The CAREN Project," CAREN, accessed May 29, 2018, <https://caren.geant.org/Project/Pages/Home.aspx>

²⁷ "Innovative Internet for Research and Education across Central Asia," CAREN, accessed May 29, 2018, https://caren.geant.org/Media_Centre/Resources/Documents/CAREN-flyer-update-March17_web.pdf

²⁸ "Erasmus Programme Scholarships," Erasmus Programme, accessed May 29, 2018, http://www.erasmusprogramme.com/erasmus_scholarships.php

2012, President Nazarbayev presented a new strategy titled “Kazakhstan-2050: a new political course of the state”.²⁹

Kazakhstan is a unitary state, but in fact is divided into three regions where three tribal communities, also called Zhuz, live: Senior - “Uly” Zhuz (South and Southeast Kazakhstan), Middle Zhuz - “Orta” (Northern, Central and Eastern Kazakhstan) and Junior Zhuz - “Kishi” (Western Kazakhstan). Zhuzes were formed in the beginning of the 17th century, but the contradictions between them are deeply rooted in the Kazakh mentality. Currently the proportions of the Kazakh population in the distribution of the Zhuzes are approximately the following: Senior – 35 percent, Middle – 40 percent and Junior – 25 percent. However, there are also groups of the population that are not part of the Zhuz hierarchy. These small groups are “tore” - direct descendants of Genghis Khan and “kozha” - descendants of the first Arabs, who brought Islam to the Kazakh steppes and committed hajj.³⁰ The government of Kazakhstan is trying to minimize the differences and contradictions between three Zhuzes, using different methods, but so far unsuccessfully. Currently, the structure of the Kazakh government shows that the majority of leading positions are occupied by the representatives of the Senior Zhuz, to which also President Nursultan Nazarbayev belongs.

In Kazakh society, in accordance with the newly adopted Country Development Strategy of “Kazakhstan-2050”, a trilingual policy is actively pursued, which is aimed at learning Kazakh, Russian and English languages. For the first time this idea was announced by President Nazarbayev in October 2006 at the XII session of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan. Currently, in Kazakh schools, along with Kazakh and Russian languages, more than 10 national languages of people living in the country are being studied. In 2008, the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan adopted the doctrine of “National Unity”. In the end of 2012, President Nazarbayev put forward the idea of transferring the Kazakh language from Cyrillic to Latin, emphasizing the policy of distancing from Moscow. According to the national census of 2009, 85 percent of the total population of Kazakhstan is fluent in Russian, 62 percent in Kazakh, and almost 8 percent of the population in English.³¹ In October 2017, President Nazarbayev signed a decree on the transition of the Kazakh alphabet from the Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet by 2025.³² Despite the fact that Kazakhstan is a strategic partner of Russia, it pursues an independent policy. In Northern and North-Eastern Kazakhstan, the majority of the population is Russian. In spite of the transition to the Latin alphabet, the Russian language retains its position in Kazakhstan. In addition, Kazakhstan actively cooperates with Turkey, China, Japan, India and the EU in the sphere of cultural and humanitarian aspects – e.g. cultural centres, scholarship programmes, and exchange of scientists.

Ethnic groups of Kazakhstan are very diverse. Kazakhs make up about 64 percent of the population, Russians 22 percent, and other nations amount to 14 percent.³³ In total, representatives of more than 30 nationalities live in the country. Interethnic problems exist in places where two ethnic groups reside – for example, in Southern Kazakhstan, where Kazakhs and Uzbeks live. The largest diaspora (from half a million to a million people) of Kazakhs live in the following three neighbouring countries:

²⁹ “Kazakhstan-2050,” Electronic government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, accessed June 19, 2018, <http://egov.kz/cms/en/law/list/K1200002050>

³⁰ Hajj is the pilgrimage to Mecca.

³¹ “Itogi Natsional'noy perepisi naseleniya 2009 goda,” stat.kz, accessed June 19, 2018, http://stat.iva.com/p_perepis/Pages/default.aspx

³² “O perevode alfavita kazakhskogo yazyka s kirillitsy na latinskuyu grafiku,” Official site of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, last modified October 27, 2017, www.akorda.kz/ru/legal_acts/decrees/o-perevode-alfavita-kazakhskogo-yazyka-s-kirillicy-na-latinskuyu-graf-iku?q=26%20%D0%BE%D0%BA%D1%82%D1%8F%D0%B1%D1%80%D1%8F%202017%20%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B0

³³ “Resmi statistikalıq aqparat: Xalıq,” Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan,” accessed June 19, 2018, http://stat.gov.kz/faces/wcnav_externalId/homeNumbersPopulation?_afLoop=6981187396821523#%40%3F_afLoop%3D6981187396821523%26_adf.ctrl-state%3Dpn7i0stqu_50

Russia, Uzbekistan and China. Approximately 100,000 Kazakhs live in Mongolia and Turkmenistan.³⁴ The dominant religions in Kazakhstan are Islam and Christianity. 71 percent of the population consider themselves Muslims, 25 percent Christians.³⁵ Kazakhstan has the lowest religious level in Central Asia, which is 42 percent. At the state level, there are no prohibitions on religion. More influence is rendered by division into Zhuz, i.e. tribal division of Kazakhs has influenced political groups, as they are often based on tribal links.

2.2.2. Kyrgyzstan

For Kyrgyzstan, neighbouring countries are the main priority because of the common history, geographic location, similarity of Turkic languages, and religion, which act as unifying factors in the region. However, for the last years, the concept of Altaism and the Altai civilization has been actively promoted, leading to integration with the population of the Russian Federation but not with regional neighbours. Kyrgyz people try to save the nomadic traditions and customs, emphasizing their belonging to the nomadic civilization. Thus, Kyrgyzstan initiated the World Games of Nomads – an international competition in ethnic sports, based on the folk games of nomads of Central Asia – in 2014.³⁶ In Kyrgyzstan, great attention is paid to developing the state language. The “Language Law” was adopted in 1989. In 2004 a new law “On the State Language of the Kyrgyz Republic” was adopted.³⁷ In 2001, the Kyrgyz government introduced a provision in the constitution that the Kyrgyz language is the state language, while the Russian language is officially recognized. Kyrgyzstan will remain the only Turkic-speaking country in Central Asia using a Cyrillic alphabet, after the transition of Kazakhstan in 2025. The participation of Kyrgyzstan in the Eurasian Economic Union and the intensification of Kyrgyz-Russian relations restrain the process of transition to the Latin alphabet. The National Programme for the Development of the State Language and the Improvement of Language Policy for 2014-2020 has been adopted in the Kyrgyz Republic.³⁸ As for the media, there is a huge division between the Russian-speaking segment and the Kyrgyz one. Kyrgyz media write for Kyrgyz-speaking people, while Russian-language media publish for those who consume news in Russian. The two segments rarely intersect. As a result, there is no dialogue between the groups.

Kyrgyzstan is divided into the North and the South, which is due to the historical development. The Northern part includes mostly nomads and the entire industry was concentrated here during the Soviet times. The South is mainly rural with people working in agriculture. There is a division by region as well, for example - Chui, Naryn, Talas, and Osh. As a result, this division influenced political and regional clans, and each clan supports their candidates during the elections.

The popularization of the Kyrgyz language began in 2011 with President Atambaev. In August 2017, the Kyrgyz government adopted the “40 steps to a new era”, which declares multilingual education as a tool for promoting diversity and civil identity.³⁹ In the section “State Language Policy” this programme aims to revise the entire structure of the education system, taking into account its transition to the multilingual education and multicultural education. However, this task remains declarative, as

³⁴ Kayrat Kazakpayev, “Kazakhi za granitsey: Skol'ko ikh naschityvayetsya i v kakikh stranakh oni zhivut?,” *Zakon*, accessed June 18, 2018, <http://www.zakon.kz/145379-kazakhi-za-graniceji-skolko-ikh.html>

³⁵ “Itogi Natsional'noy perepisi naseleniya 2009 goda,” *stat.kz*, accessed June 19, 2018, http://stat.ivia.com/p_perepis/Pages/default.aspx

³⁶ “Home”, *The World Games of Nomads*, accessed June 19, 2018, <http://www.worldnomadgames.com/en/>

³⁷ “Zakon Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki,” *Ministerstvo Yustitsii Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki*, last modified April 2, 2004, <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/1439>

³⁸ “Natsional'naya Programma razvitiya gosudarstvennogo yazyka i sovershenstvovaniya yazykovoy politiki v Kyrgyzskoy Respublike na 2014-2020 gody,” *Ministerstvo Yustitsii Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki*, accessed June 19, 2018, <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/63683>

³⁹ “By 2023, 89 projects to be implemented within State program “Forty Steps to New Era,” *Kabar*, November 27, 2017, <http://kabar.kg/eng/news/by-2023-89-projects-to-be-implemented-within-state-program-forty-steps-to-new-era/>

there are no methods how to implement this programme with no funding. Kyrgyzstan actively cooperates with Turkey, China, Japan, India, and the EU in cultural and humanitarian aspects – i.e. cultural centres, scholarship programmes, and exchange of scientists.

Kyrgyzstan is a polyethnic state with representatives of more than 80 different ethnic groups. According to the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, in 2017, out of six million people living in Kyrgyzstan, 73 percent were Kyrgyz, Uzbeks - around 15 percent, almost six percent of Russians and six percent of other ethnic groups.⁴⁰ Outside Kyrgyzstan, Kyrgyz people live in China (Xingjiang), Uzbekistan, Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Turkey. In the “Concept of Strengthening the Unity of People and Inter-Ethnic Relations in the Kyrgyz Republic” of 2013, it is reported that 65 percent of all children, enrolled in pre-school education, study in Russian, 33 percent study in Kyrgyz and almost two percent in Uzbek. In secondary schools, 73 percent of all students study in Kyrgyz language, in Russian – 18 percent, in Uzbek – almost nine percent.⁴¹ The Kyrgyz language policy has a contradictory nature, which is caused by the processes of nation-state building. On the one hand, the Kyrgyz language is introduced into all spheres of linguistic life, and on the other, attempts are made to recognize the role of the Russian language.

2.2.3. Uzbekistan

Uzbek ex-president Islam Karimov conducted active politics of identity and memory, which promoted the vision of Uzbekistan as a country that played a role of the political centre in the region (three states – Khiva, Bukhara, and Kokand – existed until the end of 19th century and beginning of the 20th century) or even in Eurasia (The Timurid Empire) and cultural contribution to the world civilization (Samarkand, Bukhara). Within the framework of identity politics, Uzbekistan was one of the first post-Soviet countries, which switched from Cyrillic to Latin alphabet, a decision that has not yet been implemented by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Moreover, the Russian language does not have such a strong position in the public sphere (administration and education) as it has in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The Muslim faith should be recognized as one of the key factors with increasing importance that unites the great majority of Uzbekistan’s population above ethnic, regional and linguistic divisions. However, the inhabitants of Uzbekistan differ substantially on the level of religious practice and identification with the religion. The character of religiosity makes Uzbeks especially similar to Tajiks. The regional identities based on family ties play an important role in social and political life of Uzbekistan as in other Central Asian countries. Uzbekistan’s political system and society are delineated by clans – regional and elite networks of patronage that strictly control access to resources. The most powerful are from Samarkand, Tashkent and Fergana Valley.

Rustam Azimov, the former Deputy Prime Minister, and Rustam Inoyatov, the former head of the National Security Service of Uzbekistan, originate from the Tashkent clan. Uzbekistan’s current president Shavkat Mirziyoyev comes from Jizzakh (the region located between Samarkand and Fergana), but he has powerful links with the Samarkand clan, where he was a provincial governor. As a prime minister, he also established important connections in Tashkent. Furthermore, he is a distant relative of Russia’s richest man and Fergana Valley native, Alisher Usmanov, who is on good terms with the Russian President Vladimir Putin. Despite being primarily a Russian oligarch, Usmanov plays a very important role in the Uzbek political and business ecosystem, being the main link between Moscow’s and Tashkent’s political elites. In effect, Mirziyoyev is closely connected with all three main clans, as well as the oligarchy in Russia close to the Kremlin.

⁴⁰ “Kirgizstan tsifralarda,” Kirgiz Respublikasının Uluttuk statistika komiteti, accessed June 19, 2018, <http://www.stat.kg/media/publicationarchive/469a3c9e-4229-4e67-9d4a-a88947a21e93.pdf>

⁴¹ “Kontseptsiya Ukrepleniya Yedinstva Naroda I Mezhnatsionnykh Otnosheniy V Kyrgyzskoy Respublike,” Kirgiz Respublikasının Prezidenti, accessed June 19, 2018, http://www.president.kg/files/docs/kontseptsiya_ukrepleniya_edinstva_naroda_i_mejtnatsionnykh_otnosheniy_v_kr.pdf

The main goal of Karimov's foreign policy was to gain the status of a regional leader because of historical and cultural factors. The main challenge to these efforts were the bad relations of Uzbekistan with its neighbours. Tashkent treated the cultural influence of other countries from the region (especially Tajikistan) and other actors with a strong suspicion. However, Mirziyoyev initiated an impressive process of reconciliation with the neighbours. He also continued the process of rapprochement with Turkey. Meanwhile, Uzbekistan has not joined the Turkic Council. In the cultural sphere, Russia remains the most important point of reference for the Uzbek society, though its influence weakened very substantially after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In the last census conducted in 1989, Russians made up more than eight percent of the Uzbek population. Most probably, their population decreased dramatically as was the case in Tajikistan, though probably to a lesser degree (Tashkent is a centre of Russian community). On the other hand, Russia gained the status of main destination for massive labour migration. According to the Russian statistical data, in 2017 more than four million Uzbeks resided and worked in Russia (many of them seasonally).⁴² They accounted for more than ten percent of Uzbekistan's population. Russia is also the main destination for Uzbek students (almost 20,000, while almost 4,000 went to Kazakhstan and 2,000 to Ukraine).⁴³

Uzbekistan is the most populous country in Central Asia (45 percent of the region's population) and the Uzbeks constitute the second largest Turkic nation after the Turks (around 20 percent of all Turkic nations). Large Uzbek communities live in neighbouring countries (around 20 percent of them), for instance in Tajikistan.⁴⁴ According to the last census in 1989, the Tajik community constituted five percent of the population but their real share in the population is believed to be much higher. On the other hand, according to the official census conducted in Tajikistan, Uzbeks make up around 15 percent of the country's population.⁴⁵ They inhabit mainly the northern part of the country, bordering Uzbekistan. The ethnic composition is complex because there are many inter-ethnic marriages between Tajiks and Uzbeks, common cultural features, including religion and bilingualism, a widespread phenomenon in certain regions. As a consequence, a huge number of people represent a multilayered national identity. The Uzbek language is divided into several dialects, which belong to three various branches of Turkic languages: Oguz (close to Turkmen language), Kipchak (close to Kazakh and Kyrgyz) and Karluk - the one with the most influence in the country, as it became the literary standard. The Tajik Persian language strongly influenced Uzbek language, particularly the Karluk dialect.

2.2.4. Tajikistan

The Tajik national identity supported by the state institutions treats the cultural heritage of Iranian civilization as a key point of reference. In Central Asia, it is particularly identified with a sedentary way of life (agriculture and irrigation), urban environment (trade, craft, architecture, education, and written literature) and statecraft (bureaucracy). However, the Tajik culture is also highly influenced by the experience of a mountainous way of life and animal herding. In all these dimensions, the Tajik culture is strongly intertwined with the Uzbek one. On the other hand, this heritage sometimes serves as an instrument of distinction of Tajik identity from Turkic nations shaped in the past by the nomad way of life (the Great Steppe and deserts). The politics of identity and memory of Tajikistan promotes the legacy of Samanid Empire, which established one of the most sophisticated cultures in the world in the 10th century, contributing dramatically to the development of the world civilization. Tajikistan as other Central Asian countries is also highly diverse in regional and ethnic identities which are

⁴² "Otdel'nyye pokazateli migratsionnoy situatsii v Rossiyskoy Federatsii za yanvar'-dekabr' 2017 goda s raspredeleniyem po stranam i regionam," Ministerstvo Vnutrennikh Del Rossiyskoy Federatsii, accessed June 19, 2018, <https://xn--b1aew.xn--p1ai/Deljatelnost/statistika/migracionnaya/item/12162171/>

⁴³ "Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students," UNESCO, accessed June 19, 2018, <http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow>

⁴⁴ "World Factbook – Uzbekistan," Central Intelligence Agency, accessed June 19, 2018, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/uz.html>

⁴⁵ "World Factbook – Tajikistan," Central Intelligence Agency, accessed June 18, 2018, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ti.html>

intertwined with political, economic and social life. The three main regions of the country are Kulob, Sughd (Khujand) and Rasht (Gharm). Currently, Kulob region, located in the southern part of the country, dominates on the central level. In addition, Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province which makes up almost half of Tajikistan's territory and three percent of its population, is inhabited mostly by Pamiris. Their culture, language and religious denomination are distinct from those of the Tajik majority. Pamiri languages belong to a branch of the Iranian language group different from the Tajik, which is spoken across Tajikistan. Pamiris are Ismaili Shiites. The importance of religion as an integral part of identity varies regionally, though generally after the fall of communism its role in all spheres of life increased substantially. According to the various sociological researches, Tajiks and Uzbeks are the most religious and traditional nations in Central Asia.

In the past, the region of Kulob was one of two pillars of Tajikistan, along with the northern region of Sogd (Khujand). President Emomali Rahmon originates from Kulob. Since the 1990s, President Rahmon has gradually cleared the Tajik political arena from any group or individual he considered a potential threat. Currently Kulobis dominate the business sector and hold key positions in security structures, at the expense of those from other regions who feel they occupy second-rank positions. However, the circle of power within Kulob clan has narrowed, as money and resources have decreased. Kulobis from other parts of Khatlon are losing influence to Kulobis from Rahmon's hometown, Danghara.

In culture, Russia remains the most influential player in the Tajik society, though its influence weakened substantially after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Due to massive emigration, Russians' share in the Tajik population decreased from almost eight percent in 1989 to less than 0.5 percent today. On the other hand, Russia gained the status of main destination for Tajik labor migration. According to the Russian statistical data, in 2017, 2.1 million Tajiks resided and worked in Russia (many of them seasonally),⁴⁶ whereas the entire population of Tajikistan approaches nine million people. Russia is also the main destination for Tajik students (more than 15,000, the second place is occupied by Kyrgyzstan with around 2,000 people). Tajik students often study at Turkish universities. After 1991, the influence of Iran in Tajikistan increased substantially, but it remains considerably below its potential. The ruling elite in Dushanbe perceives Iranian cultural influence rather with suspicion. In consequence, for instance, the number of Tajik students in Iran is negligible (around 150 people) and around 100 times smaller than the number of Afghan students enrolled at Iranian universities.⁴⁷

As far as population is concerned, Tajikistan is the third most populous country of Central Asia, but the Tajiks are after Uzbeks the second biggest nation in the region (around 20 million people). The Tajik community living in Afghanistan is substantially larger than the population of entire Tajikistan. The Afghan Tajiks, numbering at least ten million people, according to estimates, account for around 30 percent of the country's population. They live in the northern part of the country, bordering Tajikistan, mixed particularly with Uzbeks and Turkmens. Meanwhile, the Tajik ethnic community in Tajikistan surpasses seven million (around 85 percent of the population). The Tajik language, the variety of Persian makes the Tajiks different from Turkic nations in Central Asia and unites them with Iranians and many inhabitants of Afghanistan (around 80 percent of population speaks Persian, which serves as a lingua franca).⁴⁸ On the other hand, Tajik language had a huge impact on the development of the Uzbek idiom. Moreover, Tajik Persian differs from Iranian and Afghan varieties because it is written in Cyrillic alphabet. Sunni Hanafi Islam version professed by the great majority of Tajiks unites them with Turkic nations of Central Asia and makes them distinct from Shia Iran. The

⁴⁶ "Official site of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs," available at: <https://xn--b1aew.xn--p1ai/Deljatelnost/statistics/migracion-naya/item/12162171/>

⁴⁷ "Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students," UNESCO, accessed June 19, 2018, <http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow>

⁴⁸ "World Factbook – Afghanistan," Central Intelligence Agency, accessed June 18, 2018: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>

legacy of common regional state traditions (i.e. Samanid Empire) constitutes another factor, strengthening the belonging of Tajiks to Central Asia.

2.2.5. Turkmenistan

The Turkmen are particularly integrated with the region through the legacy of Turkic language, and Sunni Hanafi Islam strongly correlated with the nomadic way of life and the state tradition of steppe empires (e.g. Seljuk Turks). From the early modern times until the end of the 19th century, the lands of modern Turkmenistan (and especially its south and east) were part of Persia with all the political and cultural consequences. However, nomadic Turkmen often opposed Persian state institutions and way of living (sedentary life, agriculture, and urban culture). The Turkmen share with the neighbours the emphasis on the tribal traditions and family ties. The Turkmen confederation united for centuries the five largest Turkmen tribes named after its founding fathers who were brothers: Salors, Ersars, Tekes, Jomuds and Saryks. The current Turkmen still believe that they originate from one of five brothers. In early 1990s, after Turkmenistan declared its independence, elites gathered around President Saparmurad Niyazov recognized the bond of these tribes as a symbol around which modern national consciousness of the Turkmen is to be built. The politics of strict self-isolation intertwined with a peculiar version of all forms of regional integration resulted in very limited direct contacts between Turkmen and other Central Asian societies. This policy, shaped by the first president Saparmurad Niyazov, has been prolonged in a just slightly more soft formula by Gurbanguly Berdimuchamedov. In consequence, the Turkmen became the most distinct from the other Central Asian societies.

There are no significant links of Turkmenistan's president with other leaders in the region, because of the consequent policy of isolation in foreign policy of Turkmenistan. Former president Niyazov represented the "Teke" clan, whose members still hold many posts under fellow "Teke" Berdimukhammedov. However, Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov appears to be continuing Niyazov's practice of preference and privilege for his kin. Several recent security and other appointees hail from Berdimukhammedov's native village of Goektepe.⁴⁹

Russia is the most important transmitter of culture at the social level, especially in the media. Russians constitute a relatively significant minority in the country (five percent). Moreover, Russia is the most popular destination for the Turkmen students (around 16,000). On the other hand, the share of the Russian community in Turkmenistan's population almost halved in comparison to the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, the Turkmen do not participate on the bigger scale in the labor migration to Russia (less than 75,000 in 2017). Turkey has become an important partner of Turkmenistan in the sphere of culture as the largest Turkic country speaking besides Azeri, and the most similar language to Turkmen (Oghuz languages). Turkey is the only country in the world whose citizens are not subject to visa requirements in Turkmenistan. This caused the intensification of social (economic migration to Turkey) and scientific cooperation (student exchange - around 10,000). Turkmenistan does not belong to the Turkic Council operating as the main promoter of the idea of Turkic common identity, but, in contrast to Uzbekistan, takes part in the activities of this organization. The best exemplification of the reorientation of Turkmen identity towards the common Turkic heritage was the decision of ruling elites to change the alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin.⁵⁰

China aspires to promote its culture in Turkmenistan through activities of Confucian Culture and Language Centers, and scholarship programmes for students. The same happens in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

⁴⁹ "Turkmenistan: New President Still Bound To Clans, Nepotism," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, last modified October 10, 2007, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1078909.html>

⁵⁰ "The Gulen Movement and Turkish Soft Power," The Carnegie Endowment, last modified February 4, 2014, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2014/02/04/gulen-movement-and-turkish-soft-power-pub-54430>

Turkmenistan is the most ethnically homogenous country in Central Asia. According to the official censuses and estimates, 85 percent of citizens are Turkmen. The biggest minorities are Uzbeks (six percent) and Russians (five percent). Around 40 percent of all Turkmen live in the surrounding countries. The largest communities of Turkmen inhabit Iran (about 1.3 million people), Afghanistan (around one million people), Uzbekistan (around 150,000 people) and Pakistan (110,000 people). Turkmen are also to a certain degree ethnically related to Turkmen communities of Iraq and Syria, which are however more culturally and linguistically close to Azerbaijani and Anatolian Turks. Their estimated population surpasses four million people. Turkmen outside of the country use mostly the Arabic alphabet.⁵¹

2.3. Civil society and P2P

2.3.1. Main NGOs

Today there are about 19,680 NGOs in Kazakhstan.⁵² The main top ten include ARGO Civil Society Development Association, Kazakhstan Civil Alliance, Association of business women of Kazakhstan, The International Foundation for Protection of Freedom of Speech “Adil soz”, Civil Initiatives Support Center, Kazakhstan Crisis Centers Union, Kazakhstan Women Entrepreneurs Union, International Center for Rights Protection, “Asil bala” Association, Public Fund “LAW”. The main activities of these NGOs are connected with the social sphere, education, ecology, culture, health, gender equality and the protection of human rights.

The Kyrgyz Republic has the most liberal political system in the region, which, undoubtedly, positively affects the development of the country's non-governmental sector. The most important role in the process of creating NGOs was connected with foreign donor organizations in Kyrgyzstan in the early 1990s.⁵³ In 2004, the President of the Kyrgyz Republic approved the Concept of Cooperation between the government and NGOs, which, although it did not provide them with government funding, had a positive impact on the interaction between NGOs and government agencies.⁵⁴ Currently more than 18,000 non-profit organizations are registered in the country, operating in various spheres.⁵⁵ They include the Association of Civil Society Support Centers, the Center Polis Asia, the Congress of Women of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Public Foundation “Legal Clinic”, the “Adilet”, the Association of social entrepreneurs of Kyrgyzstan, the NGO “Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society”, the Center for Human Rights Protection “Kylym Shamy”, the Public Association “Human Rights Movement: Bir Duino-Kyrgyzstan”, the Center of Political and Legal Research, and the Ecological Movement of Kyrgyzstan. Their activities are focused on legal support, the social sphere, health protection, ecology, and business development.

Uzbekistan, as the most populous republic in the region, during the reign of the previous president, was at the centre of criticism of international human rights organizations because of the severe pressure on the activities of NGOs and the lack of freedom of speech. When the newly elected president came to power, several efforts were made to correct the image of the country, among which the conditions for the creation and functioning of public organizations in various spheres of people's life. The last decree connected with NGOs has simplified their activities in the country: cancellation of the activity coordination with registration authority; obtaining grant finances in any banks, not just in authorized banks; the pensioners from NGOs also receive a pension from the state; the establishment of the Advisory Council for the Development of Civil Society under the President, and, starting

⁵¹ “Who are the Turkmen of Syria?” The New York Times, last modified May 24, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/25/world/middleeast/who-are-the-turkmen-of-syria.html>

⁵² “Home,” infonpo.kz, accessed June 18, 2018, <https://infonpo.kz>

⁵³ “Home,” Asian Development Bank, accessed June 18, 2018, <https://www.adb.org>

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ “Home,” The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, accessed June 18, 2018, <http://www.icnl.org>

from 2019, the “Houses of NGOs” should appear in the capital and other parts of the country.⁵⁶ Currently more than 9,200 NGOs are registered in Uzbekistan, such as the Business Women’s Association of Uzbekistan “Tadbirkor ayol”, the International nongovernmental charity fund “Soglom Avlod Uchun”, the Legal problems research center, the International Ecological and Health Public Charity Foundation “ECOSAN”, the Public Fund for Support of NGOs, the National association of non-governmental and non-profit organizations of Uzbekistan, the Independent institute for monitoring of the formation of civil society, the Uzbekistan Women’s Committee, the Republican Charity Fund “Mahalla”, and the Republican Fund “Nuroni”. Their main activities are connected with the social sphere, gender equality, legal support, ecology and entrepreneurship.⁵⁷

In Tajikistan, there are more than 2,600 registered NGOs, where the most active ones include the National Association of Business Women of Tajikistan, the National Association of Political Scientists of Tajikistan, the National Association of Small and Medium Business, the National Association of Independent Mass Media of Tajikistan, the National Association of NGOs, the Public organization “Fidokor”, the Bureau of Human Rights and Rule of Law, the Public fund “Notabene”, the Human Rights Centre, and the NGO “Rushd”.⁵⁸ As in Kyrgyzstan, the social sphere, legal support, ecology, business development and also handicrafts support are the main spheres of their activities.

In Turkmenistan, around 13 NGOs are registered.⁵⁹ They are the Economic Society “Dyap-dessur”, the Public organization “Society for Turkmenistan Nature’s Protection”, the Public organization “Mashgala”, the Expert-analytical agency “Ynanch-Vepa”, the Ashgabat Club “Ynam” (“Trust”), the Public organization “JENME” (“Overcoming”), the Public non-commercial organization “BOSFOR”, the Public organization “Keyik Okara”, the Support Center for Disabled Persons of Turkmenistan, and the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs of Turkmenistan. Support to the vulnerable citizens and prevention of human trafficking are their main spheres of activity.

2.3.2. Cooperation of NGOs internationally

All the above mentioned NGOs cooperate actively with international partners. The main international partner for NGOs of all countries include the European Commission, USAID, OSCE, UNFPA, UNESCO, and UNICEF. Many of Kazakhstan’s NGOs also have different joint projects with Chevron, Samruk-Kazyna Trust, and EIDHR. Kyrgyz NGOs cooperate closely with OSI, Aga Khan Foundation and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. Not less significant are the international partners of Tajik NGOs: EBRD, UNDP, Global Fund and others. Turkmen NGOs closely cooperate with IOM, World Bank, UNHCR, ICNL. Additional Uzbek partners are Save the Children, TICA, AmeriCares, Friedensdorf INT, GIZ, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, and UNIFEM. The NGOs of all countries also often collaborate with local foreign Embassies.

2.3.3. Foreign aid to NGOs

Foreign aid has been and continues to be an important source of financial support for local organizations in Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan has a fairly liberal legislation regarding the regulation of NGO’s foreign financing, since there is no registration procedure required for receiving such assistance, no authorization is required and no additional reporting is introduced, which fully corresponds to positive international practice.

Since July 2016, Kazakhstan has signed a Law on Payment and Payment Systems, which obliges any organization financed from abroad to submit special reports to the State Revenue Committee of

⁵⁶ “Mirziyoev poruchil uprostiti' NNO zhizni i vyplachivat' ikh rabotnikam polnuyu pensiyu,” Ferghana News, accessed June 19, 2018, <http://www.ferghananews.com/news/29811>

⁵⁷ “Home,” Ferghana News, accessed June 18, 2018, www.ferghananews.com

⁵⁸ “Home,” Deutsche Welle, accessed June 18, 2018, <http://www.dw.com>

⁵⁹ “Home,” NGO Turkmenistan, accessed June 18, 2018, <http://ngo-turkmenistan.org>

the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Reports should be submitted by those NGOs that: a) provide legal assistance, b) study public opinion, and c) collect, analyze and disseminate information with the help of funds from foreign citizens or organizations.

A similar approach to the regulation of foreign aid was also used in Uzbekistan. However, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has signed a decree that slightly simplifies the rules of the work for NGOs in Uzbekistan. NGOs are no longer required to coordinate their activities with the registering body (the justice bodies), it will be enough to notify them about the activity plans. Until the end of 2018, an electronic system will be developed and introduced for submission of NGO documents and plans for various activities. NGOs are now allowed to receive funds to their special accounts in any banking institution, and not only in the branches of Asaka Bank and the National Bank (NBU), as it was practiced earlier.

On June 10, 2015, Tajikistan introduced and adopted amendments to the law “On public organizations”, which further obliged NGOs to notify the Ministry of Justice on receiving foreign financing. Public associations can carry out projects, financed by foreign entities, only after notification of registration authorities.

The most difficult procedure in Central Asia for receiving foreign assistance by local organizations is in Turkmenistan. It is necessary to have a permission for all types of foreign assistance if beneficiaries are NGOs. The procedure for obtaining the permission is complex. State bodies are granted with broad powers, allowing them to decide whether to give permission for foreign aid or not. In the case of refusal of obtaining foreign aid, the law does not provide an appeal procedure for the decision made. The NGOs that were granted a permission to receive foreign aid must comply with complex reporting requirements.

2.3.4. Tourism statistics

The Central Asian region, located in the “heart” of Eurasia, began to gradually reveal its tourism potential from the beginning of the 21st century, based primarily on the cultural and historical background (ancient cities of the Great Silk Road and monumental architecture), natural and recreational environment (huge steppes, deserts, and natural reserves) and sports such as mountain-climbing. The global trend towards the revival of the Great Silk Road also positively influences the increase of foreign tourists to the countries of the region.

The Republic of Kazakhstan with its ninth largest territory in the world has sufficient financial resources. It maintains a “multi-vector” foreign policy, which acts as a driver for major regional and world cultural and sports events such as EXPO-2017 and OSCE chairmanship in 2010.

In 2016, 1.27 million tourists visited Kyrgyzstan. The income from admission of foreign citizens is estimated as USD 415.6 million (increased by 1.4 percent compared to 2015).⁶⁰ The number of tourists increased by 8,000. In 2016, tourists from Kazakhstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Germany, Turkey, China and the United States predominantly came to Kyrgyzstan for vacation.

Uzbekistan, the central country of the region, has the largest number of tourist attractions in Central Asia and the most significant tourism industry. According to official sources, the number of tourists who visited Uzbekistan in 2017 exceeded 2.52 million people and increased by 24.3 percent, compared to 2016.

In Tajikistan, 2018 is declared as the year of tourism and folk crafts. In 2016, Tajikistan was visited by 312,602 foreign tourists, which is more compared to the same period in 2015 (increased by 72,036

⁶⁰ Tatyana Kurdyavtseva, “Tourist flow to Kyrgyzstan grows by 6.2 percent for 5 years,” 24.kg news agency, March 11, 2017, accessed August 30, 2018, https://24.kg/english/47019_Tourist_flow_to_Kyrgyzstan_grows_by_62_percent_for_5_years/

people). The newly created Tourism Committee under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan focuses on turning Tajikistan into a centre for mountain and ecotourism in Asia.

In 1993, Turkmenistan became a member of the World Tourism Organization. The National Tourist Zone Avaza, with more than 30 hotels, health-improving complexes, cottages, modern transport infrastructure, which are able to take more than 10,000 tourists during summertime, is built on the shore of the Caspian Sea. However, a closed socio-political system does not allow the republic to fully reveal its potential, so it is also difficult to obtain reliable statistics. According to some sources, approximately 100,000 foreign tourists visited the country in 2014.

2.3.5. People-to-people cooperation

Over the years of political sovereignty, the Republic of Kazakhstan conducted significant political reforms that allowed step-by-step development of a new political system, to form new institutions of civil society: political parties, NGOs, and independent media. Currently, NGOs cover virtually all socially important spheres of society.⁶¹ Kazakhstan is currently the only country in the region that has a separate ministry that deals with non-governmental sector issues (along with religious issues), established in September 2013. Kazakhstan also provides significant funding for civil society institutions through the scheme of “social order”.⁶²

Prior to gaining independence, there were traditional Tajik concepts such as khashar (joint actions of neighbors), jamomad or gashtak (when people gather to solve community problems), the mahalla council (elected representatives of community members, coordinating processes relating to public welfare issues), which laid the foundation for modern public voluntary activity.⁶³ The Republic of Tajikistan, despite the civil confrontation in the first years after the independence, also experienced significant growth in the non-governmental sector of the modern format. Unlike other new states of the region, the formation of new public organizations occurred sporadically, without participation or intervention of the state.

The Republic of Turkmenistan is the only country in the region that has a great untapped potential for the development of the country's non-governmental sector. Although the national legislation permits the creation and free functioning of public organizations, the power structures see in the non-governmental sector as “undesirable agents” of foreign countries.⁶⁴ The situation in this sector began to slightly improve at the end of 2016. On 26-27 November 2016, with the support of the UNDP country office, in the framework of the official visit of the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to Turkmenistan, a meeting of the Secretary General with civil society representatives was organized. On 6-7 December 2016, UNDP together with the National Institute of Democracy and Human Rights under the President of Turkmenistan held a two-day roundtable on “The Role of Social Organizations in achieving the Goals of Sustainable Development”.⁶⁵ In the light of these events, with UNDP's and active NGOs initiatives, an information website for NGOs of Turkmenistan was created, which by now has only a list of 13 NGOs.⁶⁶ However, public organizations still have to coordinate their activities and the grants received from foreign donor partners with the Ministry of Justice of the country, which complicates NGO activities.

⁶¹ „Nepравitel'stvennyy sektor,” kazportal.kz, accessed June 18, 2018, <http://www.kazportal.kz/nepравitel'stvennyiy-sektor>

⁶² „Home,” MTSFER – Kazakhstan, accessed June 19, 2018, <https://qz.mcfr.kz>

⁶³ „Home,” Asian Development Bank, accessed June 18, 2018, <https://www.adb.org>

⁶⁴ „Home,” Deutsche Welle, accessed June 18, 2018, <http://www.dw.com>

⁶⁵ „NPO Turkmenistana: novyye vozmozhnosti,” CSO Central Asia, accessed June 19, 2018, <http://cso-central.asia/npo-turkmenistana-novye-vozmozhnosti/>

⁶⁶ „Katalog NPO,” NGO Turkmenistan, accessed June 19, 2018, <http://ngo-turkmenistan.org/ngo/>

3. Conclusion

The cultural relationship between the Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan) and the EU has been addressed in this paper. From the educational standpoint, EU member states have set up a number of cultural institutions, which also organise language courses, such as the Goethe-Institut, the British Council, and the Institut Français.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, new higher education models with the involvement of European partners have been explored in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, ranging from attracting foreign researchers to establishing partner-financed universities. The only Central Asian country to have joined the Bologna process so far is Kazakhstan. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have ratified the “Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region”, but are not members of the European Higher Education Area.

In Europe, there are several research institutions exclusively dedicated to Central Asian studies, such as the “Zentralasien-Institut” at the Humboldt-Universität. Due to the fact that Central Asian studies are not a traditional discipline, no linguistic departments focusing on Central Asia exist at European universities. EU education projects in Central Asia include the EU Education Initiative (EUEI) with Central Asia (launched 2012), containing a programme “Central Asian Education Platform” (CAEP); Tempus (2007-2013); Erasmus Mundus and Erasmus+ (2006, ongoing); Central Asia Research and Education Network (CAREN) (2009, ongoing).

Each Central Asian country has its own history and politics of identity, as well as language, religion and alphabet differences. Existing tribal traditions and family ties continue to influence the political culture in the region. All Central Asian countries’ leaders tend to surround themselves with elites from their regions and even hometowns.

In the process of formation and development of civic society institutions (NGOs, independent media, etc.) in the region, European governmental and non-governmental organizations have provided and continue to provide logistical, organizational, consultative and financial assistance to its Central Asian counterparts. In Europe, interest in the region is gradually increasing, which adds to the numbers of European tourists to the countries of Central Asia. People-to-people relations in the region are also slowly, but progressively advancing.

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