Summary of the context, overall objectives of the project and conclusions of the action

The relations to Central Asia (CA) are an important element of the changing geopolitical setting the EU has been facing for some years now. They are influenced by the role of the rest of Asia and other world powers play in the region, which the EU has to take into consideration while focusing on its comparative advantages. Therefore, SEnECA’s overall aim is to strengthen and energize the relations between the EU and CA during its two-year-duration and beyond. To achieve this, the consortium, including all five Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan), has undertaken various activities as designed in its three thematic work packages: WP1 builds a sustainable, transdisciplinary network to link European and Central Asian researchers and to thus improve research cooperation on EU-Central Asia relations; WP2 maps and analyses the current state of EU-CA relations and on this basis gives recommendations on how to improve the EU’s policy towards CA; WP3 is dedicated to draw public attention to EU-Central Asia relations and to promote the importance of CA to Europe among different audiences.

SEnECA has established best practices for researching together in a multinational network and generated its Policy Roadmap to give expert advice for implementing key aspects of the new 2019 EU Central Asia Strategy (impact in politics). Furthermore, the project has identified ways to reach out to a wider public with events, workshops, conferences and via social media to disseminate the region and gather input for future cooperation (impact in society). Besides that, SEnECA has connected stakeholders from the key audiences in politics, science and society, especially new connections between EU- and Central Asian researchers were forged (impact in research).

Work performed during the reporting period and main results achieved

Overall, SEnECA has sought to increase connectivity by linking relevant actors, to improve policy activities by defining (new) priorities and giving recommendations, to increase awareness of CA by promoting its importance to EU stakeholders as well as the wider public and to strengthen capacities in research and higher education in CA.

Impact in research:
SEnECA has established the SEnECA Research Network including European researchers working on CA and CA researchers in European Studies. Ever since the SEnECA Research Network serves as a long-term platform to link researchers, this will facilitate future scientific cooperation, advise policy-makers on improving the EU’s research policy, and will contribute to the strengthening of research capacities in the region.

The high number of researchers included in the SEnECA Researcher Database (over 300) forms an excellent basis for the SEnECA Research Network that has been brought together at the SEnECA events to meet in person. Beside the events, the SEnECA website and social media channels has operated as successful communication platforms. Furthermore, the SEnECA Agenda for Future Research Cooperation has been developed, featuring recommendations on how to improve research cooperation between the EU and the region. The Long-term Communication Strategy, giving recommendations on speaking about EU-Central Asia relations in the public sphere, has also been disseminated via all SEnECA channels.
Impact in politics:

By increasing the receptiveness of decision-makers and stakeholders and underlining the concrete relevance of Central Asia to EU politics, SEnECA raised awareness for EU’s CA policy. Linking the SEnECA Research Network with the SEnECA Stakeholder Network gives policy-makers access to policy advice capacities also in a long-term perspective. In total, 521 stakeholders were identified which stem from different fields in politics, business sector and civil society. Based on SEnECA’s inclusive approach to demand-driven policy advice, it has exchanged views with all stakeholders constantly by interviewing them, gathering their input to the project activities and inviting them to SEnECA events. Using these insights, a Stakeholder Analysis was conducted categorising them according to their power and interest. The EU Special Representative for CA participated in the SEnECA Conferences in Riga, Almaty and Brussels. The Final Conference in November 2019 brought together a huge number of different stakeholders, ambassadors from all five CA republics, politicians, researchers and representatives of the civil society and offered the opportunity to discuss the future of EU-Central Asia relations.

Impact in society:

The project connects the SEnECA Research Network and the SEnECA Stakeholder Network with journalists, media and civil society actors that function as multipliers to promote the relevance of CA among EU citizens. To achieve impact and raise awareness for CA in the wider public, the SEnECA Communication Plan was developed to improve the communication on CA. Reaching out to the wider public was facilitated through SEnECA’s corporate identity and the fact that the project website is available in Russian and thus understandable for more recipients. In addition, a Policy Advice Training was conducted during the conference in Almaty and the workshop in Brussels. Along with mapping and analysing the current state of relations between CA and the EU and other world powers with interests in the region, SEnECA developed future priorities for the EU’s policies and recommendations for their implementation in the SEnECA Policy Roadmap. Nine “mapping papers” (SEnECA Policy papers phase 1) were set up describing the current relations between the five Central Asian states and the EU (on the supranational level but also on the national level), other Asian states and world powers such as Russia, the United States of America and China. The mapping process was conducted by a literature review and especially focused on political and security relations, economic and trade relations as well as relations in culture and civil society. Three “analysis papers” (SEnECA Policy papers phase 2) analyse the current state of both scientific cooperation between the EU and Central Asia, the EU’s Central Asian policy implementation and its perception in the region. Another “three policy papers” with recommendations on future priorities in scientific cooperation and the EU’s Central Asian policy implementation and its perception (SEnECA Policy papers phase 3) were published along with the new 2019 EU Strategy on Central Asia, based on earlier results from the phase 1 and 2. Beside a forecast on the EU – Central Asia relations in 2030, the three papers deliver an evaluation of the new EU strategy on CA providing specific recommendations for the implementation of the 2019 EU Strategy on CA along with a general reflection and assessment. The expertise given is mainly based on semi-structured interviews with partners from the network and a scorecard ranking, highlighting the most important tasks of the strategy. Each policy paper has been published open access (DOI with CC BY NC license) and promoted via SEnECA’s social media accounts and website (incl. easy accessible infographics). All SEnECA papers and deliverables are publicly accessible. Ultimately, 22 “blog posts” were authored by SEnECA members and published on various aspects of EU-Central Asia relations. All in all, SEnECA was successfully present in social media and gathered round about 1200 followers in total. In addition, numerous news articles were published on the website (16 in total), as well as 8 newsletters. The website presenting all project results reached over 125.000 views in 18 months. A special kind of outreach to the wider public was made with the organisation of the SEnECA Photo Exhibition in April 2019 at which 65 photos from “Daily lives in Central Asia” were presented at the Centre for Fine Arts “BOZAR” in Brussels – over 200 visitors attended the exhibition.
Progress beyond the state of the art, results until the end of the project and potential impacts (including the socio-economic impact and the wider societal implications of the project)

At the end of the two-year-project twelve consortium members from think tanks, universities and NGOS in Europe and all Central Asia republics have built their Trans-European and Central Asian network with research institutions in 41 European, Central Asian and other Asian countries. Altogether SEnECA created a wide bandwidth for working on the future of EU – Central Asia relations regarding the area of research, politics and society. Firstly, the Agenda for Future Research Cooperation representing a starting point for a long-lasting impact on collective research between the two regions. Secondly the recommendations given in the Policy Roadmap will help in implementing key aspects of the 2019 EU Central Asia Strategy. And thirdly, the Long-term Communication Strategy offers helpful guidance on communicating about and around CA.