

European Union Democracy Promotion in Central Asia

Implementation in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

The EU has made the area of democracy, human rights, rule of law and good governance a priority cooperation area under the framework of the EU Strategy towards Central Asia. The inclusion of strong normative elements into the Strategy was both due to the EU's commitment to democratic principles and the lack of democratisation progress in Central Asia.

This thesis examines two interrelated questions: To what extent has EU democracy promotion in Central Asia been successful, and why? Focusing on the implementation of EU democracy promotion instruments the thesis has made three original contributions. First, it adds to the existing research on democracy promotion mechanisms and provides a comprehensive analytical framework for evaluation of democracy promotion, inclusive of factors which may facilitate or impede democracy promotion in Central Asia. Second, this thesis demonstrates the validity of a holistic approach to analysing factors impeding democracy promotion. It acknowledges that a variety of diverse factors affect external democracy promotion and their impact can vary as international, regional and domestic conditions change.

Third, two original case studies were presented and analysed with taking into consideration relevant contextual conditions, which might affect the design, implementation and outcomes of EU democracy promotion. Case study approach offers a highly contextual solution to examining external democracy promotion. It allows for a depth of analysis and adds to the existing body of literature, which usually either focuses on individual democracy promotion projects or provides a shallow overview of EU activities in Central Asia. The thesis focused on the stable and wealthy authoritarian Kazakhstan and poorer Kyrgyzstan, which is prone to political instability but also to democratic openings. The case studies represented the country with more strategic importance for the EU (Kazakhstan) and the country with less strategic importance for the EU (Kyrgyzstan) in order to see how non normative interests interfere with normative interests

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In 1991, on the eve of the Gulf War, Belgian Foreign Minister Mark Eyskens gave an unflattering characteristic to the European Communities: "an economic giant, a political dwarf, and a military worm" (as cited in Whitney 1991, no pagination). His words became a declaration of a problem and, though unintentionally, were followed by more than two decades of intense activities aimed to harmonise the interests and policies of the EU member-states and to establish functional mechanisms to articulate, consolidate and pursue the EU interests worldwide.

In the course of more than 20 years the European Communities transformed into the European Union (EU), a unique international actor which consists of 28 member states and is characterised with a complex multi-dimensional governance system. The EU now has the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), an authorised official to speak on the behalf of the EU - High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR for FASP), and a foreign policy body - the European External Action Service (EEAS 2015a, no pagination). While the EU's external foreign policy might still lack effective implementation mechanisms and unity in decision making, one should admit that the EU is no longer a "political dwarf", but a regional power with a global ambition and a normative agenda. The EU's ability to assert political influence has proven itself in the ambitious enlargement rounds, but its capacity to impact the countries beyond its immediate borders remains limited. In this regard, EU efforts to promote democratic principles in Central Asia deserve particular attention as they take place in an unfamiliar and largely authoritarian region, which does not have any accession prospects.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union the five Central Asian republics, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan faced the daunting challenge of nation-building, state-building, drastic political and socio-economic reforming, and finding their niche in the international system. The Central Asian countries have gone different pathways in their pursuit of new statehood. Some of them chose a quick transition to market economy

and underwent the “shock therapy” reforms (Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan), while others preferred gradual and partial transition from command economy to market economy (Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) (Blackmon 2011, pp.15-28). Kyrgyzstan sought to integrate into the international community as much as possible and joined a variety of international organisations. Turkmenistan, on the other hand, declared “positive neutrality” and virtually abstained from participation in any globalisation processes or regional integration efforts (Kavalski 2010, pp.184-185).

Most of Central Asian countries declared their commitment to building democracy and incorporated such key democratic principles and institutions as separation of powers and regular elections into their constitutions. However, none of them can be considered free or democratic at the time of writing this thesis. The democratisation efforts vary from dynamic in Kyrgyzstan, scant in Uzbekistan, and non-existent in Turkmenistan.

Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan regularly find themselves at the bottom of international democratic ratings (Bertelsmann Transition Index 2015b; Freedom House 2015); Kazakhstan and Tajikistan are in a slightly better position, but still rated not free (Bertelsmann Transition Index 2015b; Freedom House 2015). Kyrgyzstan seems to display more willingness and effort to democratise but has not yet been able to build a sustainable or stable democratic system.

These processes were accompanied with an increasing involvement of external powers, who in one form or another attempted to get acquainted with the region, explore possibilities for cooperation, or even assist political change by promoting principles of Western liberal democracy. The EU has become one of the most visible external normative actors in the region.

1.1 EU Democracy Promotion in Central Asia: A Challenging Task in an Unfamiliar Region

In 2007, under the German Presidency, the Council of the EU issued a strategy towards Central Asia, which outlined seven priority areas of the EU’s bilateral and regional cooperation with Central Asia: human rights, rule

of law, good governance and democratisation, youth and education, economic development, trade and investment, energy and transport links, environmental sustainability and water, common threats and challenges, and, intercultural dialogue (Council of the EU 2007, no pagination). While Central Asian governments and the EU share an interest in some of these cooperation areas, democracy-related activities are often considered sensitive and challenging.

Due to historical and political circumstances democracy promotion has become an integral and almost obligatory component of EU foreign policy or, as it is often called, external action. The EU's creation and development have been closely interrelated with a set of values lying at the core of its identification. The values of human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law are attributed to the all-encompassing inheritance of Europe and serve as the normative foundation of the EU's existence (Treaty on the European Union 2012, Preamble, Art.2). In compliance with the Treaty on the European Union, the Union's external action should be guided by democratic principles (article 21, European Union 2012b). Democracy is seen as both an objective and a condition of meaningful cooperation with third countries (European Council 1991).

In Central Asia, EU efforts to promote democracy are conditioned with a variety of contributing motives. Firstly, the EU is driven by the general motive to foster liberal democracy in the world (Kotzian et al 2011, pp.995-996) and extend its normative power beyond its borders (Manners 2008, pp.570-571). As mentioned earlier, democracy lies at the core of the EU identification and promotion of this identity abroad is a natural progression of domestic democracy consolidation policy. Secondly, the European Security Strategy identifies the spread of democracy as a strategic foreign policy objective: "The best protection for our security is a world of well-governed democratic states" (European Council 2003, p.10). Thirdly, democracy is instrumentalised in development policy thanks to the wide-spread, yet contested, assumption that democracy facilitates development of a peaceful and prosperous international system. In this regard, the EU mainstreams democracy into its development policy (Schraeder 2002, pp.15-55). Finally, the EU's involvement in the region might also owe to non-normative

interests. Rich energy supplies of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan play a substantial role in the EU's motivation to engage in the region (Denison 2009, pp.5-7).

Democracy promotion in Central Asia has become a litmus test for the EU's capacity to assert influence beyond the immediate European neighbourhood. The EU has developed a range of instruments to promote democratic principles in third countries (Kotzian et al. 2011, p.997-1003), but the most effective ones are related to the prospects of membership in the EU. Since the EU cannot offer membership to the Central Asian states it has to rely on other instruments: positive conditionality instruments (e.g. development aid, closer cooperation, trade privileges); negative conditionality instruments (sanctions, critical statements); and, normative suasion through dialogue and persuasion (Schimmelfennig and Scholtz 2008; Warktosch 2008; Axyonova 2011; Axyonova 2014). EU democracy promotion in Central Asia is spread across various budget lines (the Development Cooperation Instrument - DCI; European Institute for Democracy and Human Rights - EIDHR), and is implemented by a variety of actors, including Brussels-based officials at the DCI and European External Action Service (EEAS), the EU Special Representative for Central Asia, and the EU Delegations to respective Central Asian states (Urdze 2011).

Despite the fact that the EU had invested certain efforts in supporting democracy in Central Asia, the EU's democracy promotion record remains uneven. There are two diverging views on the effectiveness and success of EU democracy promotion efforts in Central Asia and the line of disagreement lies between the policy makers and academic communities. On one hand, the European Commission' and Council's joint progress reports (2008, 2010, 2012) continuously emphasise positive advances in democracy promotion area. On the other hand, the majority of the existing research on the EU-Central Asian relations indicates that the EU democracy promotion progress has been uneven and weak (Matveeva 2006; Warkotsch 2011; Hoffman 2010; Axyonova 2011 and 2014). Monitoring data provided by third parties, international organisations such as the International Crisis Group and the Human Rights Watch, report a steady record of human rights violations, abuse of power, distorted justice, inequality and all-penetrative

corruption, demonstrate rather flawed democratic development in all five Central Asian republics (International Crisis Group 2010a, 2010b, 2012, 2013, and 2015; Freedom House 2015; Human Rights Watch 2015a and 2015b; Bertelsmann Transition Index 2015). While each Central Asian republic displays a unique political setting, varying degrees of freedom and openness, different extent of the observation of human rights, they share one important feature – none of them are democratic. The entire region is among the most authoritarian areas in the world (Boonstra 2015, no pagination). Under these circumstances, EU democracy promotion presents a curious case, which might provide certain insights into the broader field of democratisation studies, Central Asian studies and EU studies.

1.2 Research Aims and Objectives

This thesis analyses EU democracy promotion efforts in Central Asia under the framework of the EU's Strategy towards Central Asia 2007-2013 and in relation to its implementation in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. At that, it aims to reveal a holistic picture of the state of affairs on the ground taking into account the EU, local Kazakh, Kyrgyz and wider regional contexts. An analysis such as this makes an up-to-date empirical contribution linking the well-researched EU studies with the under-developed area of Central Asian studies through the lenses of democratisation and external democracy promotion studies. Based upon original interview data collected during a series of fieldwork research trips to Belgium, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and a wide range of secondary sources, the thesis addresses the underlying reasons behind the EU's involvement in Central Asia; discusses and evaluates EU democracy promotion policy and its implementation; examines local conditions in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan; and, identifies EU, domestic Kyrgyz and Kazakh, and wider regional factors which might impede a successful implementation of EU democracy promotion activities in a highly authoritarian setting like that of Central Asia.

In order to address the effectiveness of EU democracy promotion policy in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and the factors which might have impeded its implementation, I endeavour to find an answer to the following primary

research question: **To what extent has EU democracy promotion in Central Asia been successful, and why?** This research question helped establish the research design (discussed further in this chapter) and define the methods of data collection and analysis. The question was intentionally left open-ended to ensure a sufficiently large research frame for what is a genuinely big picture on the ground. However, in order to structure the research and narrow down the focus I have used a set of secondary questions:

What local contextual factors in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan might affect external democracy promotion?

How does the EU promote democratic principles in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan?

To what extent have EU democracy promotion mechanisms and instruments been used in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan?

How does broader regional environment affect EU democracy promotion in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan?

The thesis finds that EU democracy promotion has not been successful in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan due to three sets of factors. The first set of factors is the EU-related factors. As a democracy promotion agent, the EU often lacks political will, leverage and consistency in the implementation of democracy-related programming. In addition, the divergence and different prioritisation of normative and non-normative interests by various EU stakeholders makes the democracy promotion in Central Asia challenging. The second set of factors impeding EU democracy promotion in Central Asia is due to the political idiosyncrasies, the stability of the Kazakh authoritarianism and the general political instability in Kyrgyzstan, and other local factors. The last set of factors refers to the larger regional framework and the ongoing opposition of key regional powers – China and Russia, who are less than happy with what they consider a Western ideological intervention into their legitimate backyard.

The thesis has three main original contributions. First, it provides a thorough and tailored analytical framework for evaluation of democracy promotion and

factors which might impede democracy promotion in Central Asia. Second, two original case studies are presented and analysed with taking into consideration relevant contextual conditions which might affect the design, implementation and outcomes of EU democracy promotion. Third, this thesis demonstrates the validity of a holistic approach to analysing factors impeding democracy promotion. The existing research on EU democracy promotion in Central Asia often focuses only on one set of factors, usually either on the EU or on the local context, prioritising it over others. This research acknowledges that a variety of diverse factors affect external democracy promotion and their impact can vary as international, regional and domestic conditions change.

1.3 Research Design

In order to ensure a comprehensive answer to the stated research questions, I apply an iterative or circular research design. Two pre-conditions informed the choice of the iterative research design. Firstly, the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of the research topic required a holistic and reasonably flexible approach, which gives sufficient space to reflect upon discovered empirical data gathered during the data collection stage. Secondly, this design helps to address the lack of established research frameworks in this field of studies.

An iterative research approach does not seek to test a single theory. Instead, it allows for a thorough and open-minded exploration of various explanations of why the EU has or has not been successful in promoting democratic principles in Central Asia, and facilitates taking into account a broad range of factors which might impede democracy promotion in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

For the purposes of this research project I apply exclusively qualitative research. Semi-structured elite interviews, key treaties, policy documents and declarations are the core primary sources for analysis. In addition, this thesis builds its argument upon the existing research on EU as a democracy promotion agent, general Central Asian studies research, and

democratisation and external democracy promotion literature. EU democracy promotion in Central Asia is a recent political development, which has not yet been examined to its full potential. Nevertheless, there is an emerging body of literature, which focuses on various aspects of EU actions or inaction as a democracy promotion agent in Central Asia. Notable researchers include Vera Axyonova, Fabienne Bossuyt, and Alexander Warkotsch. In addition, the EU-Central Asia Monitoring Project (EUCAM) provided a broad range of empirically rich material and well-informed analysis.

In an attempt to strike a balance between depth of analysis and breadth of utilised data, the research uses a dual case study design focusing on EU democracy promotion in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan between 2007 and 2013. The period under examination corresponds with the timeframe of the ambitious EU's Strategy for Central Asia, which set the support to democracy, human rights, rule of law and good governance as one of the priority cooperation areas and provided the impetus to EU democracy promotion activities in the region (Council 2007). External democracy promotion involves a variety of actors and is informed by a multitude of factors. At the most basic level, an external democracy promotion case should involve at least two parties: a democracy promotion agent and a target country. In this research, the EU is analysed in its capacity of a democracy promotion agent in the two target countries – Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are two of the five post-Soviet Central Asian republics, which have emerged as sovereign actors in the international system in the immediate aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse. For more than 70 years, these countries were tightly integrated with Russia, and have virtually no historical record of interaction with external powers in the 20th century. In the 21st century, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan face an opportunity and a challenge to interact with numerous powers, some of which aim to get involved in their political and economic development, and assert influence over the region of Central Asia (Edwards 2003; Rumer et al 2007).

The governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan demonstrate varying degrees of, at least, formal declarative acceptance of the concepts of human rights, rule of law, good governance and democratisation. Generally, their declarations and legal acts indicate that they might share European values (see Kazakhstan's strategy paper "Path to Europe 2009-2011" issued in 2008, and the Constitutions of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan). However, the situation with democracy, human rights, and rule of law has not changed significantly since the Soviet time despite the adoption of liberal laws, democratic declarations and general openness to the "outer" world. Instead, the region remains largely authoritarian with the exception of Kyrgyzstan, where a degree of democracy does exist when compared to its immediate neighbours, though not as consolidated and liberal as compared to Europe. So, may one speak of a successful democracy promotion, promoted by such external actors as the EU, in Central Asia, and why has it been successful or unsuccessful? This research will attempt to provide possible answers and explanations. Upon completion, the research will represent an accessible account of explicit and hidden impediments to external democracy promotion projects in Central Asia, and as such, contribute to the general understanding of democracy promotion processes in post-authoritarian societies and hybrid regimes, and have practical value for those involved in democracy promotion efforts.

These two Central Asian countries were chosen as the case studies for the research project for several reasons. Kyrgyzstan represents a good case to demonstrate the EU's role and strategy in the light of the interplay between the normative mission and security interests. It is a poor country with security problems that might indirectly affect the EU: political instability, illegal migration, drug and human trafficking, porous borders, and proximity to centres of extremist activity. Therefore, democracy here is considered not only as an aim in itself, but also as a mean to facilitate domestic security and stability, and to contribute to regional and global security. Kazakhstan is the largest and richest Central Asian country and the principal hydrocarbon exporter from Central Asia with developed gas fields and substantial reserves of oil (Denison 2009, p.4). As such, Kazakhstan serves as a good case to demonstrate how prioritisation of non-political issues might affect

democracy promotion. Secondly, the overall context of the two countries is significantly different from each other and as such may contribute to a more holistic understanding of the region. Both countries are often labelled as hybrid regimes, political systems that combine elements of autocracy and democracy. However, if one imagines a scale of hybrid regimes stretching from authoritarianism to democracy, Kazakhstan is located closer to the authoritarian extreme, while Kyrgyzstan tends to fluctuate towards the democratic end of the scale. Kazakhstan is an authoritarian state with a stable economic and social situation thanks to the Caspian petro-wealth and gas, whereas Kyrgyzstan is one of the poorest Central Asian countries with an unstable political situation and prospects for further social unrest, but strong democratic tendencies (International Crisis Group 2010a). Third, despite significant differences in the economic and political setting, both countries share similar experiences of post-Soviet state-building and democracy-building. In addition, they share a common foreign policy feature: they are relatively open to cooperation with global and regional powers. Kazakhstan has once claimed its commitment to the European path of development (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, 2008), but in reality it adhered to a multi-vector foreign policy which refers to a pragmatic, interest-based policy aimed to maintain good relations with as many international actors as possible without any explicit prioritisation of strategic partnerships (Ipek 2007, p.1183). For the poorer Kyrgyzstan the multi-vector foreign policy is a matter of necessity. As a small low income landlocked country, Kyrgyzstan has to take the need to rely on external resources into consideration in its foreign policy decision making (Foreign Policy Concept of Kyrgyzstan 2007, no pagination). Given the considerable experience of cooperating with Europe, including joint efforts to consolidate democracy, there is a sufficient bulk of information for the analysis of the EU's democracy-related activities in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Despite covering various aspects of EU democracy promotion in Central Asia, official EU reports and research publications do not fully illustrate the complexity of pursuing ambitious goals in a challenging environment with limited resources and leverage in the democracy promoter's hands. Dry institutional narratives fail to reflect the intricate reality of continuous

challenges, competing perspectives of the involved institutional and individual actors, and hidden implications of EU activities on the ground. In addition, the relevant reports are often limited by the institutional constraints: they have to cover certain aspects and possibly ignore others. Academic publications, on the other hand, do not always have enough space to fully uncover the complicated topic. For this reason, the narratives of the officials and experts, who are directly or indirectly involved in EU democracy promotion in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan or in monitoring these activities, represent an invaluable source of information and complement the official narratives and research. In this regard, elite interviews offer useful means into getting a more sophisticated picture through various perspectives of the institutions and actors in question. In interviewing elites in relevant policy making, executive and expert circles, I opted for semi-structured interviews with flexible questions tailored to each group of interviewees. Semi-structured interviews are often used in elite interviewing and are instrumental for providing detail, depth, and insider's perspective at the same time allowing hypothesis testing (Leech 2002, p.665). As the next section demonstrates, the choice of semi-structured elite interviews proved to be useful for the research.

1.4 Data Collection

The data collection period began in July 2012 and was completed by June 2013. In total, 42 interviews were conducted during five fieldwork trips to three locations: two trips to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan; a trip to Astana, Kazakhstan; and, two trips to Brussels, Belgium. Interviewees can be divided into three key groups. The first, the largest and the most open group includes EU-related participants: Brussels-based staffers at the European External Action Service, the European Commission, and the European Parliament, as well as the EU officials working in Bishkek and Astana, at the EU Delegations and EU-funded projects. This group also includes several diplomats and clerks, who work in national representations of the EU member states in Brussels, in Central Asian units in the EU member states' foreign affairs ministries, and European diplomats in Central Asia. The

second, the smallest and the least open group includes relevant officials from Kyrgyz and Kazakh ministries, state agencies and other state bodies, as well as representatives of local political parties and civil society organisations. Finally, international European and local Central Asian experts and think tanks provided their invaluable contribution by sharing their professional opinions on various subjects related to EU democracy promotion in Central Asia.

The following criteria guided the selection of potential interviewees. Firstly, they needed to be directly or indirectly involved in EU democracy promotion activities in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (first group). Secondly, they had the capacity to comment on the national policies and interests on the ground and on the overall democratisation process in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (second group). Finally, to ensure an effective information cross-check and a variety of opinions, I included third parties – experts and think tanks, to the list of potential interviewees.

After a preliminary list of potential interviewees was completed, they were contacted through formal and informal channels. The mechanism of establishing a contact with each interviewee was informed by the accessibility considerations. The first group (EU-related participants) were contacted through formal channels, i.e. publicly available work phone numbers and emails. In the course of the research fieldwork trips to Astana, Bishkek and Brussels in 2012-2013 I interviewed a variety of officials working for the European Commission and its general directorates, namely the Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development and the Directorate General for Trade, the European External Action Service and its delegations to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and the European Parliament. I sought to learn their views and opinions on the effectiveness of the EU democracy promotion efforts in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and hear their story of why the EU democracy promotion has or has not been successful, and why. Prior to conducting interviews in 2013, I expected to see some differences in the opinions of the EU officials in Brussels and the EU Delegations in Astana and Bishkek. My expectations were based on an assumption that the officials dealing with democracy-related projects on the ground come into direct contact with the local context and see what policies I

and mechanisms do or do not work in the local setting. However, both Brussels-based and Central Asian-based EU officials were equally aware of the situation on the ground and expressed the views and opinions on the success of the EU democracy promotion initiatives in the region that fit into the official discourse expressed in joint progress reports. The difference was in some minor details: EU Delegations officials could comment more on the responsiveness of local partners or on technical peculiarities of delivering projects, while Brussels-based EU officials were more defensive when asked about cooperation and dialogue with authoritarian regimes.

The second group of interviewees - Central Asian officials, political and civil society activists were contacted through mixed means. In some cases, formal channels were sufficient to arrange a meeting, but proved to be time-consuming and less effective. I repeated the European Court of Auditors' selection of sources for interviews (ECA Report 2013), in order to carry out their review of the EU's development assistance to Central Asia. The auditors interviewed EU delegation staff, representatives of national authorities, Member States' embassies, technical experts, civil society organisations, other donors and stakeholders (ECA Report 2013, p.13). However, my capacity to access this selection of interviewees was limited with financial, time and bureaucratic constraints. In addition, the auditors examined 21 support programmes, both country specific and regional, and I examined 29 projects (17 in Kazakhstan and 12 in Kyrgyzstan) listed under the category of governance, democracy, human rights and support for economic and institutional reforms. Again, my access to the information on the projects was not as broad as the ECA's; I mostly used publicly available information on the projects and secondary sources.

1.5 Research Issues

I have not encountered any major problems that could have undermined the research stage, during the data collection period in Brussels, Bishkek and Astana. Thanks to careful preparatory arrangements the logistical aspects of the research trips went reasonably smooth in all three capitals. However, the data collection process encountered some issues in Central Asia. Most of

these issues were related to the sensitive nature of the research subject and individual anonymity and security concerns of interviewees from among civil servants.

In compliance with the University of Leeds Research Ethics Policy, interviewees were informed about the research aims and objectives and asked to sign consent forms before interviews could take place (see a sample consent form in Appendix A). The requirement to sign consent form has been slightly problematic for several participants. Civil servants felt uncomfortable signing a paper despite being provided with all related information and assurances that their participation was confidential and anonymous. The hesitant interviewees attributed their uneasy attitude to the consent form to a range of reasons. There was the fear of the unknown as civil servants in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are rarely approached by foreign researchers, who ask them to sign consent form, and the local researchers do not usually ask for any signatures. Secondly, they worried that a signature might give away their identity. Despite my best efforts to assure the potential participants that the signed consent forms will be stored in a secure place in Leeds, they emphasised that there might be factors or events out of my control, which might potentially make their signatures on the consent form exposed to the public. In order to address these fears and concerns, I informed my interviewees about the University Ethics Policy, assured them that the consent forms were needed to protect them, and explained the principles of confidentiality and anonymity. The fact that all interviewees, who agreed to meet, eventually did sign the consent forms and contributed to the research data collection, indicated that they were satisfied with my assurances. Nevertheless, there are legitimate reasons to believe that some interviewees were not entirely open and they had the right to do so given the less than safe political environment in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. I acknowledge their reluctance to speak openly and would like to ensure that this research does not undermine their personal safety or professional career. In order to ensure this I have anonymised all participants leaving only indications of their occupation and location (see the list of interviews in Appendix B).

Several civil servants and civil society representatives found it difficult to believe that I was a researcher and suspected that I was a journalist or a foreign agent seeking to promote a certain agenda. Woliver (2002, p.677) explains how she has experienced a certain bias from a group of her interviewees due to her affiliation with academia and a specific programme. I experienced a range of similar preconceptions from the part of my interviewees in civil service; after having learned that I come from a Western university and study democracy promotion they assumed my research is part of a Western ideological agenda. In most cases, I managed to convince the interviewees that my research is agenda-free and I am not paid by any interest groups. However, some of the prejudices regarding my affiliation were strong to the extent that some of the interviewees were not convinced I was a researcher.

Another issue was related to an unequal availability of sources. Due to the different levels of openness and access to the information in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, I was able to collect more data from Kyrgyzstan than from Kazakhstan. Despite my assurances of anonymity and confidentiality, I found it difficult to interview state officials in Kazakhstan as they felt insecure when asked democracy-related questions and could not fully trust me suspecting me to be an undercover journalist, who tried to expose them. Meanwhile, in Kyrgyzstan, state officials and civil society representatives were less suspicious and more willing to talk under the condition of anonymity. In addition, thanks to being a Kyrgyz citizen and having some personal and professional connections I managed to gain more trust and, as a result, more information from a wider variety of local civil servants and expert community. Having worked for judicial and parliamentary strengthening projects prior to starting this research project has enhanced the range of my professional contacts in Kyrgyzstan, who vouched for me and assisted with getting access to the interviewees. This slight imbalance in the availability of primary data in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan was tackled through using the method of triangulation, which also helped ensuring the validity of data and mitigating potential bias on the part of interviewed participants. I have cross-checked information through various sources and

filled in potential gaps in primary sources from Kazakhstan by using a wide range of relevant secondary sources.

Finally, there was an issue of less than explicit answers. While the majority of interviews were largely informative and the interviewees were quite generous about sharing their knowledge and opinions, sometimes they were reluctant to comment explicitly on sensitive issues such as the state of democracy in Kazakhstan or potential implications of conducting political dialogue with undemocratic regimes. The EU officials often repeated the official institutional narratives without adding too much to what I have already discovered during the preparation stage. Nevertheless, this reluctance to discuss these sensitive issues and their reaction to specific questions can be interpreted as an evidence.

In all cases, I invested a significant amount of effort and time to establish a good professional rapport. This was achieved through a variety of measures such as being particularly open and honest about the research purposes and my funding; being humble about my limited prior knowledge of the subject; showing appreciation of the time the interviewees agreed to spend to speak to me; and, ensuring confidence and comfort of interviewees (Leech 2002, p.665). The outcome of this investment was rewarding. In the course of the fieldwork trips, I had a unique opportunity to get acquainted with the opinions of various local stakeholders and observers, who had varying degrees of knowledge of and involvement in the EU democracy promotion activities on the ground. The richness of fieldwork materials helped successfully implement the iterative research cycle and explain a holistic picture of the existing situation on the ground.

1.6 Thesis Structure and Final Remarks

EU democracy promotion beyond its immediate neighbourhood is a fertile ground for research as it presents a relatively recent and underexplored area with rich empirical material. The implementation of EU democracy promotion in Central Asia can be analysed through a variety of approaches and tools. This thesis concentrates on the success of the EU democracy promotion

policy under the framework of the EU's Strategy towards Central Asia 2007-2013 and seeks to understand what factors might have impeded its successful implementation in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In other words, the thesis investigates to what extent the EU democracy promotion has been successful, and why. In order to address this question, this thesis identifies and analyses the key stakeholders in the process: the EU as a democracy promotion agent; Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan as target countries; and, wider regional environment, where EU democracy promotion takes place. It discusses and evaluates EU democracy promotion policy and its implementation and examines the factors, which might have impeded, distorted or undermined the EU efforts to promote democracy in Central Asia. In order to do so, the thesis is structured as follows.

Chapter two reviews the literature on democratisation, external democracy promotion, the EU and Central Asia. There is a shared view within the limited circle of academics, who has researched EU-Central Asian relations (e.g. Vera Axyonova and Alexander Warkotsch), that EU democracy promotion efforts have been unsuccessful, and the fault is often placed either on the EU as a half-hearted democracy promotion agent, or Central Asia as an unwelcoming for democracy soil. However, there is an important gap, which this thesis attempts to fill in. EU democracy promotion is a multi-faceted process with a variety of explicit and hidden actors and shaping factors, which intersect, collide, converge, and change on a regular basis. In order to identify and explain these actors and factors, it is necessary to employ a variety of tools. The democratisation and democracy promotion literature offers a variety of approaches and analytical tools, which could be instrumental in addressing the issue of EU democracy promotion in Central Asia. The EU as a democracy promotion agent has been under the spotlight of the democratisation studies research over the last decade. However, the researchers in this field mostly focused on EU democracy promotion in its immediate neighbourhood, where accession mechanisms could be applied. The EU's engagement in Central Asia, a former Soviet region experiencing an authoritarianism renaissance, is a recent academic interest, which emerged in the course of the implementation of the EU's Strategy towards Central Asia.

Chapter three serves to explain the local context, existing socio-political and economic conditions in the two case study countries, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Understanding the local contextual background and its differences in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan is crucial for understanding what external democracy promotion agents such as the EU face when striving to promote democracy abroad.

Chapter four examines EU efforts to promote democratic principles and norms under the framework of the EU Strategy towards Central Asia. In this chapter, I investigate the EU's actors and their objectives in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan; map the EU legal and normative framework in relation to its external democracy promotion policies; and, focus on specific projects and activities aimed to promote democracy in Kazakhstan in Kyrgyzstan.

Chapter five presents an analytical part of the thesis, which aims to answer the first part of the primary research question: To what extent has the EU democracy promotion been successful? For this purpose, I analyse the existing evaluation of EU democracy promotion policies and test it against the primary and secondary data I collected. In addition, I develop a set of evaluation criteria to see whether the democracy promotion objectives as set by the EU-CA Strategy have actually been met.

Chapter six makes the use of the existing literature, original interview data and other sources to identify and explore the range of factors impeding EU democracy promotion. It employs a three-dimensional structure to analyse how local contextual conditions, EU-related factors and broader regional setting affect EU democracy promotion efforts in the target countries. In doing so, the chapter addresses the second part of the primary research question: Why EU democracy promotion has (or has not) been successful.

Chapter seven summarises the key findings and arguments of the research and discusses venues for future research and policy implications based upon the implementation outcomes of EU democracy promotion activities in 2007-2013.

Chapter 2

External Democracy Promotion: Promoters and Targets

2.1 Introduction

There are several researchers in the English-speaking academia, who directly addressed the topic of EU democracy promotion in Central Asia. One of them is Vera Axyonova, whose most recent book examines EU democracy promotion in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan at its micro level (Axyonova 2014). Publications by Warkotsch (2011, 2008), Hoffmann (2010), Crawford (2008), Fabienne Bossuyt and Paul Kubicek (Bossuyt and Kubicek 2011, 2015), and few others provide certain insights and helpful directions for further research. The Europe-Central Asia Monitoring Programme, a joint project by *Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior* (FRIDE; Madrid) and the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS; Brussels), presents another valuable source of relevant discussion and analysis on the topic, but from a slightly different policy-relevant angle (EUCAM 2015). However, the overwhelming majority of relevant publications are limited in scope and are able to only partially cover such a complex and multidimensional issue as EU democracy promotion in Central Asia.

In order to support the scarce research on EU democracy promotion in Central Asia, this thesis aggregates the existing fragmented publications on EU democracy promotion in Central Asia, and makes use of the original primary data collected for this research project in 2012-2013. This thesis provides an in-depth detailed analysis of EU democracy promotion through the examination of three key dimensions - EU dimension, local contextual dimension, and the broader regional setting. Before embarking upon this task, it is important to explore the existing research in the field.

Due to the limited amount of publications on the topic, this chapter identifies and maps three broader areas of research, which serve as the foundation of this thesis, namely Democratisation Studies, EU Studies, and Central Asian

Studies. Bearing in mind the research question, the basics in the three areas will be discussed with the primary focus on the selected issues and debates. This will help unravel the case of EU democracy promotion in Central Asia and make sense of the primary data in subsequent analytical and empirical chapters. Therefore this chapter is structured into three sections, each addressing a relevant area of research. The first section is devoted to the largest of all three areas, Democratisation Studies. Prolific authors and heated intellectual debates are abundant in Democratisation Studies. For this reason it is particularly difficult to navigate through this theoretically and empirically rich body of research. Nevertheless, using the thesis objectives and research questions as guides, key concepts, issues and debates will be discussed including definitions of democracy, the interplay between democracy, stability and development, democratisation processes, the external dimension of democratisation, external democracy promotion, and, democratisation and democracy promotion in post-communist countries. The second section explores the EU in its capacity of a global democracy promoter. The focus will therefore be upon examining the EU concept of democracy, its developmental approach to democracy promotion, and the normative vs. realist debate with regard to the EU's motivation to promote democracy abroad. In addition, the most relevant publications on EU democracy promotion in Central Asia seek to examine the Central Asian political landscape and identify local contextual factors, which might be useful for understanding the two case study countries – Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The Central Asian Studies currently recovers after a major disruption in the academic research during the Soviet era. While there is a plethora of publications on Central Asia, only a section of them fits into the scope of this thesis. For this reason, I concentrate on the existing research publications that are capable of explaining the local political landscape in Central Asia. In particular, I focus the research on historical legacy, socio-economic and political context, as well as academic publications on regime stability and security.

2.2 Democratisation Studies

Democracy is the world's new universal religion.

Paul Corcoran (1983, p.15)

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the collapse of the Soviet Union and formal acceptance of democratic principles in post-communist countries fuelled a triumphant mood among Western academic and policy making circles as liberal democracy was deemed “one competitor standing in the ring as an ideology of potentially universal validity” (Fukuyama 2006, p.42). As the third wave of democratisation (Huntington 1991) seemingly overwhelmed the vast landmass of formerly Soviet Eurasia, an increasing number of state, non-state and transnational democracy promotion agents flooded the democracy promotion area having created a formidable field within the development aid sector (Carothers 2007). Major donors, including developed countries and the United Nations (UN), sought to mainstream democracy and the related principles of good governance, rule of law and human rights into their development assistance agendas. Although, the short-term record of these endeavours is uneven as the externally supported democratisation processes evolved into different forms in different countries.

This wealth of empirical data provided an impetus to the already thriving field of research on the external democracy promotion. This section focuses on the relevant concepts and issues, which are instrumental for understanding EU democracy promotion in Central Asia. Initially, it outlines the concept of procedural democracy, which is a popular concept amongst policy making circles involved in external democracy promotion. Afterwards, I explore relevant academic debates on the interplays between democracy and development, development and stability, values and interests of democracy promoters, and touch upon the opposite trend to democracy promotion – autocracy promotion.

While external democracy promotion is a relatively recent phenomenon democracy is probably one of the most contested concepts in the history of social sciences, which has been examined “from every conceivable angle for over twenty-five centuries” (Whitehead 2002). Before proceeding to an overview of external democracy promotion drivers, mechanisms and I

possible outcomes, it is important to establish some key features of democracy and its intrinsic value for external democracy promotion.

Procedural democracy

Procedural democracy refers to the type of democracy favoured by most by practitioners as it is more straightforward and benchmark-able. Procedural democracy traces its roots back to Joseph Schumpeter's classical theory, which defines democracy as an "institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote" (Schumpeter 1942, p.269). Robert Dahl (1973, pp.2-3) suggested a very similar definition of democracy or "*polyarchy*" to describe Western political systems as continuous processes characterised by dimensions of rights and freedoms that ensure citizens' participation in political decision making. Samuel Huntington was also a strong advocate of procedural-institutional democracy. He suggested that having consolidated procedures and institutions was crucial to channel the shifts in values and expectations generated by modernisation, an inevitable companion of development (Huntington 1968, p.32).

Adherents of procedural democracy usually offer a minimal set of achievable standards to classify a political system as a democracy because "fuzzy norms do not yield useful analysis" (Huntington 1991, p.9). Such pragmatic approach to defining democracy remains quite appealing to democracy promotion agents as the key elements of procedural democracy – elections, separation of powers, participation in political life, pluralism, and citizen rights and freedoms are easier to convert into policy objectives. It is important to acknowledge that the conception of democracy is a highly debated topic and there are as many definitions of democracy as there are writers on democracy. For the purposes of this thesis, it is reasonable to accept that the conventional democracy promotion implies the promotion of procedural liberal democracy.

Democracy, Development and Stability Debate

The inter-relationship between democracy, development and stability is another interesting contested issue within the Democratisation Studies field. It is possible to mark out four academic opinions in this debate (Carothers and de Gramont 2013, p.3). The democracy-first opinion views democratic governance as a vital condition for socio-economic development. The advocates of this opinion base their argument on the positive economic performance of democracies as compared to non-democracies and argue that a well-functioning political system facilitates economic development (Siegle et al. 2004). The development-first opinion suggests that a transition to and consolidation of democracy requires a set of socio-economic conditions in place. A most notable representative of the development-first camp is Seymour Lipset, who argued that socio-economic development facilitates democracy through factors such as urbanisation, literacy, mass media, and industrialisation, which produce a social structure conducive to democratisation (Lipset 1959, p.82). Lipset insisted that a democratic political system requires a certain level of modernisation. More recent studies discovered that the democracy-first approach can be detrimental to economic development as premature democracies slow economic growth and affect stability (Sirowy and Inkeles 1990, p.129).

The third opinion on the interplay of democracy and development finds itself somewhere in between emphasising both political and socio-economic aspects of development. Thus, Linz and Stepan (1996, pp.7-12) list various factors, which are vital for successful democratic transitions, including macro-level statehood, prior regime type, actors (especially, the leadership, who manages a transition), and contextual (political economy, legal context, and international influences). Finally, Bueno de Mesquita and Downs using the examples of China and Russia indicated that the link between democracy and economic development is very weak. In their opinion, economic growth does not necessarily lead to democracy. Much to the opposite, the gains of economic growth are likely to be used to oppress political opposition, deter democratic change and sustain existing authoritarian regime (Bueno de Mesquita and Downs 2005, p.78). In addition to this the democratic transition might actually threaten political stability as it

requires a drastic transformation of pre-existing order. Drastic transformation contains latent threats to societal stability.

Interests vs. Norms in Democracy Promotion

While the interrelations between democracy, development and stability focus mostly on the recipient end of democracy promotion, the debate on normative and interest-based drivers behind external democracy promotion addresses the motivation of democracy promotion agents. Here, the debate involves two opinions, which are reasonably clear and visibly different in theory, but much less so in practical terms. The rationalist approaches emphasise the instrumental nature of external democracy promotion and its importance for the pursuit of security and business interests of donors. Normative approaches highlight democracy as a universal value and suggest that democracy promotion is a normative duty of established democracies.

Rationalist approaches to democracy promotion view the latter as a foreign policy instrument designed to pursue national interests of developed democratic states. During the Cold War, democracy promotion often implied regime change in pro-Communist countries. It was seen as a geopolitical tool for the ideological containment policy. As an outcome, the United States have developed a conviction that the nature of political regimes in third countries have direct effects on United States security. Democracy promotion has become an important tool of political engagement with friendly governments in third countries. Democracy and development were valuable as a way to bolster political goals and prevent the spread of Communism in the world (Carothers 2009, p.16).

Nowadays, this motivation pattern is less popular against the background of the Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns, which have undermined the image of the US democracy promotion (Carothers 2007, p.114). The democratic peace logic has a more lasting effect on the motivation dynamics for democracy promoters. According to this logic, democracy promotion agents engage in democracy promotion abroad as the ruling elites believe in the utilitarian nature of democracy promotion, i.e. that in the long-term,

promoting liberal democratic principles abroad will facilitate more peace and cooperation thus creating a secure international environment with less structural pressures on the state. However, democracy comes second to immediate security considerations. Democracy can be promoted only if it does not have negative effects on national security. If more urgent security issues arise, democracy promotion assumes secondary importance (Peceny 1999, Schweller 2000).

Alternatively, liberal theorists view democracy promotion as instrumental to maximise welfare gains and ensuring economic benefits for private actors (Moravcsik 1997, pp.528-530). Economic cost-benefit analysis determines foreign policy choices and requires the liberal democratic state to support its sub-state commercial actors abroad by creating favourable conditions for their business in third countries. For this reason, the utilitarian importance of external democracy promotion varies from country to country and depends on a variety of structural factors (Ikenberry 1999). If a democracy promoting state does not have any substantial interests in a third country, it is unlikely to put a significant amount of effort and resources to promote democracy in this country.

Normative approach to democracy promotion argues that democracy represents a universal positive value for humanity, and serves the interests of the majority in a society (Dahl 1998, pp.44-61). This assumption grounds itself on normative and institutional logic. The normative logic implies that political elites internalise liberal democratic values and act on their basis whenever possible. Accordingly, democratic leaders prefer non-violent resolution of conflicts and seek cooperation with other democratic leaders (Doyle 1997, pp.4-7; Maoz and Russett 1993, p.31). The institutional logic relies on the social groups, who would oppose war and pressure their leader into non-violent conflict resolution through democratically elected and accountable institutions (Lake 1992, p.25; Owen 1997, p.42). Dahl uses empirical evidence of the post-World War II reality to prove that democracies do not fight each other. In particular, he states that 'of thirty-four international wars between 1945 and 1989 none occurred among democratic countries' (Dahl 1998, p.57).

Utilitarian explanations bring analysis to the level of individual citizens, who are uninterested in wars because wars endanger their lives and welfare. Under democratic governance, individual citizens are empowered in policy and decision making, and theoretically, they are more likely to push their governments to seek peace in potential conflict situations (Rummel, 1983). A broader view of democracy presupposes that democratic development of countries entails closer economic cooperation among them. Close economic cooperation has spill-over effects on political cooperation, and make wars unlikely as they may affect both political and economic cooperation among states (Mansfield, 2002; Russett and Oneal 2001). As the normative approaches to democracy promotion evolved, a new argument developed in the field. This argument goes beyond seeing democracy as an international norm and extends this logic to external democracy promotion. In this regard, developed democracies have a moral obligation to support democratisation processes in other countries (McFaul 2005).

The normative vs interest-based motivation debate has significantly affected the research trends in EU studies as well. As further discussion in this chapter will demonstrate the EU studies have an on-going debate between normative theorists and structural realists.

Political and Developmental Approaches to Democracy Promotion

Having discussed the reasons behind external democracy promotion it would be reasonable to focus on implementation of democracy-related projects. It is possible to distinguish between two approaches to democracy promotion: political and developmental (Carothers 2009). The key difference between these two approaches is how they view the value of democracy in providing democracy assistance.

The political approach views democracy as “a positive value in itself” (Carothers 2009, p.7), and employs the Dahlian concept of democracy. The essence of democracy assistance for adherents of the political approach is promoting fair elections, ensuring civil and political rights, and, sometimes, supporting the establishment and consolidation of such institutional features as a diverse parliament or an independent judiciary. The political approach

might adopt confrontational forms if the government of the host country is both oppressive and non-cooperative. However, democracy promoters might be less assertive if an oppressive regime shows support to their interests (Carothers 2009, p.7). The developmental approach attributes a secondary role to democracy and sees the value of democracy in its capacity to facilitate favourable conditions for social and economic development.

The developmental approach views democratisation as a slow and gradual process that requires a set of socio-economic prerequisites. The developmental approach aims to introduce democratic principles and practices through mainstreaming them into the general development assistance agenda in target countries. It applies indirect methods of democracy promotion and rarely involves any sort of confrontation with the host government (Carothers 2009, pp.8-9). In most cases, democracy promotion that follows the development-first logic is implemented through indirect technical assistance projects.

While the complexity of the real world does not allow for the existence of these approaches in their pure forms, Carothers notes that the US democracy promotion represents a politically-driven top-down approach and is capable of challenging the host government by supporting opposition or encouraging free mass media and civil society organisations (Carothers 2009, p.14). The EU approach is mostly developmental with the focus on promoting social and economic development with inclusion of democratic norms and processes (Del Biondo 2011).

Mechanisms of Democracy Promotion

Moving from the policy-level to the implementation level, it is important to discuss the research on mechanisms of external democracy promotion. Here, the literature is diverse and more empirically grounded, which can be particularly useful for this research on EU democracy promotion. From the evidence provided by democracy promotion mechanisms it is possible to identify several key mechanisms.

Diffusion of democratic norms through certain channels (transmission of democratic principles across borders in a geographic neighbourhood) is an unintended mechanism, which consequently requires little effort and investment (Brinks and Coppedge 2006; Rogers 2003, p.5). Here specific mechanisms diverge slightly. Pevehouse argues that membership in regional organisations with an established democratic tradition increases the chances of a democratic regime change in participating countries (Pevehouse 2002). Starr and Lindborg highlight global, regional and neighbourhood effects of democratisation. The location in a largely democratic neighbourhood has a capacity to contribute to non-democratic countries to pursue democratic change (Starr and Lindborg 2003). Brinks and Coppedge (2006) trace the neighbour emulation within the US and its effects on neighbouring countries, which tend to follow the direction in which the majority of other countries in the region. The latter finding is important for this research as it might explain the different patterns of democratisation dynamics in the immediate EU neighbourhood and the Central Asian neighbourhood.

If diffusion does not require any deliberate effort to induce democratic changes, democracy promotion by force not only requires a significant amount of effort, but also political will, resources and sufficient legitimisation. Based upon the principles of liberal interventionism this mechanism often takes the form of military intervention that aims to forcibly remove an oppressive regime and create initial conditions for democratisation process. While policy makers may use it as a last resort in democracy promotion, it is generally assumed that it is not particularly effective (Pickering and Peceny 2006, pp.555-556) because it involves both domestic and international controversy.

Other mechanisms of democracy promotion such as democracy support, strategic calculation, and normative suasion lie in between the unintended diffusion and the military intervention. Democracy support or democracy assistance refers to projects on human rights, civic education, electoral assistance, legal reforms, and support to independent mass media and civil society organisations. The democracy assistance mechanism aims to create

the socio-political conditions conducive to democratic transition (Carothers 2007; Levitsky and Way 2010, p.39).

Strategic calculation presents a non-violent mechanism based upon the costs and benefits analysis logic employed by the recipient. Strategic calculation usually refers to positive and negative conditionality. Positive conditionality involves linking incentives to the recipient's acceptance of democratic standards and principles. Negative conditionality penalises non-compliance with the democratic standards and principles promoted by democracy promoter through sanctions (Schimmelfennig and Scholtz 2008, pp.188-196; Schimmelfennig 2005, pp.827-860). Despite the popularity of conditionality as a democracy promotion mechanism, there are concerns that recipients or target countries do not fully engage in cost and benefit analysis or are not sufficiently interested in "carrots and sticks".

Checkel and Warkotsch argue in favour of normative suasion as a more sustainable and lasting democracy promotion mechanism. Normative suasion involves a continuous process of argumentation, otherwise known as international socialisation, between the socialiser (democracy promotion agent; donor) and the target country, where the former attempts convincing the latter that democratic change is a right thing to do (Checkel 2005; Warkotsch 2008). Proponents of normative suasion insist that the transfer of norms and values through international socialisation is more reliable as the norms and values are actively discussed and contested, learnt and internalised, i.e. genuinely adopted by the recipient (Risse and Sikkink 1999, pp.6-11). To what extent this is possible remains questionable and will be tested through the case of EU democracy promotion in Central Asia.

Autocracy Promotion

Autocracy promotion is not a primary focus of this thesis, but it presents an alternative process, which might explain the peculiarities of the democratisation process in Central Asia.

After two decades of proliferation of democracy promotion agents, policies and activities, researchers in the field noted an actual decline in liberal

democracy around the world. This “backlash against democracy” was characterised with the spreading view of democracy promotion as Western interventionism amongst recipient countries, the closure or limitation of the activities of democracy promotion agents, and the re-assertion of authoritarian regimes (Carothers 2006, pp.59-62; Burnell and Schlumberger 2010). Autocracy promotion literature builds upon a complex empirical evidence of the recent decades. However, unlike democracy promotion literature, autocracy promotion literature is rather immature and offers counter-intuitive (Borzel 2015, p.519) findings, which, nevertheless, may explain both the backlash against democracy and the uneven record of external democracy promotion in the former Soviet Union.

While this is an area under-researched, there are academic efforts to identify key concepts, issues and ideas. In particular, researchers attempt to identify autocracy promotion agents, who can be divided into two groups. The state promoters of autocracy include China and Russia as “main suspects”, and Iran, Cuba, and Venezuela under President Chavez as a “supporting cast” (Burnell 2010, pp.1-2). Given the small number of states and organisation, who occasionally oppose Western democracy promotion, it is difficult to speak of a concerted action against democracy promotion.

In addition, researchers attempt to analyse the motivation behind autocracy promotion. The motives can be normative: autocracies need to multiply the specific political regime in order to increase their legitimacy (Börzel and Risse 2012). Alternatively there are structural explanations, within the political economic perspective, which explains the autocracy promotion dynamics with a shared economic culture that facilitates economic cooperation between autocracies. However, these conclusions are presented with caution: the issue of stability is important and established autocracies would endorse other autocracies in their region only if this does not affect their stability, security or economic interests (Bader et al 2010).

Similarly to democracy promotion, researchers identify and describe the mechanisms of autocracy promotion, which can take both unintentional and deliberate forms. Unintentional form usually implies transmission of norms through diffusion or contagion, through the power of example (Burnell 2010,

pp.7-8). Jackson outlines the economic links and soft power mechanisms as an indirect method to divert Western ties and reduce the European incentives offered to local leaders, trade cooperation, and broadening access to the European market, norms and values, education etc. In addition to these mechanisms, authoritarian agents of influence can offer autocratic socialisation through multilateral and bilateral channels.

However, the most solid research in this sub-field seems to focus upon typology and analysis of authoritarian regimes. Levitsky and Way offer an insightful analysis on competitive authoritarianism and its resilience against democracy promotion. Given the fact that the prior regime types in Central Asia were authoritarian, it makes sense to take their findings and apply them to the Central Asian setting. Competitive authoritarianism is a regime, which combines authoritarian practices with democratic institutions, and is based upon the ruling party strength, state's coercive capacity, and state control over wealth (Way 2010).

Democracy Promotion vs. Autocracy Promotion?

Most importantly, one needs to take into account the fact that democracy promotion and autocracy promotion do not occur in an isolated space. More often than not, they are parallel or confront each other. These areas of confrontation are diverse and are often located where democracy promoters and autocracy promoters have overlapping areas of influence. In this regard, Bliesemann de Guevara's (2008, pp.365-368) research on contested sites for nodes of governance might offer powerful insights. Contested sites theory suggests the regions, where different nodes of governance and different sets of norms compete to win the hearts and minds of transition regimes. Global powers of the USA, Russia, China and the EU bring their vision of development and governance or offer their respective sets of norms to be accepted and internalised by recipients (Lewis 2010).

Similar logic can be traced in Deyermond's theory of *Matrioshka* hegemony. Deyermond offers a flexible analytical framework to comprehend the variety of actors and their strategies in a contested site. Deyermond argues that different international actors and their strategies can be accommodated together and co-exist creating a multi-level regional hegemony (Deyermond

2009). In that case, none of the democracy and autocracy promoters possess an undisputed and permanent dominant position in any area of the world beyond their borders. Instead, they engage in a variety of great and small games, where the rules and players transform and change as the games progress.

Finally, an important aspect when addressing the democracy promotion and autocracy promotion interplay is that the reality of democracy promotion and autocracy promotion dynamics are far from being clear-cut, black-and-white, good-vs-bad patterns. To the opposite, Borzel discovered that Western democracies do not consistently commit themselves to democracy promotion; just like authoritarian regimes, their primary concerns are stability and security, and exportation of norms comes second. Alternatively the authoritarian regimes do not always pursue autocracy promotion. They rather pick and choose the specific cases, where they feel the need to counter Western democracy promotion efforts in order to protect their political and economic interests. Democratisation and democracy promotion studies, alongside the emerging field of autocracy promotion studies, tend to overestimate external dimensions of democratisation. The local actorness and ownership of democratisation or consolidation of authoritarianism still play a decisive role (Borzel 2015, pp.521-525).

Democratisation studies offer a rich pool of old and new research, which would be important within this research. However, due to scope limitations, it is only possible to address a select number of issues, debates and ideas, which will be instrumental in addressing the research question: To what extent has EU democracy promotion been successful and why? The literature reviewed in this section was more general, and the specific nature of the democracy promoter in this thesis (the EU) and the target countries (Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in Central Asia) requires a more tailored review of the existing research. For this reason, the next two sections will address the EU as a democracy promotion agent, and Central Asia as one of the areas of the world where democracy is being promoted.

2.3 European Union Studies

The European Union has evolved from a narrow cooperation project, the European Coal and Steel Community to a complex organisation with a broad range of common policy areas and growing governance system. The integration processes within the EU have reached the point where the Union actively pursues Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and has a spokesperson for the united external action. The EU's international role and identity attracts particular attention of researchers, and forms a "growth area" in the EU studies field (Rogers 2009, p.832). Studies on the EU's international role and identity provides insights into its democracy promotion policy because the role and identity may inform the EU's motivation to promote democracy abroad, and shape what and how the EU projects abroad as its values.

It is possible to distinguish between two broad theoretical approaches that attempt to explain the EU's international role, identity and motivation to promote democracy abroad: liberal democratic idealism, and realism. Liberal democratic idealism refers to several debates and issues, which characterise the EU as a distinct civilian and/or normative power and singular international actor pursuing the mission of promoting democratic peace and prosperity in the world through non-violent means (Duchene 1972, 1973; Manners 2002, 2006; Youngs 2001). Realism in its different variations is represented by authors who argue that EU politics still revolves around states and interests, primarily survival interest, and its reliance on non-military means is conditioned by the mere lack of military capacities (Bull 1982, 1983; Hyde -Price 2006).

Duchene vs. Bull Debate

In the 1970s, Francois Duchene introduced his vision of the European Community (European Union) as a distinct civilian power and an alternative to the military superpowers of the time, the USA and the USSR. Duchene emphasised the unique nature of the European Community, "a new animal among the larger beasts" (1973, p.7). He argued that Europe was the first contemporary international actor to exert influence by the means of

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economic and political power rather than by military means (Duchene 1972, p.19). Duchene suggested the unity of the European Community and pooling efforts and resources of its member states was crucial for the consolidation of the Europe's role in international affairs. He was convinced that thanks to Europe's population, economic performance and joint capital "the Community's potential is an impressive even by super-power standards" (Duchene 1973, p.2).

Civilian power includes three key features: economic power as the primary mean to achieve national goals, the primacy of diplomacy in settling international disputes, and, reliance on legally-binding supranational institutions (Twitchett and Maull in Manners 2002, p.237). Civilian concept is both descriptive, as it characterises the EU's specific foreign policy and prescriptive, as it provides recommendations and a vision of a desirable policy. Civilian power is about values and process and has a two-fold fundament: the EU's being, political essence, and the EU's doing, external action (Nicolaidis and Howse 2002, pp.770-771). The "civilian power Europe" argument has served to deflate the supremacy of military power and state-centric approach in international system, i.e. the current dominant realist approach to international relations theory. However, champions of realism have never given up their stand in this battle of ideas.

In the 1980s, Hedley Bull contested the concept of progressive civilian power. Bull argued that the European civilian power relied upon and strongly depended on the military power of European states and its strategic ally, the USA (Bull 1983). Under the framework of the Cold War and the Soviet threat, Europe had two options to survive: ally with the US, or rely on its own resources, and the latter was hardly possible with the "civilian" power (Bull 1983, p.877). Bull noted that the European foreign policy's reliance on "civilian" power and lack of purely European military instrumentalities "will make only a limited impression on the rest of the world, and leave the European allies still with no alternative to following in the wake of the United States, where matters involving peace and war are concerned" (Bull 1983, p.880).

Duchene's and Bull's debate developed under the overarching conditions of the Cold war. The military vs. civilian power debate was strongly informed by such phenomena of the time as bloc logic, hard-headed realism and the state-centred practice of international relations. With the collapse of the USSR and the end of the Cold war the international system had undergone significant transformations that included the elimination of bloc logic, the short-term triumph of liberalism, and hopes for democratic peace (Fukuyama 1989), alongside the diversification of global actors with non-state entities. Academia reflected this transformation in a burst of new and revival of old debates on power, sovereignty and international roles played by different actors.

Manners vs. Hyde-Price Debate

With the significant post-Cold war changes of the EU's structure and operation, the debate between liberal democratic idealist and realists visions of Europe has gained new impetus. In 2002, Ian Manners presented his vision of the European Union "as a promoter of norms which displace the state as the centre of concern" (2002, p.236). He suggested shifting the focus of the academic discourse from state-like features of the EU to its normative power of ideational nature. Manners identified the hierarchy of norms that constitute the fundamental basis of the EU laws and policies. The top five core norms included peace, liberty, democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Minor norms included social solidarity, anti-discrimination, sustainable development, and good governance (Manners 2002, p.242). These norms penetrate the legal framework of the Union, and can be traced in official publications, statements, and speeches of the EU officials.

Manners marked out several ways by which the EU norms are diffused among other political actors. Contagion implies an unintended diffusion of ideas, while informational diffusion results from the deliberate strategic communication. Procedural diffusion transfers the EU's norms through institutionalised relationships between the EU and a third party. Transference of norms takes place when the EU exchanges material goods

or assistance/aid with third parties. A notable example of such diffusion of norms is conditional assistance to developing countries: a beneficiary country receives assistance only if it makes a feasible effort to adjust its domestic policy or legislation to the norms of the donor. Overt diffusion stems from the presence of the EU in third states, Commission delegations and the EU member-states' embassies. The last, factor of norm diffusion is a cultural filter, which affects the formation and diffusion of international norms (Manners 2002, pp.244-245).

The normative power Europe concept has been criticised on several grounds. Thomas Diez (2005) criticised it for the lack of originality, and referred to a very similar concept of civilian power proposed by Francois Duchene in 1970s. Helene Sjursen (2006) criticised the normative power of European theory for a lack of an unequivocal method of analysis.

However, the most substantive criticism of the normative power Europe concept came from the realist school. The structural realist approach argued that the EU was not a unique international actor in its own right. Instead, it represented "a vehicle for the collective interests of its member states" (Hyde-Price 2006, p.220). Hyde-Price stressed that the EU was established in the heyday of the Cold war, and was a form of states' adaptation to the structural pressures of the time. The development of the common foreign and security policy, which is often considered to prove the liberal democratic aspirations for increased cooperation, viewed from the realist perspective is nothing but the adaptation to the present international system and reaction to post-Cold war structural pressures (Hyde-Price 2006, p.223).

The end of the Cold war resulted in three consequences, which presented certain challenges to the European security. Firstly, Europe needed to integrate a united Germany. A closer union based upon the Maastricht Treaty facilitated this purpose. Secondly, the EU needed to complete the economic agenda of the 1980s to compete with the US and Japan. Once again closer union was necessary to achieve this objective. Thirdly, with the collapse of the socialist camp Europe faced the challenge of the neighbouring area to its east that was rather chaotic and unstable. This endowed Europe with a new role as a guarantor of peace and stability in

Central and Eastern Europe. While individual European states were unable to tackle such tasks the EU was more capable of addressing economic, social and political aspects of transition than its Eastern neighbour countries (Hyde-Price 2006, p.226). The EU is used by states to tackle these tasks as “an instrument of collective hegemony”, and it relies on a range of available means (ibid, p.227). There is still some space for normative consideration as member states allow the EU to act as the repository for shared ethical concerns. However, ethnical concerns and norms are on the real agenda as long as they do not conflict with core national interests of member states (Hyde-Price 2006, p.222).

A larger unresolved dichotomy lies at the core of these debates and it refers to the core question: What do democracy promoters promote: norms or interests? In the EU context, the liberal democratic (normative) camp views democracy as a universal value, which needs to be promoted (Manners 2008, p.563). On the other hand, the structural realist perspective tends to view the EU as an intergovernmental instrument of adaptation to structural pressures of the contemporary international system (Hyde-Price 2006, p.225), and puts member states and their interests at the core of EU policies (Hyde-Price 2006, p.227). In this regard, democracy promotion is secondary to other interests, and is pursued to the full extent only it does not clash with more important security or economic interests. While the issue of the EU nature and motivation is crucial for understanding the complexity of its engagement in democracy promotion in such regions as Central Asia, at the practical level, it is also important to understand how the EU defines the very notion of democracy.

EU Conception of Democracy

A “floating but anchored” conception of democracy (Whitehead 2002, p.6) fuels the long-standing theoretical debate on the substance of democracy. However, more tangible and measurable definition is required for the purpose of this thesis. The EU does not appear to have a clearly codified concept of democracy, which could be used to measure its progress in

external democracy promotion. Therefore, it is important identify key components of democracy as they are defined by relevant EU documents.

In this regard, two documents might prove useful. The Copenhagen Criteria, identifies the requirements for potential candidates to the EU membership. As the criteria are applied to all future EU member-states, it is reasonable to conclude that these define the minimal democratic standard in the eyes of EU institutions. Copenhagen Criteria identify three key components: 1) stable institutions that guarantee democracy, the rule of law, and human rights; 2) functioning market economy; 3) adherence to the EU laws, the *acquis communautaire*. The predominant and relevant criteria is democracy promotion, and it clearly indicates the strong preferences for procedural-institutional type of democracy.

Another important document is the Council Regulation of 1999, which stipulates the requirements of mainstream democracy, the rule of law and respect of human rights and freedoms into the implementation of development cooperation. This Regulation identifies the necessary components of development cooperation: the rule of law, political pluralism, good governance, the participation of the people in the decision making process, electoral processes, and separation of civilian and military functions (Council 1999). These components offer a broader vision of democracy but do not clarify how these standards can be achieved at practical level.

However, these two documents are not treated as sources to define democracy. Surprisingly enough, the search for the EU definition of democracy still continues as various EU institutions continue to issue different documents, which indicate new dimensions of democracy. Thus, in 2009, the European parliament adopted a resolution on democracy building and urged to use of the UN General Assembly's 2005 definition of democracy as a reference point for its democracy promotion policies abroad (in Wetzel 2015, p.1). The lack of a shared definition of democracy accepted by all key EU institutions and enforced through development policies indicates the weak conceptual foundation in EU democracy promotion. Kurki (2015) describes this lack of solid foundation as "fuzzy liberalism" and argues that it is not an accidental feature of EU democracy promotion. In

fact, the “fuzziness” of EU conception of democracy reflects upon the EU’s politico-economic model of democracy and developmental approach to democracy promotion abroad. Framing democracy into a blurred discourse gives the EU an opportunity to stay flexible and incorporate social and economic factors of democratisation into the democracy promotion process (Kurki 2015, p.41). Such framing results in an unclear EU definition of democracy, which requires a case-specific consideration.

EU Motives to Promote Democracy: Manners vs. Hyde-Price Debate in Action

The EU is often regarded as a unique international actor characterised by ideational power and normative drivers (Manners 2008, p.580). Liberal democratic explanations of the EU’s democracy promotion policy are somewhat mainstream approach in the relevant literature. The EU’s rationale to promote democracy in third countries falls within the lines of democratic peace theory’s assumption that democracy facilitates the development of a peaceful and prosperous international system (Schraeder 2002, pp.15-55). Such an assumption is explicitly declared in the European Security Strategy, which considers democracy instrumental to ensuring secure neighbourhood (EU 2003). According to its own understanding, the EU is driven by the universal motive to foster liberal democracy in the world (Kotzian et al 2011).

As some researchers note, the EU is driven by its self-perception as a normative power, which needs “to spread its fundamental ideas and norms throughout the world” (Hoffmann 2010, p.93), and “to foster the western model of liberal democracy” (Kotzian et al 2011, p.996). Such a mission is not exclusively outward; to the opposite, one may apply the externalisation hypothesis to explain the interplay between the EU’s external policy and domestic affairs. When declaring its commitment to promote democracy worldwide, the EU institutions and the EU member-states’ governments have to tighten democratic procedures at home to avoid being accused of double standards (Youngs 2001, p.46).

Nikolaidis and Howse (2002) also consider the EU's normative mission as vital for its preservation. They identify normative projection as the EU's mechanism of norm diffusion to other international actors. The EU seeks to expand its normative framework to the world and "to reproduce itself by encouraging regional integration around the world" (Nikolaidis and Howse 2002, p.768). At that, the EU uses narratives of projection to export its norms to other countries. The export of norms requires several intermediary factors and involves economic and political means. Thus, trade facilitates democratisation, which, in its turn, facilitates the export of the liberal vision of peace. At that, the EU has a long history of normative projection and expansion. For centuries, Europe has perceived itself as "a vanguard that may have something to teach the rest of the world" (Nikolaidis and Howse 2002, p.769). It asserted its influence on all six continents by the means of brute military force combined with cultural intrusion (Christian missions, export of European lifestyle, European law, colonial governance, science, technology and entertainment). The projection of Europe's model of statehood, economy, justice and lifestyle took different shapes and labels: enlightenment, colonialism, imperialism, or recently civilian/normative power (Nikolaidis and Howse, p.765).

Other authors are more careful in stating the purely normative character of the EU's policies abroad. A group of researchers conducted eight case studies of the EU's foreign policy and identified characteristics of the EU foreign policy in each particular case (Tocci 2008a, 2008b). They have set three basic criteria to evaluate the EU policy in target countries: normative goals, normatively deployed instruments and discernible normative impact, a visible result. On the basis of these case studies, they concluded that the European Union might have normative legislation, but often pursues *Realpolitik* goals, apply mixed normative-realist means, and its policy in each particular case might result in both normative and non-normative outcomes. In other words, the EU represents a multi-faceted actor, whose activities combine both normative and realist objectives and vary from country to country.

EU democracy promotion mechanisms

The EU uses positive and negative mechanisms of promoting democratic values, or linkage (Freyburg 2009; Levistky and Way 2010) and leverage (Lavenex and Schimmelfenig 2011). Positive mechanisms, or linkages, include democracy assistance through agreements, technical assistance, training, information exchange, education, and support for civil society (Youngs 2001, pp.31-34). Positive mechanisms work on the basis of social and communication ties of the recipient country to the EU (Freyburg 2009). Such ties are expected to diffuse democratic norms among important domestic stakeholders and inform attitudes by a prolonged exposure to norms (Freyburg 2009, pp.1-4). Negative or coercive mechanisms refer to the suspension of contractual relations and sanctions that are used in relation to the regimes, which abuse democratic principles (Youngs 2001, pp.34-37). In addition to conventional democracy promotion mechanisms, the EU has certain leverage on the countries in its immediate neighbourhood, which are willing to join the EU (Lavenex and Schimmelfenig 2011). In the latter case, the EU can externalise its domestic democratic practices by requesting potential candidates to adopt them as a condition to join the Union.

EU democracy promotion in Central Asia

The EU and Central Asia: strategy for a new partnership, the document adopted by the Council in 2007 under the German Presidency, sets forth the EU's key objectives in CA, outlines areas of cooperation, and identifies general policy of the EU's involvement in CA. The strategy indicates the rule of law, human rights, democratisation, education and training as "key areas where the EU is willing to share experience and expertise" (EU 2007, p.5). From 1991 to 2007, EU assistance was provided under the framework of the Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS). In 2007, due to the re-structuring and unification of the EU development assistance instruments, TACIS programmes were replaced with the Development Cooperation Instrument (Axyonova 2011). The EU earmarked an assistance budget for Central Asia under the DCI for 2007-2013 that

amounted to 719 million Euros (Regional Strategy Paper 2006). Its assistance to Kyrgyzstan amounted to 17 million Euros for 2011-2013, and this sum was expected to be split among three priority areas – education, poverty reduction, and good governance (EU Delegation to the Kyrgyz Republic brochure 2010).

However, despite the intentions to assist development and democratisation in Central Asia, the projects and activities in these priority areas were implemented with mixed results. This rather uneven record of the EU's democracy promotion in Central Asia raises questions regarding the underlying reasons, which might impede democracy promotion in Central Asia. Some authors put the responsibility for the lack of progress on the democracy promoter, the EU (Warkotsch 2008; Axyonova 2011), while others extend this responsibility to local conditions and the responsiveness (or lack thereof) of local governments (Matveeva 2006; Hoffmann 2010).

Researchers note the gap between the declared EU policies of democracy promotion and the actual significance attributed by the EU officials to the task of promoting democracy in non-EU countries. Warkotsch (2008; 2011) highlights this gap with regard to the bilateral Partnership and Cooperation Agreements negotiated between the EU and individual Central Asian states. The EU strives to commit third countries to democracy through political dialogue. The PCAs, which represent core document shaping formal EU relations with the Central Asian countries, contain only a brief and vague section on the political dialogue with the rest of the document dealing in detail with functional aspects of economic cooperation (Warkotsch 2008, p.243). In the fields of human rights, rule of law, good governance and democracy, reflection is needed on how to support positive trends and tangible results through the human rights dialogues and bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

This gap might be explained by the prioritisation of non-political objectives in the region. The most exemplary case is the EU policy towards Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan is a semi-authoritarian state ruled by the same leader, Nursultan Nazarbayev for more than 20 years. Nazarbayev's regime might seem more democratic in comparison with other notorious Central Asian dictators

(Cummings 2005), but fraudulent elections, limited freedoms and regular human rights abuse brought Kazakhstan a characteristic description – petro-authoritarianism (Walker and Goehring 2008). In the light of the European quest for diversification of energy supply sources, Kazakhstani abundant oil and gas fields are of great interest for the EU. The Kazakh gas has been a strategic commodity for the EU before the gas crisis of 2006. Europe's main gas supplier, Russian Gazprom, heavily relied on purchasing the Kazakh gas and reselling it to Europe (Matveeva 2006, pp.72-75). Currently, the EU is conducting wide-ranging energy dialogues with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, and considers the gas supplies of these countries for the Southern Corridor with a trans-Caspian link (Emerson and Boonstra 2010). Energy needs are increasingly distorting relationships between democracies that consume hydrocarbons and the authoritarian states that produce those (Walker and Goehring 2008, p.25).

Other authors include local conditions to the list of factors, which might impede democracy promotion in the region. Hoffmann (2010) focuses on good governance as an element of the EU's democracy promotion agenda, and argues that the implementation of good governance-related initiatives is rather weak due to several reasons. Firstly, the prospects for external good governance promotion in such stable authoritarian environment as Central Asia are limited. Secondly, the local governments have to agree on good governance promotion, which they are often reluctant to do. explains such reluctance with an assumption that transparency, participatory politics, and strengthening of formal institutions might undermine the basis for rule and power maintenance (Hoffmann 2010, p.89-90). Thirdly, the EU is reluctant to push harder in its pursuit of democracy, thus creating opportunities for local governments to limit their concessions and feign reforms. Matveeva is also critical of democracy promotion saying that approaches to democracy promotion often disregard local contexts, overestimate existing human capacity and ignore the real needs of people on the ground (Matveeva 2006, p.77).

2.4 Central Asian Studies

[In Central Asia] The position of affairs changes not every hour, but every minute. Therefore, I say vigilance, vigilance, vigilance.

General Mikhail Skobelev (as cited in Bellairs 1900, p.164)

Central Asian studies as a social science sub-field is rooted in the 19th century British-Russian geopolitical competition - the Great Game. The Great Game provided impetus to the scrupulous examination of the broader Central Asian region by the military and civilian explorers. British travellers, scholars, soldiers and spies, such as Alexander Burnes, Ralph Cobbold and George Curzon to name a few, shared their stories about encounters with the local peoples, cultures and politics in numerous travel notes and other publications. The Russian exploration of the region was more intensive thanks to the geographic proximity and the vested interest in keeping the Russian Empire's southern belly free of conflicts and from the British. Russian researchers and military officers Skobelev, Bartold, Radlov, Przhevalsky and Aristov (again, to name a few) produced a bulk of versatile, first-hand observations of this *terra incognita*, which was referred to as Middle Asia or West Turkestan in Russia (as opposed to East Turkestan – Chinese Central Asia; Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya 2011, p.9). Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, the British Royal Geographic Society and the Russian Royal Geographic Society were the leading research hubs in the nascent Central Asian studies field (Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya 2011; Hopkirk 1992). Geopolitics and colonial considerations heavily influenced the agenda of Central Asian studies during this period and the research primarily focused on the geostrategic importance of the Eurasian Heartland (Mackinder 1904; Hopkirk 1992).

With the end of the Russian Empire in 1917 and the subsequent incorporation of West Turkestan into the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1922, the research on Central Asia *de jure* had become a part of the broader Sovietology field (Artemov 1982). However, *de facto* Central Asian studies dissolved because Sovietology both inside and outside the USSR focused primarily on the West of Urals and ethnic Russians (see Motyl 1989 for a critical analysis of conceptual flaws inherent

to the mainstream Sovietology). With few rare exceptions (e.g. Dunn and Dunn's 1967 research on Soviet regime and native cultures), Sovietology largely ignored Central Asia.

Only with the collapse of the USSR and after a decade of initial familiarisation with the region (Malik 1994; Ehteshami 1994; Atabaki 1998; Banuazizi 1994), Central Asian studies experienced a renaissance with the growing research on political idiosyncrasies in Central Asia (Collins 2004; Cummings 2012; Radnitz 2010; Hale 2015), geopolitics (publications by Blank, Olcott, McFaul, Trenin and Menon), international political economy (Spechler and Spechler 2010; Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013), and other issues occurring in and around the Central Asian region. From among the variety of the contemporary research on Central Asia, transitology studies as applied to the post-Soviet Central Asia context offer most relevant insights for this thesis. Democracy promotion in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan presents an integral part of larger democratisation efforts, which, in their turn, are a component of the political and economic transition in the post-Soviet period.

Nations in Transit?

The collapse of the USSR raised hopes among Western policy making circles that Central Asia would join the "triumphant" liberal democratic West (and share Fukuyama's enthusiasm of the early 1990s) and transition from command economy to market economy and from the Soviet-era authoritarianism to democracy. These hopes were fuelled with the early declared commitments to support the transition of some Central Asian leaders. Kazakh and Kyrgyz leaderships were among the first ones in the regions to adhere themselves to the rejection of old Communist way and the adoption of international standards (Gleason 2001, p.168). As the reality has demonstrated, both economic (market liberalisation) and political transition (democratisation) went unintended routes and resulted in the fusion of old and new economic and political elements and the formation of a unique Central Asian hybridity.

The independence era started with several major economic shocks in all five Central Asian republics: the cessation of Moscow subsidies; the disintegration of the Soviet production, trade and distribution networks and the subsequent closure of large state-owned enterprises; and, the botched privatisation that gave the rise to the few 'new rich' and the fall into poverty of numerous 'new poor'. Two of the five Central Asia republics, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan adopted the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) and World Bank's (WB) suggestion of drastic economic reforms aimed to liberalise prices, reduce government regulation of economy, and encourage competition and foreign trade. These reforms were dubbed "shock therapy" (Gleason 2004, p.51; Blackmon 2010). Due to these economic shocks, the most population in the region found themselves in a dire economic situation with rocketing unemployment rates, significant reduction of the public social welfare, hyperinflation, a sharp decline in income levels, and growing poverty (Radnitz 2010, p.42; Pomfret 2006).

The similarities of economic transition between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan end with the initial economic shocks related to the collapse of the Soviet economy and the adoption of the shock therapy. Kazakhstan, thanks to its enormous deposits of oil, gas, uranium and metals and successful attraction of foreign investment, was able to mitigate the socio-economic consequences of the Soviet disintegration and the post-Soviet shock therapy (Walker 2008). The purpose of the economic transition has soon become obsolete: by the new millennium, it was evident that the Soviet-era command economy disappeared, but, instead of a free market economy, Kazakhstan developed a state-controlled capitalism – petro-authoritarianism (Walker 2008) strongly imbedded into neopatrimonial political system and turned into a rentier state (Pomfret 2006, pp.10-11; Franke et al 2009; Kaluyzhnova 2008). Its smaller neighbour Kyrgyzstan has not yet recovered after the 1990s double shock and become a heavily indebted country relying on external budget support (Pomfret 2006, p.11). Kyrgyzstan's poor economic performance, reliance of externally generated funds, such as donor aid, foreign loans, labour migrant remittances and partial dependence on sole gold mine made the country a semi-rentier economy (see detailed analysis in Chapter 3).

External involvement in reforms is likely to cause domestic reaction, which might distort the reform objectives. Rigid prescriptions and requirements of external actors make the reluctant domestic forces to develop informal coping and circumvention strategies (Bliesemann de Guevara 2008, p.363). In the case of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the shock therapy imposed by the international financial institutions with the permission of national leaders unintentionally created conditions for a flourishing informal economy. Initially a survival tool for ordinary citizens, the Central Asian grey market grew in scope and scale and turned into a transnational phenomenon spread across the wider Central Eurasian region, where the informal small-scale trade in daily essentials can be found side by side illegal trade in people, weapons and drugs (see more about the informal economy in former Soviet Union in Polese and Morris 2014; in Tajikistan - Gleason 2001, p.174; in Uzbekistan - Rasanayagam 2011). The rise of the informal economy has had lasting effects on democratisation processes because it has undermined the state's capacity to control commercial flows (less so in Kazakhstan, more in Kyrgyzstan), has deflated the very concept of the rule of law, and, has given a rise to undemocratic actors such as organised criminal groups (Kupatadze 2012) and practices such as corruption (Engvall 2012, Kupatadze 2012).

Despite disastrous socio-economic consequences, the economic transition was sanctioned and supported by the ruling regimes across Central Asia as they saw the need to meet the international standards and join globalisation processes (Gleason 2004; Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013). Political transition to democracy, on the other hand, attracted much less attention and political will from the part of local elites. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan almost immediately put presidential political system in place, but their paths of political consolidation diverged greatly (Hale 2012, p.73). President Nazarbayev was able to maintain a firm grip on power from the Independence Day in 1991 up until now. First President Akayev was less capable of maintaining his power and after having flirted with democratic rhetoric for about 15 years, he lost it in the course of the 2005 Tulip Revolution. While some authors debate whether Kyrgyzstan is a democracy, there are clear signs that the Central Asian region presents a stable authoritarian environment with a strong democratic deficit, presidential

regimes, and unfair elections (Kubicek 2010, p.38; Hoffmann 2010). What seems to attract more research attention is the question why “the once seemingly monolithic Soviet bloc generated such complex patterns of democracy, quasi democracy, and autocracy” (Hanson 2003, p.143).

Responding to the need to re-evaluate the transition period, researchers engaged in an analysis of the factors, which might have impeded and distorted the political transition process. Structural factors impeding the transition included Soviet structural legacy and economic factors, most of which lie either in the disintegration of the Soviet economy or in the immediate post-Soviet context. Lack of national unity (Kubicek 2010, pp.41-43) caused by multi-ethnic composition of former Soviet state-nations (as opposed to Western nation-states, which evolved from ethnic nation to civic nations; Glenn 1999), and, sub-ethnic identities and loyalties – such as clan and tribal belonging (Collins 2006) were seen as detrimental to the initial state consolidation and democracy building.

Due to the harsh post-Soviet socio-economic conditions the political systems of Central Asia acquired some unique undemocratic features. Radnitz explains how the survival needs of both elites and masses led to the consolidation of subversive clientelism, where the traditional reliance on the state is replaced by interest-based obligations to independent elites, who act as a surrogate state providing social support and employment opportunities to local communities (Radnitz 2010). Under these circumstances, there was no space left for the development of and consolidation of state institutions and democratic practices. The uneven and troubled economic development in the early independence years was related to the survival discourses: the economic situation in the beginning of the transition was simply unfavourable for a successful political transition (Luong 2005, p.258).

On the other hand, some researchers highlighted actor-oriented factors. Ruling elites and major political figures faced uncertainty in the transition period and opted for non-democratic politics to stabilise their respective countries (see Isaacs 2010; Nourzhanov 2010 on Nazarbayev; Anderson 1999 on Akayev, first Kyrgyz President). The role of Central Asian leaders cannot be overestimated given “the highly personalistic context of Central

Asian politics” (Gleason 2001, p.169), which remains a major impediment to successful democratisation in the region. Personalities of the Central Asian leaders and their reluctance “to give up their power and actually abide by ‘rule of law’ principles” are often seen as key challenges to a successful democratisation process (Kangas 2004, p.82). Below them, non-ruling business elites are not interested in democracy as it does not serve their immediate survival strategies. They are either interested in protection from the state (Radnitz 2010), or in investment in the state to rip benefits through corruption or administrative power (Engvall 2012). The role of masses is ambiguous in this regard. Western mass media and some political observers saw the people as the key drivers of democratic change during the Kyrgyz revolutions in 2005 and 2010 (Kuzio 2008; McFaul 2015). In reality, only few Western academics dug into the Kyrgyz political soil deep enough to differentiate between a genuine democratic mobilisation and an elite-led mobilisation, where the people act as “the weapons of the wealthy” (Hale 2015; Radnitz 2010, p.15-27).

Conceptualisation of the gap between the transition expectations and the outcomes gave rise to a bulk of research devoted to the hybrid Central Asian regimes. Authors attempted to explain the peculiarities of the Central Asian political regimes and produced a variety of labels such as benevolent authoritarianism (Anderson 1999, p.55), Central Asian hybrids (Matveeva 1999, p.31), patrimonial regimes (Collins 2009), imitation democracies (Furman 2008), patronal political regimes (Hale 2015), and imagined democracies (Beachain and Kevlihan 2015). While, these characterisations share some conceptual similarities, Henry Hale’s patronal politics theory (and partly Isaacs 2010 and Peyrouse 2013 on neopatrimonial regimes) satisfies the research requirements of this thesis. Hale re-evaluates conventional patron-client networks in the Central Asian context and provides a wider analytical framework for a more comprehensive understanding of the domestic context in the target countries. More importantly, Hale’s work signifies the departure of Central Asian studies from Western-bound or Soviet-bound ideals into a more autonomous area of studies, which requires stepping away from the “theory of ideal” and accepting that Central Asia interprets and applies the Western ideas of

parliamentary politics, participation, parties, and so on, in its own way. In addition, Hale insists on accepting the dynamism of Central Asian politics (something Russian General Skobelev warned of more than a century ago – see epigraph), and staying open to what a new day in Central Asia brings.

Furman's imitation democracy concept and Beachain and Kevlihan's imagined democracy narrative will be instrumental for explaining the ability of Kazakh and Kyrgyz political regimes to mimic democratic institutions and practices without actually applying them. Other aspects of research on domestic politics, political landscape and economies in Central Asia will be useful for creating a comprehensive picture of the target countries. As mentioned before, this thesis builds its argument from a wide variety of sources and follows the principles of congruence and research flexibility.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the relevant literature within three fields of study: Democratisation studies, the EU studies, and Central Asian studies. It brought publications on different aspects of external democracy promotion, EU external identity and foreign policy, and Central Asian politics together in order to identify the core issues and questions, and to lay out the analytical and conceptual fundament for my research project on the topic of the EU's democracy promotion in Central Asia.

Research on democracy promotion reflects the rise and fall of the post-Cold War enthusiasm about the end of the ideological rivalry and an expected global conversion to democracy. Acceptance and commitment to democracy of the formerly authoritarian states of Eastern and Central Europe, former Soviet Union, and parts of Asia and Africa provided certain ground for optimism about future democratic development of these countries. Publications of the 1990s reflected these expectations; authors discussed third wave of democratisation (Huntington 1991), and triumph of liberal democracy (Fukuyama 1992), and considered democracy to be a universal value (Dahl 1998). The quality of democracy and a certain extent of democratic principles' distortion in local societies caused less optimistic and more pragmatic views on the fate of democracy and democracy promotion

strategies. Nowadays, researchers on external democracy promotion (Richard Youngs, Thomas Carothers, Gordon Crawford, Peter Burnell) acknowledge the necessity of collective effort from both democracy promotion agents and recipients of democracy assistance, the role of tailored democracy promotion policies, and the responsiveness of local actors.

The overview of the existing research in this field helped identify core questions and issues, which should be taken into account for an analysis of the EU's democracy promotion policy case in Central Asia further in this thesis. It is possible to mark out four key questions, which arise from recent publications on external democracy promotion: who and why promotes democracy; how they promote democracy; and, how local actors perceive and react to external involvement in the domestic process of political reforming; and, what outcomes of external democracy promotion are. These basic questions will be asked with relation to the EU's policy in Central Asia, and answered in next chapters of this thesis. Researchers in the field of democracy promotion problematise the motivation of democracy promoters, mechanisms and instruments of democracy promotion, the issue of agency, implementation and compatibility of democracy promotion policies with local conditions, technical issues related to implementation of democracy assistance projects, and, outcomes of democracy promotion projects.

The EU studies section focused on the debates on the EU's external identity, projection of its identity onto its foreign policy, including external democracy promotion policy, and the EU's activities in Central Asia. From this field of research, it is possible to identify a duality in the mainstream approaches to viewing the EU's identity and foreign policy. Thus, Ian Manners views the EU as a normative power, whose mission on the international scene involves spreading democratic values and norms. Adrian Hyde-Price argues against this assumption from the structural realist point of view; in his opinion, the EU's foreign policy revolves around its member states' interests, the most important of which is survival in the post-Cold War world. European states pursued integration and creation of common foreign policy as a way to adjust to structural pressures of the contemporary international system. The normative vs. realist dichotomy sets an analytical framework to examine the

EU's democracy promotion in Central Asia. The EU's legal framework does contain references to democratic values and norms, which are stated as guiding principles in its foreign policy, so in this regard the EU might be considered as an actor with strong normative agenda. The actual implementation of the EU's foreign policy and objectives pursued in different parts of the world shows that the EU might be a multi-faceted actor, which pursues both self-interest goals and normative goals (e.g. see eight studies edited by Tocci, 2008). Acknowledging such duality in the EU's policy overseas is useful for this research as it helps providing more comprehensive understanding of the EU as an international actor and a democracy promotion agent.

Central Asian politics is relatively recent research field because the Central Asian countries entered the international scene as independent actors only 20 years ago. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are no exception with their ongoing political reforms. Both countries have declared their commitment to democratic values in their constitutions. Nevertheless, researchers highlight local authoritarian tendencies and non-democratic practices.

While the review of the research findings on relevant topics serves to help building the analytical and conceptual framework for this research project, certain gaps in the literature should be noted. Firstly, the research on Central Asia is diverse, but fragmented. This research project will attempt bringing these fragmented research publications together to create a patchwork of the Central Asian political landscape. Secondly, the problematisation of issues does not always provide comprehensive explanation of factors, which might inform and shape democracy promotion policies and implementation. The existing research publications often place more emphasis on one side of democracy promotion initiative, either on "promoter", or "recipient". In the rest of this research work, I will attempt to explore factors shaping democracy promotion policy and implementation on both sides with taking into consideration secondary factors and hidden stakeholders. Thirdly, the research on the EU's democracy promotion shows certain geographic preferences as it predominantly focuses on the European neighbourhood (Schimmelfennig and Scholtz 2008; Hyde-Price 2006), Middle East and Africa (Lynch and Crawford 2008; Del Biondo 2011; Youngs 2001). In this

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regard, Central Asia as the EU's democracy assistance recipient is rather unusual research topic. This research project will fill in this gap in regional coverage of the EU's democracy promotion studies and focus on the EU's involvement in democratisation process in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Chapter 3

Local Context in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

3.1 Introduction

External democracy promotion presents an inter-active, multi-dimensional, dynamic process that involves a broad variety of domestic and external actors each having an agenda of their own. From among these actors, two play a direct role in this process: a democracy promotion agent (donor) and a target country (recipient). Under the framework of this thesis the EU is a democracy promotion agent, and Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are target countries. This chapter aims to explore the domestic context of the two target countries – Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The need to address relevant contextual factors stems from the fact that the conditions in the target countries have a potential to affect the responsiveness of local governments and societies, increase or limit the external agent's leverage, enhance or distort the implementation of democracy promotion activities, and eventually shape the outcomes of donor projects and programmes.

There is an important limitation to bear in mind when addressing the local context in target countries. Democracy promotion can be affected by such a vast variety of factors that it is impossible to take into account all relevant aspects. In order to strike a fine balance between the wealth of information and the focus of the research project I will concentrate on few most important domestic factors - the state of democracy, regime stability, and the level of economic development of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Using the existing research and other data I identify key socio-political and economic contextual factors, which might be important for external democracy promotion in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. An overview of these factors will help produce a concise and comprehensive understanding of the local context in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

The chapter is structured as follows. The section that follows this introduction offers a general overview of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. These

two countries have only recently emerged on the political map of the world and have not gained much international attention throughout these years. For this reason it is necessary to introduce Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to the reader and highlight some aspects of their geography, demographic composition and history that might be helpful to understanding the local context. The next substantial sections are devoted to the state of democracy, regime stability and economic development. The section on economic development highlights the difference in economic performance between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The wealthiest nation in Central Asia, Kazakhstan has more freedom in both domestic and external politics. On the other hand, the poor donor-dependent Kyrgyzstan has to take into account the interests of numerous donors when conducting domestic and external politics.

3.2 General Overview

The study of democratic transitions will take the political scientist deeper into history than he has commonly been willing to go.

Dankwart Rustow (1970, p.347)

While there is a risk of making this section overly descriptive, there is also a need to introduce Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to the reader because these two countries rarely appear in global mass media headlines or attract any other international attention. In doing so I briefly go through the usual geographic, demographic and societal facts and figures, and proceed to some key socio-historical developments that could explain the trajectories of the post-Soviet transition including democratic transition (or, lack of thereof) in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are landlocked countries located in the heart of the Eurasian continent. Both share borders with China, Uzbekistan, and each other. Kazakhstan also shares borders with Russia, Turkmenistan and Iran through the Caspian Sea, and Kyrgyzstan neighbours Tajikistan in the south (see map of Central Asia in appendix C). As one might see, none of these neighbour countries are democratic. The majority of Kazakhstan's and Kyrgyzstan's neighbours regularly find themselves at the bottom of

international democracy rankings and are regularly criticised by international human rights watchdogs (Freedom House, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International to name a few).

With the territory spanning across 2,724,900 square kilometres, Kazakhstan is the largest country in the region and the ninth largest country in the world. Kyrgyzstan occupies modest 199,951 square kilometres (CIA 2014, no pagination). Despite their size differences both countries experience difficulties with the special management, domestic transport infrastructure and communications. In Kazakhstan, the existing roads and communications are insufficient to cover the vast territory, which primarily consists of semi-arid steppe. Mountains occupy 94% of the Kyrgyz territory and separate the country into two parts, north and south. Only one road connects north and south, and in winter the connection between two parts of the country is limited due to the risks of avalanches and landslides (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013, pp.242-254).

The population of Kyrgyzstan is 5.834 million people. Kazakhstan is three times bigger with 17.29 million people. Both are unitary states with regions – *oblast'* as the largest administrative territorial unit (7 in Kyrgyzstan and 14 in Kazakhstan). Both countries have two capitals, a formal and an informal ones. The cities of Bishkek, the official capital, and Osh, also known as the southern capital, enjoy the status of cities of national significance in Kyrgyzstan. Kazakh cities of Almaty, the former capital, and Astana, the current capital, are cities of national significance and are considered southern and northern capital respectively (World Bank 2015a and 2015b).

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are multi-ethnic societies. More than 130 ethnic groups live in Kazakhstan and about 90 live in Kyrgyzstan. In Kyrgyzstan, the ethnic Kyrgyz constitute 72.2% of the total population. The next two largest ethnic groups are Uzbeks - 14.3% and Russians - 6.9% (National Statistics Committee of Kyrgyzstan 2015). In Kazakhstan, the ethnic Kazakhs are the majority - 63.1%. The next two largest ethnic groups are Russians (23.7%) and Uzbeks (2.9%; CIA 2014). In both countries there are small numbers (less than 1%) of Chinese Turkic Muslims - Uyghurs, who have been migrating to Central Asian countries throughout the twentieth century

up until now. The presence of Uyghurs in Central Asia, especially in the bordering Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, is allegedly a matter of concern for the Chinese Government, whose policies aim to reduce Uyghur separatism in the Western province of Xinjiang (Starr 2004). However, the scale and reality of such concern is unclear.

Both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are bilingual. The language of the majority ethnic group, so-called “titular nation” Kazakh and Kyrgyz respectively has the status of the state language. The Russian language as the *lingua franca* in majority former Soviet republics is a legacy of the Soviet past. In the last decade the language has become a topic of heated debate in both countries. Due to the growing ethno-nationalist sentiments in both societies a part of the local population in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan insist on reducing the use of Russian language in public and private life. The political leadership in both countries does not seem to share these sentiments and attempts to contain them, possibly due to the concerns that a real or perceived threat to the Russian language or to the Russian diaspora can affect Kazakh and Kyrgyz relations with Russia.

The majority population in both countries are Sunni Muslim (70-75%; CIA 2014). Thanks to large groups of Slavic population Orthodox Christianity is the second largest religious denomination in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Other religious beliefs enjoy a degree of freedom, but this freedom regularly shrinks due to an increasingly restrictive legislation on religion (Human Rights Watch 2008; Freedom House 2011). In the light of the recent global developments the participation of Central Asians, including Kazakh and Kyrgyz citizens in the Islamic State’s (IS) activities in Syria is a matter of growing concern. The exact number of Kazakh and Kyrgyz IS recruits is unknown but recent reports on the local nationals joining or recruiting for IS indicate that the concerns are justified (RFE/RL 2015).

As this brief introductory overview demonstrates despite some differences Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan face similar social and security issues. The similarities between two countries stem from two factors: the geographic proximity and a shared past. In the following discussion I identify key historical developments, which shaped the current political and socio-

economic context in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Two periods informed the formation of the contemporary Kazakh and Kyrgyz societies: the period of Turkestan under Tsarist rule (roughly nineteenth century - 1917), and the Soviet period (1917-1991). The year 1991 can be considered the beginning of new period for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan – the period of independence and transition.

Pre-Soviet Societal Structures

Prior to the Russian colonisation in the nineteenth century the population of Central Asia consisted of kinship-based traditional communities, whose areas of living were not defined by strict borders. The natural environment shaped the lifestyles of numerous Central Asian communities. Since agricultural lands were located mostly in the southern Central Asian area of fertile river valleys local Uzbek, Turkmen, and Tajik populations adopted sedentary lifestyle. Northern parts of the area were either mountainous territory or semi-arid steppe. The Kazakh and Kyrgyz tribes, who inhabited these areas, practiced either semi-nomadic pastoralism in mountainous regions or nomadic pastoralism in the vast steppe. Different production cycles in sedentary and nomadic communities resulted in distinct socio-political systems. The sedentary south was home to state formations - *khanates*, centralised states with developed political structures. The nomadic tribes of the north had highly stratified pastoral society with extended familial household as the basic social unit: “an exogamous group of families related in the male line, which occupied common winter quarters” (Dunn and Dunn 1967, p.148). These basic social units formed federations: several familial households formed *uru*, a clan. Several clans constituted a tribe. A confederation of tribes, if large enough, could elect a *khan* (Dunn and Dunn 1967, p.148). The electoral monarchy was a feature of the so called “nomadic democracy”, but the elected khan had a very weak authority and the communities were largely ruled by local leaders (Furman 2008, p.33; Abramzon 1971). While Kyrgyz communities were relatively small, Kazakhs managed to build three larger socio-geographic units - *zhuz* (horde), which included dozens of tribes (Furman 2008, p.34).

The pre-Soviet socio-political organisation of the Kazakh and Kyrgyz societies is important due to several reasons. Firstly, the kinship-based structure had survived the Russian rule and was revived in the independence period. Kazakh division into three hordes can be traced at the highest political levels as the current political elites in Kazakhstan know their horde allegiance and, to a certain extent, use it in everyday politics (Skokov 2014). In both countries, kinship-based networks are a subject of public and academic attention. Clan politics is an attractive narrative, which is often used to explain the peculiarities of local political dynamics (Collins 2006 and Schatz 2006). Secondly, the volatility and instability of larger socio-political structures and domination of smaller community structures have survived the test of time as well. In the pre-Soviet period when geographic and weather conditions were appropriate the larger structures would easily fall apart into a number of smaller groups or even individual familial households drifting apart in search of better pastures (Cummings 2005, p.17). In contemporary Kazakhstan and especially Kyrgyzstan, political allegiances are almost as fragile as the pre-Soviet ones. Political elites find it difficult to form and maintain stable alliances, i.e. larger structures (Radnitz 2010b; Hale 2015). For this reason, the nation-building proves to be quite challenging as multiple loyalties do not seem to facilitate national unity, a much-needed pre-requisite for statehood consolidation and democratic transition (Rustow 1970, p.350).

Russian Colonisation and the Soviet Union

The Russian settlers started migrating to the region as early as in the 17th century. The Tsarist government, especially under Petr Stolypin's administration (1906-1911), encouraged Russians to settle in the region in order to ensure the control over the vast territory of Central Asia. By the mid-nineteenth century the Tsarist Russia took the control over the most of Central Asia through armed conquest, negotiations, and voluntary accession, but in 1917 the Tsarist rule was overthrown by the Soviet power (Morozova 2005, p.67-69). The short-lived rule of the Russian Empire introduced few important socio-economic features, which were later

consolidated by the Soviet Union. Firstly, the industrialisation diversified the previously agricultural economy of the region having speeded up the modernisation process. Secondly, the semi-forced sedentarisation of traditionally nomadic communities reshaped the existing kinship-based social structures by including the neighbourhood factor to the old blood-line factor of personal and social identification (De Young et al 2013). Finally, the Tsarist Russia set the conditions for making Russian the lingua franca in Central Asia.

The Soviet regime inherited the colonial possessions of the overthrown Russian Imperial power. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan became a part of the Soviet Union in 1920 first as one autonomous republic. In 1936 they became two separate union-level republics (Artemov 1982). Under the Soviet rule the processes of industrialisation, sedentarisation and russification reached their peaks having made the traditional Kazakh and Kyrgyz communities fully sedentary and Russian-speaking.

The ethnic composition of Kazakh and Kyrgyz Soviet Republics got further diversified with a significant influx of Russian migrants, who moved to emerging cities to support the booming military industrial complex (Dunn and Dunn, 1967, p.149). More ethnic groups arrived. Some, including Germans, Koreans, Poles, and North Caucasian ethnic groups were forcefully deported to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan during Stalin's regime. Others were recruited during the Virgin Lands campaign in Kazakhstan aimed to turn the vast Kazakh steppe into agricultural land in 1954-1956. In addition, there were individual migrants, who settled in the region in search of a better life (Cummings 2005, p.16).

Soviet social engineering and co-existence of numerous ethnic groups within the Soviet state resulted in the creation of a large Soviet community where numerous ethnic, tribal, residential, cultural, professional and linguistic affiliations created a unique multi-layered identity, which depended on each individual's life story (Glenn 1999, pp.48-49). At the same time the Soviet authorities pursued "national in form, Socialist in content" policy and acknowledged certain rights of ethnic groups in the multi-ethnic Soviet Union. It is important to note that the USSR applied dialectical approach to

the issue of nationalism based on the premises that assimilation and nation-building are not mutually exclusive processes. The Soviet Union introduced and implemented top-down nation-building in Central Asia. Nevertheless the Soviet rule actually reinforced the sense of national affiliation through the establishment of the Soviet Republics, when large ethnic groups were given politically and geographically defined territory that bore their name (Collins 2006, p.21).

However, as this brief historical overview demonstrates the Kyrgyz and Kazakh statehood and nationhood were blueprinted and introduced in the top-down manner by external actors – decision makers in Moscow. Neither Kazakhstan nor Kyrgyzstan have had any substantial experience of autonomous state- and nation-building. Similar to other former colonies they did not develop their statehood. They received ready national structures and institutions from their colonial power. At that both countries also lacked any democracy experience as the colonial powers preceding the independence were largely undemocratic and left a strong authoritarian legacy that shaped both the societal and state structures. As a result of these historical developments Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were “hardly prepared for an unexpected adventure in state building” (Lewis 2008a, p.123).

3.3 Transition and Democracy

The adventure in state building started in December 1991, when the collapse of the Soviet Union was legally fixed and the now-former Soviet republics were granted independence. The immediate post-Soviet period was full of significant changes, which took place with little preparation time or sufficient resources. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan had to quickly write and approve constitutions, create national currencies, design and adopt state symbols (flags, hymn and state emblem), and join the United Nations (MFA Kazakhstan 2015, MFA Kyrgyzstan 2015). By 1994 all elements of the external façade of statehood were in place. Political and economic transformation proved to be much more challenging objectives.

Transitional Period

The initial transitional period was characterised with multiple economic shocks and crises. The collapse of the Soviet Union was accompanied with the disintegration of the Soviet production, trade and distribution system and closure of large state enterprises, which provided employment for a large part of the population (Pomfret 2006, p.5). The subsequent unemployment and deterioration of the quality of life was further worsened by the swift economic reforms in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were the two countries in Central Asia that accepted the fast track economic reforms suggested by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Gleason 2004, p.45). Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan preferred gradual, state-controlled transition from command economy towards market economy (Blackmon 2009). Turkmenistan's decision to abstain from externally suggested reforms ensued from President Niyazov's decision to enforce the concept of "positive neutrality", which implied effective disengagement and distancing from international affairs and organisations (Kavalski 2010, pp.184-185).

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan proceeded with suggested reforms and launched the process of liberalisation of prices, privatisation of state property, reduction of government regulation of economy, facilitation of competition and foreign trade through legislative adjustments, and withdrawal of state subsidies (Gleason 2004, p.51). The immediate socio-economic effects of the shock therapy were catastrophic for the majority population. The liberalisation of prices resulted in hyperinflation with the prices on basic goods and services rocketing 14 times in Kazakhstan and 8 times in Kyrgyzstan at the inflation peak years (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Inflation rates as percentage from GDP 1991-1998

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Kazakhstan	96.4	1,472	1,243	1,546	161	39	16	5.7
Kyrgyzstan	134	830	754	181	42	35	19	9

Source: World Bank Data 2015a and 2015b

The privatisation of state property took place against the background of this hyperinflation and resulted in an unequal distribution of privatisation opportunities. The citizens in both countries received vouchers that could be exchanged for shares in state-owned companies. Due to the desperate economic situation the majority population had to exchange those vouchers for immediate cash in order to survive this period. As a result the privatisation profited the new rich while the majority population have become even poorer. Lucrative privatisation facilitated the emergence of a plutocracy, deepened the gap between the new poor and the new rich, and contributed to the growing perception of inequality (Matveeva 1999, p.40; Morris and Polese 2013). The Soviet welfare state disappeared along with the Soviet Union and the newly independent Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan had no means to support the impoverished population (Radnitz 2010b)

In addition to these socio-economic hardships the transitional period facilitated the development of informal economic practices in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The quickly changing circumstances forced people to respond with alternative jobs in informal, unregulated by the state sectors to avoid unemployment and poverty (Morris and Polese 2013 offer an excellent account of the informal economic development in the post-Soviet space). Informal economic activities required the services and activities, such as security provision or taxation, which are normally provided by the state. For example, organised criminal groups offered basic security and protection as well as resolution of disputes between informal economic entities. The growing demand in the informal sector resulted in the consolidation of organised criminal groups. While in Kazakhstan the formal state structures did manage to restrict and contain these groups, the weaker and less stable Kyrgyzstan saw the rise of criminal groups, who took advantage of instability and chaos in the early independence years. As the time passed former racketeers and criminals legalised themselves through private security companies and developed relations with the formal economic and political elites, who had to take into account the new power brokers (Morris and Polese 2013; Kupatadze 2008). This gave rise to the political-economic-criminal nexus, where the lines between political elites, business community and criminal underworld got blurred, and illegal activities got intertwined with

legal ones. Under such circumstances, the enforcement of the rule of law principle has become somewhat challenging.

The challenging economic transition had few important implications. First, the externally promoted economic reforms and the associated hardships left a long-lasting distrust in the benevolent external actors and in reforms in general. The one lesson learnt by the local population was that any change will make their situation worse. Second, the rise of the informal sector and the development of organised criminal groups changed the power landscape in Kyrgyzstan. Underworld kings accumulated enough financial power and human capital to build relations with the local political and economic elites. Finally, the survival needs of political elites and the general population revived the traditional networks of support – kinship and neighbourhood-based patron-client groups. The well-off patrons acted as a surrogate state and provided the means to survival and services that the weakened states could not provide (Radnitz 2010b).

These socio-economic circumstances made political transition very difficult. The unfavourable economic conditions made political elites opt for non-democratic policies to stabilise the countries. In Kazakhstan, President Nursultan Nazarbayev prioritised stability and economic recovery over democratic transition and embarked upon building a strong presidential regime in 1991 and successfully carried on the regime consolidation for the next 24 years (Nourzhanov 2010, pp.107-132). Kyrgyzstan opted for political reforms, but could not successfully complete, consolidate and enforce the democratic transition due to the regular authoritarian setbacks and continuous political instability. In the first 15 independence years Kyrgyzstan was ruled by President Askar Akayev, who first acted as a liberal reformer, but gradually turned into an autocrat after having significantly limited the powers of the parliament, government and the judiciary. President Akayev's increasing pressure on local political leaders, deteriorating economic situation and the public frustrations on inflation, reduction of social benefits and growing unemployment culminated in the 2005 regime change, one of the colour revolutions in the post-Soviet space. The 2005 regime change, also called Tulip revolution, brought President Kurmanbek Bakiyev in power (Lewis 2010, pp.45-61).

The Current State of Democracy in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

The last decade (2005-2015) was characterised with further consolidation of President Nazarbayev's regime in Kazakhstan and increased political instability in Kyrgyzstan. Thanks to series of constitutional amendments the current political system is strongly presidential. Kazakh President enjoys a wide range of powers and encounters no opposition from the side of the executive, legislative and judiciary branches. President Nazarbayev personally has the right to run for re-elections until he dies or decides to stop as the constitutional amendments in 2007 gave him the status of the First President with the right of unlimited terms. In Kyrgyzstan, in the course of the revolutions, presidential powers were cut back and the current political system is parliamentary-presidential.

In 2007-2014, Freedom House has reported a solid evidence of stagnation with occasional regression (downward trends) in the democratisation process in both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. According to the Freedom House's Freedom in the World annual reports in 2007-2014, Kazakhstan has not been free even once, and Kyrgyzstan has continuously been "partly free" except for 2010, when the increasingly autocratic regime of President Kurmanbek Bakiev was overthrown by public protests.

Table 2: Freedom in the World scores for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in 2007-2014

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Kazakhstan	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5
Kyrgyzstan	4.5	4.5	4.5	5.5	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0

Scores read: 1.0 to 2.5 (free), 3.0 to 5.0 (partly free), and 5.5 to 7.0 (not free); Based on the Freedom in the World reports 2007-2014, Freedom House 2015

The seemingly stagnating Kazakh democratisation record has actually been characterised with regular downward trends due to a long-standing abuse of human rights and political freedoms and continuously shrinking space for civil society and free mass media. In the course of the seven reported years, Freedom House repeatedly highlighted trends, which significantly hindered

democratisation in Kazakhstan: the consolidation of President Nazarbayev's rule through electoral politics; political violence and oppression; and, suppression of independent mass media and civil society. Mass media continued facing harassment throughout the period with regular legislative restrictions and crackdowns on mass media in the form of suits and prosecutions against critical mass media outlets, new legislation on internet, and blocking attempts to open new media outlets (Freedom House Kazakhstan Reports 2013-2014; Isaacs 2010a, pp.198-203).

Kyrgyzstan has demonstrated a different democratisation pattern thanks to a democratisation impetus provided by the 2005 Tulip revolution that overthrew President Akayev's regime. However, the hopes for consolidation of the Tulip revolutions' small victories in the area of mass freedom and competitiveness of political parties proved to be vane as the newly elected President Kurmanbek Bakiev's regime quickly showed signs of the notorious Central Asian authoritarianism. From 2007 to 2010, Kyrgyzstan has repeatedly received downward trend ranking due to the consolidation of President Bakiev's regime through constitutional amendments, fraud elections, oppression and intimidation of free mass media, civil society and political opposition. The deterioration of freedoms and rights in the country resulted in another revolution in April 2010. The uprising launched a chain of events in the country, some of which were positive such as the adoption of a new constitution balancing presidential and parliamentary powers and competitive parliamentary elections in October 2010. This significantly improved Kyrgyzstan's score and moved it back to the partly free category (Freedom House 2011). In the following four years (2011-2015), Kyrgyzstan has maintained its partly free status and had its ups and downs in the democratisation process. Ups included a competitive presidential election in October 2011, which resulted in the first peaceful and legitimate transfer of power (Freedom House 2012) and the establishment of a new anticorruption body. Downs revolved around an unfair treatment of ethnic minorities in the post-conflict period, issues with judicial independence, and regular dismissals and appointments of the government (Freedom House 2012, 2013 and 2014).

Electoral politics played an important role in consolidating the Kazakh authoritarianism and fuelling the Kyrgyz unstable democracy. In 24 years, there were 4 presidential and 7 parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan, and 5 presidential and 6 parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan (Beachain and Kevlihan 2015, p.501). Nursultan Nazarbayev won each presidential elections in Kazakhstan and called for at least three early parliamentary elections, when the parliaments were too independent. In Kyrgyzstan, both parliamentary and presidential elections were accompanied with the fear of instability as both ruling and competing political elites mobilised their support groups and often relied on illegal mechanisms to ensure victory (see Beachain and Kevlihan 2015 for electoral politics and Radntiz 2010b on electoral mobilisation of masses). In both countries, elections were usually critiqued by international observers and endorsed by regional observers. Such international electoral watchdog as OSCE observation missions regularly noted a variety of electoral fraud tactics committed by the ruling authorities in both countries, as well as an overall atmosphere of intimidation, mass media bias, low representation of opposition parties on election commissions, procedural violations, and flawed handling of post-electoral complaints (ODIHR 2006). Regional observation mission from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS Portal 2015) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO Portal 2015) regularly supported elections in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and noted a high democratic standard of the elections' conduct.

In addition to electoral politics, political violence and oppression facilitated the authoritarian consolidation in Kazakhstan and instability in Kyrgyzstan. International human rights watchdogs repeatedly raised the issue of increasing violence and oppression directed against opposition leaders, human rights advocates and trade unionists. Two opposition leaders were killed around the 2005 presidential elections (Lillis 2006). In 2009, human rights activist Yevgeny Zhovtis was arrested and subjected to "the grossly deficient judicial proceedings", along with a range of other officials and businessman (Freedom House 2010). However, the most notorious act of state-sanctioned violence in Kazakhstan took place in December 2011, when a sit-in strike of oil workers in the Zhanaozen city turned into riots and

the police opened fire on the strikers. Oil workers in Zhanaozen, a Western Kazakhstan single-industry (oil and gas) town, went on strike to demand higher wages and better working conditions in May 2011. The strike gained popularity among underpaid oil and gas industry workers with more people joining the protest and the nearby towns supporting the action. The state's violent response to the strike was unexpected: police and riot troops "showered the people with bullets" on 16 December 2011 (Sindelar and Toiken 2012). 16 people were shot dead and trade union activists were arrested. The regime carried on the crack down on unions and opposition across the country and adopted more restrictive legislation (Freedom House 2013; Al Jazeera 2011).

In Kyrgyzstan, political assassinations started under President Bakiev's regime, which has been relying upon brute force to get rid of dissidents: members of the parliament, politicians, businessmen, journalists and even famous sportsmen fell victims to assassinations (Ovchinnikova 2009). However, political oppression has always been present in one or another form under all four political regimes in Kyrgyzstan, but its scope was considerably lower than in Kazakhstan.

Better democratic situation in Kyrgyzstan owes to more open political system and freedom. Despite such positive signs of democracy in Kyrgyzstan as a vibrant civil society, opposition political parties and relatively independent mass media, it is impossible to note a stable democratisation record. Regular returns of authoritarianism and two violent regime changes leave continuous concerns about stability of Kyrgyzstan as a state and the uncertain future of its hybrid political regime. Against the background of its highly authoritarian neighbours, Kyrgyzstan appears as a relatively democratic country and boasts being the first case of the peaceful transition of power in the region, and the first and only parliamentary-presidential republic, but its instability does not make it a particularly exemplary showcase of successful democracy.

Unlike Kyrgyzstan, protest is virtually absent in Kazakhstan, but this does not necessarily imply universal consent with the regime. Potentially dangerous topics of oppression and human rights violations are managed

through mass media control and diversion of public attention to other issues (BTI KZ 2014, p.17). Nevertheless, the public generally does seem to support the president's course of "stability, accord and growth" (BTI KZ 2014, p.17), thus sustaining the stable authoritarian rule of President Nazarbayev.

In summary, in the last decade, there was a steady decline in democratic governance, freedoms and rights in Kazakhstan and an uneven democratisation record in Kyrgyzstan. In both cases, it is too early to speak of any improvement in the area of good governance, rule of law, human rights and democracy. Kazakhstan remains a stable authoritarian regime with little space for political pluralism and free and fair elections. The political system in Kyrgyzstan is characterised with a mixture of authoritarian and democratic features and is continuously undermined by regular outbursts of violence and instability.

3.4 Regime Stability

The varying paths of economic development can be explained by two important contextual factors: regime stability and the degree of economic development. Stability in general and regime stability in particular presents a crucial contextual factor, which shapes democratisation process and affects the success of external democracy promotion initiatives. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan find themselves on the two opposite extremes of the stability factor. While in Kazakhstan President Nazarbayev managed to build and maintain a stable non-democratic regime, the Kyrgyz political system is subject to frequent and turbulent changes of ruling elites. In this section, I examine degrees of regime stability in Kazakhstan under Nazarbayev and Kyrgyzstan under its four post-independence regimes through the analytical framework developed by Lucan Way. Way identified three sources of authoritarian organisational capacity in the post-communist countries that define the ability of ruling elites to ensure the loyalty of regime supporters and the elimination or reduction of regime opposition. These sources are ruling party strength, coercive capacity of state and state control over national wealth. In addition, Way developed a system to evaluate each of

these sources of authoritarian organisational capacity as weak, medium or high (Way 2010, pp.229-252). In order to analyse the regime stability in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in the post-Soviet period (1991-2014), I will first explain Way's analytical framework and, afterwards, I will apply this framework to Kazakhstan under President Nursultan Nazarbayev (1991-present) and Kyrgyzstan under President Askar Akayev (1991-2005), President Kurmanbek Bakiev (2005-2010), the Provisional Government (2010), and President Almazbek Atambayev (2011-present).

Before embarking upon an analysis of the regime stability and regime survival in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, it is important to explain the sources of regime stability. Ruling party strength is a vital source of authoritarian regime stability. Ruling parties ensure the loyalty of elites uniting them within a structured and hierarchical organisation, where the top patron is the president himself. In addition, ruling parties and the president support each other during and in between electoral campaigns. The presidential backing helps winning votes during parliamentary elections. In return, ruling party mediates the presidential will and ensures control over legislature. Way differentiates between three levels of ruling party strength (Way 2010, pp.230-231). The absence of a ruling party or reliance upon several smaller parties signify a weakness. Medium strength requires a well-organised single ruling party. A strong ruling party refers to a well-organised party with other, non-material sources of legitimacy, in particular, an established ideological tradition.

State coercive capacity implies the regime's ability to contain regime opposition and prevent or stop large-scale protests through state security apparatus (Way 2010, pp.232-234). In order to have coercive capacity, state security networks and law enforcement bodies need to be well-paid, well-equipped, coherent, loyal and ready to use force against the regime opposition (civilian fellow citizens). In the ideal for the regime scenario, the security forces would also have some experience in using force either against external enemies or against domestic opposition. If the security forces have these characteristics, state coercive capacity is deemed strong. If they have all characteristics apart from experience, state coercive capacity

is medium. State coercive capacity is weak where security forces lack funding, equipment, training and experience.

The last, but not the least pillar of regime stability is state control over wealth, which refers to the leaders' ability to access national resources in order to buy off opposition, keep supporters loyal, and maintain a strong ruling party and well-financed security forces (Way 2010, pp.234-235). In addition, access to national resources, gives the leader the control over the entire society's wealth and the monopoly of resources distribution. This ensures the conformity of the large proportion of less well-off population (Ross 2001, pp.349-351). The population have to regularly demonstrate their loyalty to the regime, e.g. through electoral support or non-participation in regime opposition and protests, in order to keep their jobs and have access to social benefits - crumbs from the resources-pie. State control over wealth is high if the leadership has dominant control over the economy or rely on mineral resources for more than 50% of total exports.

Table 3: Analytical framework for the evaluation of authoritarian organisational capacity

	Weak	Medium	Strong
Ruling Party Strength	No/multiple parties	Single ruling party	Single party with an established ideology
State Coercive Capacity	Under-funded, under-paid and unequipped	Well-funded, well-paid, inexperienced in actual combat	Well-funded, well-equipped and experienced in combat
State Control over Wealth	Lack of resources; Extensive privatisation	Limited amount of resources; Partial state control over economy	Oil-rich states (>50% exports are resources); Centrally planned economies.

Source: Way 2010, p.236

This table crystallises the analytical framework and clarifies the regime stability evaluation criteria. Originally, Way applied this framework to evaluate regime stability and survival in Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine in 1999-2001. I apply it to

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and make a distinct differentiation between all four Kyrgyz regimes within the 1991-2014 timeframe. This differentiation is required to provide a sufficient degree of accuracy when addressing the local political context.

Ruling Party Strength

Ruling parties in the Central Asian context usually use a vote-seeking logic. A ruling party does not need a competitive political ideology or attractive policy proposals. It relies upon the regime's existing policies and seeks to get as many members as possible by avoiding a clearly defined ideological position (Bader 2010, p.8). Such pattern is wide spread in Central Asia, where ruling parties are a popular instrument for cementing the regime and attaching democratic façade to undemocratic electoral politics.

The Otan party, the predecessor of the current ruling party Nur Otan in Kazakhstan was established in 1999 through merging a number of pro-presidential political parties. It was renamed Nur Otan after another merger in 2006, now with the Asar party headed by President Nazarbayev's daughter Dariga Nazarbayeva. In 2007, Nursultan Nazarbayev officially headed Nur Otan. As a classic ruling party, Nur Otan is based upon the key organising principle – loyalty to the president. The loyalty to the president borders with the cult of personality as one can see from the official party doctrine:

The first President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Elbasy Nursultan Nazarbayev is the founder of our party. We relate finding of Independence and recognition of achievements of Kazakhstan with his name on the international scene. Elbasy's state course defines the future for our people. Elbasy has not only designated strategic objectives for Kazakhstan, but has also created conditions for the achievement of those objectives. His wisdom, humanity, strong will, aspiration for the better future and selfless service to the people will always be an example for us and future generations to come (Nur Otan 2015)

The political platform of Nur Otan mirrors President Nazarbayev's prioritisation of non-political matters, such as education, economic development, healthcare etc. Nur Otan's party doctrine does mention such principles as freedom, rule of law and civil society in a descriptive and non-

committal way. However, the official declaration to dominate contradicts and undermines these principles: “The «Nur Otan» party intends further to keep the dominating role in the life of the country” (Nur Otan 2015).

In compliance with Way’s analytical framework, Nur Otan is a medium-strength ruling party. It does not have any competitor political parties in Kazakhstan, partly thanks to the legislative restrictions on creating political parties (Isaacs 2010a, pp.201-204). Nur Otan enjoys strong material backing as the country is striving economically and the national wealth is largely in the hands of the ruling regime and the party. However, it lacks a strong ideological platform and non-material incentives to be a strong ruling party. As many observers note, the fate of Nur Otan is tied to President and it is impossible to predict whether the party will keep its “domination” after President Nazarbayev leaves his position due to natural or other causes (Isaacs 2010a, pp.211-2012; interviews 41 and 42 with the leaders of two opposition political parties in Kazakhstan, 17 May 2013).

The first Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev (1991-2005) followed the regional patterns of autocracy consolidation through ruling parties. His ruling party - “Alga Kyrgyzstan!” was established in 2003 through merging of 4 smaller parties. Akayev’s daughter Bermet Akayeva headed the party because, according to the Kyrgyz Constitution, the President could not belong to political party. Similarly to Nur Otan in Kazakhstan, Alga enjoyed a quick success: it promptly recruited a large number of new members and won the majority seats at the Parliament (Lewis 2010, pp.48-50). However, due to the different political setting in Kyrgyzstan the electoral fraud and the consolidation of the ruling party strength brought the demise of Akayev’s regime closer. In March 2005, in the course of flawed parliamentary election, Alga party won 69 out of 75 places at the parliament. This contributed to the ongoing public dissatisfaction with the Akayev’s rule, made the political elites threatened by the regime consolidation. Eventually, the public and elites’ frustrations led to a regime change - the Tulip revolution (Radnitz 2010a). Alga party fell apart immediately after the revolution. While Akayev did establish a unified ruling party, the party failed to prove its viability and lacked both financial and non-material backing to stay in power, i.e. Alga had low strength.

President Kurmanbek Bakiev followed the example of his predecessor when creating a new ruling party - Ak-Zhol. Again, just like other presidents in the region, he sought to consolidate his power through taking over the majority seats at the parliament during controversial parliamentary elections in 2007 (ENEMO Elections Report 2007). The plan worked for few years as the loyal Parliament adopted few constitutional amendments, which increased presidential powers at the expense of parliamentary and executive powers (Bader 2010, p.5). However, in 2010, as an outcome of increasingly oppressive and violent regime, President Bakiev was ousted from power in the course of the second Kyrgyz revolution. Ak-Zhol party was dismissed on the next day. As the ruling party did not meet the President's expectations and failed to survive the regime change, it is clear that it had low strength. The Provisional Government headed by first female President in Central Asia – Roza Otunbaeva, which took over the power in between the revolution and the presidential elections in 2011. Due to the diversity of political elites involved in ousting President Bakiev and running the country in 2010-2011, there was no ruling party during this period.

The current President Almazbek Atambayev has a ruling party as well, but his situation is drastically different from his less successful predecessors. Firstly, President Atambayev established the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK) long before coming into power. The SDPK developed naturally based upon a small group of supporters with a shared ideological platform (social democracy). Secondly, the SDPK does not have majority seats at the Parliament; unlike Alga and Ak-Zhol, the SDPK is just one of five powerful political parties at the Parliament. As such, it has to negotiate and cooperate with parliamentary opposition. The position of the SDPK is probably a positive sign for democracy in Kyrgyzstan, but for regime survival and consolidation the SDPK is a medium-strength party. The SDPK is reasonably strong as the President, the Speaker and the majority Government are either SDPK members or associates, but it is not as solid as Nur Otan in Kazakhstan.

State Coercive Capacity

The Soviet regime left an invaluable legacy – a well-organised, extensive and diverse security services with well-trained human resources. However, the distribution of this legacy was quite uneven: Kazakhstan inherited a large military infrastructure, available weapons, including nuclear weapons, and a considerable proportion of the former Soviet military-industrial production. Kyrgyzstan received a limited military infrastructure and lacked any meaningful military industry. In addition to the unequal starting conditions, Kazakhstan managed to sustain, reorganise and consolidate its security and law enforcement bodies thanks to the steady economic growth in the 2000s. Kyrgyzstan has not only failed to strengthen its security networks, but lost a large part of the inherited Soviet security infrastructure due to limited financial resources and the lack of perceived threats (Marat 2007, pp.84-85, 90-95). Due to these differences in state security framework, Kazakhstan has medium-high coercive capacity while Kyrgyzstan has only scored low under all four regimes.

The Kazakh security services are well-equipped and well-paid, but they have not been “baptised by fire”, i.e. tested their capacity in an armed conflict. The only test the Kazakh security forces have had so far took place in the town of Zhanaozen in West Kazakhstan, where the police used weapons against a group of striking oil workers.

In Kyrgyzstan, due to the limited financial resources, the security forces have always been weak and incapable of sustaining the regime against organised protests. Severely underpaid and unequipped police forces could not do much to help saving Akayev’s and Bakiev’s regimes against the protestors in 2005 and 2010 (Way 2010, pp.232-233). However, there are variations of the weak: Bakiev attempted strengthening the grip on the country’s coercive apparatus by appointing his brother Janysh Bakiev, Head of the State Security Service in 2008. This measure only slightly increased the oppressive capacity of security forces in 2010, when they used lethal weapons having shot about 90 people dead and hundreds injured (ICG 2010). The Provisional Government had very limited control over security forces whatsoever due to the limited funding, the inter-ethnic crisis and the

legitimacy controversy (the Provisional Government was not elected; it came into power through a violent regime change in 2010). The current President Atambayev exerts a certain degree of control over security forces. However, against the background of an overall less stable regime, he is unable to gain full control: political elites, both formal and informal, have their own networks within security services and can effectively prevent the concentration of power in the President's hands.

State Discretionary Economic Control

Finally, the last pillar of regime stability is state control over economic resources. According to Way's classification, country cases are considered to have high state economic control if states rely on mineral wealth for more than 50% of their exports (Way 2010, pp.234-235). Kazakhstan's primary source of income is oil and oil products and President Nazarbayev allegedly has access to this national wealth. The inter-relation between authoritarian regime stability and petro-wealth will be discussed in more detail in the next section on economic development. President Nazarbayev's regime enjoys a high degree of economic control, which makes it possible to sustain the other two pillars – the ruling party and the security apparatus.

In the considerably poorer Kyrgyzstan, the weak economic performance has made it difficult to ensure regime stability for each president and the general political stability. In the course of extensive privatisation in the 1990s, all more or less important and profitable companies landed in hands of foreign investors and local business elites. The local business elites used their share of wealth to build patron-client networks, which gave them some capacity to claim a share of formal power either at the Parliament or within the executive branch. The access to the nation's scarce wealth sources has become both means and aim for political and business elites. The wealthy seek to invest in public support or in formal positions of power in order to protect their status and to increase their wealth (Radnitz 2010b). As a result of such practices, the Kyrgyz state has turned into an investment market with unwritten rules and regulations based upon corruption, favouritism and informal politics (Engvall 2015). President Bakiev attempted to take control

over the country's finance by establishing the Central Agency of Development and Innovation and appointing his son Maxim as the Agency Director. All state revenue and distribution of budget money went through the Agency, but the system proved short-lived as President Bakiev was ousted in 2010 and the Agency was abolished (Matveeva 2010, p.3). Apart from this impressive take on the budget, there were no successful or considerable attempts to control the national wealth.

Incumbent Regime Survival

After having analysed the pillars of regime stability in Kazakhstan under its sole leader Nazarbayev and in Kyrgyzstan under the leadership of three Presidents and the Provisional Government, it is possible to evaluate the regime stability. In Kazakhstan, the regime stability and survival rate remains medium to high as all key sources of power are in place and under the control of President Nazarbayev. In Kyrgyzstan, the regime survival has traditionally been low for almost all regimes. The inability to sustain the ruling party strength and the excessive electoral fraud cost Presidents Akayev and Bakiev their power. The Provisional Government was too short-lived and diverse to build any viable political alliance. From the beginning, it was clear the Provisional Government is a temporary transitional measure. The under-funded and weak security services could not offer a stable foundation for any regime consolidation in Kyrgyzstan. Finally, the poor economic performance and the lack of substantial resources made the regime reliance on national wealth obsolete. In the absence of significant resources, the Kyrgyz ruling regimes could not have sufficient resources to strengthen security services or to stabilise the social welfare state. Nevertheless, President Atambayev has chances to make it to the end of his term without being ousted.

Atambayev's regime survival owes to several factors. First, President Atambayev relies on a political party with some ideological platform and long-standing history. Thanks to more than two decades of consistent and active participation in politics, the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan seems to be more reliable than the hasty attempts to build a loyalist party of his predecessors. Second, the current political system in Kyrgyzstan has

stricken a fragile balance. This is not necessarily a sign of successful democratisation because the competing political elites are not always inclined to pursue democratic objectives. To the contrary the pluralism and multi-polarity in the Kyrgyz politics stem from the diversity of small powerful leaders each pursuing their own selfish interests (Lewis 2010, p.45).

Third, there is an overall public saturation with the mass protests and drastic political changes. The tumultuous political life in the last ten years has gradually shaped the public opinion on protest. Finally, President Atambayev enjoys a degree of international support. While President Atambayev proved himself pro-Russian, he managed to keep good relations with other important international actors, China, the EU and the US. These factors might be insufficient on their own, but together they make the current regime in Kyrgyzstan slightly more stable than the previous one. Nevertheless, one should bear in mind that “the position of affairs changes not every hour, but every minute” (General Mikhail Skobelev as cited in Bellairs 1900, p.164).

Table 4: Organisational Power and Incumbent Regime Survival in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan 1991-2015

	Ruling Party Strength	State Coercive Strength	State Discretionary Economic Control	Incumbent Survival
Kazakhstan under Nazarbayev, 1991-present	Medium	Medium-High	High	Medium-High
Kyrgyzstan under Akayev, 1991-2005	Low	Low	Low	Low
Kyrgyzstan under Bakiev, 2005-2010	Low	Low	Low	Low
Kyrgyzstan under Provisional Government, 2010-2011	Low	Low	Low	Low
Kyrgyzstan under Atambayev 2011-present	Medium	Low	Low	Medium-Low

Based upon Way 2010, Table 9.1. “Organisational power in 1999-2001 and incumbent survival through the mid-2000s”, p.236

Overall, the state of regime stability in the two case study countries differs quite drastically. Thanks to the strong leadership positions of President Nazarbayev and the energy riches Kazakhstan managed to establish a stable but authoritarian regime. The neighbouring Kyrgyzstan has had few democratic openings but could not ensure the stability of its political system.

3.5 Economic Development

The success of Kazakhstan in building and sustaining a stable authoritarian regime stems from an important factor – its strong economic performance. Kyrgyzstan, as a poor nation with limited resources, finds it difficult to maintain political stability, not speaking of successful democratic reforms. The differences in economic development of the two target countries are significant (see Table 5). With the GDP 30 times smaller than in Kazakhstan and more than one third population living below the poverty line, Kyrgyzstan finds itself in a poor economic situation and has to rely extensively on external loans and donor aid.

Table 5: Key economic performance indicators of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan
Income level	Upper middle	Lower middle
GDP	\$212.2 billion	\$7.404 billion
GNI per capita	\$11,670	\$1,250
Poverty ratio	2.9%	37%
Human Development	Medium	Low
HDI Rank	70	125

Sources: World Bank 2015a and 2015b; UNDP 2014

Despite these differences in economic performance, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan share one feature: they are both rentier states dependent on exported resources and externally generated income. Kazakh petro-wealth

is an impediment to successful external democracy promotion as the country represents an economically successful authoritarian country that undermines the usual democracy-development association. The Kyrgyz relative dependence on donor aid provides external democracy promoters with a good leverage, but the dynamic nature of the Kyrgyz rentierism might make this leverage less efficient as Kyrgyzstan uses a combination of externally produced rents and does not depend much on a single rent source.

Kazakh Rentier State

Kazakhstan is extremely rich in natural resources. Deposits of 99 elements of 110 total known elements have been discovered on the Kazakh territory, of which 70 were explored and 60 are extracted. Kazakhstan has 50% of the world reserves of tungsten; 21% of the global uranium reserves; 23% of chromium; 19% lead; 13% zinc; and, 10% of the world reserves of copper and iron (Investor's Guide 2013, p.22). Kazakhstan's energy resources are impressive as well: 30 billion barrels of proven oil reserves; 45.7 trillion cubic feet of proven natural gas reserves; and, 33.6 million tons of proven coal reserves. Kazakhstan produces approximately 1.64 million barrels of oil per day. Production has continued to grow in recent years thanks to the development of its massive Tengiz, Karachaganak, and Kashagan fields, which are located in Western Kazakhstan. The offshore Kashagan field (13 billion barrels) is the world's largest oil discovery of the last three decades. The Caspian onshore Tengiz deposit (6-9 billion barrels) is the main site of oil exploitation in Kazakhstan as Kashagan is still under development. Finally, Karachaganak, an onshore oil deposit add impressive 8-9 million barrels oil to the Kazakh petro-wealth (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013, pp.166-171). Gas deposits are considerable as well: from 1.8 trillion m³ of proven gas reserves (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013, p.169) to 2.5 trillion m³ (Johnson 2007, p.38).

The exploitation of natural resources in Kazakhstan stems back to the Soviet period, but the foundation of the current economic boom was laid in 1990s when the oil production and exports rapidly increased (Spechler and Spechler 2010, p.75). The steady increase in oil and gas exports allowed the

Kazakh government to buy back some of its shares in private companies and develop a solid negotiations position in the economic cooperation with key international stakeholders: Russia, which owns and controls the main pipelines; China, which shows an increasing interest in purchasing Kazakh energy resources; and the European countries, who are interested in diversification of energy supply sources. As some researchers argue, the petro-wealth brought some political benefits as well: in 2010, Kazakhstan received enough support from member-states to chair the OSCE (Spechler and Spechler 2010, p.76).

Kazakhstan has an export-oriented resource-based economy. In 2014, the total Kazakh exports amounted to 78.2 billion USD. At that, the crude oil exports amounted to 53.6 billion USD, i.e. 68.5% of the total Kazakh exports is crude oil (KAZNEX INVEST 2015). Other exports include ferrous metals, copper, aluminum, zinc and uranium. At that, Kazakhstan produces the largest share of uranium from mines - 41% of world supply in 2013. While it is possible to measure the country's petro-wealth in financial terms, its importance in social and political terms is difficult to evaluate. The level of the state's hydrocarbons addiction was best described by a local politician, who bitterly noted that "the entire country is shooting itself up with oil" (interview 41, leader of a Kazakh opposition political party, 17 May 2013). In numerical terms, the dependence on the export of hydrocarbons amounts to 39% of the state revenues in 2010. In the same year, the mining and petroleum industries accounted for 33% of GDP (Revenue Watch 2013). At that, only 12% GDP are collected through oil-free taxation, so, the state hardly depends on its citizens' contributions in economic terms.

Kazakhstan's energy riches play ambiguous role in the country's development. On one hand, the availability of large amounts of petro-wealth helps sustaining the country's regime despite limited freedoms, and regular human rights abuses. On the other hand, petro-wealth fuels the growing social gap in the country. Astonishing flow of foreign investment and profits had its casualties: a stark inequality of wealth (Johnson 2007, p.34). Despite Kazakhstan's striking economic performance indicators, the wealth of the nation is unevenly distributed. The disproportion between the new rich and

the new poor steadily increases thanks to the blooming oil industry and decline in other economic sectors.

Firstly, there is a considerable gap between the centre (President and his immediate circle of family and officials), which single-handedly manages and distributes the country's riches, and periphery (people and local administrations), which survives under conditions of oil-oriented economy and "enjoys" the decaying Soviet transport, communications and social welfare infrastructure. Centre-periphery relations in Kazakhstan are characterised with resentment-submission dynamics as local leaders cannot openly challenge centre's policies and are reluctant to explicitly display their discord. For example, oil and gas-rich Western and Northern provinces and former capital city Almaty, which remain crucial contributors to the national budget or so-called "donor provinces" (Cummings 2001, p.22), do not necessarily receive as much as they contribute: virtually all revenue goes to the national budget and is redistributed among all provinces. At that, substantial part of budget funds is directed to grand construction projects and international forums in Astana that often serve the aim of aggrandizing the country's achievements and boosting its international profile. As one of my interviewees, a local political party leader explained "Yes, the capital [Astana] is beautiful, but the capital lives at the expense of regions" (interview 42, 17 May 2013).

Secondly, the difference in living standards is particularly striking in the provinces without developed oil and gas industry which are often left behind the country's economic boom. About 75% of the oil is located in the Western Kazakhstan (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013, p.166). With the attention of the political and economic elites focused on hydrocarbons in the Western Kazakhstan, other provinces find themselves in an under-privileged position with much less employment opportunities and declining living standards. Disparities between oil-rich regions and other regions, as well as imbalance in wages and living standard of those involved in energy economy and the rest is striking for external observers as well. An EU Delegation to Kazakhstan staffer noted that oil is the basis of the Kazakh economy, but it is also a big social risk as whoever is cut out of oil economy is cut out of any opportunities (interview 36, 14 May 2013).

Thirdly, there are issues in oil and gas rich provinces. Western provinces have high GDP per capita because of the oil extraction, but big social problems because the employment opportunities exist only in oil and gas (interview 36, 14 May 2013). Thanks to the domination of petroleum-based economy, many towns have turned into single-industry towns with high cost of living and lack of basic infrastructure (HRW 2012, p.21). While petroleum companies make sure the industrial sites are equipped with contemporary technology, local residents do not have such basic things as paved roads, electricity, and running water (HRW 2012, p.21). Thus, despite being one of the most oil- and gas-rich provinces, the Mangystau region, Western Kazakhstan, remains one of the poorest ones. The poverty rate in the region reached 21.2% in 2010, and was the highest in Kazakhstan.

These disparities and inequality were noted by various international organisations and observers. IMF analysis recommended Kazakhstan to diversify its economy away from the petroleum sector (IMF 2011). As IMF warns against continuous disparity between the rich and the poor: “A key challenge is ensuring that the benefits from the oil wealth are shared by the population as a whole” (IMF 2011, p.27). Similar concerns were voiced by my interviewees in Astana: both local and European officials and experts noted oil dependency, lack of economy diversification, and inequality as major challenges in Kazakhstan.

The oil and gas industries and the revenue generated by them remain largely under the control of the state. The state-owned Kazmunaygaz controls about half of the country’s hydrocarbons industry, and the generated revenue is managed by the National Oil Fund. The Fund was established in 2001 to stabilise state income through covering budget shortfalls in case oil prices fall below a certain level. There is no clear data on the Fund’s assets, transactions and investments, and one can only imagine how much wealth is accumulated in the Fund given the country’s intense oil and gas trade. However, it is clear that the President controls the Fund (Revenue Watch 2013), and, as such, can easily use the country’s immense resources to further consolidate and extend his stable authoritarian rule.

Kyrgyz Rentier State

Despite significant economic reforms and shock therapy, it is unclear whether the uneasy transition to market economy succeeded and Kyrgyzstan turned into a full-fledged market economy. As Pomfret notes, Kyrgyzstan's old central planning appeared to be being replaced by a rentier economy in which insiders live off the resource rents rather than generating new output (Pomfret 2003, pp.11-12). Up until now, the Kyrgyz economy is a surprise for the Kyrgyz officials themselves. Minister of Economy of the Kyrgyz Republic Sariev once noted that "The Kyrgyz economy is nonsense" as it does not fit into usual ratios of import and export, income and expenditures. Minister Sariev acknowledged that three factors keep the national currency alive: labour migrant remittances, shadow economy and criminal money.

In reality, Kyrgyzstan has several sources of income: Kumtor gold mine (about 37% GDP), labour migrant remittances (25%), taxation (24%), and donor aid (average 8% in 2000-2010). Most of these income sources will be discussed below.

Kyrgyzstan has modest, especially when compared to Kazakhstan, deposits of natural resources. Oil and gas are available in limited amounts in the Fergana valley, Southern Kyrgyzstan. Most of the sector is involved in mining: there are 161 active mining companies; the State Geology and Mining Resources Agency has issued about a thousand licenses for prospecting, exploration and mining (National Statistics Committee of Kyrgyzstan 2015). Most of these mines are small ventures, but there is one mine, which makes single largest contribution to the Kyrgyz economy – Kumtor gold mine in the Issyk-Kul province, Northern Kyrgyzstan. The site is operated by the Kumtor Operating Company (KOC), a subsidiary of Centerra Gold Inc. (Canada). Kumtor gold mine accounts for 37.7% of the industrial sector in Kyrgyzstan, and constituted 6.2% of the total GDP in 2013 (Ministry of Economy of the Kyrgyz Republic 2013).

The site is operated by the KOC, but the whole venture is a joint partnership with the Kyrgyz Government, which is represented by the Kyrgyzaltyn JSC, a state-owned company. The partnership represents an interesting case of strategic mutual dependence. Centerra Gold Inc. is Kyrgyzstan's single largest investor, while Kyrgyzstan via Kyrgyzaltyn JSC is Centerra's largest shareholder with 33 % of the common shares, which value more than 1.5 billion USD (Kumtor's 2nd Quarterly Report 2011). The initial agreement between the Kyrgyz Government and Centerra Gold Inc. was signed in 1992. After several years of the project capacity development, the site started its full operation in 1997. The Kumtor mine is a growing enterprise: during nine months in 2011, the Kumtor mine produced 444, 460 ounces of gold, which is 31 % more than during the same period in 2010. The Kumtor mine provides 2,663 jobs with 95% employees being Kyrgyz citizens, and funds local community support projects and charity (Kumtor's 2nd Quarterly Report 2011). The KOC pays considerable amount of taxes to the Kyrgyz state budget. The payments include revenue-based tax, pollution tax, income tax, payments to the social insurance fund, customs duties and payments to the Issyk-Kul Development Fund (Kumtor's 2nd Quarterly Report 2011).

While Kumtor provides some data on its activities, the Kyrgyz government reports are less clear. As a result, there is no clear shared knowledge or understanding on to what extent Kumtor contributes to the national budget. Officials highlight the importance of Kumtor, but the specific data on the extent of Kumtor's contribution remains rather unclear. This might indicate both incompetence of state officials in dealing with economic reporting and deliberate hiding of actual profits. The only thing all parties agree upon is that Kumtor is important, and will remain important source of the state rent.

The access to international resources plays a pivotal role in survival strategy of the Kyrgyz government (Kavalski 2010, p.17). Within the last twenty two year (1991-2013), Kyrgyzstan has in total received 7.7 billion USD international aid (Aid Flow charts 2013). In total 49 various funding organisations have been providing and still provide donor aid through 6,032 projects to the country (Aid Data 2013). Top international donors include the World Bank, United States, ASDB Group, Japan, and International Monetary

Fund (Aid Data 2013). On 10 July 2013, at the second donor conference, Prime Minister Satybaldiev appealed to donors asking 5 billion USD to implement 77 national projects. The projects require 10 billion, and 5.5 billion will be covered from other sources.

Many recent projects, run and funded by various donors, are devoted to helping the Kyrgyz Government manage its internal and external debts and support its budget. Kyrgyz public budget deficit in year 2008 is 0.1 % of GDP, while in year 2009 it is 1.5% of GDP. National Bank of the Kyrgyz Republic attributes this substantial change to the introduction of new Tax Code, which reduced the total number of taxes, reduced VAT rate, and the increased need for additional budget expenses (NBKR 2010). It is forecasted that Kyrgyz budget deficit will reach 5.1% of GDP in 2010. The widening deficit is said to be a result of the increased budgetary allocations for the development budget (mainly infrastructure projects), monetisation of benefits, higher pensions, and increased compensation to vulnerable social groups. Public budget support is an important factor for development aid, as many development agencies seek ensuring sustainability of their aid, and request the local government to carry out projects on their own expenses after the life of development projects. However, this is not often possible due to the public budget deficit.

One more external rent comes from former and current Kyrgyz citizens, who travel abroad to work and send money back to support their families in Kyrgyzstan. As employment prospects are getting more challenging in Kyrgyzstan, more and more young capable people leave abroad in pursuit of better paid jobs to earn their living and support their families, who often stay in Kyrgyzstan. Since the early 90-s and up to the date, labour migrants, or *gastarbeiters* as they are usually called in the region, have contributed 9.7 billion USD to the Kyrgyz economy. Labour migrant remittances rose from less than 30 million USD in 2002 to more than 2 billion USD in 2012. In 2011, the country received 1.709 billion USD in personal labour remittances, which amounted to 27% of the 2011 total GDP (6.198 billion USD; World Bank Data 2013). Thanks to the increasing flow of remittances, the Kyrgyz Republic is one of the largest recipients of remittances (relative to GDP) in the world.

The dependence on labour migrants' remittances is so strong, that any crises in Russia or Kazakhstan affect the influx of money to Kyrgyzstan. The global crisis of 2008 did not affect Kyrgyzstan directly, but the downfall of GDP growth from 8.4% in 2008 to 2.3% in 2009 can be explained by economic downturns in two major economic partners of Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Kazakhstan (ADB 2010). At the grass roots level, the crisis was more feasible as it hit the livelihood of many families. As Reeves observed in 2010, many families in Kyrgyz provinces who expect receiving money from family members in Russia once every one or two months have been waiting, without transfers, for a year or more as the financial crisis stopped Russia's mid-2000s construction boom in its tracks (many Kyrgyz migrants work at construction sites; Reeves 2010, pp.3-4). These families clearly lacked this financial source, and this might have affected their capacity to ensure adequate housing, food, education, and healthcare.

A side effect of this dependence on labour workers remittances is that it increases the country's dependence on Russia and to lesser extent on Kazakhstan as most of the Kyrgyz labour migrants travel to these countries in pursuit of jobs. Dependence on these remittances implies a certain degree of dependence on Russia, and might actually facilitate Russia's autocracy promotion (as discussed further in Chapter 6). This dependence on neighbouring authoritarian countries might be an alarm bell for external democracy promotion. The leverage the authoritarian Russia, Kazakhstan and China have on Kyrgyzstan is difficult to ignore as it operates on many levels. In addition to migrant remittances, Kyrgyzstan depends on these countries in terms of exports and imports. Kyrgyzstan benefits from trading activity that takes place in the trading "corridor" from China to Kazakhstan and Russia. In addition, Kyrgyzstan imports more than exports, and the imported goods are critical for the basic survival of majority population: fuel, wheat, and fertilizers. At that top importers of fuel, wheat and fertilizers are Russia (33.1%), China (22.9%) and Kazakhstan (9.5%; Ministry of Economy of the Kyrgyz Republic 2013). The inter-relation between Kyrgyzstan and its three top trade partners is a case of increasing economic dependence, which might also imply political dependence. Any change in trade policies of these countries might affect Kyrgyz economy and deteriorate social and

economic conditions of citizens, which might result in social unrest. There has already been a case when international politics strongly affected economics. In April-June 2010, as a reaction to the violent change of regime in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan closed its border with Kyrgyzstan. As a result, there was a quick rise in fuel and bread prices, which was upsetting for the wider population and caused certain dissatisfaction with the Provisional Government (news reports by Kabar and AkiPress information agencies 2015).

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter sought to outline, discuss and analyse historical, political and economic context in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Despite some drastic differences in territory, population, energy resources, democratisation record, and economic performance, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan share some historical, political, social, and economic features. These include similar societal nomadic structures in the pre-Soviet period, the shared Soviet past, the initial post-Soviet transition to market economy, limited political pluralism, and significant dependence on external rents.

Throughout the last two centuries, the Kazakh and Kyrgyz peoples have undergone drastic social, political, economic and cultural transformations that have significantly shaped contemporary Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. However, transformation processes were usually initiated, designed, and implemented by external powers. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have limited experience in state-building, institution-building, and democratic governance. They had traditional nomadic communities with *uru* and tribal hierarchy before becoming parts of the Soviet Union; the Soviet governance was on the brink of totalitarian and authoritarian regime; and the post-Soviet transition has resulted in an unstable semi-democracy in Kyrgyzstan and stable authoritarianism in Kazakhstan.

The transition from command economy to market economy after the collapse of the Soviet Union is important for the research project for several reasons. Firstly, it is instrumental to understanding the current state of affairs in the Kazakh and Kyrgyz economic sectors. Secondly, it explains certain

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degree of distrust and disillusionment in the Western reform proposals in the region. Finally, it provides some insights into the emergence and dynamics of informal economics, which, together with informal politics, constitute a grey area that makes democracy promotion challenging for external actors. The transition period did not lead to expected economic growth or improved social welfare. Much to the opposite, these changes resulted in negative effects, increasing the financial vulnerability of many people, reducing available jobs, and decreasing the quality of life. Unintended socio-economic outcomes of the transitional reforms included poverty, gap between the new rich and the new poor, accumulation of wealth through unfair and obscure privatisation, change of popular perceptions of the state and external actors; and informal (sometimes illegal) economic activities and practices.

Relatively dynamic political life in the early years of independence in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan did not last long; the ruling elites in the two countries quickly sought to tighten the grasp on their newly-obtained power domestically and simultaneously maintain the “democracy facade” for the international community. As a result of the divergent political system formation process, the countries have developed their respective political regimes: unstable democracy in Kyrgyzstan, and stable authoritarianism in Kazakhstan. Instability in Kyrgyzstan has put the importance of democracy for public well-being and development under question, while authoritarian Kazakhstan unexpectedly served as a bright illustration of good economic performance without democratic governance. This might significantly undermine external democracy promotion efforts and the very cause of global democracy promotion.

Economic context in the two countries is characterised with rentier economy. Understanding rentierism under Central Asian conditions might provide significant insights into the issue of local responsiveness to external incentives to adopt certain political and economic practices. Kazakhstan is a large oil rentier state, while Kyrgyzstan has a different rentierism pattern: it survives on a combination of externally retrieved rents: gold mining revenue, labour migrant remittances, and donor aid. Rentier economies might contribute to understanding of the enduring stable authoritarianism in Kazakhstan, and inability of Kyrgyz leaders to sustain authoritarianism in

Kyrgyzstan without fluctuations between democracy and autocracy. As it will be discussed in more detail further in the dissertation, Kazakhstan's stable authoritarianism might be supported by the country's petro-wealth: Kazakh officials welcome know-how and technology exchange, but are increasingly reluctant to accept the Western criticisms on poor human rights and democracy records. Kyrgyzstan is more responsive to external material incentives due to the lack of natural resources and overall moderate economic performance. However, Kyrgyzstan has developed a combination of various external rents, and if it fails to obtain grants and technical aid from one external actor, it might fill in the gap with other rents.

Despite of the shared Soviet past and relatively similar starting position in the early independence period, Kyrgyzstan's and Kazakhstan's paths of economic and political development significantly diverged in the new millennium. In the course of two violent changes of political regime in 2005 and 2010, two inter-ethnic conflicts in 1991 and 2010, numerous constitutional amendments and dynamic political life, Kyrgyzstan has transformed into an unstable imitation democracy. Kazakhstan has consolidated a strong authoritarian presidential rule based upon a steady economic performance and an enormous petro-wealth, i.e. became a stable autocracy.

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have formed distinct types of political regimes. Kyrgyzstan demonstrates better democracy scores than Kazakhstan but its political and economic performance are significantly impeded by continuous instability. Kazakhstan, on the other hand represents a strong authoritarian presidential rule based on the personality of President Nazarbayev, oppressive regime, and sound economic performance.

Chapter 4

EU Democracy Promotion in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

4.1 Introduction

The European Union (EU) embarked upon building bilateral and multilateral ties with the Central Asian Republics soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The EU member states were quick to recognise the newly independent states, establish diplomatic relations, and consider trade and economic cooperation opportunities. However, due to the geographic remoteness and the socio-economic crisis in Central Asia at the time, the engagement of EU member states was rather limited. The EU engagement with the region has largely concentrated on the development aid provided to the distressed former Soviet countries under the framework of the Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) in 1991-2006 (Frenz 2008).

In June 2007, the Council of the European Union adopted the Strategy towards Central Asia 2007-2013, which signalled a new phase of inter-regional and bilateral relations between the EU and its member states and the five republics of Central Asia. The Strategy outlined seven broad cooperation areas, including democracy, good governance, rule of law and human rights (Council of the EU 2007, pp.12-15). Democratic principles and democracy promotion have already become an integral part of the EU's involvement as an international actor and a normative power. Due to this, the inclusion of democracy assistance to the Central Asia Strategy was unsurprising, and the EU continued its role of a democracy promotion agent in this less than democratic region.

The EU applies a range of mechanisms and instruments to further normative elements of its foreign and development policy. The EU funds, implements and oversees democracy related projects, engages in political and human rights dialogue, as well as provides technical assistance to various local actors, including government and civil society organisations. These activities

involve a variety of actors on the EU side, such as EU institutions and EU member states. The complexity of the EU's institutional framework and the multi-dimensional nature of its external democracy promotion can be overwhelming at times. Further analysis in this thesis will require to aggregate and categorise the available information on key stakeholders, their interests and motivation, as well as to analyse the EU conception of democracy and its implementation through democracy promotion activities abroad.

The primary purpose of this chapter is to explore EU engagement in democracy promotion in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. For this purpose, the chapter aims to identify and analyse what actors are involved in EU democracy promotion in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Secondly, it is crucial to explore the legal and normative foundation of EU democracy promotion globally, regionally and at the level of individual countries. Thirdly, the chapter aims to identify the spectrum of available democracy promotion instruments and their implementation in the two target countries. While the previous chapter provided the context in the target countries, this chapter provides the context of the democracy promotion agent and transitions the thesis' narrative from contextual discussion to empirical analysis. Understanding the EU actors, their motivation, the legal and normative framework, and implementation of democracy promotion activities is vital for the evaluation of EU democracy promotion in the chapter that follows this chapter.

In order to address these issues, the chapter is structured as follows. The first section explores the role, capacities and interests of relevant EU actors. Afterwards, I map the legal and normative framework of EU democracy promotion and identify what efforts the EU undertakes to promote democracy. Finally, the chapter focuses on the existing mechanisms and instruments of EU democracy promotion and their application in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, then concluding by systematising and summarising the key discussion points.

4.2 EU Actors and their Interests in Central Asia

The EU is one type of actor, while its member states are another type of actor, and their interests might diverge.

Kyrgyz foreign policy analyst (interview 1, 31 July 2012)

The EU presents a unique supranational multilateral actor in the making. The dynamic evolvement of the EU's institutional set-up and policies have led to the multiplication of actors within the EU. Exploring the issue of EU actorness is challenging due to the sheer number of institutional, national and subnational actors and stakeholders within the Union. In order to address this challenge, I divided the actors, who might be directly or indirectly involved in external democracy promotion, into two large groups. The first group refers to the EU's institutional actors and their roles in external democracy promotion. Such institutions as the European Commission, the Council of the EU, and the European External Service play a significant role in shaping, implementing and monitoring EU democracy promotion activities abroad. The EU member states, on the other hand, have varying degrees of interest in promoting normative objectives abroad and prioritising cooperation with certain regions. The role of the EU member states in decision making should not be underestimated because any significant action related to common policies requires consent of the member states. For this reason, addressing the interests and stakes of the EU member states in Central Asia might provide certain insights and contribute to the understanding of the difficulties associated with EU democracy promotion in Central Asia. Therefore, this section first explores the variety of the EU's institutional actors involved in external democracy promotion at different levels. Afterwards, it discusses the interests and positions of the key member states engaged in the region. Finally, this section concludes with a brief overview and analysis of the EU actors, their capacities and roles in order to narrow down the focus of this research and highlight the most relevant information.

EU's Institutional Actors

The European Council is in charge of determining the high-level political direction and priorities for the EU. The European Council convenes twice a year and is composed of the heads of member states and the President of the European Council, who facilitates cohesion and consensus in the European Council's decision making. The European Council's role in external democracy promotion is significant as it sets general guidelines of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and external democracy promotion presents a part of CFSP. However, the European Council's area of activities is so high that it does not have a considerable impact on the substance, contents or other vital details of democracy promotion in specific regions and countries.

The Council of the European Union is an intergovernmental body responsible for non-legislative acts in external relations and definition of strategic priorities. The Council consists of ministers of EU member states. The Council participates in shaping CFSP, which includes external democracy promotion and regional strategies. As an important decision maker in the EU foreign policy, the Council is responsible for prioritisation of regional and bilateral partnerships, as well directions of EU foreign policy. In addition, the Council is involved in regular monitoring and revision of the strategies' implementation. Within the Council's structure several bodies are of particular importance. The Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER), composed of the member states' permanent ambassadors to the EU, presents the opinions and interests of the member states and prepares the Council meetings (article 240, European Union 2012c). COREPER meets weekly and shapes the agenda of the Council meetings, but it does not have decision making powers. It is its engagement in the preparation of the Council meetings that makes COREPER a CFSP actor to be considered. Political and Security Committee (PSC), a permanent body of the Council, is in charge of monitoring the international situation where it concerns CFSP. As such, it plays an important role in the way the EU responds to significant international developments or crises (Eur-Lex 2011, no pagination).

The rotating Council Presidency by the member states is another body within the Council, which plays a role in shaping the Council's agenda and to a certain extent – the strategic direction of external action and development policies. The COREPER and the Presidency can potentially influence the preparatory stages of agenda setting. However, their influence on decision making might remain limited because in the post-Lisbon institutional structure they share powers in external action with other agents, in particular, the Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Head of the EEAS (Vandecasteele et al 2013, pp.12-13; Vandecasteele et al 2015, pp.562-568). As both COREPER and the Council Presidency consist of representatives of the member states, their proposals are often informed by specific policies and interests of the member states.

The European Parliament is a legislative and representative body of the EU directly elected by European citizens. The European Parliament shares its legislative competences with the Council. The majority of legislative acts need to be agreed upon by both the Council and the European Parliament through the so-called co-decision procedure. The European Parliament plays a particular role in external democracy promotion. Firstly, through the co-decision procedure, it participates in the adoption of legislative acts, some of which might concern external democracy promotion. Secondly, in compliance with the Lisbon Treaty, the European Parliament has a say in EU expenditures through its participation in the budgetary procedure (Hix and Hoyland 2013, p.173). Thirdly, the European Parliament oversees the activities of other EU institutions to ensure implementation of democratic and transparent governance of the Union. Finally, the European Parliament is a large political forum for discussing EU's policies and activities. As the only directly elected institution of the EU, the European Parliament is less constrained by the member states' interests and institutional politics and has more freedom to express opinion on such sensitive topics as the state of democracy in third countries. Nevertheless, the European Parliament's powers and capacities should not be overestimated. Firstly, due to the institutional set-up and separation of powers, the Parliament generally has less power than the Council (Thomson 2011, p.13). Secondly, as a large institution consisting of multiple political parties and individuals from different

member states, the European Parliament often lacks unity on the relations with the regions, which represent less strategic interest for the EU. The European Parliament can exert more influence on decision making when there is a certain degree of unity across political factions (Hix and Hoyland 2013, pp.174-175). In the case of the EU-Central Asian relations, this unity is absent as hardly a dozen Members of the European Parliament (MEP) raise Central Asia to the agenda (interview 17, a European Parliament clerk, 10 March 2013; Tsertsvadze 2014, pp.1-2). Therefore, while it is important to acknowledge the European Parliament's role in voicing opinions on the general state of democracy in Central Asia and the EU activities in the area of democracy promotion, these power and capacity limitations should be taken in consideration.

The European Commission, together with the Council of the EU and the European Parliament, is involved in legislative process (it has the right of legislative initiative), decision making, and implementation and monitoring of EU common policies. The Commission consists of 28 Commissioners, including the President of the Commission (European Commission 2015, no pagination). Structurally, the Commission consists of Directorate-General (DGs) and services. From among the Commission's DGs, the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO) is primarily responsible for defining EU development policy and implementing development aid, including democracy assistance. As development cooperation is intertwined into the external relations framework, DG DEVCO closely cooperates with the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy acting as the Vice-President of the Commission. Until recently, the European Commission has been in charge of EU diplomatic missions abroad and development aid was coordinated within the Commission, between DG DEVCO and Directorate-General for the External Relations (DG RELEX). In 2010, the newly established EEAS took over these duties and, in 2011, DG RELEX merged with the EEAS. Nowadays, DG DEVCO relies on the extensive network of the EU Delegations to collect information on development needs to implement and oversee its activities in third countries (Julian 2012, no pagination). The importance of the Commission and, in particular, DG

DEVCO for external democracy promotion in Central Asia can hardly be overestimated as the Commission is an important decision maker and implementer in the development policy area.

The establishment of the European External Action Service (EEAS), the EU's diplomatic service, in 2010 has enabled the EU to facilitate the developmental and political components of external democracy promotion. In compliance with the new institutional set-up and separation of duties, DG DEVCO implements development aid, while the EEAS, together with such political figures as the High Representative or EU Special Representatives, engages in political and human rights dialogue. The EEAS and the Commission's DG DEVCO share programming competencies for development cooperation and report to the Council and the Commission (Donor Tracker 2014, p.3).

The EEAS consists of geographical and thematic units, each dealing either with a specific region or topic. Six geographical departments manage the EU's diplomatic relations with Asia and the Pacific (MDI), Africa (MDII), Europe and Central Asia (MDIII), North Africa, Middle East, Arabian Peninsula, Iran and Iraq (MDIV), Americas (MDV) and multilateral relations (MDVI). Two EEAS departments work in the areas that are relevant for EU democracy promotion activities. Central Asia Unit of MDIII is in charge of diplomatic and political relations with Central Asia, each Central Asian country is allocated a desk officer (interviews 18, 19, 20, EEAS, 10-11 March 2013). Directorate on Human Rights and Democracy of MDVI is directly involved in the preparation and conduct of human rights and political dialogue between the EU and third countries (interviews 21 and 23, EEAS, 11-12 March 2013).

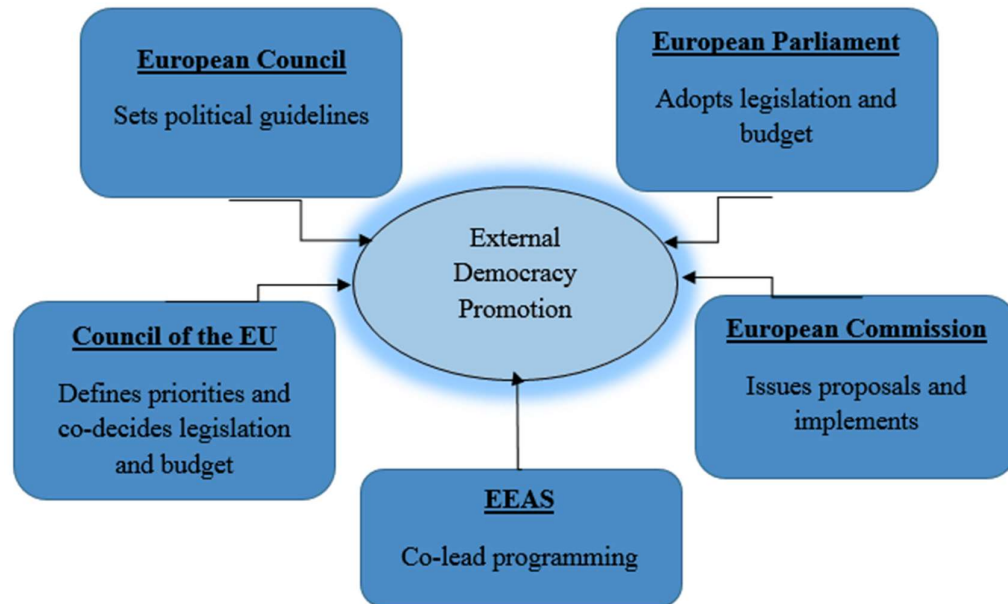
Until 2010 the EU did not have a significant diplomatic presence in the region. The European Commission opened its Delegation in Kazakhstan in 1994 and extended its area of responsibility to the other four Central Asian states. Only in 2010 the EU missions in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were upgraded to the status of EU Delegations. EU mission in Uzbekistan was upgraded in 2012, and Turkmenistan still does not have a full EU diplomatic mission (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013, pp.58-59). EU Delegations carry out a

variety of roles, which makes them an important player in external democracy promotion. EU Delegations monitor and manage development and cooperation programmes on the ground and, consequently have greater knowledge about the local context in target countries. In addition, EU Delegations act as a focal point for all local actors and stakeholders, including governments, civil society, specific beneficiaries and the general public.

Under the framework of external action, there is one more institute, which might be relevant for external democracy promotion. The institute of EU Special Representatives (EUSR) was established in July 2005. In total, there are nine EUSRs, who are nominated by member states, appointed and funded by the Council, managed by the Commission and are accountable to the High Representative for CFSP (EEAS 2015d). The EUSR for Central Asia participates in political and human rights dialogues, carries out regular visits to the region, and issues statements on various occasions. So far there have been five EUSR for Central Asia appointed: Ján Kubiš (2005-2006); Pierre Morel (2006-2012); Patricia Flor (2012-2014); Janos Herman (2014); currently Peter Burian (2015; EEAS 2015d). The role of EUSR for Central Asia primarily revolves around symbolic representation, communication and public diplomacy functions. EUSRs are not key decision makers, but they are crucial for increasing the visibility of the EU in the region and smooth communications at political level.

Overall, it is possible to state that each key EU institutions is in one way or another involved in external democracy promotion. The graph 1 below illustrates the EU institutions and their duties in relation to external democracy promotion. In addition to the top three EU institutions – the Council of the EU, the European Parliament and the European Commission, EEAS is a recent institutional body, whose functions directly relate to external democracy promotion.

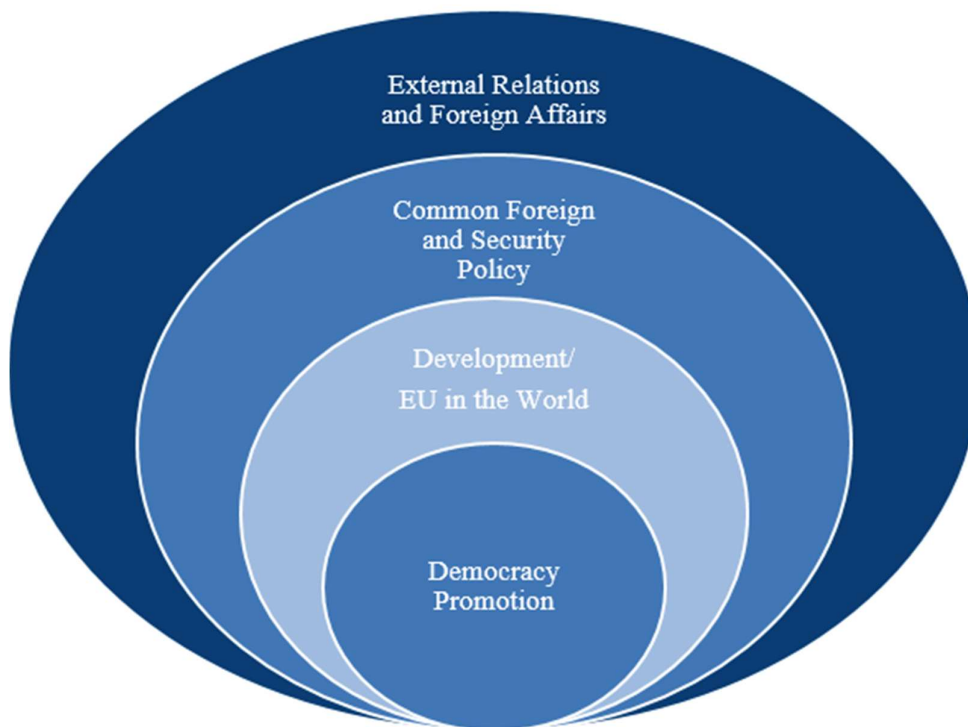
Graph 1: EU institutions involved in external democracy promotion



While all these institutions contribute to EU external democracy promotion, it is important to note that the extent of these contributions vary. In order to understand the share of responsibility and involvement of relevant EU institutional actors in external democracy promotion it is useful to map the external democracy promotion policy within the framework of larger EU policies (see graph 2). The EU's shared policies have significantly evolved and diversified over the last few decades. The most recent changes in the institutional set-up and policies division took place after the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, which established the European External Action Service responsible for the CFSP implementation, and permanent presidency of the European Council. As a unique supranational organisation that unites 28 nations, the EU is involved in the regulation and management of 15 different areas of shared interest (European Commission 2015, no pagination). One of these areas is external relations and foreign affairs, which, in its turn, consists of three policy areas: CFSP, emergency assistance and foreign policies (focuses mostly on international trade). Emergency assistance and foreign policies are less relevant for analysing EU external democracy promotion in Central Asia and they can be skipped here. CFSP deals with a variety of issues, including specific geographic and thematic policies. From

among this variety of CFSP components, development and the EU in the world deserve our attention as external democracy promotion finds itself at the intersection of these two policy areas. On one hand, the EU applies a developmental approach to democracy promotion and considers democracy assistance an integral part of its development policy. On the other hand, democracy assistance to third countries fits into the framework of EU relations with these countries, and, as such, it inevitably constitutes a part of the EU's external action.

Graph 2: Mapping EU democracy promotion within broader policies



Thus, external democracy promotion belongs both to the larger development policy and the external action area. Due to this positioning within the larger framework of EU external relations and foreign affairs, implementation of external democracy promotion is managed by the EU institutions, which are primarily responsible for development policy and external action, i.e. respectively the European Commission's DG DEVCO and the European External Action Service. These institutions and their structural bodies, along with the powerful Council of the EU, are the key institutional actors involved in EU democracy promotion abroad.

EU Member states

After having discussed the EU's institutional actors who are engaged in external democracy promotion it is important to examine the roles and interests of EU member states. Central Asia represents a strategic interest for some member states. This interest primarily stems from the participation of EU member states in the recently completed military campaign in Afghanistan, as well as the rich energy resources of Kazakhstan. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan practice more state control over natural resources and do not welcome foreign investment, i.e. the access to energy resources in these two countries varies from limited in Uzbekistan to virtually absent in Turkmenistan (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013; interview 19, EEAS, 10 March 2013). Due to limited resources and poor economic performance, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan do not attract much attention from the part of EU member states, whose engagement with these countries is limited to donor aid. As a result of these dynamics, it is mostly Kazakhstan, who represents a reasonably significant strategic interest for EU member states in Central Asia.

The implementation of the EU Strategy towards Central Asia overlapped with an important international development. In 2003-2014, a number of the EU member states contributed to the United States-led War on Terror by having sent their troops to Afghanistan to support the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). During this period, the ISAF troop contributing nations from the EU (see Appendix D) were interested to ensure a continuous and reliable involvement of the Central Asian governments. Central Asian countries formed a vital part of the Northern Distribution Network (NDN), an alternative to the less safe Pakistani transportation route used by ISAF to transport cargos and military personnel to and from Afghanistan. Against the background of this increased interest in the region, the Central Asian states intensified their cooperation with the EU.

While the ISAF campaign had a specific timeframe and ended in 2014, the trade cooperation with the region might have longer term significance. In the global context Kazakhstan is hardly a top trade partner for the EU, but in the regional setting it is the main trade partner. Kazakhstan is the richest

economy in Central Asia (Pomfret 2011, pp.132-148). When compared to its poorer neighbours, Kazakhstan is seen as a success story: “an enthusiast player in international and regional organizations, successfully denuclearized, economically thriving, relatively stable politically” (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013, p.608). But what makes Kazakhstan the top regional priority for the EU and its member states is its rich energy resources: 92% of Kazakhstani exports to Europe are hydrocarbons (European Commission 2014b).

The need for energy supply diversification was fuelled by recent issues with the key gas supplier to Eastern Europe and Germany - Russia. In 2006, Russia disrupted the gas supply to core transit and customer states of Eastern Europe. Russia could not amicably settle its disputes over prices and payment with Ukraine and Belarus so cut gas supply for a short period (Haghighi 2007, p.357). This disruption made some EU states realise the extent of their dependence on Russian gas supplies and consider alternative options. The Kazakh gas has been a strategic commodity for the EU before the gas crisis of 2006. A key gas supplier to the EU, Russian Gazprom had heavily relied on purchasing the Kazakh gas and reselling it to Europe (Matveeva 2006, pp.72-75). European-Kazakhstani energy trade could have been facilitated by relative geographic proximity of Kazakhstan (Denison 2009, p.4), but at the moment this remains a prospect rather than a reality. Most Kazakh (and Uzbek – Uzbekistan is another country rich in gas in the region) gas is consumed domestically. The existing exports are mostly exported to Russia and China. Nevertheless, the EU considers Central Asia as a potential alternative source of energy resources (Dickel et al 2014, p.26). However, not all EU member states benefit equally (if they can benefit at all) from the economic cooperation with Kazakhstan and other countries in the region.

As the country-by-country analysis below demonstrates, such factors as the presence of EU member states' businesses, dependence on energy imports, and historical ties (or, lack thereof) contribute to the perceived importance of the Central Asian countries by individual EU member states. Perspectives and approaches of states are often affected by the interests of respective intrastate actors. As Moravcsik (1997, pp.516-520) notes intrastate actors in

the economic domain (commercial companies) and the role of individual member states (in this case, EU member states) often inter-relate. The states with large commercial companies active in undemocratic countries might have other priorities than the states without any companies active in these countries. On the other hand, some states are not interested in Central Asia simply because they have no previous history of relations topped with very limited economic and political interests.

Germany, one of the largest European economies, is a key economic partner for Central Asia. The EU Strategy towards Central Asia was drafted largely by the German initiative, promoted and adopted under the German Presidency at the Council (interview 15 with an official from the German MFA, 13 February 2013). Due to economic and socio-historic reasons, Germany is engaged with the region more than any other European country. This special relationship is conditioned with an extensive presence of German businesses in Kazakhstan. German companies focus on a variety of projects in the country ranging from the energy sector to the electronics and training of specialists. Economic interests are reciprocated by strong willingness to cooperate on the Kazakh side: German investors and experience are much welcomed in the country (interview 39 with German Embassy to Kazakhstan officials 15 May 2013). For Germany, Kazakhstan is the most important trading partner in Central Asia (German Federal Foreign Office 2015, no pagination). For Kazakhstan, Germany is the top European trading partner (Ministry of Economy of Kazakhstan 2015). In addition to strong economic relations there is a solid social connection as well. The 180,000-strong German diaspora in Kazakhstan and the 800,000 Kazakhstan-born Germans (German Federal Foreign Office 2015, no pagination).

Italy has assumed a very pragmatic position with regard to the cooperation in Central Asia. Italy sees avoiding harsh criticism and refraining from normative mission as a key to successful cooperation in Central Asia (Indeo 2013, p.2). Italy has been quite successful in securing an access of its companies, namely ENI, to the rich energy resources in Kazakhstan, as well as in establishing a small but solid commercial presence at least in Kazakhstan (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013, p.69).

Spain's approach to its relations in Central Asia displays a similar degree of pragmatism as it focuses primarily on economic cooperation with Kazakhstan (De Pedro 2012, p.3).

The case of the UK relations with Central Asia is an interesting one because, on one hand the UK's development agency DFID runs a set of democracy related projects in the majority of Central Asian republics on the top of its contributions to EU democracy promotion through the shared EU policies (DFID 2015, no pagination). On the other hand, the UK has a large business representation in Kazakhstan (in other countries the share of foreign businesses in general is insignificant). British companies are among the largest foreign investors in the Kazakh economy. British investments operate mostly in the energy sector, but there are attempts to diversify the scope of investment and get involved in the industries and services other than oil and gas: BG Group and Shell in the energy sector, AMEC and Schneider Electric in infrastructural construction and management, and more than a hundred British smaller companies in other sectors (Walker 2013, p.2). In addition to commercial companies, there are individuals, whose personal relations with Central Asian leaders or other interests, put them under the spotlight. Thus, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair's PR Company was hired by the government of Kazakhstan to promote the country's image abroad and serve as President Nazarbayev's personal advisor. Current British Prime Minister David Cameron's support in improving Kazakhstan's profile was publicly acknowledged by Kazakh authorities (Watt 2013, no pagination). The UK's dual role as a seemingly committed democracy promoter through DFID and a loyal partner of less than democratic regimes stems from the diversity and power of intrastate actors in the UK. While this is an interesting topic, it might be less relevant for this research.

France's foreign policy interests traditionally lie in its former colonies and francophone countries (Peyrouse 2012, p.2). These prioritisation of bilateral partnerships stem from foreign policy considerations, commercial interests and increasingly important migration dynamics. French assistance to Central Asia is not substantial and is mostly concentrated on cultural and education exchange (Peyrouse 2012, p.3).

Portugal has its priorities far from the region as well: its key non-EU partnerships lie in Brazil and Africa, where Lisbon believes it brings added value to the shaping of European approaches (Simao 2012, p.4). Like several other EU member states, France and Portugal has largely delegated the issues of democracy and human rights to the EU level.

The Baltic States have some expertise in the region, but even they acknowledge that this expertise might be outdated: “the region has changed and we haven’t kept up with the changes there as we had experienced drastic changes ourselves” (interview 22 with a clerk from an EU member state’s representation to the EU, 12 March 2013). The Baltic States are primarily interested in business opportunities in Kazakhstan. Thanks to Kazakhstan’s growing economy and the Baltic States’ economic difficulties, the latter explore opportunities to get involved in business and trade in Kazakhstan. Baltic States do not get involved in human rights and democracy projects “for fear of endangering their trade relationships” (Jekabsone 2013, p.2). Until recently, ISAF withdrawal was on the agenda, but not a priority as Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia’s troops in Afghanistan were quite limited (Jekabsone 2013, p.3).

Belgium and Luxembourg demonstrate very little interest in the region and Central Asia is “only marginally” important to their foreign policies (Bossuyt 2013, p.1).

Greece had limited security or business interests in Central Asia, but not much engagement in promoting democratic principles. Its limited engagement with democracy promotion took place through multilateral institutions, particularly the EU and the OSCE (Zyga 2013, p.4). Against the background of the continuous economic crisis in Greece, the cooperation with Central Asia in general and democracy promotion in particular have lost any, even limited appeal to Greece.

This country-by-country overview might leave an impression that the majority of EU member states are only concerned about their energy, trade and security, and have little regard to normative objectives. However, the issue is more complex than that. EU member states might be interested in realpolitik issues, but, as a part of the EU, they share its normative discourses.

When addressing the intrinsic drivers behind EU decision making one should not ignore the role of norms. The dynamic interplay of norms and interests in the formation of the EU, its further development and current functioning might explain some of the inconsistencies associated with EU democracy promotion abroad. The EU was established on the basis of mutual interests and shared norms of its founding member states. Interests and norms are still at the core of EU decision making, but it is difficult to state how much they weigh against each other because every issue of shared EU concern and any international partnership in question might have their specific interest-to-norm ratio. Interests and norms do not necessarily contradict each other. On the contrary, they can display varied interaction patterns, including convergence, complementarity and conflict. These interaction patterns are far from set in stone. As the circumstances surrounding each issue or partnership change, so does the pattern of the norms and interests' interplay.

In the case of Central Asia, the EU displays a degree of duality. On one hand, the rich energy resources in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan and the prospects for insecurity in the wider region are matters of strategic interest for some of the EU member states. On the other hand, the spirit of the EU and its normative background make the inclusion of normative, non-material objectives unavoidable. This, *per se*, does not represent an issue. However, given the local context in the highly authoritarian region, the promotion of democratic norms and principles affects relationships with the local leaders and governments which, in turn, might affect their decisions on the EU access to national energy resources. So far there is a shared view that the EU has not managed to strike a balance between its interests and norms that would ensure an access to energy resources without undermining its normative commitments. Crawford (2008, p.188) notes a large gap between the EU's value agenda and its self-interests. Cooley (2008, p.1186) insists that security and energy in Central Asia are and will remain the primary interests for external actors.

The argument in this thesis tends towards this opinion as well, but offers a more nuanced analysis by explaining some underlying reasons and implications of this duality and resulting inconsistencies (see chapter 6). The

positions of the EU institutions and EU member states on the subject of the democracy promotion in Central Asia are not antagonistic, but the differences are noticeable. With the establishment of the EEAS and appointment of the HR for CFSP and EU Special Representatives for Central Asia and for Human Rights, some EU officials expressed an opinion that the normative burden on the member states slightly decreased and they preferred to let the EU's institutional actors deal with such sensitive issues as democracy and human rights in the authoritarian countries of Central Asia, while the governments and non-state commercial stakeholders from the member states develop trade and economic relations in the region (interviews 18 and 19, EEAS, 10 March 2013). Nevertheless, despite the fact that interests often win over norms in Central Asia, democratic principles and norms are embedded in the structure and the psyche of both the EU's institutional actors and its member states to such an extent that democratic norms and discourses

Norms and discourses affect EU policies in the sense that they inform social behaviour of institutional and individual decision makers (Laffan 2001; Diez 1999). The appeal and power of norms within the EU are often strong enough to hold back selfish realist inclinations of its member states and ensure a degree of equality between larger and smaller states, richer and poorer nations (Laffan 2001, p.716). In this regard, it is important to examine both legal and normative foundations of EU democracy promotion in Central Asia and discuss what kind of democracy the EU uses in its discourse and practice.

4.3 Legal and Normative Framework of EU Democracy Promotion

The Union's action on the international scene shall be guided by the principles which have inspired its own creation, development and enlargement, and which it seeks to advance in the wider world: democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Treaty on the European Union, article 21, European Union 2012b

The legal and normative foundation of the EU democracy promotion policy in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan can be divided into three tiers. The first fundamental tier includes general EU policy documents, which define the very essence of the EU, set forth its principles and values, and serve as a guidance to conduct a normative foreign policy globally. The second tier refers to regional policy documents that define directions of regional cooperation with Central Asia. The third tier includes partnership and cooperation agreements (PCAs) and other bilateral documents specifying country-specific programmes and activities. It is interesting to point out that as these tiers progress from general global to more specific, country-tailored documents, the significance attached to democracy decreases.

First Tier: Global Framework

Democratic principles and norms have become well integrated into the EU's internal structure and external relations through continuous rigorous inclusion of these norms into a broad range of EU legal and normative acts, declarations and statements. As early as in 1972 at a summit in Paris, Heads of States of the Community expressed their determination "to base the development of their Community on democracy, freedom of opinion, the free movement of people and of ideas and participation by their peoples through their freely elected representatives" (European Communities 1972, p.2). As the Union evolved, the commitment to democratic principles and human rights have spilled over from domestic domain to external relations. Thus, in 1991, the Council of the European Communities defined the promotion of democracy and human rights as both an objective and a necessary condition of development cooperation in its resolution (Council of the European Communities 1991).

Since adoption of the Treaty on the European Union in 1992 in Maastricht, the inclusion of democratic principles to external relations and development cooperation have been become a consistent feature in any related documents issued by EU institutions. The Maastricht Treaty listed development and consolidation of democracy and the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms among main provisions

on a common foreign and security policy (article 11, European Union 1992). The Amsterdam Treaty put the principles of liberty, democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law at the core of the EU's foundation (article F, European Union 1997). The Nice Treaty stated that the EU's cooperation with third countries shall be guided by these principles (article 181, European Union 2000). In 2007, the Lisbon Treaty consolidated all previous provisions on democratic principles in domestic and foreign policies, and made the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU legally binding. The Charter reinforces the provision that the EU "is founded on the indivisible, universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity; it is based on the principles of democracy and the rule of law" (Preamble, European Union 2012a), and corresponds to the overall democratic spirit of the EU. The current Treaty on the EU consolidates and reinforces all above-mentioned provisions and lists support of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the principles of international law as the EU's foreign policy objectives (article 21, European Union 2012b). Given that TEU serves as informal constitution and guides all common EU policies, it is possible to say that democratic principles are expected to be incorporated into any domestic or external actions.

Promotion of democracy and human rights plays a varied role as an objective, a pre-requisite to global security, and a development cooperation condition. The European Security Strategy interprets democracy promotion not only as an objective in itself but also as an instrument to ensure European security: "The best protection for our security is a world of well-governed democratic states. Spreading good governance, supporting social and political reform, dealing with corruption and abuse of power, establishing the rule of law and protecting human rights are the best means of strengthening the international order" (Council of the EU 2003, p.10). The provisions on democracy and good governance as development aid conditions can be found in all major development-related documents of the last three decades. The Cotonou Agreement with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries adds good governance to the respect for human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law to the list of essential Agreement elements (2000). Other documents that refer to democratic

principles include the European Commission's Communication of May 2001 on "The EU's Role in Promoting Human Rights and Democratization in Third Countries" (European Commission 2001), the European Consensus on Development, adopted by the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission (European Union 2005), and in the Council Conclusions on Democracy Support in the EU's External Relations (Council of the European Union 2009). The list of these documents can be quite long, but the point made here is that the promotion of democracy and human rights is an integral element of the first-tier global policy-setting documents of the EU, which define the Union's international identity and guide its relations with third countries and international organisations.

Second Tier: Regional Framework

While the EU-Central Asian relations have generally followed the normative guidelines set by the first-tier global legal and normative framework, the EU's strategy towards Central Asia (Council of the EU 2007, p.12) has become more specific, tailored to the region document, which emphasised democracy and other related concepts as an important part of multilateral regional cooperation. The Strategy explains the EU's general interests in the region and highlights its cooperation instruments and mechanisms. The document identified seven cooperation areas of the EU's policy in the region: (1) human rights, rule of law, good governance and democratisation; (2) youth and education; (3) promotion of economic development, trade and investment; (4) strengthening energy and transport links; (5) environmental sustainability and water; (6) combating such common threats and challenges as border management, organised crime, drug trafficking, weapons trade and corruption; and, (7) inter-cultural dialogue. The Strategy often serves as a reference point in discussions on the EU policies towards the region as it sets the cooperation framework and declares the EU's commitment to certain areas of development in the region. The adoption of this strategy has completed the collection of regional strategies adopted by the EU in order to regulate its foreign policy. Other strategies included Black Sea Synergy, EU Arctic Policy, Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, European Economic Area,

European Neighbourhood Policy, and Northern Dimension (EEAS 2015b, no pagination). European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is a relative strategic priority as it covers the immediate neighbourhood. The ENP received 12 billion euros in 2007-2013 (for 12 participating countries) compared to the EU Central Asia Strategy, which was worth 719 million euros for the same period and included 5 participating countries (EEAS 2015b, no pagination). The Regional Strategy Paper (RSP) for Assistance to Central Asia 2007-2013 issued by the European Commission is another core document, which specifies the implementation and funding details of the EU Strategy towards Central Asia. The RSP reiterates the EU strives to promote human rights and democracy worldwide but slightly scales down the commitment to democracy promotion. The RSP focuses on the democracy and development bundle and closely associates one with another. They are seen as reciprocating elements, which reinforce each other and together help the target countries ensure stability, security and well-being of its citizens.

Third Tier: Bilateral Framework

At the bilateral level, it is up to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to regulate relations of this countries with the EU and the incorporation of normative elements into bilateral framework. PCAs set provisions of mutually beneficial cooperation and regulate political, economic, trade, and cultural relations between the EU and the two Central Asian countries. It is notable that both PCAs unambiguously state that respect for democracy and human rights are crucial for bilateral relations with these countries (article 2, European Communities, their Member States and Kyrgyz Republic 1999; European Communities, their Member States and Republic of Kazakhstan 1999), but the overwhelming majority of the Agreements' provisions focus on trade and economic cooperation.

The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, negotiated between the European Communities and Kyrgyzstan in 1995, entered into force in 1999. The PCA served to supplement the TACIS support to Kyrgyzstan, and to replace the old Agreement on Trade and Commercial and Economic

Cooperation, negotiated between the European Communities and the USSR in 1989. The PCA main focus areas are political dialogue, trade in goods, business and investment, legislative cooperation, economic cooperation, cultural cooperation, and financial assistance-related cooperation (European Communities, their Member States and Kyrgyz Republic 1999; European Communities, their Member States and Republic of Kazakhstan 1999). Kazakhstan and the EU have recently negotiated an enhanced PCA, which emphasised the privileged relationship the EU has with Kazakhstan.

Thus, it is possible to conclude that the first-tier documents set the general direction and explain the spirit of the EU policies. The second-tier documents provide more specific account of the EU policy towards Central Asia, and the third-tier documents (PCAs) specify bilateral relations with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. As one may have noticed, the significance attached to democracy decreases as the scope of these documents goes from global to local. As further discussion in this thesis will demonstrate, the same pattern applies to the reality of EU democracy promotion implementation: as the EU moves from global level to local level, the importance of democracy seems to lose its appeal.

The EU Concept of Democracy

In compliance with the Treaty of the EU, the EU's external action should be guided by the principles of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms (article 21, European Union 2012b). However, neither the Treaty nor the majority of the first, second and third-tier legal and normative documents provide sufficient explanation of the meaning of democracy. Given that democracy is an integral element of EU legal and normative framework the absence of a clear uniform definition of democracy in the EU is striking. In the absence of a shared definition, researchers, including myself, have to scrutinise the rich bulk of relevant legal and normative documents and explore discourses of the EU's institutional actors in order to unravel the EU concept of democracy. Due to the subjective nature of such effort, the outcomes might vary (cf. chapter contributions in Wetzel and Orbie 2015; Axyonova 2014; Hobson and Kurki 2012).

In pursuit of a clear-cut functional definition of democracy I turned to the two EU bodies that are responsible for the implementation of EU democracy promotion policies abroad, the EEAS and the Commission's DG DEVCO. EEAS defines democracy as "the political system that best – through proper mechanisms – allows people to enjoy their civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights" (EEAS 2015c, no pagination). DG DEVCO does not offer a straightforward definition of democracy but indicates the essential components of democracy – human rights, participation in political decision making, free mass media and a strong civil society (DG DEVCO 2015, no pagination). The inclusion of these components and the overall institutional narratives within EEAS and DG DEVCO suggest a broad and quite blurred concept of democracy and its association with human rights and socio-economic development.

The so-called Copenhagen criteria were the next point of reference in the search of an all-EU definition of democracy. Any candidate to the EU is required to meet the following criteria: stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities, a functioning market economy, and, sufficient administrative and institutional capacity to implement the *acquis communautaire* – EU law. As these criteria are essentially an entry requirement for all EU member states it is logical to assume that, in theory, each current EU member state has met them. The Copenhagen criteria might shed some light upon what constitutes the domestic definition of a democracy as it is applied to EU member states, and it is logical to extend this definition to the external domain of EU politics. If this is even partly so, the EU concept of democracy as suggested by Copenhagen criteria clearly indicates a preference for a procedural-institutional type of democracy. This type of democracy resembles the classic Dahlian concept of polyarchy and differs from the broad definition of democracy as formulated by EEAS and DG DEVCO.

The third point of reference was the higher institutional level – the top three EU institutions and their documents. From among numerous publications of the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament, I have selected a few, which go into some detail when explaining the concept of democracy. The Council Regulation of 1999 is probably the closest to offer a reasonably

I

detailed definition of democracy as it highlights the key components of democracy support (article 2.2., Council of the EU 1999). The Regulation closely links democracy to a set of inter-related concepts such as good governance and the rule of law, which is characterised with an independent judiciary, a humane penitentiary system, constitutional and legislative reforms, and abolition of the death penalty. It also emphasises procedural elements of democracy, the separation of powers, public participation in political decision making, and free and fair electoral processes. Finally, the Regulation outlines the conditions that facilitate creation and consolidation of democratic environment: political pluralism with a strong civil society, independent mass media and political freedoms. Thus, the Council provided a definition of democracy that goes beyond the minimalist set of procedural-institutional democracy. The European Commission also opts for broader definition in its Programming Guide for Strategy Papers on Democracy and Human Rights: "A democratic political system is inclusive, participatory, representative, accountable, transparent and responsive to citizens' aspirations and expectations" (European Commission 2008, p.7).

The European Parliament's Office for Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy lists the following essential elements of democracy: public participation and elections; political freedoms; separation of power; a strong and independent parliament; the rule of law; political pluralism; transparency and accountability; and, free mass media (OPPD 2009, pp.17-27). This list of essential democracy components is largely inspired by the UN General Assembly's resolution. The decision to use the UN definitions is both practical and normative as it stems from the desire to follow the most universal definitions available and avoid a euro-centric definition of democracy (OPPD 2009, p.5).

As this overview of democracy definitions in the EU demonstrates, there is no single uniform concept of democracy, but the essential components of democracy mentioned in relevant EU documents are often similar: participatory politics, the rule of law, human rights, good governance, and political pluralism. Nevertheless, it is difficult to disagree with Milja Kurki, who describes this thin and complex conceptual foundation of EU democracy promotion as "fuzzy liberalism". Kurki argues it is an intentional

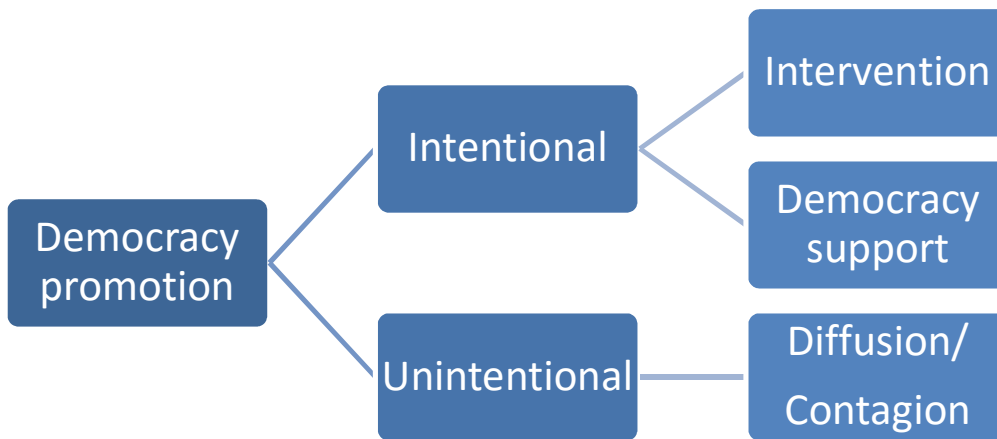
effort from the part of the EU to keep the concept of democracy blurred. This blurred, or “fuzzy”, concept makes the EU flexible in its democracy promotion efforts in specific target regions and countries. In addition, it allows the EU to incorporate social and economic elements of development into the democracy promotion agenda and avoid purely political and sensitive dialogue with partner governments (Kurki 2015, p.41). As an outcome, the EU definition of democracy requires a case-specific attention and the following section will address the EU’s approach to democracy promotion in Central Asia, and in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in particular.

4.4 Implementation in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

Before engaging in a region and country-specific discussion of EU democracy promotion activities, it is useful to recall general information on democracy promotion mechanisms. This is required to identify which mechanisms are available in general and define which ones are applicable to Central Asia and Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in particular. In addition, this puts EU democracy promotion in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan into a larger perspective, which will later help analyse the effectiveness of EU democracy promotion and the factors affecting it.

At the most general level, democracy promotion can take unintentional and intentional forms (see graph 3 below). Unintentional forms, which require much less effort (if any) in promoting values and principles, are usually referred to as diffusion or contagion. Unintentional spread of democratic values can occur through regional organisations with a strong democratic tradition (Pevehouse 2002, p.613), geographic proximity to and extensive interactions with a powerful democratic state (Brinks and Coppedge 2006, pp.479-482). In the case of the EU and Central Asia, the unintentional forms of democracy promotion are less plausible as the Central Asian republics cannot join the EU and are located too far to experience the neighbourhood democratic spill over effects.

Graph 3: Democracy promotion classification



Intentional forms of democracy promotion can refer to military intervention and democracy support. Military intervention as a democracy promotion mechanism has become an unpopular measure due to the controversial nature and high political and economic costs with unpredictable results (Pickering and Peceny 2006, pp.555-556; Youngs 2002, pp.22-23). The EU is particularly reluctant to rely on hard power as it contradicts the spirit of the EU and its emphasis on the use of non-coercive means in external action (Youngs 2006, pp.53-54). Democracy support or democracy assistance, on the other hand, has gained popularity and become a mainstream form of democracy promotion. Democracy assistance is wide-spread among relevant policy making circles to the extent that democracy promotion and democracy assistance are often used interchangeably. As the EU largely relies on this form of democracy promotion, the further discussion will revolve around various mechanisms of EU democracy assistance and their implementation in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Due to the extensive research on EU democracy promotion that has been going on in the last decade or so, there are numerous typologies of various EU democracy promotion mechanisms and instruments. Inventing a new typology for this research would be an unnecessary exercise, especially taking into consideration that these typologies are repetitive and similar in many ways. Instead, I opted to use the existing research on the subject

adjusting it to the case of EU democracy promotion in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. It is possible to highlight three mechanisms of EU democracy promotion: strategic calculation (Schimmelfennig 2005; Checkel 2005), normative suasion (Warkotsch 2008), and democratic empowerment (Borzel and Risse 2004; Axyonova 2014).

Strategic calculation refers to the conditionality-based mechanisms and involves a set of social and material incentives or punitive measures from the part of democracy promotion agent and a cost-and-benefit analysis from the part of target countries (Checkel 2005, pp.808-810). Incentives, or positive conditionality, link incentives to meeting the EU requirements on democratic values and principles. Incentives can vary from the prospects of joining the EU to trade privileges or increased development aid. Punitive measures, or negative conditionality, include trade embargoes, visa bans and other sanctions imposed on the state or individual officials, who, in the view of the EU, are responsible for the violation of democratic norms and human rights. The logic of strategic calculation is based upon an assumption that the target countries and their governments are pragmatic rational actors, who can weigh the costs of compliance with the EU requirements on democracy and related norms against the benefits of doing so. If the benefits are higher in the eyes of target country and its representatives, the EU democracy support proposals are more likely to succeed.

The second mechanism of EU democracy promotion, normative suasion seeks to engage target countries and their political elites in a democratic socialisation process through continuous discussion of democratic norms and persuasion to adopt these norms. Normative suasion operates through the “power of better argument”, appropriateness of behaviour, persuasion and complex learning. The adherents of this mechanism insist that only normative suasion can ensure long-term success of democracy promotion and a genuine ownership of the democratisation process on the ground (Warkotsch 2008, pp.241-242). In order to be successful normative suasion requires a degree of conviction, commitment and consistency on the side of socialiser – the EU. To what extent this is achievable for the EU remains a question to be discussed further in the thesis.

Democratic empowerment is somewhat less researched and less frequently listed as an EU external democracy promotion mechanism compared to strategic calculation and normative suasion. Democratic empowerment is more often discussed with regard to the internal democracy consolidation in the EU (Vauchez 2008) and support to democracy consolidation in the prospective and recent EU member states (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2004). Democratic empowerment presents a useful mechanism in highly authoritarian environments as it does not require the target country government's consent and works directly with domestic actors, who might bring or support change – e.g. civil society organisations, mass media or youth organisations. Such non-state targeting does not fit into the strategic calculation logic as the local political elites in Central Asia are not likely to see benefits in a strong civil society or free mass media. Neither does it fit into the normative suasion mechanism as democratic empowerment is based on capacity-building rather than on persuasion: the beneficiary are supposedly already persuaded, but they might lack skills, knowledge and experience to implement changes (Axyonova 2014, p.29).

Thus, EU democracy promotion mechanisms in Central Asia include strategic calculation (conditionality), normative suasion, and democratic empowerment. After having established that, it is possible to examine specific EU instruments used to promote democratic principles and norms in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In order to structure further discussion, I group instruments within each mechanism and discuss how they are applied in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. As EU democracy promotion finds itself at the intersection of EU development aid policy and EU external action, the range of implementation instruments includes both development aid instruments and foreign policy tools. Development-related instruments find themselves mostly within the strategic calculation and democratic empowerment groups, while foreign policy tools are mostly relevant for the normative suasion group (see Table 6 below).

Table 6: EU democracy promotion (DP) mechanisms and instruments

Mechanisms	Strategic Calculation	Normative Suasion	Democratic Empowerment
Instruments	<u>Positive conditionality:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU accession • ENP • Trade opportunities • Development aid <u>Negative conditionality:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PCA clause • Sanctions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political dialogue • HR dialogue • CFSP instruments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electoral observation • Capacity-building
Implementers	Council of the EU DG DEVCO DG Trade EEAS EU Delegations	Council of the EU European Commission European Parliament EEAS EU Delegations EU SR for Central Asia	EIDHR DCI NSA-LA
Targets	State actors	State actors	Non-state actors

Based upon Axyonova 2014, pp.28-30; Warkotsch 2008; Schimmelfennig 2005

Strategic calculation instruments require some leverage available, “carrots and sticks”, which should ideally look sufficiently meaningful for the target government in order to engage in a cost-and-benefit analysis and choose proposed democratic changes. From among available EU strategic calculation instruments only a few can be applied in Central Asia. Due to the geographic and political circumstances, the most powerful leverage of the EU - the “golden carrot” of EU accession could not offered as an incentive to adopt and implement democratic norms and principles (Freire and Simao 2013, p.178). Another incentive, a privileged relation with the EU can be used only to a limited extent. The EU has a range of regional partnerships and strategies, one of the most privileged ones in Eurasia is the Eastern Neighbourhood Partnership (ENP). ENP offers the recipients closer relations

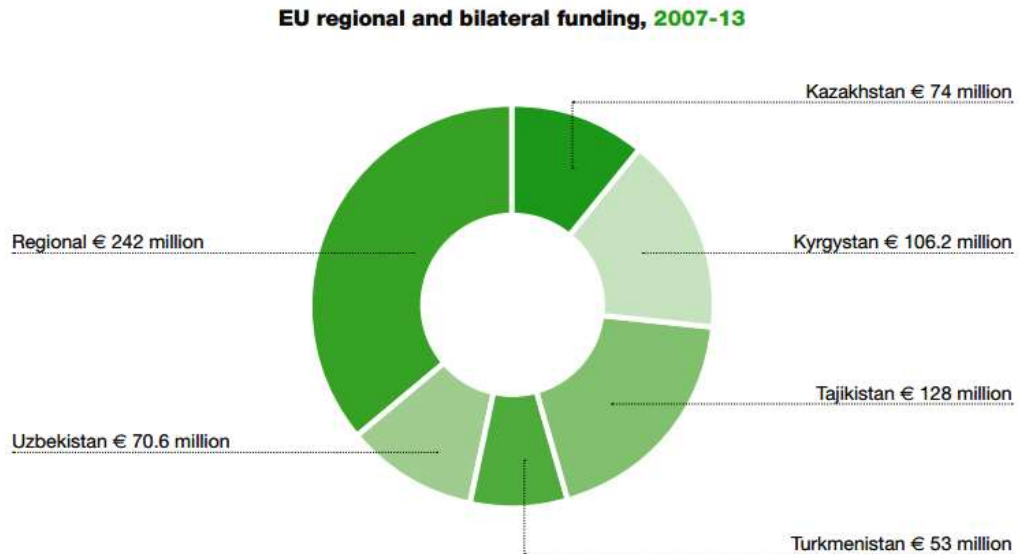
with the EU, which involve such attractive stimuli as a facilitated visa regime and trade provisions (Buscaneanu 2015, p.252). However, the ENP does not include Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Unable to use its first and second most effective incentives, the EU has to rely on other incentives such as trade opportunities and increased development aid. Trade opportunities are most applicable to Kazakhstan, the economic powerhouse of the region with strong trade relations with the EU member states. Enhanced trade and economic cooperation are already offered to Kazakhstan under the framework of the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) negotiated in 2014 (DG Trade 2015, no pagination). This opportunity has not been used to its full extent to encourage Kazakhstan's compliance with the principles of democracy and human rights. The European Parliament issued three resolutions calling both Kazakhstan and the EU to link the adoption of the Enhanced PCA to the human rights situation and political reform in Kazakhstan (European Parliament 2012a, 2012b, 2013). Despite these calls, the negotiations proceeded with minor delays, but not on the EU side. Kazakhstan has been too preoccupied with securing its membership in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and proceeding with its participation in the Eurasian Economic Community and the Customs Union with Russia and Belarus (interview 24, DG Trade, 12 March 2013; interview 37, Kazakh MP, 15 May 2013).

Development aid as an instrument of democracy promotion was applicable to both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in 2007-2013 through the DG DEVCO. The European Commission's development agency – DG DEVCO runs a set of geographic and thematic instruments. The largest geographic instrument, which covers Central Asia, is the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) The thematic instruments include the Instrument for Stability (IfS), the European Institute for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and few others which are not relevant for Central Asia. DCI is the primary instrument of development aid and democracy promotion, through which the most of the allocated funds are spent. The EU's total budget for the implementation of the Central Asia Strategy is 750 million euro; 635 million of which are channelled through the DCI (Tsertsvadze and Boonstra 2013, p.1). These

funds go to regional and bilateral programmes and projects (see graph below).

Graph 4: EU Regional and Bilateral Funding in Central Asia 2007-2013



Source: European Commission 2011a, p.6

The general DCI objectives were directed towards helping developing countries meet MDGs. In the Central Asian context, DCI prioritised poverty reduction and sustainable development “while not ignoring democracy, good governance, rule of law, and human rights” (Boonstra and Hale 2010, p.5). The current (2007-2013) development aid priorities in Kazakhstan are good governance, judicial reform, education and economic trade, especially in regions and rural areas. Starting from 2015, Kazakhstan is no longer eligible to receive development aid as a middle income country. In Kyrgyzstan priorities include rule of law, education, and social protection, including improving public financial management. In addition to area-specific Kyrgyzstan receives budget support, which contains some near-democratic provisions such as the requirements on transparency, accountability and anti-corruption measures. At the regional level, the EU-funded programmes prioritize cooperation in the field of energy and transport, environment, education, security and stability (European Commission 2011a; interviews 25 and 26 with DG DEVCO officials, 12 March 2013).

In the area of democracy, human rights, good governance and the rule of law, the EU applies two-dimensional approach. Regional programme aim to facilitate democratisation through enhanced cooperation between the Central Asian republics. For example, in 2008 the EU launched the Rule of Law Initiative for Central Asia to support reforms and share experiences between the EU and within Central Asia in the area of legal and judicial reforms. The Initiative consists of two components: an EU-Central Asia Rule of Law Platform which implies a high-level regional political dialogue and smaller technical assistance projects (Rule of Law Platform 2015). The activities under the Rule of Law Initiative included providing expertise, training, support of legal reform, and international exchange. At the bilateral level, the EU prefer a project-approach where democracy promotion and development goals are implemented through a number of projects carried out by European and local organisations with the EU funds. The number and nature of these projects constantly changes as they emerge and close down. For the purposes of this thesis, I chose 17 projects in Kazakhstan and 16 projects in Kyrgyzstan listed under the “Governance, democracy, human rights, and support for economic and institutional reforms” category on the websites of EU Delegations to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

In addition to positive conditionality instruments (trade and development aid), the EU has a limited ability to apply negative conditionality when the target countries in Central Asia fail to respect democratic values or human rights. The only legally binding document, which foresees a punitive measure for a substantial violation of democratic principles or human rights, is the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) negotiated between the EU and third countries on bilateral basis. PCAs with Central Asian countries follows the same pattern and the “essential elements” can be found in the body of the PCA’s text:

Respect for democracy, principles of international law and human rights as defined in particular in the United Nations Charter, the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, as well as the principles of market economy, including those enunciated in the documents of the CSCE Bonn Conference, underpin the internal and external policies of the Parties and constitute an essential element of partnership and of this Agreement (Article 2; PCA with Kazakhstan 1999; PCA with Kyrgyzstan 1999)

In compliance with the PCAs' article 93, violation of the essential elements set out in article 2 constitute a break of the Agreement and might lead to suspension of any trade or other privileges and imposition of sanctions. However, the EU is generally very reluctant to apply the essential elements clause. In the case of EU-Kazakh and EU-Kyrgyz relations this clause has never been applied despite continuous criticisms with regard to the human rights situation and the state of democracy in these two countries. In the broader regional setting this clause was applied once and to a limited extent in Uzbekistan in response to the Andijan massacre (Youngs 2006, p.55; Warkotsch 2008, p.246). The sanctions against Uzbekistan included an arms embargo and a visa ban for 12 officials, but they were scaled down to just the arms embargo within a year.

Second, normative suasion instruments include political dialogue, human rights dialogue, foreign policy tools, and other means of non-material encouragement of democratic reform in target counties. The EU has been discussing democracy and human rights from the moment of establishing bilateral and multilateral relations in the region. However, it is under the framework of the EU Central Asia Strategy in 2007, the EU established a structured regional political dialogue at the level of foreign ministers and bilateral human rights dialogues with each Central Asian republic (Council of the EU 2007, p.2). Political dialogues have higher level participants but do not always focus on human rights and democracy. In this regard, human rights dialogues are more useful as an instrument of democracy promotion as they are devoted solely to human rights and related issues and aim to persuade the Kazakh and Kyrgyz state representatives of the need to respect human rights and follow democratic principles (Axyonova 2014, p.59). In compliance with the Council's Guidelines on Human Rights Dialogues, they need to involve non-state actors – civil society organisations, activities and experts (Council of the EU 2009). Non-state participants do not usually attend the formal dialogue rounds, but meet with the EU representatives prior and after the official meetings are held (Axyonova 2014, p.92). For non-state actors, these dialogues are often a much needed opportunity to have their opinions heard at the state level.

In 2007-2013, the EU held six rounds of human rights dialogues with both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Human rights dialogues in Kyrgyzstan concerned the national framework for the protection of human rights and human rights protection of vulnerable groups of population - women, children, refugees, and prisoners. In Kazakhstan, the EU usually expressed concerns about freedom of expression, the prevention of torture, civil society organisations and freedom of religion. In addition to structured dialogue platforms, the EU uses a variety of foreign policy tools as both means of normative persuasion and non-material conditionality. These tools include demarches, declarations, common positions, and joint actions (Crawford 2008, p.177). However, in the case of Central Asia, these tools are rarely used. The European Parliament is relatively vocal in issuing various statements, but due to the nature of the EU politics, these statements are less likely to make difference than, for example, common positions.

Third, in addition to these instruments, which involve state actors in the target countries, the EU has two institutions that support democratic empowerment and do not require the formal consent from the part of the target countries' governments: the European Institute for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and the Development Cooperation Instrument's Non-State Actors-Local Authorities (DCI NSA-LA) thematic programme. The EIDHR provide support to non-state actors through democracy and human rights related projects. The DCI NSA-LA supports local participation in development and decision making. Both programmes aim to develop the capacity of non-state actors, give them opportunities to be heard and accounted for in domestic politics. However, both programmes are quite under-funded given the scope of their work and its importance for democracy promotion. Thus, in Kazakhstan, the EIDHR received 2.36 million euro and the DCI NSA-LA received 3.15 million euro from the total 74 million euro of bilateral aid to Kazakhstan (Tsertsvadze and Boonstra 2013, p.8). In Kyrgyzstan, the EIDHR received 2.7 million and the DCI NSA-LA received 3.75 million euro (Tsertsvadze and Boonstra 2013, pp.9-10). Taking into consideration that these money were allocated for eight years, the funding does seem sufficient to pursue the ambitious objectives set by the EU Strategy towards Central Asia.

Although, each mechanism has distinct set of instruments, some of instruments play a double role and can be categorised to operate through two or even three mechanisms simultaneously. For example, human rights dialogue extends its action throughout all mechanisms. Prior to a human rights dialogue, the EU holds consultations with civil society organisations thus empowering them with an opportunity to be heard at higher level meetings through the EU. The human rights dialogue itself aims to both persuade target state of the need to respect human rights and democratic norms and reward or punish through acknowledging or condemning the target state's actions or inaction.

Despite having some limitations with regard to the use of its most effective instruments, accession and privileged partnership, the EU does employ a wide range of mechanisms and instruments. The extent to which these instruments are used seem to be rather limited, which might partially explain the uneven outcomes of its democracy promotion activities in Central Asia.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter examined EU democracy promotion in Central Asia by identifying the EU institutional and national stakeholders, the legal and normative framework of EU democracy promotion in Central Asia, and the implementation details in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

As a unique international entity the EU consists of a variety of actors whose identities and interests can converge, complement each other and even contradict each other. The European Commission, Council, and to lesser extent the European Parliament are the powerhouses of the EU's general policy towards Central Asia. European External Action Service, the EU's foreign policy agency, manages the key subdivisions and institutions, who are involved in the implementation of EU policy on the ground, reporting and monitoring. In addition to these institutional actors, the chapter discussed EU member states, whose varying degrees of interest in Central Asia stem from their participation in Afghanistan campaign and the involvement of their commercial companies in Central Asian economies. Due to the variety of

internal actors, the EU has to juggle and reconcile a variety of interests in the region, which range from such Realpolitik considerations as geopolitical location, security issues and trade to normative considerations. The Realpolitik agenda of the EU in the region is informed by such global issues as the international security framework informed by the US-led War on Terror; the need to diversify energy sources supply; and the EU's most recent Eastern enlargement, which brought the region closer to the EU borders. In terms of security interests, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan per se are relatively less crucial for the EU; their importance stems from their geographical proximity to other strategically important countries and regions, namely Afghanistan, Russia, and the European Neighbourhood.

While, it is true that normative and non-normative areas of cooperation are not necessarily incompatible, they still might affect the EU's drivers to promote normative goals in Kazakhstan and to lesser extent in Kyrgyzstan. Increasing business interests of EU member states might affect the willingness and readiness of inter-governmental institutions of the Union and national government to push harder and apply conditionality when needed with regard to local governments.

The EU democracy promotion in Central Asia lies upon a three-tier legal and normative foundation. First tier is the EU's general policy documents. Second tier is region-specific policy documents. Finally, country-specific agreements represent third tier. The strategy towards Central Asia sits on the second tier and represents a key policy document that regulates EU democracy promotion in the region. Human rights, rule of law, good governance and democratisation are noted as a priority area in the region.

The conceptualisation of democracy presents a universal challenge for both academics and policy makers. There is no universally accepted conception of democracy, which could be used for measuring or promoting democracy, but specific agents of democracy promotion or democracy watchdog organisation often compile their sets of ideas and principles that define democracy. The absence of a functional and shared definition of democracy complicates programming, planning, implementation and evaluation of EU democracy promotion abroad. The implementation of EU democracy

promotion activities corresponds to the blurred nature of the conceptual definition of democracy. The EU employs three mechanisms of democracy promotion in Central Asia: strategic calculation, normative suasion, and democratic empowerment. However, the extent to which these mechanisms and associated instruments are used is rather limited and scattered.

While such state of affairs might seem paradoxical and unreasonable, it might indicate two important implications to bear in mind. Firstly, each EU institutions and even subdivisions within these institutions seem to have their specific definition and vision of democracy set forth in legal and normative documents. These definition are not significantly different from each other, but the absence of a uniform shared definition of democracy is a sign of a conceptual disarray within the EU. Secondly, the “fuzzy liberalism” in place of a clear and functional definition of democracy might be intentional. The blurred concept of democracy can be shrunk or expanded depending on specific context or situation, and such freedom of using this concept is quite instrumental to ensure a tailored approach and positive evaluation of any efforts as the following chapter demonstrates.

Chapter 5: Evaluation of the EU Democracy Promotion in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

5.1 Introduction

In any case, this is better than nothing.

The European External Action Service Staffer (interview 21, 11 March 2013)

This chapter evaluates EU democracy promotion efforts in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in 2007-2013 under the implementation framework of the EU Strategy towards Central Asia. This chapter answers the first part of the thesis' primary research question: To what extent has the EU democracy promotion been successful in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan? In order to answer this question the chapter evaluates each EU democracy promotion mechanism - strategic calculation, normative suasion, and democratic empowerment, against the empirical evidence collected through primary and secondary sources. Thus, the structure is as follows. The section following this introductory note evaluates the strategic calculation mechanism and its implementation in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The second section explores the normative suasion mechanism. The final substantial section analyses EU efforts to empower non-state actors in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

It is important to clarify what evaluation implies at the outset. Evaluation is an objective assessment of a project, programme or policy, its design, implementation and results. Evaluation aims to define to what extent the assessed project, programme or policy has been relevant, how far they have been fulfilled, and to see how efficient, effective and sustainable they are (Molund and Schill 2004, p.106). Under the framework of this thesis, evaluation implies an objective assessment of EU democracy promotion mechanisms, their design, implementation and results. I chose to focus on individual mechanisms because while they are interconnected and are often implemented together, the logic of their operation varies and should be tested separately. At that, the thesis focuses on the intrinsic evaluation, i.e. the evaluation of democracy promotion in terms of its own democratic

objectives as opposed to extrinsic evaluation, which is to what extent democracy promotion serves other policy objectives of the democracy promotion agent (e.g. counter-terrorism or support to economic development; Burnell 2007, p.22).

An evaluation of external democracy promotion is a daunting task due to several reasons. First reason is rooted in the flawed conceptual framework of external democracy promotion. Democracy is a difficult-to-measure debated notion. Debates on what constitutes a democratic system and which countries could be considered “genuine democracies” have never ceased to exist in both policy making and academic worlds. There is no single uniform position on the concept of democracy within the EU as well. This significantly impedes evaluation of the outcomes of EU democracy promotion because there are simply no clear criteria to measure them against.

Secondly, any attempt to measure individual contribution of an external democracy promotion agent to democratisation process in a target country inevitably encounters the problem of attribution. It is very challenging, if possible at all, to identify the exact contribution of an external democracy promoter to the democratisation processes due to the multitude of overlapping domestic and external factors, which affect democratisation. The EU impact on the democratisation process, or lack thereof, in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan is particularly challenging as these two countries host a variety of external state and non-state democracy promotion agents (more in Kyrgyzstan than in Kazakhstan though) on the top of a range of domestic actors, each of which might have contributed to political development..

Finally, external democracy promotion strategies and tactics vary among different democracy promotion. Moreover, the substance and implementation of democracy promotion of one democracy promotion agent might vary from one target country to another as the domestic context informs the choice of mechanisms, instruments and approaches to democracy promotion. The general principles in specific regions might be similar, but the choice and prioritisation of democracy promotion components, instruments and funding allocations are informed by EU

interests in regions and countries, the domestic political context and local needs and expectations.

These and other difficulties associated with evaluating democracy promotion put any researcher, who undertakes this task, under the pressure of elaborating their own criteria. This research is no exception as it applies a distinct set of criteria, which take into consideration the peculiarities of EU democracy promotion in Central Asia. In order to develop suitable evaluation criteria, I identified several aspects to be taken into account, or “criteria for evaluation criteria”. Firstly, the evaluation criteria need to be tied to EU objectives and evaluation criteria as set in the EU Strategy towards Central Asia (Council of the European Union 2007), the Regional Strategy Papers (European Commission 2006), and joint progress reports issued by the Council of the EU and the European Commission (2008, 2010, and 2012). It would be unfair to expect the EU to achieve absolute victories in an environment that is not particularly conducive to democracy. Therefore, it makes sense to measure against the EU’s self-imposed objectives and scrutinise what the EU positions as key components and achievements of EU democracy promotion in Central Asia.

The other “criteria for evaluation criteria” were inspired by the participatory approach to evaluation of development assistance promoted by Crawford and Kearton (2001 pp.84-99). The participatory approach to evaluation acknowledges that external democracy promotion does not take place in an isolated environment, where the amount of invested efforts directly correlates to the outcomes. The participatory approach takes into consideration the political context, where democracy promotion takes place and the perspectives of domestic actors (Crawford and Kearton 2001, p.vii). The local political context and domestic views on external democracy promotion could help explain whether specific democracy promotion instruments have been relevant, effective and adequate, while the view of local actors could shed some light on the responsiveness of beneficiaries and the sustainability of democracy promotion efforts on the ground.

In order to incorporate these criteria – focus on the EU objectives, the political context, and the local perspectives, I analyse the democracy promotion mechanisms employed by the EU in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan through the local context conditions and the opinions on the ground. As it is difficult to evaluate the exact contribution of EU democracy promotion to the democratisation processes in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan I also discuss the general democratisation progress in these two countries in order to see whether Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have become more democratic during the increased engagement of the EU in the region. The EU notes some positive developments in the region, yet acknowledges that overall developments have not been “as good as hoped for” (Council of the EU and the European Commission 2012, p.36). The last section discusses the developments in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in the area of democracy, human rights, rule of law and good governance. This section differs from the rest as it attempts to track the general democratisation progress in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. One should acknowledge that due to the attribution issue it is impossible to associate democratisation progress or regress with the EU involvement because there are other actors and factors, which affect the state of democracy in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

In order to ensure a comprehensive and reliable analysis I use a variety of primary and secondary sources. The EU’s formal self-evaluation - joint progress reports are useful for identifying EU objectives and achievements. In compliance with the requirements on transparency and accountability, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Commission (EC) regularly review and report on the implementation of the EU’s Strategy towards Central Asia to the European Council. The Council of the European Union (the Council) finalises and approves progress reports and makes them available for the public. Since the adoption of the EU Strategy towards Central Asia in 2007, three joint progress reports were issued in 2008, 2010 and 2012. A joint progress report assesses the overall strategy implementation, evaluates progress in key sectors, overviews implementation instruments and mechanisms, and reflects upon achievements and shortcomings of the EU Strategy towards Central Asia for the given period. The reports are very general and lack specific benchmarks

and achievements, but they do indicate whether the EU believes it has or has not achieved something in the area of democracy and related issues.

Another important source of formal reporting was unfortunately unavailable. Once a year, all EU-funded technical assistance projects undergo the Results Oriented Monitoring (ROM) process conducted by externally hired experts. ROM reports supposedly ensure an external, objective and impartial feedback on the performance of European Commission aid projects and programmes (Hall and Clauss, 2012). ROM reports are highly technical and might have been very insightful for this research, but they are not publicly available.

To balance the democracy promoter's view, it is important to provide as many views on EU democracy promotion in Central Asia as possible and to test it against the empirical evidence on the ground. For this purpose, I made an extensive use of the empirical evidence collected during my fieldwork trips in 2012-2013. The views of EU officials, local beneficiaries and observers, and other relevant actors enforce the participatory approach to evaluation and bring insights into potential relevance and sustainability of external democracy promotion on the ground. These views should be taken with some reservation as some of them might be informed by the position of the interviewed persons and the institutions and organisations they belong to. Nevertheless, they provide an invaluable snapshot of the current trends and opinions both within the EU and in Central Asia.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge and to make the full use of the ongoing research that has been done by other, academic and non-academic observers such as EUCAM. Established in 2008, a year after the adoption of the EU Strategy for Central Asia, EUCAM has been scrutinising European policies towards Central Asia through research and discussions. EUCAM enjoys a certain degree of independence as its project activities have been coordinated, sponsored and supported by a variety of actors, including charities, the European Parliament, think tanks, and academic institutions. Academic publications on the subject might be limited, but they often offer certain insights in different comparative perspectives. For example, Vera Axyonova's research on EU democracy promotion highlights the differences

in EU approach in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan and focuses on the micro-level to evaluate EU democracy promotion. While this thesis focuses on a different set of countries and incorporates both micro, meso and macro levels, Axyonova's work can be extremely useful to put things into a truly regional perspective. In addition, publications by Bossuyt, Kubicek, Warkotsch, Hoffmann and others offer various perspectives across time, space and different thematic aspects.

5.2 Evaluation of the Strategic Calculation Mechanism

They pretend to reform, we pretend to open our markets to them. In effect, neither of us has genuine intentions to do so.

Michael Leigh, German Marshall Fund of the US, "Neighbours of Our Neighbours" Conference, College of Europe, Bruges, 15 November 2012

Cited by the permission of Mr Leigh

This section evaluates the application of the strategic calculation mechanism of democracy promotion by the European Union in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The strategic calculation mechanism employs tangible and intangible rewards and punishments to encourage target governments to accept and implement principles of democracy, rule of law, good governance and respect to human rights. From among the EU range of strategic calculation instruments (see Table 7 below), only a limited number of instruments are applicable and used in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. As the EU cannot offer Central Asian governments to join the Union or its closer cooperation frameworks such as the European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument, it lacks its most powerful "carrots" in the region. At the same time, the EU is reluctant to apply the available "sticks" - suspension of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA clause) or other sanctions, in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In the absence of other means of meaningful leverage the EU has to rely on enhancing trade opportunities and the provision of development aid.

Table 7: Strategic calculation instruments: Applicability and usage

Strategic Calculation Instruments	In Kazakhstan		In Kyrgyzstan	
	Applicable	Used	Applicable	Used
EU accession	No	No	No	No
ENPI	No	No	No	No
Trade opportunities	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Development aid	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
PCA clause	Yes	No	Yes	No
Sanctions	Yes	No	Yes	No

Therefore, it makes sense to focus on these the provision of trade opportunities and development aid as instruments of the democracy promotion in order to evaluate the efficiency and success of strategic calculation for the intrinsic purposes of democracy promotion, i.e. promotion of democratic principles, human rights, rule of law and good governance.

Trade opportunities

Trade with the EU, an economically developed and internationally active region, is regarded as an important benefit, which might assist normative conditionality. However, using trade opportunities with the EU as an instrument of positive conditionality has not worked as intended in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

In Kyrgyzstan, the provision of trade opportunities was not and could not be used as a reward for compliance with democracy and human rights standards due to the current limited trade capacity and the strict EU trade regulations in place. The EU-Kyrgyz trade is insignificant for both parties. Kyrgyzstan imports from the EU more than it exports to the EU, but overall the trade volume is not crucial even for Kyrgyzstan (Ministry of Economy of the Kyrgyz Republic 2013). As a senior official at the Kyrgyz Ministry of

Economy explained the Kyrgyz production does not meet the strict European standards (interview 2, 3 August 2012). There is a limited potential for Kyrgyzstan to export organic agricultural products, but in the absence of certified laboratory to confirm the organic nature of these products this potential will remain abstract. As it is highly unlikely that the EU would change its trade regulations to let Kyrgyzstan into its market, the trade opportunities for Kyrgyzstan are limited, which removes trade from the toolkit of EU democracy promotion in Kyrgyzstan.

In this regard, trade could have been a considerable leverage in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan is the top trade partner for the EU in the region with the trade with Kazakhstan accounting for 85% of the total EU-Central Asian trade (EEAS 2009a, no pagination). China and Russia remain Kazakhstan's top trade partners, but Italy and Netherlands are top exporters and Germany is among top importers (KAZNEX INVEST 2015, no pagination). In addition, despite the impressive economic performance, Kazakhstan still requires significant foreign investment and is certainly interested in deepening and widening trade and economic relations with the EU.

Under these circumstances the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement negotiations between the EU and Kazakhstan in 2011-2014 presented an opportunity to enforce the EU's normative profile and push for more specific and decisive steps to improve the political and human rights situation in Kazakhstan. The enhanced PCA included, among other provisions, an important trade and investment measure – reciprocal most-favoured nation treatment for trade in goods, which could have been an attractive tangible reward for Kazakhstan (House of Commons 2015). Due to the high-profile of this type of Agreement and the fact that Kazakhstan was the only country from the Commonwealth of Independent States to be invited to an enhanced partnership, researchers and civil society alike had high hopes that the new PCA will push forward the existing democracy and human rights concerns (Tsertsvadze and Axyonova 2013; interview 16, 10 March 2013; interview 41, 17 May 2013).

This opportunity has been largely missed as the enhanced PCA with Kazakhstan was adopted without much progress on the normative

conditions on the Kazakh side. Despite several calls from the European Parliament to put a stronger emphasis on democracy and human rights and to enforce the “more for more” policy (European Parliament 2013 and 2012a), the negotiations proceeded with less attention to normative conditionality. Conditions were in place, but their substance was limited to the continuation of political dialogue. The Enhanced PCA does highlight the importance of the rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms as the core universal values (House of Commons 2015; EEAS 2014). It does not have any mechanisms in place to ensure that trade preferences follow positive progress in the area of democracy and human rights. Just as with the previous PCA, only suspension of the Agreement can be used in cases of a grave violation of human rights, and, as the experience shows, even this limited measure is not likely to be applied.

Moreover, the negotiations were somewhat paradoxical given seemingly different bargaining positions of the EU and Kazakhstan. One might assume that Kazakhstan, as an economically less developed partner with a humbler international profile, should have had a weaker position. In reality, Kazakhstan was not only able to shape the direction and substance of negotiations, but also delayed them throughout eight rounds in three years. From the interview with the European Commission’s DG Trade official (interview 24, 12 March 2013), it appears that the delays in the negotiations on the enhanced PCA came from the Kazakh side. The negotiations did not depend on Kazakhstan’s progress in the area of democracy and human rights, they depended on the availability and readiness of the Kazakh counterparts to negotiate. This stands far from the official narrative of ultimate success and achievement (EEAS 2014), and contradicts the logic of “carrots and sticks” as applied in strategic calculation mechanism. Moreover, it has sent a message around the region that despite its normative rhetoric the EU is reluctant to attach conditionality to its cooperation offers (Hoffmann 2010).

Development aid

Technical and other assistance channelled through projects has become a significant part of the EU's democracy promotion tactics in the region. The EU has continuously reported positive progress in the field of democracy, human rights, rule of law and good governance. The joint progress reports highlight the EU's support to democracy under the framework of development aid and assistance with constitutional, judiciary and prison reforms (Council of the European Union and European Commission 2008, 2010, 2012).

Development aid is important for the intrinsic evaluation of democracy promotion because it advances normative objectives in two capacities, as a reward and as a democracy support instrument. Firstly, the democracy promotion agent can use development aid as a reward for compliance with human rights and democracy standards. In this regard, it is important to pursue the "more for more" principle: increased compliance with the donor's requirements should ideally ensue increased allocation of development aid. Secondly, the EU approach to development assistance closely links democracy promotion to development aid. Mainstreaming democracy into other areas of cooperation is based on the assumption that "human rights and democratisation linkages can be established for all sectors" (European Commission 2008, p.3). As a result of such approach, EU projects on the ground found themselves at the cross-section of democracy, development and other related areas, and some projects support democratisation processes in target countries through direct and indirect means.

Below, I evaluate to what extent development aid has worked as a strategic calculation mechanism of democracy promotion in the Kazakh and Kyrgyz settings. I place the analysis into the larger politico-economic context and incorporate local perspectives on the importance and efficiency of EU-funded democracy related projects and activities.

Due to different levels of economic development (see Table 5 for an illustration of differences between the two countries), Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan represent drastically different environments for development assistance. Two factors need to be in place for development aid to be an

appealing reward and have some leverage over the local governments: a high demand for external aid in target countries and a meaningful supply from the part of donor. In terms of high demand, the EU development assistance had been more appealing for the poorer Kyrgyzstan than for the “upper middle income” Kazakhstan (World Bank 2015a and 2015b). In terms of meaningful supply of development aid, it is difficult to argue that the EU contributions have had an impact. To remind the reader, the total budget for the implementation of the EU Strategy towards Central Asia in 2007-2013 amounted to 750 million euro, 70% of which were channelled through bilateral assistance programmes in all five Central Asian republics (Council of the European Union 2007, p.28). In total, Kazakhstan received 75.6 million euro as bilateral development assistance during the reported period. The EU’s total development assistance allocations in Kyrgyzstan amounted to 106.2 million euro (DG DEVCO 2015). For Kazakhstan, this amount might be unimpressive (interview with Kazakh MP, interview 37, 15 March 2013), but for Kyrgyzstan any amount is welcomed and appreciated (interview 2, 3 August 2012).

Development aid in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

Kazakhstan is a tricky recipient of EU aid because the actual demand for assistance is questionable. In this regard, EU support to Kazakhstan reflects certain controversies inherent to the general EU aid dynamics in the world. As Booth and Herbert (2011, p.11) note, EU aid is poorly targeted at regions and countries that suffer the most and some of its development aid goes to regional strategic partners rather than the countries in most need. For example, in 2009 only 46% of EU aid reached lower income countries (Booth and Herbert 2011, p.11).

On the other hand, the perceived need of conditional development assistance seems to be limited. Kazakhstan is the 51st most developed country in the world, and the country’s ambition is to get into the top 30 by 2050 (the Decree of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2013). In the 1990s, Kazakhstan required foreign aid to address the consequences

of the Soviet disintegration and shock therapy reforms (see section 3.3 and 3.5 for more details). Nowadays, the situation and more so – the domestic perception of the situation, is drastically different. Kazakhstan's changing perception attitude to Europe can be illustrated with few recent examples.

A panel at Astana Economic Forum 2013 was devoted to the question “Can Russia and Kazakhstan help the European Union out of the current economic crisis and recession?” (Astana Economic Forum 2015). Panellists discussed possibilities for building a new, non-Western-centric financial system and creating the world of *Razvitie* (Russian word for development). The use of transliterated Russian word in an English-language agenda is remarkable on its own: insisting on a Russian word in pre-dominantly Western area of development assistance might indicate the willingness to challenge what the local elites perceive as the Western monopoly on what is right and what is wrong (interviews 37, 38, members of Kazakh Parliament, 15 May 2013).

Moreover, Kazakhstan has recently transitioned from receiving development aid to providing it to other countries. The Kazakh government implements Presidential Decree on the Conception of Official Development Aid (2013), which foresees establishing a development assistance institution – KazAid, whose organisational principles are similar to the existing Western development agencies. The Conception declares its commitment to the humanitarian mission, but also emphasizes that the development agency and global aid is required for the prestige of the country (Presidential Decree 2013). This transition signifies not only an important shift in the international role of the country, but also in the perception and perspectives of Kazakhstani political elites. The informal and unrecorded conversations with few civil servants in Kazakhstan had a very different tone from similar conversations in Kyrgyzstan. The Kazakh officials expressed less excitement about foreign aid and mentioned that the country is rich enough to take care of itself.

Understanding these circumstances, the EU development aid to Kazakhstan was accompanied with limited conditions. The conditions revolved around the Kazakh commitment to reforms and agreement to let the projects operate. The commitment was reported to be present (European Court of

Auditors 2013), but there is an important question to bear in mind: To what extent the local commitment to accept normative conditions and adopt democratic principles is genuine. Opponents of strategic calculation as a democracy promotion mechanism in Central Asia (Warkotsch 2011, p.104) rightfully question what happens after the beneficiary receives its reward. It is difficult to trace or measure the degree of true commitment and what it might imply for democracy promotion.

Given the Kyrgyz dependence on foreign aid, it is legitimate to assume that the EU would apply stricter conditions attached to development assistance. It was interesting to discover that the conditionality in Kyrgyzstan has also been limited to mostly technical conditions, which do not necessarily promote democracy. At that, a part of funds were allocated under the sectoral budget support framework, which remains a subject of heated debates in the development-related research as controversial (Hayman 2011) or even counterproductive for democracy promotion (Handley 2009).

As “the country in the region most committed to democratic reforms” (European Commission 2011a), Kyrgyzstan, along with Tajikistan, is a recipient of sectoral budget support. The primary objectives of the sectoral budget support are to promote macroeconomic stability and political progress, to strengthen the government’s commitment to carry on reforms, and, to send a signal to other countries in the region that the EU will support countries, which embark on the path to democracy and political reforms (European Commission 2011b). A low income country with regular budget deficits and 37% poverty rate (World Bank 2015b), Kyrgyzstan welcomes any financial contribution to the development. Local officials refer to EU assistance as timely and useful (interview 3, Ministry of Finance, 3 August 2012). The EU assistance allows paying social benefits to the population, but it also proves that Kyrgyzstan depends on foreign assistance.

While budget support might be reasonably useful for supporting the social welfare state in Kyrgyzstan, its role as an indirect democracy promotion instrument remains limited. It is not unusual for donors to use budget support as an instrument of political conditionality and attempt to “buy” reforms on

the ground (Molenaers 2012, p.791). However, the conditions attached to the budget support provided by the EU to Kyrgyzstan do not seem to address political issues. EU officials provided only blurred indication of the conditions having said that the government needs to achieve “certain indicators” in terms of policies (interview 25, 12 March 2013). The Kyrgyz officials were more open and explained that conditions included reforms and legislative changes, but are mostly there to ensure smooth implementation of the social projects (interview 2, 3 August 2012). There might be indirect contribution of budget support to democracy promotion though: the EU is quite strict about addressing the issues of corruption, transparency and accountability, and through this it might contribute to developing a political culture within the Kyrgyz institutions that would meet at least some minimal standard of democracy, good governance and rule of law.

In the short-term perspective, the budget support entails several concerns. First concern is the above mentioned minimal conditions. The European Commission made three tranches to support the Kyrgyz budget upon an assessment of progress in the area of public financial management. The assessment only demonstrated that the Kyrgyz government “remained committed to further reforms” (European Court of Auditors 2013, p.26). This is a worrying trend in the general EU-Central Asian cooperation: for the local governments it is sufficient to demonstrate “commitment”, which then is interpreted as an achievement on the EU side and a reasonable ground to continue providing benefits. Meanwhile, this commitment does not necessarily imply a genuine readiness to democratise the political system or otherwise make the politics in the Central Asian countries more open and accountable. From observations of the politics in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, as well as from the existing research on Central Asia, it is possible to conclude that this commitment is “little more than liberal window dressing” (Hoffmann 2010, p.90). The Central Asian government mastered the art of making “cosmetic change or tactical concessions” and exchanging them for both tangible and intangible Western rewards (Warkotsch 2007, p.496). This trend has already affected the democratisation process in Central Asia. The current political systems in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are often referred to as hybrid regimes, patronal regimes, or imitation

democracies. This categorisation is legitimate, but the core reason behind this co-existence of democratic façade and authoritarian reality is the numerous compromises made by democracy promoters. Central Asian regimes found a convenient way of reconciling the domestic reality with the external requirements of democratisation. They have quickly learned that “commitment” and imitation are sufficient to meet the conditions of the EU partners. This is not likely to change in the near future unless democracy promotion agents change their perception of success and achievement and start pushing harder.

Second concern with regard to budget support is its potential effect on maintaining status quo domestically. A number of reasons contribute to the Kyrgyz budget deficit. Some of them are objective, e.g. the lack of natural resources, the global economic crisis, which affects labour migrant remittances from Russia. Other reasons are rooted in poor governance and corruption. When the EU attempts to fill in this gap, it actually rectifies the government’s poor performance in distribution of resources and creation of opportunities for people, and indirectly contributes to sustaining the status quo, i.e. poor resource management. Continuous budget support to poorer countries like Kyrgyzstan helps to sustain otherwise incapable corrupt regimes, which use the provided assistance to cover holes in the budget caused by poor management and corruption. In this sense, budget support pursues unintended objectives and, instead of providing temporary solution during transition period, sustains poor governance and authoritarian regimes.

Project-approach: Promoting democracy?

The EU’s general approach to democracy promotion incorporates democracy promotion into larger development assistance framework and blends promotion of democratic principles into a large scope of activities. Therefore, it would be unreasonable to expect a project or a set of projects, which would have a clear-cut focus on democracy. However, it is worth

examining what kind of projects and activities the EU pursues under the democracy promotion agenda.

The number and substance of the EU-funded projects in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan listed under the “Governance, democracy, human rights and support for economic and institutional reforms” category constantly changes as projects open and close (average lifespan of a project is roughly two-three years). In order to avoid confusion, I chose a time point – 23 May 2013, and used the publicly available data on the projects that were operational at this particular date. The selection of date was informed by the completion of fieldwork interviews and the fact that the implementation of the EU Strategy towards Central Asia was in its full swing.

The majority of EU-funded projects in both countries are devoted to facilitating socio-economic conditions for democracy. From among the project listed under the category of governance, democracy, human rights and support for economic and institutional reforms, several projects aim to improve the administrative capacity in both countries. The attention to the institutional capacity building overwhelms the EU development assistance at both regional and bilateral scale. In Kazakhstan, priorities are judicial reform and improvement of public services for social and economic reforms. In Kyrgyzstan, the judicial system reform, human rights and public financial management present top priorities.

Project-approach had a potential to be useful for democracy promotion, but the way it was implemented under the framework of the EU Strategy to Central Asia made its success limited and raised certain concerns and even light distrust from the local actors, both state officials and civil society.

The first and most discussed issue was the large number of projects in general and the number of projects related to democracy, good governance, rule of law and human rights. In an attempt to cover all cooperation areas indicated in the Strategy, the European Commission dispersed the fairly limited funding across a broad variety of regional and bilateral programmes, this resulted in small project budgets and enormous administrative burden on the EU Delegations. The limited finance did not allow projects to go in depth and limited their operations to “cheaper”, quick win activities, such as;

training, legislative reforms and limited-scope awareness raising campaigns (interview 8, a staffer of an EU-funded project in Kyrgyzstan, 17 August 2012). The administrative and management burden on the Delegations was great as they had to oversee up to 40-50 projects simultaneously in addition to other activities. At that, these projects involved multiple lines of reporting and budgeting (European Court of Auditors 2013, p.7). One of interviewees, an MEP, expressed a suspicion that the Delegations were deliberately understaffed and overloaded to keep the thorough reporting to minimum (interview 43, 11 July 2013). To what extent this suspicion is true remains a question, but the amount of work the Delegation staffers had to do left at least one visible shortcoming: the publicly available information on the projects was limited.

The second issue with the implementation of the project approach was the substance the projects have been promoting. Most of these projects contribute to both normative and non-normative interests of the EU. Prioritisation of judicial reforms and administrative economic reforms in Kazakhstan were largely improving the investment climate and ensuring smoother access to the local markets for European companies (Bossuyt and Kubicek 2015, p.180). While there is nothing inherently wrong with improving the investment climate, the goal of promoting democracy and human rights was at times overshadowed by other objectives and concerns. In Kyrgyzstan, the interplay of normative and non-normative objectives in development assistance was less obvious and the project approach was focused on promoting a broader democracy (Bossuyt and Kubicek 2015).

Finally, in an attempt to investigate and incorporate the local perspectives on EU development aid and project approach, I have discovered that local civil society representatives, state officials and relevant domestic experts were largely confused, suspicious or disillusioned about the EU democracy promotion efforts. In Kazakhstan, I was unable to interview state officials, but the available civil society representatives and political opposition simply accused the EU of double standards. In their opinion, the EU was close friends with Nazarbayev's regime and despite the declared commitments to democracy and human rights, it failed to address these issues in

Kazakhstan. These views should, of course, be taken with some caution and understanding that these interviewees might have been frustrated with the little attention they get from the democracy promotion agents operating in Kazakhstan. However, the existence of these views among local actors cannot be ignored.

In Kyrgyzstan, the local perspectives were diverse. State officials were largely confused about the EU activities and asked me to clarify for them what the EU exactly promotes and how. Some of the interviewees did this with a degree of visible scepticism remarking that the Cold War was not over and it just took a different format (interview 27, Kyrgyz MP, 22 April 2013). Local civil society and experts expressed concerns about the actual spending in EU-funded projects. In their opinion, the overwhelming majority of funds return to the EU in the form of salaries of the expatriate staffers and invited experts and trainers. In their opinion, it was a waste of resources for Kyrgyzstan because foreign experts are much more expensive than local experts and have very limited knowledge and understanding of the local setting. However, they also pointed to the shortcomings of hiring domestically: local experts are not totally independent in their work. They might be professionals, but they are too much aware of what they are expected to deliver, and often sacrifice their objectivity for the sake of good project indicators (interview 6, 13 August 2012). It was not possible to fully verify the allegations on project budget spending as individual project reports are not publicly available. The European Court of Auditors reports that administrative costs (salaries) represent 14.6% of the development spending in Central Asia, but it does not specify how much is paid to hired experts and trainers, who are accounted as part of project activities (European Court of Auditors 2011, 2013, p.23).

Nevertheless, the democracy related projects might have long-term impact on the overall democratic culture in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Project activities serve as a complementary mechanism of socialisation where local institutional and individual beneficiaries (state bodies and civil servants) learn principles of democracy, transparency and accountability from the experience of cooperating with the EU institutions and officials. Given the number of these projects and the number of beneficiaries, who in one way or

another were engaged in project activities, there is a chance that some basic principles have been noted on the ground.

Concluding remarks for the evaluation of the strategic calculation mechanism

From the variety of EU democracy promotion instruments based upon positive or negative conditionality, the EU used only trade opportunities and development aid in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Other instruments, in particular the “golden carrots” – EU accession or ENPI, are not applicable to the region. Negative conditionality (PCA clause and sanctions) is applicable, but hardly ever used. For these reasons, I focused on trade opportunities and development aid as strategic calculation instruments aimed to promote democratic objectives. Due to different economic and political settings, these instruments were applied differently in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, but the results were largely similar. Trade opportunities were not used as a positive conditionality mechanism in Kyrgyzstan, and it is impossible to measure their success. In Kazakhstan, the EU did not attach considerable conditions to the provision trade opportunities and this instrument failed to be used as a reward for compliance with democratic and human rights standards. Development aid has been partially successful, but less in the capacity of a reward. It is more likely to be successful in the long-term perspective, as an element of socialisation.

Kyrgyzstan is more dependent on external assistance and conditionality was applied more successfully over there. Kazakhstan does not need much technical assistance or budget support. Kazakhstan can afford the lack of democracy and human rights violations, while Kyrgyzstan is too poor and dependent on donor aid to allow human rights violation on a large scale. For this reason, the scope of democracy promotion activities in the two countries was slightly different. In Kazakhstan, the democracy related projects were mostly indirectly promoting democracy and focused on technical, non-sensitive issue. The overall narrative of the EU officials on the ground and the character of project operations indicated the overarching caution from the EU side not to “offend” or alienate the ruling regime by “pushing too

hard". On the other hand, Kyrgyzstan is an easier ground for democracy promotion, but the overall success of strategic calculation has been limited because the available instruments have not been used or were used to a limited extent. The project approach might have beneficial in the long-term perspective as the numerous projects engaged large numbers of local institutions and individuals, who might have internalised some of the normative principles that the projects promoted either directly or indirectly.

Table 8 below summarises the findings of this section. As the findings demonstrate, the strategic calculation instruments have not been successful due to limited or partial application of the available tools.

Table 8: Strategic Calculation Instruments: Applicability, usage and success

	In Kazakhstan			In Kyrgyzstan		
Strategic Calculation Instruments	Applicable	Used	Successful	Applicable	Used	Successful
EU accession	No	No	N/a	No	No	N/a
ENPI	No	No	N/a	No	No	N/a
Trade opportunities	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	N/a
Development aid	Yes	Yes	Limited success	Yes	Yes	Limited success
PCA clause	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Sanctions	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No

Finally, I would like to note a surprising fact that was raised few times by interviewees (interview 16, EUCAM expert, 10 March 2013; interview 19, EEAS, 10 March 2013). It might seem paradoxical, but EU assistance to Central Asia lacks transparency. The general information, e.g. joint progress reports, is available, but specific implementation details are difficult to obtain. The list of projects on the EU Delegations' websites is not up to date; the

links are often broken (especially in Kyrgyzstan) and contain very limited information (usually, the budget, implementer and timeframe). On few occasions, I requested information at the EU Delegations on the projects, but would receive the same links to the Delegation websites. The results-oriented monitoring reports on individual projects exist but are unavailable for public. It is unclear whether country by country reports are issued. When asked about country by country reports, the EEAS officials appeared defensive and seemed cautious about the objectives of my interview and questions (interview 18, EEAS, 10 March 2013). The only available sources of EU's self-evaluation are joint progress reports, but they focus on macro-level and provide a blurred picture of EU achievements in the region.

5.3 Evaluation of the Normative Suasion Mechanism

No one has the right to tell us how to live and how to build our country.

President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev (as cited in KazInform 2013)

Normative suasion as a democracy promotion mechanism operates mainly through bilateral and multilateral dialogue platforms, where the EU representatives attempt to persuade the Central Asian governments to accept and enforce the principles of democracy, good governance, rule of law and respect to human rights. In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan this mechanism is implemented in the form of regular regional political dialogue and bilateral structured human rights dialogue. Political dialogue existed before the adoption of the EU Strategy towards Central Asia in 2007 and was held under the framework of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements with Central Asian governments. With the adoption of the Strategy, the political dialogue's profile has been raised to the regional level. Human rights dialogue was a new form of cooperation introduced by the Strategy, which aimed to make raising human rights concerns a regular occurrence in the EU-Central Asian relations. This section evaluates the implementation of these two normative suasion instruments and their effectiveness in pursuing democracy promotion objectives by the EU. In order to provide a comprehensive evaluation of this democracy promotion

mechanism, I will first look at the EU self-evaluation and identify what the EU see as successful normative suasion. Afterwards, I will analyse whether the political leadership of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the primary targets of this mechanism, have served the intrinsic objectives of democracy promotion.

EU evaluation of the implementation of political and human rights dialogues

The official EU reporting highly evaluates its dialogue-based instruments. The joint progress reports regularly highlight the intensification of multilateral and bilateral high-level meetings between the EU and Central Asia as one of major achievements of the Strategy implementation (Council of the European Union and European Commission 2008, p.35; Council of the European Union and European Commission 2010, p.6; Council of the European Union and European Commission 2012, p.6). The reports do acknowledge that human rights dialogue is particularly sensitive and the progress in human rights protection and promotion is halted by the local factors. Nevertheless, the very fact of the structured human rights dialogue's existence is often reported as a great achievement. Thus, the second joint progress report praises the dialogues for being open and frank and for conveying European good practices, experience and policies in the area of democracy, human rights and good governance (Council of the European Union and European Commission 2010, p.6).

EU officials, especially those involved in the preparation and conduct of these dialogues, hold onto the official institutional discourse when explaining why they should be considered achievements:

This might be a game: we ask, they promise. But in any case, this is better than nothing. We express our concerns about human rights in these countries; UN does the same, so do other actors. And this makes Central Asian governments think that something needs to be changed. This is putting diplomatic pressure (Interview 21, EEAS Human Rights Unit, 11 March 2013)

Officials at the EEAS and EU Delegations to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan acknowledge that the results are not as visible and significant as the external observers would expect but they also warn of the risks and dangers of pushing Central Asian partners too hard (interview 18, EEAS, 10 March

2013; interview 20, EEAS, 10 March 2013; interview 35, EU Delegation to Kazakhstan, 14 May 2013). The lack of immediate results shall not put the actors involved in democracy promotion off; the key to success is continuity and consistency, as well as a balance in the relations with the local governments. More pushy strategies and stricter rhetoric might affect the willingness of the governments to cooperate and exclude the EU from having any, even minor role in the region. Closing these doors shut might affect not only the EU interests in the region, but also the local population, “who will suffer the most” from the EU turning its back to these countries (interview 20, EEAS, 10 March 2013).

This discourse persists not only across the EU institutions (the Commission’s DGs DEVCO and Trade; EEAS), but also throughout time. Laruelle and Peyrouse interviewed the European Commission’s desk officers for Central Asia in 2010 and discovered the same discourse: democracy promotion is a slow gradual process, and democracy cannot be imposed from outside and more push will alienate partners on the CA side (Laruelle and Peyrouse, 2013, p.61).

This “better than nothing” discourse that I have repeatedly heard throughout my fieldwork trips left me puzzled for some time as I expected more specific and ambitious success stories. However, given the official objectives set by the EU Strategy towards Central Asia, this discourse is both understandable and legitimate. The Strategy sets two key objectives for the human rights dialogue: to discuss questions and enhance cooperation on human rights, and to raise the EU concerns on human rights in the Central Asian countries. As far as one can judge from the official coverage of the human rights dialogue rounds, the EU does exactly this: discusses human rights issues and raises the EU concerns. The political dialogue’s objective, as set by the EU Strategy, is even less ambitious: it just needs to be established, which has been done as early as in 2007, almost immediately after the Strategy’s adoption (Council of the European Union 2007, p.27). The reported achievements might be commensurate with the objectives as stated in the Strategy, but their effectiveness in promoting principles of democracy, good governance, rule of law, and human rights remains doubtful.

In the course of investigating the intentional and unintentional effects of the EU normative suasion, I have identified several unintended short-term outcomes of related to the implementation of the dialogue-based instruments in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Firstly, the ruling political elite, especially in Kazakhstan, use the intensification of contacts with the EU as a tool to consolidate and legitimise their axis of power domestically. Secondly, there are concerns that, instead of international socialisation of Central Asian regimes, i.e. convincing them to accept international standards of democracy and human rights, reverse socialisation took place. Central Asian elites managed to shift the EU discourses in the region to hard security concerns at the expense of less attention to democracy and human rights. Thirdly, the EU's tailored approach to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan resulted in tailored responses from the part of the target governments. The target governments have figured out the sort and approximate amount of rhetoric and shallow action to keep the EU reasonably satisfied and able to report achievements and responsiveness on the ground. Below, I will discuss these outcomes in more detail.

EU dialogues and regime legitimisation

Normative suasion aims to socialise the political elites in Central Asia, but in reality the local ruling elites often use the dialogue platforms and increased number of official visits to convince domestic audiences that the regime enjoys international recognition. As local government officials acknowledge, the leaders of Central Asian countries understand the importance of international recognition and legitimacy for domestic and foreign politics (interview 1, Kyrgyz President's Administration, 31 July 2012). Cooperation and regular mutual visits to the established democracies increase the prestige of the ruling political elites and allows them build a narrative of universal recognition and international success for domestic audiences. For this reason, the visits to Europe are used to demonstrate that they are accepted by Western countries as legitimate and democratic leaders despite negative assessment of elections.

In this regard, the Kazakh government has succeeded the most: it manages to maintain an image of the country, which attempts to improve its democracy and human rights situation, without actually doing anything substantial. Thanks to the regular attendance of the human rights dialogue rounds, Kazakhstan get the credit for its commitment to human rights and uses “rhetorical manipulation of EU–Kazakhstani ties” to (Ansechi 2014, pp.13-15). Similar to other, more authoritarian countries in the region, Kazakhstan has figured out that mere participation and no active opposition to the EU dialogue is sufficient to please the EU partners and to look cooperative in their eyes (Stroehlein 2015). An outcome of such situation is that a *status quo* can carry on forever as it is convenient for both democracy promotion agent and target government.

Moreover, EU democracy promotion in the form of political dialogue might actually be assisting the countries’ backslide to authoritarianism. Increased communications and visits of high profile EU officials to Kazakhstan considerably boosted Nazarbayev’s regime image and prestige, and sent a controversial message to the Central Asian countries that authoritarianism and regular human rights violations do not affect relations with Europe. The EU needs to maintain favourable relations with the autocratic regime of President Nazarbayev and, in effort to please the ruling regime, it sometimes contradicts the efforts of other democracy promotion agents in the country. Thus, in the aftermath of 2012 parliamentary elections, High Commissioner Catherine Ashton stated: “I also welcome the fact that three parties will be represented in Parliament, which is a positive step towards the development of a pluralistic and democratic political culture in Kazakhstan” (Ashton’s Statement on Kazakh parliamentary elections, 2012). Meanwhile, the political context of these elections were far from democratic. The elections were called early because President Nazarbayev single-handedly dismissed the Parliament in the late 2011 (USDoS 2012, p.22), a hardly legitimate move by any accounts. The OSCE reported that the elections did not meet the fundamental principles of democracy elections as the Kazakh government barred several political parties from participation. On the top of them, OSCE reported ballot stuffing, carousel voting, and proxy voting (OSCE/ODHIR 2012). The three parties elected to the Parliament presented

exclusively pro-government political forces. Nur-Otan Democratic is headed by President Nazarbayev. The People's Communist party was created as an alternative, pro-governmental Communist party that was highly supportive of the President (interviews 37, 38, Kazakh MPs, 15 May 2013). Finally, Ak-Zhol Democratic party was known as a strong pro-presidential party as well. This context was well-known in the EU. A member of the European Parliament mentioned that he voiced his concerns about the flawed elections and the lack of opposition at the Kazakh Parliament at the European Parliament and informed the clerks at the European Commission and the EEAS (interview 43, MEP, 11 July 2013).

It should be acknowledged that the external reinforcement of the regime only contributes to the regime stability. The key factors supporting it can be found inside: ruling party strength, state coercive strength, and state discretionary economic control (see section 3.4). For these reasons, in Kyrgyzstan, the situation is different due to the domestic instability of the ruling regime. As chapter 3 demonstrates, none of the four Presidents of Kyrgyzstan had sufficient domestic means to maintain and consolidate their power. External influence and increased contacts with the established democracies of the EU have not played a significant role in the regime survival.

Reverse socialisation

The intensification of bilateral and multilateral contacts with Central Asian governments pursued a variety of goals with the overarching objective to socialise the local political elites into accepting at least some minimal standard of democracy and human rights. In reality, reverse socialisation took place and the EU, de facto, agreed to cooperation under the local rules. The shift can be traced from the EU Strategy towards Central Asia through the joint progress reports and press releases on the rounds of regional political dialogue. The EU Strategy explicitly links political dialogue to promotion of the first area of cooperation: democracy, human rights, good governance and the rule of law. The first joint progress report mentions political dialogue as an instrument of advancing democratic principles

(Council of the European Union and European Commission 2008, p.7). From the second joint report onwards, it is evident that the focus of the regional political dialogue lies largely in the areas of energy cooperation (Council of the European Union and European Commission 2010, p.41), and, hard security issues, e.g. war on terror and drug trafficking (2010, p.6, 29). While the focus on security is not a negative thing per se, the obsession with hard security concerns affects the causes of democracy and human rights as they shift the primary focus of policy makers and the public away from the intrinsic goals of democracy promotion. As an outcome, the political dialogue carries on, but its substance focuses on hard security threats more than on democracy promotion through normative suasion.

As to the human rights dialogue, it was marginalised into what Melvin characterised as “the ghetto of the dedicated dialogue mechanisms” (Melvin 2012, p.4). Human rights issues are considered sensitive in the region and, as some EU officials report, EU member states are reluctant to raise these issues in bilateral relations with Central Asian states. Here, the situation varies of course: some EU member states express more concerns about normative issues, while others do not necessarily ignore, but pay much less attention preferring to delegate these issues to the EU institutional actors. Several EEAS officials, as well as experts, complained that EU member states outsource these issues to the EU level so that they do not have to deal with them at the bilateral level, which might affect other, non-normative interests (interview 19, EEAS, 10 March 2013; interview 20, EEAS, 10 March 2013; interview 16, EUCAM Expert, 10 March 2013). While this might be a reasonable option for the EU member states, it signals that reverse socialisation affected them as well: Central Asian states taught the EU member states that human rights are sensitive issues, which should be avoided. Otherwise, the ruling regimes might be offended and alienated.

Tailored approach and tailored responses

The EU attempts to emphasise the parity between the parties involved in dialogue and provide a space for both dialogue partners to express their

opinions and concerns. At the same time, not all Central Asian partners are equal. In the case of the EU-Kazakh dialogue platform, Kazakhstan might be more in the position of an equal partner thanks to its strong economic performance and trade and commercial ties with the EU. Kyrgyzstan, on the other hand, often finds it in the position of a donor aid and normative advice receiver being less of a partner and more of a mentee. Axyonova noted a similar pattern when comparing human rights dialogues in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan: “the deliberative, equality-based approach was only partly employed in the case of Uzbekistan and absent in the case of Kyrgyzstan” (Axyonova 2014, p.104). Similar comparisons were made by experts. An expert from EUCAM compared HR Catherine Ashton’s remarks following her visits to Kazakhstan and to Tajikistan, and noted that the language used with regard to poor countries like Tajikistan is saying what they should be doing, while when talking to rich countries the language is different. It is more diplomatic and it highlights that Kazakhstan is an important trade partner (interview 16, EUCAM Expert, 10 March 2013).

The local perspectives reflect these observations. When comparing the bilateral human rights dialogues throughout the Central Asian region, the Kyrgyz state officials have noted what they considered unbalanced and unfair treatment of poor countries in the region. Kyrgyzstan is criticised for much less grave human right abuses than Uzbekistan or Kazakhstan (interview 27, Kyrgyz MP, 22 April 2013). At bilateral and multilateral EU-Kyrgyzstan meetings, democracy and human rights issues take more time and attention than economic issues, which are of more interest for the Kyrgyz side. Democratic discussions usually concern civil society, mass media and human rights (interview 2, Kyrgyz Ministry of Economy, 3 August 2012). In Kazakhstan, economic and trade cooperation takes precedence, while democracy and human rights have turned into “a box to tick” (interview 21, EEAS, 11 March 2013). In other words, once again, Kazakhstan can afford a certain level of human rights abuse and authoritarianism. The differentiated approach to richer and poorer, or more strategically important and less important countries in the region affects the substance of democracy promotion in each country: in Kazakhstan, the EU promotes elements of procedural democracy focusing on conditions for

democratisation rather than on broader democratisation. In Kyrgyzstan, the EU promotes more broader notion of liberal democracy (Bossuyt and Kubicek 2015, p.180). This tailored approach results in tailored responses. In Kyrgyzstan, the responsiveness was reported as very high and the overall climate for democracy promotion as more favourable because the local political elites accepted the fact that they have to comply with the EU requirements. In Kazakhstan, this compliance is restricted to technical areas. Kazakhstan's leadership accepts only expert ideas and practical tips on improving different areas of activities. They believe they have sufficient expertise themselves, but might listen and accept some ideas from outside. Otherwise, they are not exactly willing to accept drastic reforms of the system (interview 5, EU Delegation to Kazakhstan, 19 August 2012; interview 35, EU Delegation to Kazakhstan, 14 May 2013).

On the other hand, the tailored approach does not seem fair in the eyes of local stakeholders, who feel as if they are left behind for the sake of the EU balancing its relations with the government and everyone else. Local non-state stakeholders involved in democratisation, for whom external support is vital, seem to be running out of hope about the EU's role in democracy promotion. They refer to the gap between the EU rhetoric and action as "difficult-to-hide hypocrisy" (interview 42, a leader of a Kazakh opposition party, 17 May 2013). One of political activists referred to a recent example: On 31 March 2013, a group of local independent observers reported fraud at local elections in Semipalatinsk city, and informed the European about the fraudulent electoral process. To their disappointment, there was no reaction from the EU side. As the activist complained, "The EU receives the information, but keeps silent. They see everything that is going wrong in this country, but they carry on supporting this corrupt regime and even sending their advisors to help it" (interview 42, a leader of a Kazakh opposition party, 17 May 2013). While such frustrated opinions might be an outcome of this particular person being left behind, it does demonstrate how some local stakeholders might perceive the EU's role in democracy promotion.

The use of normative suasion mechanism might bring some results in the long run as the diplomatic pressure carries on and potentially increases.

The implementation of dialogue-based instruments is associated with a number of inconsistencies. So far, it seems like reverse socialisation, i.e. socialisation of the EU by the stronger Central Asian regimes, is becoming a trend, which is convenient for both counterparts making compromises to accommodate each other. This continuous compromise might be more beneficial for the Central Asian regimes though as they carry on with the established hybrid regimes behind the democracy façade. For the EU, this compromise results in continuous criticisms and accusations of double standards within Central Asian communities. Double standards were frequently mentioned by a variety of interviewees in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. State officials were more cautious and tactful when explaining the EU's double standards, but members of the parliament and civil society representatives openly accused the EU of double standards. Under these circumstances, whatever the EU does or does not do to promote democracy through normative suasion results in criticisms.

5.4 Evaluation of the Democratic Empowerment Mechanism

Democratic empowerment is drastically different from the two previous mechanisms of democracy promotion as it is directed towards non-state actors, who might be drivers of change on the ground. The EU uses the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and DCI's thematic programme Non-State Actors and Local Authorities (NSA/LA) to support civil society, independent mass media and local authorities. Democratic empowerment instruments are important for promoting such core elements of democracy as political rights, civil rights and broader participation in decision making (Bossuyt and Orbie 2015, p.178). Activities ran under the framework of EIDHR and NSA/LA do not require the host government's consent and are usually more flexible and touch upon more "sensitive" issues than other activities. While the extent to which democratic empowerment is implemented is limited (e.g. EIDHR spent 9 million euro for the entire Central Asia in 2005-2011; Emerson et al 2010, p.6), it has made certain achievements. In particular, the EU has created platform for meeting and discussion for state and non-state actors. While in Kyrgyzstan, the civil

society is vibrant and vocal enough for the government to hear them, in Kazakhstan such platform was much needed and the country hosted the largest number of EIDHR projects in Central Asia (Bossuyt and Kubicek 2015, p.180).

Democratic empowerment in the civil society sectors in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan is often regarded as the best possible way to assist democratisation under the current political circumstances (Axyonova 2012; Bossuyt and Kubicek 2015). The NGO sector is politically safer option as it is usually not (or should not be) associated with the flaws and imperfections of the ruling regime and, as such, it is less controversial. Civil society can potentially lead and encourage grass-roots democratisation processes and build a fundament for long-term sustainable societal changes.

EU grants and trainings provided for civil society in Central Asia through the EIDHR and DCI's NSA/LA instruments are often vital for the survival and development of the non-state sector. Due to the non-commercial nature of their activities, NGOs are unable to exist on their own. Therefore, EU and other external sponsors literally make civil society possible in Kazakhstan and especially in Kyrgyzstan. In Kyrgyzstan, the civil society is striving. It is probably mostly due to the dynamic civil society and the sheer number of NGOs that Kyrgyzstan is sometimes regarded the "island of democracy" in Central Asia.

Nevertheless, some features of the local political context might have shaped the implementation of the democratic empowerment on the ground. EIDHR's main way of operation is through distributing small-scale grants to local civil society organisations. These grants are of great importance for Central Asian civil society, but there are few reservations to be taken into account.

Firstly, only a limited number of NGOs are eligible and capable to apply and win these grants (Axyonova 2012, p.3). Representatives of civil society in Kyrgyzstan, the most vibrant and numerous in the region, acknowledged that despite the large number of NGOs operating in the country, less than a dozen are actually able to meet the donor's requirements and apply (interview 7, a Kyrgyz NGO leader, 15 August 2012; interview 10, a Kyrgyz

NGO, 17 August 2012). The EU grant application procedure is notorious for being particularly complex and heavily bureaucratic. In addition, all documents need to be submitted in comprehensible English. This excludes a large part of the local civil society from participating as they lack English speaking staff and cannot afford to hire a professional translator.

Secondly, the civil society in Central Asia has been traditionally supported from outside. The post-Soviet development of the non-state sector was largely funded by Western state and private organisations, who arrived to the region with agendas of their own. The civil society organisation in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan is still hardly self-sustainable. In Kazakhstan, civil society relies on a mix of sources, including the Kazakh government. Kazakhstan has taken into consideration the external pressures to cooperation with civil society and the inevitability of the civil society's existence and opted to control civil society organisations through direct and indirect support and endorsement. As a result, there is a rise of GONGOs – Government Organised Non-Governmental Organisations, which are partially funded by the government and, among other functions, help to create and sustain the democracy façade.

The Kyrgyz civil society is much larger, more active and diverse, and less dependent on the state because the state simply lacks resources to fund the non-state sector. The issue with the Kyrgyz civil society lies in their continuous dependence on external funds. Kyrgyzstan hosts a large community of donors (Bossuyt and Kubicek 2015, p.188), a number of whom support civil society and promote their understanding of democracy. This demand gives the rise to the supply: in pursuit of funding to survive, local NGOs adjust their activities and programmes to meet the expectations and preferences of donors. These NGOs are often referred to as BONGOs – Business-Oriented NGOs. BONGOs in conventional understanding refer to the organisations founded by commercial companies in order to represent their interests and serve as a business-society medium (van Tulder and van der Zwart 2006, p.136). In the Kyrgyz context, these organisations are called BONGOs for the nature of their activities: selling civil society services for donor funding. The Kyrgyz BONGOs closely follow the international

development sector and respond to the current trends. One of the local interviewed experts illustrated the work of BONGOs with this example: the number of NGOs dealing with LGBT issues is highly disproportionate to the actual number of the people identifying themselves as LGBT in Kyrgyzstan because LGBT issues received a lot of international attention after the adoption of the law on gay propaganda in Russia. The international concerns about the treatment of homosexuals in Russia had a spill over effect on the entire region and international funding has become available to support the NGOs dealing with LGBT issues. The Kyrgyz NGOs responded accordingly (interview 6, a Bishkek-based expert, 13 August 2012).

The Europeans seem to be aware of GONGOs in Kazakhstan and BONGOs in Kyrgyzstan, as well as other “murky affiliations” of some local civil society organisations, but they also acknowledge that in the absence of reliable and accurate information on the ground they have to work with what they have (interview 15, German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 13 February 2013; interview 19, EEAS, 10 March 2013).

The “murky affiliations” of NGOs and, through their medium, of the EU have caused a reactionary response from the state. Following the Russian treatment of NGOs (Federal Law on non-commercial organisation 2012), the Kyrgyz Parliament drafted the bill, which classified externally funded NGOs dealing with political issues as “foreign agents”. The bill aims to counteract the foreign agents’ involvement and destructive influence over domestic policies. The bill was not adopted; it was recalled for further elaboration (Fergana 201, no pagination). Given the continuous public debate on the nature of NGOs activities and their external funding, there are reasons to believe that the bill might be raised again by the new convocation of the Kyrgyz Parliament.

Overall, the EU support to democratisation through democratic empowerment remains mixed. On one hand, it is affected by the peculiarities of the civil society in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and the perceptions and reactions to the civil society from the state. On the other hand, the EU contributes to the preservation and survival of the civil society sector.

Without external funding, these organisations would have probably gone extinct or accepted more government funding thus making the NGO sector less independent. The contribution of civil society to the democratisation is difficult to evaluate but it is undoubtedly informed the political dynamism and the public awareness of human rights and political freedoms.

5.5 Evaluation of the Democratisation Progress in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

After having evaluated all three democracy promotion mechanisms employed by the EU to advance the principles of democracy, human rights and good governance in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, it is reasonable to zoom out from individual activities and their impact on local state and non-state actors and analyse the bigger picture. This section evaluates the state of democratisation in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan during the lifespan of the EU Strategy towards Central Asia. While it is difficult to attribute the democratisation progress or lack thereof to the EU policy and activities, this might help understanding whether the two target countries made any progress at all. For this purpose, I use two sources; Freedom House and the Bertelsmann Transformation Index, because they offer one of the most detailed accounts of the situation with democracy and human rights on the ground.

Freedom House provides a solid evidence of stagnation with occasional regression (downward trends) in the democratisation process in both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. According to the Freedom House's Freedom in the World annual reports in 2007-2013, Kazakhstan has never been free during this period, and Kyrgyzstan has continuously been "partly free" except for 2010 (see Table 9). While Kazakhstan demonstrated continuous stagnation in its "not free" status, Kyrgyzstan has demonstrated a more dynamic record of political change. Kyrgyzstan started the reported period as being partly free with the 4.5 score; has been classified as not free in 2009, in the eve of the April 2010 regime change (see Chapter 3); and, restored and maintained its partly free status in 2011, but now with a lower

score than in the beginning of the reported period (5.0; Freedom in the World reports 2007-2014).

Table 9: Freedom in the World scores for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in 2007-2014

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Kazakhstan	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5
Kyrgyzstan	4.5	4.5	4.5	5.5	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0

Scores: 1.0-2.5 (free), 3.0-5.0 (partly free), 5.5-7.0 (not free);

Source: Freedom in the World 2015

To fully understand the implications of these developments, it is important to uncover the story behind the numerical evaluation. For this purpose, I firstly trace the freedom and democratisation record (as reported by Freedom House) in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Democracy in Kazakhstan

The seemingly stagnating Kazakh democratisation record has actually been characterised with occasional downward trends due to a long-standing abuse of human rights and political freedoms and continuously shrinking space for civil society and free mass media. In the course of the seven reported years, Freedom House repeatedly highlighted several trends, which significantly hindered democratisation in Kazakhstan: general consolidation of the President Nazarbayev's power through a largely flawed electoral process; political violence and oppression; continuous suppression of mass media and civil society; and, legislative and executive limitations imposed upon religious freedoms.

Regime consolidation and fraud elections: About a year before the adoption of the EU's Central Asia Strategy in 2007, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev secured one more term for himself winning "a crushing victory" (Freedom House 2007, no pagination). The electoral campaign took place

against the background of increased pressure on the civil society and political opposition in Kazakhstan. OSCE observation mission noted a variety of electoral fraud tactics committed by the authorities, an atmosphere of intimidation, mass media bias, low representation of opposition parties on election commissions, procedural violations, and flawed handling of post-electoral complaints (OSCE/ODIHR 2005, pp.11, 15-19, 23-25). In early 2007, parallel to the negotiations on the EU-Kazakhstan and EU-Central Asian cooperation on the eve of the EU CA Strategy adoption, the executive and legislative powers passed Constitutional amendments, which removed term limits personally for Nazarbayev by giving the untouchable status of the First President. The “voluntary” early dissolution of the Parliament in 2007 and the dissolution of the Parliament by President Nazarbayev’s personal discretion in November 2011 made any hopes for actual separation of powers in the country obsolete and significantly consolidated the formal and actual powers of the First President (Kashkeeva 2007, no pagination). The flawed electoral process has always been a feature of the stagnating democratisation in the independent Kazakhstan, but as the time passed the mechanisms and instruments of electoral fraud diversified and turned more blatant. The 2011 presidential election once more proved that peaceful transfer of power through competitive and fair electoral process might be in a distant future, but not a real possibility: President Nazarbayev won yet another election with 95% vote (OSCE/ODIHR 2011)

Political violence and oppression: In addition to electoral manipulations, the Kazakh authorities demonstrated an increasing worrying tendency toward political violence and oppression. Throughout the 2007-2014 period and before that, Freedom House repeatedly raised the issue of increasing violence and oppression directed against opposition leaders, human rights advocates and trade unionists. Two opposition leaders were killed before and after the 2005 presidential elections, in November 2005 and February 2006 (Lillis 2006, no pagination). In 2009, human rights activist Yevgeny Zhovtis was arrested and subjected to “the grossly deficient judicial proceedings”, along with a range of other officials and businessman (Freedom House 2010). Long-standing tradition of oppressing dissidents was not anything new, but the Zhanaozen massacre in December 2011

came across as a surprise for both domestic and external public. The sit-in strike of oil workers in the Zhanaozen city turned into riots as police opened fire on the strikers. The clashes between rioters and police resulted in 14 deaths and a hundred injured people (Al-Jazeera 2011). The event took place a year after Kazakhstan's chairmanship at the OSCE and in the middle of the EU-Kazakhstan negotiations on enhanced partnership and cooperation agreement. A violation of human rights at such gross scale could not be disregarded by the EU officials, but the response was rather mild. The spokesperson of the EU High Representative Catherine Ashton (not even Ashton herself) issued a cautious statement expressing Baroness Ashton's deep concerns about the events and hopes that the authorities will investigate and find a peaceful solution (Statement by the spokesperson of the EU High Representative Catherine Ashton on the events in the Zhanaozen district of Kazakhstan 2011).

Mass media: The reported period in Kazakhstan (2006-7) started with the executive power's attack on what has been left from the independent mass media: a new media minister held a campaign of increased state control over information and a new restrictive media legislation was passed. Mass media continued facing harassment throughout the period with regular legislative restrictions and crackdowns on mass media in the form of suits and prosecutions against critical mass media outlets (FH Kazakhstan report 2010, 2011, 2013), new legislation on internet (FH Kazakhstan report 2010), and blocking attempts to open new media outlets (FH Kazakhstan Report 2014).

Religious freedoms: One more issue of concern throughout this period was the restriction of public expression of religious beliefs. In 2011, the new law ensured state control over religious groups and restricted public religious expression. The law has been criticised for being strict and excessively restricting freedom of expression through extra-legal measures and violent raids on private gathering (Human Rights Watch 2015). The freedom of consciousness is a key human right and the systematic abuse of this right in Kazakhstan has become a regular occurrence.

Democracy in Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan has demonstrated a different democratisation pattern thanks to a democratisation impetus provided by the 2005 Tulip revolution that overthrew President Akayev's regime, which, after having started as the "island of democracy" in Central Asia (Anderson 1999), gradually turned autocratic (see Chapter 3 Local Context). However, the hopes for consolidation of the Tulip revolutions' small victories in the area of mass freedom and competitiveness of political parties proved to be vane as the newly elected President Kurmanbek Bakiev's regime quickly showed signs of the notorious Central Asian authoritarianism, which has been flourishing in the nearby Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

Just as in the case of Kazakhstan, some of the most significant setbacks in the democratisation process coincided with the EU's extensive consultations and negotiations with the Kyrgyz leadership aimed. Parallel to what later will be showcased by the EU as an effort to meet the local needs and simultaneously promote democratic principles, Freedom House, as well as other external observers such as the International Crisis Group, Human Rights Watch and Transparency International, reported deterioration of the political freedoms and rights. From 2007 to 2010, Kyrgyzstan has repeatedly received downward trend warnings due to the processes and events, which significantly impeded the democratisation process in the country: namely, the consolidation of the President Bakiev's regime through constitutional amendments, fraud elections, and oppression and intimidation of free mass media, civil society and political opposition (tactics similar to the authoritarian consolidation in Kazakhstan).

Regime consolidation: Unlike his predecessor Akayev, President Bakiev did not hesitate or wait long to consolidate his powers by all possible means. Soon after winning the presidential election in tandem with Felix Kulov, a Northern politician, who ensured the support of the Northern Kyrgyzstan, President Bakiev forced his powerful colleague out of the tandem, from Prime Minister's position and marginalised few more influential politicians

from the political arena (International Crisis Group 2006). In 2006-2007, President Bakiev and few supporters at the Parliament introduced a new constitution, which increased presidential power at the expense of the parliament in 2007. The constitution was approved by a referendum on 21 October 2007. A day after, President Bakiyev dissolved the Parliament announced early parliamentary elections in December (International Crisis Group 2011, no pagination). At the same time, President Bakiyev worked on the consolidation of his political party – Ak-Jol, which was established and registered in just one day (registration process usually takes longer as it requires a considerable package of documents) on 15 October 2007. The pro-presidential party sought to “make Kyrgyzstan an advanced democracy” (Fergana 2007, no pagination), but it was too obvious that the party was created with the sole purpose of strengthening President’s influence at the new Parliament (Bader 2010, p.).

After the October 2007 Constitution (and parallel to the increasing EU engagement with the region and Kyrgyzstan under the framework of the EU’s Central Asia Strategy) and up until the overthrow of the regime in 2010, Freedom House reported the flawed parliamentary elections in December 2007, where opposition was marginalised and squeezed out of the legitimate domain of policy and decision making (another similarity with the Kazakh tactics of regime consolidation). Presidential Ak Jol party won 71 of 90 seats, and the second runner up political party, which happened to be an opposition party, was simply disqualified from Parliament (International Crisis Group 2011).

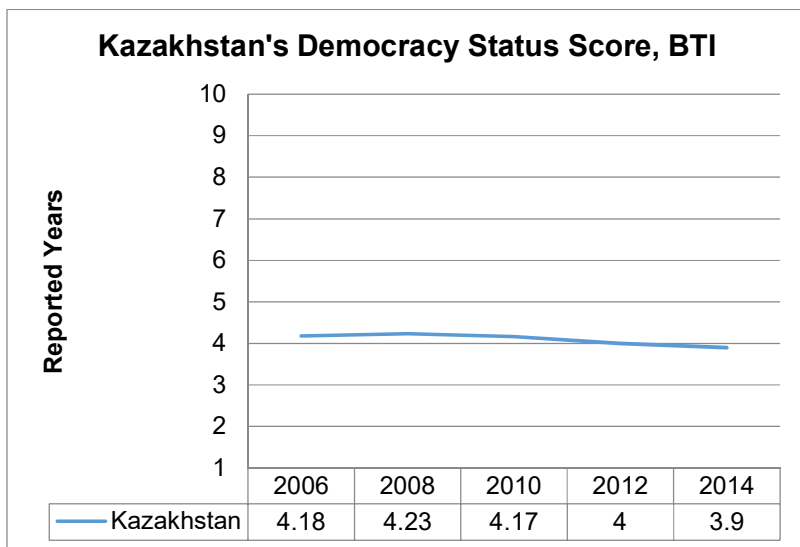
In addition to this, Freedom House also covered the authorities’ efforts to intimidate the opposition and silence civil society and mass media to the ongoing reduction in political pluralism (FH report 2009). The situation with political freedoms and democracy has deteriorated significantly and the regime has been increasingly relying upon brute force to get rid of dissidents: members of the parliament, politicians, businessmen, journalists and sportsmen fell victims to assassinations (see Chapter 3 and Ovchinnikova 2009).

The downward spiral into political violence and one-party rule was eventually stopped by the April 2010 uprising, which ousted President Bakiyev and his network. The uprising launched chain of events in the country, some of which were negative like violent clashes in the south, and others positive – the adoption of a new constitution balancing presidential and parliamentary powers and competitive parliamentary elections in October 2010. This significantly improved Kyrgyzstan's score and moved it from not free back to the partly free category (FH 2011). In the following three years, Kyrgyzstan has maintained its partly free status and had its ups and downs in the democratisation process. Ups included a competitive presidential election in October 2011, which resulted in the first voluntary transfer of power (FH 2012); and, the establishment of a new anticorruption body. Downs revolved around an unfair treatment of ethnic minorities, issues with judicial independence, and regular dismissals and appointments of the government (FH 2012, 2013 and 2014).

Quality of democracy in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan's democratisation progress, or lack of thereof, is regularly monitored by a team of analysts at the Bertelsmann Foundation, who issue their findings in the biennial BTI reports explaining the situation on the ground in both quantitative and qualitative terms. BTI's democracy status score indicator as it provides an aggregate assessment of key democratisation elements: political participation, rule of law, stability of democratic institutions, political and social integration (BTI website 2015). Another advantage of the BTI's assessment is that the countries' democracy status score is not measured against each other, but against their own progress through 9 years, from 2006 to 2014. As the graph below demonstrates, the Kazakh democracy status has been steadily declining throughout the period under focus: having started with an unimpressive 4.18 score, the country managed to get a slight improvement in 2008, but eventually declined to 3.9 in 2014.

Graph 5: Kazakhstan's Democracy Status Score in 2006-2014



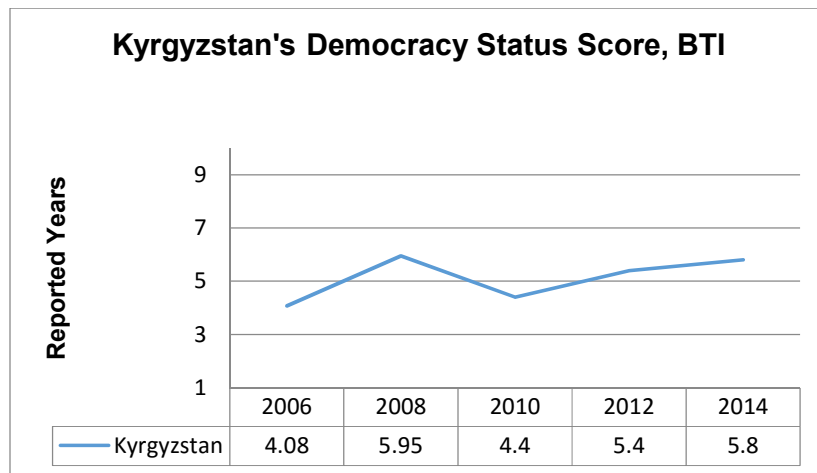
Based on the Bertelsmann Transition Index Reports 2006-2014, the Bertelsmann Foundation

The BTI reports for this period highlight several ups and downs. A major up was Kazakhstan's OSCE Chairmanship, which encouraged the country's leadership to at least make declarative commitments to democratic principles and ideals. However, this temporary up was quickly overrun with few events, which significantly impeded the democratisation process in Kazakhstan. Each election within this period of time elections was a major blow to democracy. In 2011, President Nazarbayev single-handedly made a decision to call on early presidential elections in less than a month after the end of the OSCE Chairmanship and won with 99.5% of the vote (BTI 2014 Kazakhstan Country report, p.10). A year later, he called for the early parliamentary election, which resulted in a very pro-presidential and obedient parliament (BTI 2014 Kazakhstan Country report, p.10). While this information is hardly a secret to any observer outside and inside the country, it is amazing how the joint progress reports never mention it and ignore two simple facts: no elections in Kazakhstan have ever been recognised as free and fair, and the leadership has not changed since 1989 (BTI 2014, p.10). In other words, there are no signs of participatory politics or fair electoral process, which represent basic components of a democracy. Adding political violence, control over religious environment, regular attempts to control

mass media and prosecution of dissidents do not make the Nazarbayev's regime any more democratic. To what extent a regime like this is susceptible to democratic change is unclear, as well as it is unclear whether limited insufficiently funded efforts to promote democratic principles through a range of small technical projects have any capacity to induce change or keep what is left from democracy in Kazakhstan afloat.

On the other hand, Kyrgyzstan has demonstrated a wider range of fluctuations in democracy status and significantly better democracy scores in the 2006-2014 period. In spite of low start in 2006 in the aftermath of the Tulip revolution of 2005 and a temporary down in 2010 before, during and immediately after the 2010 revolution, Kyrgyzstan managed to improve its democracy score in 2012 and keep the positive progress in 2014 (see graph below).

Graph 6: Kyrgyzstan's Democracy Status Score in 2006-2014



Sources: Bertelsmann Transition Index Reports 2006-2014

Such positive signs of democracy in Kyrgyzstan as a vibrant civil society, opposition political parties and relatively independent mass media, all of which existed throughout the existence of the independent Kyrgyzstan, did not ensure a stable democratisation record. Regular returns of authoritarianism and two violent regime changes leave steady concerns about stability of Kyrgyzstan as a state and the uncertain future of its hybrid political regime. Against the background of its highly authoritarian

neighbours, Kyrgyzstan appears as a relatively democratic country and boasts being the first case of the peaceful transition of power in the region, and the first and only parliamentary-presidential republic, but its instability does not make it a particularly exemplary showcase of successful democracy. Another feature of the democratisation process is who sets directions of change in the country. From the BTI Report (2014, pp.3-4), as well as from the analysis of the local context in Chapter 3, it is clear that any significant political changes are due to the actions or inaction of political elites and the presidents in power. In this regard, it is difficult to state that individual projects or meetings make a difference. To the opposite, given the importance of personalities in the Kyrgyz, as well as Kazakh, politics and the EU's approach, which does not work with personalities but with institutions and process, the EU democracy promotion is not likely to make a meaningful impact under the current circumstances.

There are reasons to indicate a steady decline in the democratisation in Kazakhstan and an uneven record of the democratisation process in Kyrgyzstan. In both cases, it is too early to speak of any improvement in the area of good governance, rule of law, human rights and democracy because even the seemingly better democracy score in Kyrgyzstan is undermined with regular outbursts of violence and instability.

5.6 Conclusion

The EU's official evaluation of its democracy promotion efforts and overall progress in the implementation of the EU Strategy towards Central Asia, it is legitimate to say that the EU, in the face of the Commission and the Council, who produced the joint progress reports, has been largely positive when evaluating the Central Asia Strategy outcomes. All three reports note good progress and reiterate the validity of the Strategy's approach and instruments. The overarching narrative of the joint progress reports acknowledges that the EU Strategy set out an ambitious agenda, and insists that much has been achieved (Council of the European Union and European Commission, 2012, p.13). It is important to note that joint progress reports

are basically a self-evaluation attempted by potentially biased stakeholders: the European Commission and the Council and their subdivisions, which prepare and publish these reports, are the EU agencies primarily responsible for the formulation, planning, funding, and implementation of the EU Strategy towards Central Asia. Therefore, the largely positive feedback on the implementation of the Strategy's activities, including democracy promotion activities, is confusing due its discrepancies with other evaluation sources, but hardly surprising.

Non-EU sources, including local stakeholders and observers, local, European and international think tanks and academics, in their majority express negative views on the effectiveness of the EU democracy promotion in the region in general and in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in particular. Views on the ground remain less certain and more confused about the objectives and overall EU involvement in the region, but the EU impact on the ground is very limited in the eyes of the local stakeholders. Overall, state officials seemed to be unimpressed with the EU policy in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and could not point to any meaningful success explaining it with the EU's limited leverage (interview 1, Kyrgyz President's Administration, 31 July 2012), and reluctance to allocate more funds for the implementation (interview 27, Kyrgyz MP, 22 April 2013). Some officials accused the EU of applying double standards to evaluating democracy and human rights in the region and general inconsistency in the EU policy.

The continuation of political and human rights dialogue and the absence of explicit refusal to hear about democracy and human rights on the side of the target countries' governments are often considered as success and achievement. Given the EU efforts combined with the efforts of other external and domestic democracy promoters, it is possible to assume that some improvement of the overall democracy score has been achieved in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. However, the largely positive evaluation provided by the EU sources contradicts a number of other sources. Reports and other publications by INGOs, think tanks and other observers say that democratisation process has not improved in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. To the opposite, they provide evidence of the further consolidation of the

authoritarian rule in Kazakhstan and the hybrid regime in Kyrgyzstan. Against the background of a stable and steadily developing authoritarian regime in Kazakhstan, it is difficult to speak of any advances in democratic reforms. If anything, the country has become less democratic in the course of the reported period and President Nazarbayev's power has only increased throughout this period.

Chapter 6

Factors Impeding EU Democracy Promotion in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

6.1 Introduction

While it is reasonable to attribute the inconsistency and lack of efficiency of EU democracy promotion to the EU approach (Axyonova 2014) or to unfavourable local conditions (Warkotsch 2011), a comprehensive multi-faceted analysis is required to explain the complexity of promoting democracy in Central Asia. It is crucial to acknowledge and analyse diverse factors that undermine successful EU democracy promotion in the region. The EU cannot bear full responsibility for less than successful implementation of its policy in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan because it has not been the sole contributing actor in the democratisation process.

This chapter acknowledges the limitations to the EU capacity to promote democracy in Central Asia and aims to identify what EU, local and regional factors impede a successful democracy promotion. In doing so, it answers the second part of the research question: Why has EU democracy promotion in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan not been successful? In order to explain the complex variety of actors and factors, which affect EU democracy promotion in the region, the chapter will unfold in three dimensions - European, local (Kazakh and Kyrgyz), and regional. The section following this introduction examines the issues, challenges, and opportunities on the EU side, i.e. potential shortcomings on the democracy promotion agent's side. Afterwards, the focus shifts to the (pre)conditions on the ground in order to highlight the political, economic, and socio-cultural aspects in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, which might impede external democracy promotion efforts in general, and the EU efforts in particular. Finally, the last substantial section addresses the wider regional context of the EU democracy promotion in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and discusses why and how the

current regional setting affects and counterbalances EU democracy promotion efforts in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

6.2 EU Factors

Existing research on EU democracy promotion in Central Asia highlights a diverse range of factors which impede EU efforts in the region. These can be divided into factors that relate to the difficult regional context and others that pertain to the EU's own shortcomings. Vera Axyonova identifies a variety of EU factors, which impede successful implementation of EU democracy promotion objectives in Central Asia. These include the weakness of the EU in the eyes of Central Asian elites, the lack of conditionality mechanisms, and, an inconsistent application of the available democracy promotion tools (Axyonova 2011, 2014). The failure to offer meaningful incentives, to respond to democratic abuses and to allocate sufficient funding to promote democracy are often mentioned as impeding factors (Warkotsch 2011; Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013; Youngs 2008).

These factors affect EU democracy promotion in Central Asia to varying degrees, yet the majority of them could be addressed through a decisive concerted action fuelled with generous resource allocations (human, administrative, political, and financial). What seems to be larger problems in the case of Central Asia are insufficient political will caused by the numerous actors on the EU side, and the lack of leverage. Therefore, it is possible to reduce the variety of factors impeding EU democracy promotion on the EU side to three large root causes, which give rise to other, smaller factors: an insufficient prioritisation of the Central Asian region in the EU's range of bilateral and multilateral partnerships around the world; the multitude of actors with varying interests within the EU; and, limited EU leverage in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Central Asia is not a top priority for the EU

Both EU and Central Asian interviewees frequently referred to the lack of interest or motivation on the EU side as a fundamental root cause of the EU's limited efforts to promote democracy in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Central Asian politicians observed that the EU can provide substantial democracy assistance and political support but only if the recipient country presents a strategic interest for the majority of the EU member states, or, at least, for the most powerful EU member states (interview 27, Kyrgyz MP, 22 April 2013; interview 42, a leader of a Kazakh opposition party, 17 May 2013). A similar opinion came from Brussels, where an EU diplomat noted that "if EU wants to have something done, it gets it done" (interview 19, 11 March 2013).

The insufficient EU interest in the region stems from the fact that Central Asia finds itself quite low in the EU's "pyramid of privilege" (Holland and Doidge 2012, p.16), which refers to a complex mix of association and cooperation arrangements, where those at the top enjoy favourable treatment and those lower down have less privileges in relations with the EU (Sutton 2001, p.94). The pyramid of privilege is a highly dynamic construct, where partnerships shift up and down depending on the ever-changing EU and individual member states' interests and priorities, as well as on the current global setting and important international events and developments. Due to geographic, historical and economic circumstances, Central Asia does not currently have what it takes to occupy a solid place in the pyramid: geographic proximity, post-colonial ties, or strategic interests.

"Neighbours of our neighbours": None of the Central Asian countries share any borders with the EU and cannot be considered as potential candidates to the EU. The lack of shared borders affects the possibility of having a privileged relationship with the EU. Central Asia, along with the Middle East and Sahel, constitute what the European Commission identifies as "neighbours of our neighbours" (European Commission 2006, p.11), which implies that from a geostrategic point of view, Central Asia is less important than EU's "closest neighbours" - the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) countries (EEAS 2015a). This prioritisation dynamics can be traced through

a range of means, but the most explicit one is a comparison EU allocations to ENP countries and Central Asian countries. In 2007-2013, the EU assistance to Georgia, an ENP country, amounted to 452 million euros (European Commission 2014a), a generous allocation compared to the 750 million euros for all five Central Asian republics allocated for the same period under the framework of the EU Central Asia Strategy (Council of the EU 2007).

Lack of historical ties: Being a distant region does not necessarily place Central Asia outside the EU's pyramid of privilege. In the case of Central Asia, the geographic distance is accompanied with cultural distance and the lack of any shared past. Until recently, Europe and Central Asia have had limited to no interaction, and those existing scarce exchanges between the two regions either took place through Russian mediation or under the Soviet control (Costa Buranelli 2014). An outcome of this extremely limited interrelation between Europe and Central Asia is that Central Asia remains an unfamiliar region with no shared historical or cultural ties. The lack of familiarity with the region results in a limited regional expertise within the EU and less informed decision- and policy making. As some of Brussels-based interviewees acknowledge it is very difficult for them to understand "what is exactly happening in Central Asia" (interview 17, a clerk at the European Parliament, 10 March 2013; interview 20, EEAS, 11 March 2013). In the absence of a solid regional expertise in the EU, the EU representatives in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have to rely on local experts, mass media and international NGOs publications to get acquainted with their new place of work. The issue of limited expertise and understanding of the local conditions was often mentioned by Kyrgyz and Kazakh interviewees. For them, the EU unawareness of the genuine state of affairs was a matter of fact and a significant factor impeding a successful engagement with the region: "The EU attempts to promote their values in the region, but to their disadvantage, they lack knowledge and understanding of local politics, which results in less efficient contribution" (interview 6, a Bishkek-based expert, 13 August 2012). State officials added that this ignorance was mutual: they could not understand the logic of the EU, while the EU could not understand

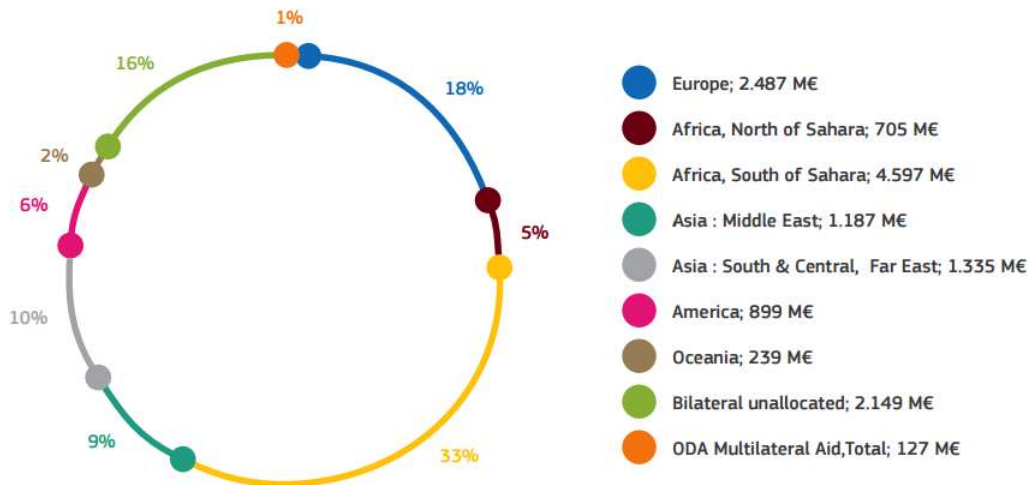
the way politics work in Kyrgyzstan (interview 3, Kyrgyz Ministry of Finance, 3 August 2012).

The lack of shared past has one more implication, which impedes the EU's engagement with the region. EU democracy promotion policy constitutes an integral part of EU development policy and follows its prioritisation logic. The colonial past of the EU member states has significantly shaped and influenced EU development policy, which dates back to 1957 when France proposed including development assistance to the Treaty of Rome negotiations' agenda in order to get assistance with funding "the heavy costs of its colonial possessions" (Holland and Doidge 2012, p.2). For many years, the EU's member states-former colonial powers lobbied the provision of preferential trade agreements and development assistance to their former colonies. Whether it is due to strategic and economic deliberations of EU member states (Serrano 2011, p.91) or a presumed responsibility towards their former colonies (Grilli 1993, p.337-338), the colonial past of EU member states has become a contributing factor, which affected where the EU's development aid goes. Yaounde (1964), then Lome (1975-2000) and finally Cotonou (2000) Conventions have continuously placed African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries on the top of the pyramid of privilege (Arts and Dickson, 2004). With the collapse of the Soviet Union and series of enlargement in 2004 and 2007, the EU's development policy has become more diverse and it is now shaped by a larger variety of factors, e.g. the EU's commitment to the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, even under these circumstances, Central Asia struggles to occupy a higher priority position in the pyramid because it is not deprived enough.

Central Asia is not poor enough: Due to limited available resources, it is reasonable to ensure that the development aid, including democracy assistance, reaches the countries, where this assistance is needed the most. In this regard, Sub-Saharan Africa takes precedence over all other regions because it is lagging behind in terms of meeting the core MDGs (Holland and Doidge 2012, p.227). A snapshot of the EU's overseas development assistance (ODA) from 2013 clearly demonstrates the prioritisation of Africa in EU development aid distribution. Central Asia, as part of a much larger

regional grouping that included South Asia and Far East, only received about 10% of the total ODA.

Graph 7: Regional distribution of EU aid to developing countries in 2013



These EU aid allocations largely reflect the general public opinion on the aid distribution (Eurobarometer 2011). The majority of EU citizens believe that Sub-Saharan Africa should be the priority in the allocation of development aid (70% respondents). The next regions in need are the Middle East and North Africa (33% respondents), and the Indian sub-continent (25%). Central Asia comes sixth in the “public pyramid of privilege” sharing its place with the Eastern European countries and the rest of the former Soviet Union (Eurobarometer 2011).

Prioritisation of regions and countries makes it challenging to justify closer cooperation with Central Asia or larger aid allocations, including democracy assistance, because the Central Asian countries are neither strategically important nor sufficiently poor. Moreover, a closer look at the individual country dynamics demonstrates that only Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are considered poor, while Kazakhstan has already become an upper income country, which currently develops its own overseas assistance programmes (Kazakh MFA 2015; World Bank 2015b). As to the rest of the region, their key economic indicators might not be the best (see Table 10 below), but they are hardly comparable to the socio-economic situation in the crisis stricken Sub-Saharan Africa or Middle East.

Table 10: Key economic performance indicators of the Central Asian states

Country	Income Level	Poverty ratio	GDP	GNI per capita
Kazakhstan	Upper income	2.9%	\$231.9 billion	\$11,550
Kyrgyzstan	Lower middle	37%	\$7.226 billion	\$1,210
Tajikistan	Low	47.2%	\$8.508 billion	\$990
Turkmenistan	Upper middle	No data	\$41.85 billion	\$6,880
Uzbekistan	Lower middle	16%	\$56.8 billion	\$1,880

Source: World Bank 2015a and 2015b

Having no shared border, no historical ties and being a non-severely deprived region, Central Asia stays quite low in the EU pyramid of privilege in foreign relations. The limited interest the EU does have in Central Asia is shaped by the issues beyond Central Asian borders, i.e. the region is not important per se, but only against the background of other, wider regional developments such as the recently completed NATO operation in Afghanistan or the need to address the European dependence on Russian energy resources (Melvin 2012). At that, it is important to discern the degree of importance enjoyed by different Central Asian countries. In spite of Commission President Barroso’s assurances that Kyrgyzstan is “a very important partner” and Kazakhstan is “an important partner” in the strategic region of Central Asia (Barroso 2013 and 2014), in reality the EU relations with these two countries are visibly different.

Kazakhstan might not be a strategic partner at the global scale, but it undoubtedly is a strategic priority at the regional scale, from among the five Central Asian republics. Thanks to the rich energy and other natural resources and steady economic performance, Kazakhstan is treated as a near-equal strategic partner in the region, while much poorer Kyrgyzstan is primarily seen and treated as an aid recipient, who requires assistance to reduce poverty and to address domestic security and stability threats.

Axyonova observed that the EU-Kyrgyz relations resembled “a teacher-student relationship rather than a peer-to-peer deliberation” (Axyonova 2014, p.103; also, Akiner 2010). In contrast, Kazakhstan - richer and more stable authoritarian country, can demand a slightly different treatment (interview 20, EEAS, 11 March 2013).

On the other hand, Kyrgyzstan is not strategically interesting for the EU and its member states. As a top foreign policy analyst from the Kyrgyz Government noted the stable positive relations between the EU and Kyrgyzstan, but stated that the EU, as a foreign policy actor, does not seem to have vital interests in Kyrgyzstan. European countries do not have any vital commercial interests in Kyrgyzstan as none of European companies are commercially involved in Kyrgyzstan (interview 1, Kyrgyz President’s Administration, 31 July 2012). Kazakhstan, in his view, is a different story though as it represents a good investment market and a source of oil for Europe (interview 1, Kyrgyz President’s Administration, 31 July 2012). In this regard, there is a clear lack of the solid platform of for pragmatic, interests-based cooperation. However, one should acknowledge the unique nature of the EU, where the agency is multi-fold. “The EU might promote norms and values, but its member states pursue their interests” (interview 1, Kyrgyz President’s Administration, 31 July 2012).

Multiple EU actors and interests

The issue of different interests the EU has in the region in general and in each country in particular is another EU factor, which affect EU democracy promotion. The *sui generis* nature of the EU has both positive and negative effects on its democracy promotion efforts. On one hand, the voices of 28 nations, if channelled in one direction, do have much more weight than one country’s voice. On the other hand, the crucial and sensitive decisions are often made in capitals of EU member states, which might have different, even opposite interests and priorities with regard to the external action. This results in a disarray and lack of harmony of the European choir.

The EU's institutional arrangement and politics might be difficult to grasp from outside and Central Asian stakeholders do not always understand why they hear different and sometimes contradicting narratives from various EU actors (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013, p.59). The EU institutions usually pursue the same broader objectives set the Treaty on the European Union and other policy documents. However, it is important to bear in mind that EU democracy promotion is carried out through diplomatic channel (EEAS) and through development assistance channel (DG DEVCO). At that the crucial decision making is done at the Council of the EU and the European Commission. As the intergovernmental organisation, the Council of the EU aggregates the positions of member states, who have varying interests in Central Asia (see section 4.2), and has to account for these interests in its actions. The Commission experiences slightly less involvement and pressure from the side of member states, but pursues mostly development-related objectives, i.e. democracy is not the primary objective.

The European Parliament is least dependent on the opinions of member states and most vocal is raising democracy and human rights concerns, but its powers and ability to influence the situation on the ground is limited. The European Parliament plays an interesting role in the EU-Central Asian relations. On one hand, it does not have many powers and opportunities to get involved in the implementation of the EU Strategy towards Central Asia. The European Parliament discusses the EU policy in the region at the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET 2015) and runs several bilateral parliamentary friendship groups to supplement the political dialogue with Central Asian countries. However, in practical terms, the European Parliament does not and cannot go beyond discussing, voicing its opinions and reporting on the EU activities and policies in Central Asia (see Chapter 4 on the actors and stakeholders and their roles). The Parliament's opinion on foreign affairs is not legally binding, and heated debates or conflicts on the Central Asian affairs are rare, if not absent. In general, MEPs in their majority do not demonstrate much interest in the Central Asian region; only few MEPs occasionally share their opinions on the EU involvement in Central Asia.

On the other hand, when MEPs do express opinions they come across as critical and, in this regard, very different from the generally positive and optimistic rhetoric of the European Commission, the EEAS and their subdivisions. Several democracy and human rights “hardliners” at the European Parliament, such as Socialist MEP Paul Murphy and the Green Party MEP Nicole Kiil-Nielsen, manage to direct the overall tone and nature of some parliamentary discussions on Central Asia into more critical direction and highlight the existing shortcomings of the policy implementation and warn of potential consequences of compromising democracy promotion.

The positions of EU member states are not an issue per se, but their multitude and different prioritisation when it comes to the EU policy in the region become an impediment to concerted action. EEAS officials emphasise that normative (promotion and support of democratic principles) and non-normative interests (trade, diversification of energy resources and security) are compatible and successful cooperation in these two areas is not necessarily mutually exclusive (interview 20, EEAS, 11 March 2013). Officials directly involved in human rights and political dialogues do not allow any compromise on this matter: “We are not selling human rights concerns for gas or oil (interview 21, EEAS, 11 March 2013). On the other hand, EU officials, who are not involved in political dialogue or human rights dialogue, note some potential effects of over-focussing on human rights and democracy issues: this might affect trade and economic cooperation. He acknowledges the institutional set-up of the EU and the political foundation of the EU requires pushing forward normative issues, but too much criticism will alienate Central Asian partners and this might complicate any further cooperation both in political and economic matters: “Over-focusing on human rights and democracy sometimes undermines trade and economic cooperation” (interview 24, DG Trade, 12 March 2013). A staffer at the European Parliament goes beyond cautious evaluation of the normative-non-normative interplay and sincerely states “You criticise a country, but then you need discussing energy...” (interview 17, 10 March 2013).

While European Commission and EEAS deny any adverse effects of commercial interests on democracy promotion and human rights monitoring,

MEP Paul Murphy unambiguously acknowledges that “economic interests of the European Union and European based companies will always take priority over human rights” (Murphy 2013). While Murphy’s views might be shaped by his Socialist background and the fact that the European Parliament enjoys more freedom of expression compared to other EU institutions, few officials in other European institutions confidentially expressed similar concerns: “EU-CA dialogue is more about trade and energy. Human rights and democracy is often a box to tick in their dialogue with us” (interview 21, EEAS, 11 March 2013). Under these circumstances, it is difficult for the EU to maintain a coherent and consistent policy and deliver unequivocal and clear messages to the Central Asian audience, which still struggles with the concept of the EU.

Limited leverage

The final root cause for limited success of EU democracy promotion is the lack of leverage over the Central Asian regimes. The EU’s most attractive leverage – EU accession, is not available for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. While for the EU actors it goes without saying that Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan are ineligible to join the EU, both Kazakh and Kyrgyz presidents did consider this option at least once in their career. President Nazarbayev was more realistic about Kazakhstan’s prospects and rightfully noted that Kazakhstan “can only dream of becoming an EU member state” (Der Standard 2004). Kyrgyz President Atambayev chose a straightforward approach and asked his EU leadership directly: “I said that we are always ready to sign an agreement with the EU, I was told that it has no common border with Kyrgyzstan” (Atambayev 2015). The lack of membership prospects limits both the EU’s determination to promote democracy in countries, which are unlikely to ever become a part of the Union, and deprives the EU of its most effective democracy promotion mechanism – democracy promotion through positive conditionality where EU accession is an attractive reward for compliance with the EU requirements on democracy, good governance, rule of law and human rights. As the discussion in the previous chapter demonstrated, the EU has other means of leverage, but most of them have

not been used to the full extent in Central Asia. Nevertheless, in the history of EU-Central Asian relations, there was a favourable moment of opportunity in the year when the Strategy was adopted.

The EU willingness to engage with Central Asia in a substantial and meaningful way stemmed from a favourable window of opportunity in 2007. The EU, local and regional factors converged in a reasonably favourable constellation that gave rise to the aspirations of bringing change to Central Asia and bridging Europe with the former Soviet south.

Firstly, the EU was at the peak of its foreign policy activities. The mid 2000-s were characterised with an intensified discourse on the importance of the EU as a global actor and calls to consolidate and strengthen the Common Foreign and Security Policy. Against this background, the Strategy has become a part of a larger effort to go beyond the immediate European neighbourhood and test the EU's capacity to get engaged with the countries, which do not have membership prospects. In addition to reaching out to previously unfamiliar regions, there was a tendency to "go East", i.e. to develop the EU's relations with Russia and the former Soviet Union. In this regard, the EU Central Asian Strategy has become a geopolitical spillover from a larger set of Eastern policies, which were adopted around this time. By 2007, the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Black Sea synergy policy were in place and functioning, and Central Asia was a missing puzzle in the post-Soviet board.

Secondly, the German presidency at the Council of the EU in 2007 was another important driver behind the adoption of the EU CA strategy. The development and adoption of the Central Asian strategy corresponded to the German foreign policy objectives at the time: development and promotion of Eastern policies and German interests in the region, including trade and economic cooperation in Kazakhstan and a military base in Termez, Uzbekistan.

Thirdly, the larger global setting at the time of the Strategy's adoption played its role as well. The Strategy was adopted a year before the global economic crisis hit the EU economy and gave rise to a range of pressing domestic

issues. In addition, a range of European countries were involved in the US-led military campaign in Afghanistan and Central Asian countries were needed as part of the local logistical chain, Northern Distribution Network and a stable area in the proximity to extremely volatile Afghanistan (see Appendix D). In terms of regional setting, Central Asia at the time was a relatively open space for the EU to increase its presence and engagement with regional countries. China and Russia have only started shifting their focus to the region and have not yet intensified their activities to an extent to effectively prevent or undermine the EU agenda. Plus, the attention was more on anti-terrorism and overall security in Central Asia, so the EU's Strategy, which was generously loaded with the security discourse did not cause too much resistance from the part of these two powerful actors. In addition, EU-Russian relations were not particularly friendly, but at least at this particular moment in 2007 there have not been any major clashes on important international issues.

Finally, there were more or less favourable domestic conditions within Central Asia. By the mid-2000s, Kazakhstan has not only recovered after the wild 1990s, but also managed to significantly develop and market its energy resources extraction industry. Against the background of the EU's increasing need to diversify its energy supply sources, Kazakhstan seemed like a plausible option (Denison 2009). Moreover, the industrial and housing construction boom in Kazakhstan required significant investment and some of the European companies ventured into exploring investment and cooperation opportunities (interview 39, German Embassy to Kazakhstan, 15 May 2013). Such EU member states as Germany, Netherlands and Italy found their commercial companies getting involved in the economic development of Kazakhstan, and needed to protect and facilitate these commercial interests. On the other hand, there were important political developments within Central Asian countries. In 2005, the Tulip revolution overthrew a largely authoritarian regime in Kyrgyzstan. While the new regime did not prove itself to be any more democratic, but it did give a chance to the EU to intensify cooperation and political dialogue without undermining its normative considerations; for few years, Bakiev's regime has enjoyed some credit of trust. Kazakhstan had been developing an

unprecedented document at the time: Path to Europe (MFA of Kazakhstan 2008). Path to Europe declared the country's intention to deepen and widen its cooperation with Europe and turn this Asian post-Soviet country into a European oasis. Kazakhstan's pro-European aspirations peaked at that period as the country attempted distancing itself from poorer neighbours (Kazakhstan even left the Asian Football Confederation to join UEFA in 2002; its Central Asian neighbours still play in Asian Football Cup). In Uzbekistan, the situation was different, but at least, the initial international outrage caused by the 2005 Andijan massacre had faded by 2007 giving external powers a chance to carry on dialogue with the authoritarian leadership. In Turkmenistan, the long-standing dictator Saparmurat Niyazov died in 2006. In general, the region was still largely authoritarian but the degree of authoritarianism was relatively lower for a brief period of time.

This window of opportunity is gone now and the context conditions are less favourable for the EU to assert influence over the democratisation process on the ground. Firstly, the 2007 peak of foreign policy activity was overshadowed with the global financial crisis and subsequent economic crises within the EU (Greece and Spain). Against the background of domestic issues, democracy promotion is a remote and authoritarian region like Central Asia has probably lost a part of its urgency. Secondly, due to the Council presidency rotation, the President countries have changed and brought their own ideas on foreign policy priorities. There have been another brief opening for Central Asia during the recent Latvian Presidency, but this opening has been missed against the background of other pressing issue, such as Syrian crisis, the war in Ukraine and the sanctions against Russia, all of which also signified a different global setting, where democracy in Central Asia is less pressing. Finally, the domestic context changed as well.

6.3 Local Factors

Central Asia presents one of the toughest places for external democracy promotion. Being one of the most authoritarian regions in the world with some of the world's longest ruling leaders (Nazarbayev ran Kazakhstan for

25 years; Gizitdinov 2015, no pagination), Central Asia offers a hardly welcoming environment for the principles of democracy and human rights. For this reason, the local context conditions are usually blamed for less than successful external endeavours to promote democracy. This section focuses on a number of historical, political and economic conditions in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, which impede EU democracy promotion.

Historical factors

The existing research on EU democracy promotion in Central Asia does not always place the democratisation processes in the region in a comprehensive historical context. Meanwhile, the historical context is important for understanding the difficulties of democracy promotion in the region. Both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan had little or no experience in independent governance, institution-building, state-building, or democracy. In the pre-Soviet period, the Kyrgyz and Kazakh tribes had a socio-political structure, which differed significantly from the modern concept of nation-state. The societal organisation revolved around kinship based structures with two-tier governance: local community leaders, who dealt with everyday politics, and an external power (e.g. Kokand Khanate or the Tsarist Russia), who played a limited role in governance having been primarily preoccupied with taxation and military recruitment. The Kazakh and Kyrgyz statehood in its modern understanding was introduced by the Soviet power, but to a limited extent. The countries were heavily influenced by the Soviet legacy with its lack of political pluralism and democratic freedoms, flourishing bureaucracy, and centralised governance.

Unlike their western fellow countries in the Baltic region – the former Soviet Republics of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, Central Asian republics of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan neither had geographic proximity to developed democracies in Europe, nor cultural tradition of democratic rule (Furman 2008). In fact, both were never intended to be an independent state: “the Soviet system imploded and independent became *de facto* reality for the republic” (Collins 1999, pp.2-3). For Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, state- and nation- building were challenging tasks as “prior to the formation of the USSR, they had not existed in their present shape, name or form” (Farrant

2006, p.61). Lack of statehood experience and no experience in procedural democracy informed the democratisation process at both state and societal level. Both leaders and the public managed to grasp the form, the exterior of democracy, but not necessarily its spirit and values.

There is an important distinction between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan regarding establishment and early years of their political regimes. In Kazakhstan, the super-presidential regime of President Nazarbayev has been established before the country gained independence. President Nazarbayev was appointed Chairman of the Council of Ministers (equivalent to Prime Minister) in 1984 and became the President of the Soviet Kazakhstan in 1990, i.e. he has already monopolised the power before the country has officially become independent. In other words, Kazakhstan has never had an opportunity to change its political development path and democratise. Kyrgyzstan had more democratic openings. The first president Akayev was initially seen as a democratic reformer. When he failed to live to these expectations, there was an opportunity for democracy to take stronger roots in 2005, in the aftermath of the Tulip revolution, when the then oppressive regime was demolished. Two more chances followed the 2010 regime overthrow: during the 2010 events and in 2011, when the country had what was largely seen as the first democratic elections (Horesh and Bollier 2011, no pagination).

In addition to the limited experience in state-building, institution-building and democratisation, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have a negative experience of externally driven reforms, which resulted in a certain level of public mistrust to external actors. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are the two Central Asian countries that have agreed to undergo the shock therapy in the 1990-s. The socio-economic costs of the 1990-s transitional reforms have resulted in the wide-spread public fear of drastic reforming, which extends to any more or less significant changes; solid distrust in government and the state; and deep-embedded suspicious attitude to the Western actors or Western ideas.

Researchers noted that the shock therapy for former Soviet countries was not particularly beneficial for the latter: they turned into “the firing range upon

which the western international financial organisations, staffed in the main by US and UK educated economists, sought to test out their big guns of monetarism, deregulation, privatisation and the retreat of the social state” (Polese and Morris 2013, p.1). The deterioration of economic situation and life quality was clear to anyone, who survived the so-called shock therapy. Statistical data might only partially demonstrate the gravity of the situation and its impact on the general public.

Kyrgyz Republic saw real GDP decline by 45% between 1991 and 1995; Kazakhstan’s decline in GDP was less thanks for the country’s rich natural resources. Manufacturing output fell substantially during the 1990s; many industrial sites were shut leaving thousands without jobs. Individual agricultural entrepreneurship and Kumtor gold mine kept economy floating in Kyrgyzstan, and natural resources of Kazakhstan saved the latter’s economy from collapse (Pomfret 2006). In 1993–95, Kyrgyzstan had the highest poverty rate of any Eastern European or former Soviet economy (Pomfret 2006, p.15). Decrease in the state social support and shrinking salaries of public sector employees (teachers, civil servants, medics) combined with high inflation rates shattered the economic situation in many households. The retreat of the social state significantly reduced support to vulnerable social groups (disabled, senior citizens, large families, and others). Budget cuts and close-down of large industrial facilities affected working-age population inducing instability in the labour market and rapid increase in unemployment (chapter by Cieslewska in Polese and Morris 2013, pp.121-135; Pomfret 2006). Only by 1997 had Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan managed to stabilize their economies and tame inflation rates, while continuing to implement ambitious, yet controversial privatisation (Gleason 2004, p.52). The rise of poverty was particularly challenging for people, who lived in the Soviet Union – one of the two superpowers for the most of the twentieth century. People were simply unaccustomed to and unprepared for poverty, and many struggled to adapt to the rapidly changing circumstances (Pomfret 2003, p.9). The consequences of shock therapy in Kazakhstan had a chance to be alleviated (and post-factum justified in the eyes of general public) with the economic rise resulting from the country’s energy riches. In Kyrgyzstan, there has never been a chance to fix the damage in the social

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welfare of citizens: 33.7% of Kyrgyz citizens live below poverty line compared to 5.3% population below poverty line in Kazakhstan (CIA 2014).

While the researchers focused on the socio-economic consequences of this period (e.g. Pomfret 2003), not much has been written on the non-material effects. It is difficult to measure the level of mistrust to the West that the 1990s reforms produced, but the informal conversations with the local participants in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan indicate a long-lasting suspicion towards the West. Some of the interviewees compared the EU engagement with the region with the Cold War ideological rivalry (interview 37, a Kazakh MP, 15 May 2013). Others noted that nothing good comes from close cooperation with Europe because its assistance is intrinsically selfish and pragmatic (interview 2, Kyrgyz Ministry of Economy, 3 August 2012). These views were expressed in an informal setting, but they do indicate a degree of hostility towards the EU that was most likely shaped by the experiences of the 1990s in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Political factors

In terms of local political context, I have identified three major impediments to democracy promotion. First is the ability of the ruling political elites to mimic democracy for the external observers. Second is the wide-spread perception of democracy as a threat to stability exemplified by already notorious Kyrgyz democracy. Finally, the regime stability in Kazakhstan and the regime instability in Kyrgyzstan play their role in complicating promotion of democratic principles.

Mimicking democracy: European officials in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan noted a degree of enthusiasm (more in Kyrgyzstan than in Kazakhstan though) from the side of local actors they work with on daily basis (interviews 35 and 36, EU Delegation to Kazakhstan, 14 May 2013). Kazakh and Kyrgyz Governments alike were praised for their readiness to discuss and participate in projects (interviews 35, EU Delegation to Kazakhstan, 14 May 2013). However, it would be reasonable to question the genuine degree of enthusiasm and commitment on the ground. The local

context requires acknowledging two simultaneously existing realities: one exists on paper, de jure and in the rhetoric of political elites. Another reality is on the ground, it exists in the execution of paper, de facto and in the lives of ordinary citizens. Basically, the debate is imitation democracy, democratic façade, lip service paid to the external observers.

While political conditionality and democracy assistance played an important role in giving rise to democratic reforms in post-Soviet Central Asia, the need to fit into the international community provided an important incentive for Central Asian governments to at least declare formal commitment to democracy and introduce some democratic institutions and practices. The costs of being openly authoritarian in the age of the triumph of liberalism (Fukuyama 2006) and democracy's third wave (late 1980s-early 1990s; Huntington 1991) were higher than the prospects of creating a formal democratic architecture, which would please Western powers. Paradoxically enough, the costs of the democratic façade are still lower than two other options: full compliance with the democratic principles or open authoritarianism.

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan chose to combine democracy and authoritarianism in different proportions without fully adopting either option. Both countries demonstrate at least partial compliance with the EU requirements in the field of democracy. A brilliant example of how the democratic façade works can be found in the most recent presidential campaign in Kazakhstan. Elections in Kazakhstan represent a vital element of the democratic façade because on one hand there is a clear and unambiguous commitment of the nation's leader to hold regular elections:

Election is the most important constitutional and patriotic act. Election should be held in strict compliance with the legislation, in an open and fair manner with the broad participation of local and international observers (President Nursultan Nazarbayev, as cited in Lebedev 2015, Eurasian Centre)

The reality on the ground demonstrates that elections are nothing more than a function to enhance regime legitimacy as they have nothing to do with determining who will govern (Levitsky and Way, 2010, p.7). In the last

presidential elections in 2011, President Nazarbayev won 95% votes. In 2015, President Nazarbayev not only enforced his right to run for the next presidential term one more time, but also called an early election. President Nazarbayev, who has been leading the country as the President since 1991 and in reality since 1989, has an exclusive right to run for presidency as many times as he would like. In compliance with the 2007 constitutional amendments, “One and the same person may not be elected the President of the Republic more than two times in a row”, but “this limitation does not apply to the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan” (par.5, art.42, Constitution 1995 as amended in 1999, 2007, 2010, and 2011).

President Nazarbayev’s decision to run for presidency in 2015 received large popular support. In fact, he stated his initial reluctance to participate in the election: “I have been governing Kazakhstan for many years, I stand at the inception of the independence. Maybe it is time to change the decorations, as they say in theatre?” (as cited in Lebedev 2015). The public support and seeming non-violation of the Constitution are insufficient for the construction of democratic façade. In compliance with established custom, democratic elections should be competitive. And, this is where one can trace the cost of the democratic façade. In the ongoing discussion of the 2015 presidential election, civil society organisations and experts actively exchange opinion in what has remained from the independent mass media. The debate mostly revolves around the number of candidates; no one questions Nazarbayev’s victory. Despite 30 persons expressing their willingness to participate in the election and submitting the required documents, only three candidates were registered: current President Nazarbayev, the leader of a pro-governmental Communist Party¹, and the head of trade unions’ federation. As NGOs and opposition leader agree, the reasons behind having only two relatively unknown competitors are largely pragmatic: one competitor for Nazarbayev is improperly too few, and more than two is too expensive (as cited in Toguzbaev 2015).

¹ There are two communist parties in Kazakhstan: one is pro-governmental and sits in the Parliament; another one considers itself opposition

This practice of faking free and fair elections aims to ensure “mimicking democracy” to please the external audience without giving up the authoritarianism. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are hybrid regimes, i.e. they combine aspects of democracy and autocracy. Hybrid regimes are firmly entrenched – they are not a stage that these countries could pass through. They have become the final destination, a compromise between what the international community expected and what the domestic actors (political leadership and to a certain extent population) pursued.

The power of example: As a part of normative suasion, the EU refers to the parliamentary and presidential elections in Kyrgyzstan as an example that a peaceful transition of power through elections is possible in the region (2012, p.5). The regional perspective on the Kyrgyz democracy is drastically different though. Kyrgyzstan is often referred to as a negative example in two senses. Firstly, the Kyrgyz example is how external involvement in domestic affairs can bring a country to the brink of collapse. Secondly, Kyrgyzstan is an example of how democracy brings instability and affects economic development.

When discussing domestic politics in Kyrgyzstan, one should also take into consideration how Kyrgyzstan is viewed in the region. The tumultuous political life in Kyrgyzstan, coupled with instability, security threats, and poor economic performance in this small country, can hardly serve as a positive example of democracy. In other words, Kyrgyzstan has become a bad example for local authoritarian regimes (interview 17, a European Parliament clerk, 10 March 2013). The references to the Kyrgyzstan’s permanent state of instability have become rather frequent element in the rhetoric of authoritarian leaders in Central Asia, who equal democracy to catastrophe when addressing domestic audience:

When our neighbours in Kyrgyzstan tried to establish complete freedom of democracy, it led to such cataclysms that they still can’t recover. We see this in Ukraine, we see this in Georgia. Our people see it. We say the economy first, then politics. We need to move gradually (Nazarbayev 2010)

Actors in the region have interests of their own, and for regional ruling elites the primary interest is regime preservation. Some of authoritarian regimes in Central Asia are not happy with what is happening in Kyrgyzstan. So, tend to “demonise” Kyrgyzstan. Locally produced documentaries and reports about Kyrgyzstan are titled as “Cannibals of the Revolution”, “Ethnic Massacre and Genocide”, etc (interview 6, a Bishkek-based expert, 13 August 2012). Likewise, the tone of news and other programmes in neighbouring countries keep using narratives of danger and insecurity in Kyrgyzstan (Central Asia News 2012).

Economic factors

As a middle income country with growing economy, Kazakhstan is less dependent on technical assistance or budget support than the neighbouring Kyrgyzstan. Less dependence on external technical assistance makes conditionality-based approach less efficient. In other words, Kazakhstan can “afford” human rights violations and authoritarianism, while Kyrgyzstan is more dependent on external assistance, including budget support and technical assistance provided by the EU (interview 20, EEAS, 11 March 2013).

Informal economic practices might undermine the principle of rule of law. The Soviet rule strictly controlled informal trade of goods and services, and the latter existed at a very limited scale. Liberalisation of economy and economic hardships gave rise to informal economy. Quickly changing circumstances forced people to respond with alternative jobs in informal sector to avoid unemployment and poverty; for some it was an escape from poverty, for many it was virtually the only way to survive (chapter by Cieslewska in Polese and Morris 2013, p.131). Bazaars have become and still remain biggest employers in Kyrgyzstan and to lesser extent in Kazakhstan. As the profits were limited and the trust in state decreased, a part of economic activities went into shadow reducing the state revenue from taxation. As an outcome, an alternative economic system developed. As informal economic activities required other services, which are normally

carried out by the state, and informal practices extended to other activities. For example, basic security and rule of bazaar law have been ensured by organised criminal groups, who either forced or negotiated with traders to make them pay protection money. Weak state institutions failed to prevent the emergence of criminal groups, who took advantage of instability and chaos in the early independence years. As the time passed, former racketeers and criminals either legalised themselves as private security guards or formed more consolidated and powerful criminal groups (Cieslewska in Polese and Morris 2013; Kupatadze 2008). This gave rise to the political-economic-criminal nexus, where the lines between political elites, business community and criminal underworld got blurred, and illegal activities got intertwined with legal ones. Under such circumstances, enforcement of the rule of law principle has become somewhat challenging.

6.4 Regional Factors

Chinese or Russian domination is like living in the cage with a dragon and a bear.

Dosym Satpaev as cited in Andrukhaeva 2014

There is a fundamental issue for the EU in Central Asia: the region has powerful alternatives. A comprehensive analysis of an external democracy promotion case requires taking into consideration the fact that the democracy promotion agent and the target country are not the only players in the field. In case of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, regional powers and broader authoritarian regional environment in Central Asia impose considerable constraints upon the EU's capacity to induce democratic change and Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan's freedom to democratise. Russia, as a major regional power and a long-standing strategic partner of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, asserts strong influence on the current political culture, economic activities, and foreign policy choices in the region. China is a major economic and trade partner for all Central Asian countries and a generous donor, whose unconditional and diverse assistance offers an attractive alternative to the EU's conditional aid. China and Russia lead

regional organisations, inform regional politics, and through the power of their own example prove the viability of undemocratic regimes. Together they contribute to an emerging regional environment characterised with the "league of authoritarian gentlemen" (Cooley 2013, no pagination) and consistent record of human rights violations. Other countries in the region, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and, to lesser extent Tajikistan represent notorious authoritarian regimes, who regularly find themselves at the very bottom of international freedom and democracy ratings (BTI 2014, Freedom House 2015). In such a highly undemocratic environment like wider Eurasian region, any inclination towards liberal democracy is a dangerous deviation from the regional norms; it is dangerous in the sense that it sets an unwanted precedent of welcoming Western, read – alien principles and norms, which often contradict the regional principles and norms of doing politics. In this regard, Central Asia is probably one of the brightest examples of how the need to fit into regional political setting might undermine the need of international socialisation.

While Europe remains a geographically and culturally distant power with unclear normative-realist agenda and limited leverage, Russia and China are unavoidable regional powers, whose political, economic and cultural influence over the region of Central Asia can hardly be overestimated. In order to investigate the role these regional powers might play in EU democracy promotion in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan it is necessary to identify their interests and policies, and to analyse how these two regional powers impede EU democracy promotion in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. It is also important to note that Kazakhstan, thanks to its recent economic rise and rich energy resources, has slightly more freedom in foreign policy choices than Kyrgyzstan, which suffers from continuous economic issues and heavily relies on external financial sources, including labour migrant remittances, donor aid, grants and loans. Before everything else, I suggest a brief introduction of the bilateral relations between Russia and China on one side and Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan on the other side.

Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, China had very limited, if any, relations with the Soviet Central Asia and these relations were invariably

mediated through Moscow. As soon as the former Soviet republics gained their independence, China engaged in building good neighbourly relations with the bordering countries. Primary concerns during the early 1990s included delineation, demarcation and demilitarisation of shared borders and prevention of Uyghur separatism's consolidation (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013, p.27). Uyghurs represent an ethnic minority in both countries: 0.9% population in Kyrgyzstan (National Statistics Committee 2015); and, 1.44% population in Kazakhstan (Kazakh Agency on Statistics 2014)

After having addressed these pressing issues, Chinese leadership sought to establish a collective security framework (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) and to engage in mutually beneficial partnership relations with the Central Asian republics. Most notably, China succeeded in establishing strong economic and trade relations. Chinese involvement in the Kazakh and Kyrgyz economy boomed in the early 2000-s with the trade volumes increasing up to 300% in just one year (2002-2003) and has since been steadily growing (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013, p.35). At the moment, China ranks first top trade partner in Kyrgyzstan (Ministry of Economy Report 2013) and second in Kazakhstan (KAZNEX INVEST 2015). Kazakhstan, as the largest Central Asia economy, accounts up to two thirds of the total Chinese-Central Asia trade. Just like the majority of external partners, China's primary economic interest in Kazakhstan lies in the field of natural resources and investment opportunities in the booming economy: the recently signed contracts are worth \$30 billion of Chinese investment (Lillis 2013). For Kyrgyzstan, China is the top importer of manufactured goods: Kyrgyzstan re-exports up to 75% of the Chinese goods to other CIS countries, and this makes a considerable contribution to the Kyrgyz economy in the forms of customs and other tax charges, and employment. In addition, China is also the top investor in Kyrgyzstan and a generous donor, who funds vital infrastructure projects and offers considerable development assistance (Joint Kyrgyz-Chinese Declaration 2014).

Overall, Chinese policy in Central Asia is informed by its general foreign policy strategy of "peaceful rise" based upon the tenets of multipolarity, multilateralism, non-interference and pragmatism in foreign affairs (Womack

2008, pp.273-274; Breslin 2011). This normative setting combined with consistency, generosity and responsiveness of the Chinese policy in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan has resulted in an important shift of local perceptions of China. The traditional representation of China as an “enemy of Turkic people and as a historical opponent of Islam” (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013, p, 39) is being gradually replaced with the image of a generous donor and a pragmatic and reliable partner, whose interests are clear and reciprocal to the domestic interests in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan: stability and economic cooperation.

Russia

Nevertheless, despite Chinese achievements in the region, China comes as the second most influential power in Central Asia as Russia’s solid long-standing position in Central Asia remains undisputed. Russia’s interest in Central Asia and broader former Soviet neighbourhood has probably reached its peak in the last 25 years. Immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian states were hardly any priority for the new Russian administration (Bondarevsky in Ferdinand 1994, pp.40-41). At the dawn of the new statehood in the early 1990s, the Russian leadership faced roughly same “challenges of independence” as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan: establishing itself as an international actor with a new identity, nation-building, and transition to market economy (Bondarevsky in Ferdinand 1994, pp.40-41). The situation has changed drastically when young and energetic Vladimir Putin replaced aging Boris Yeltsin first as the Prime Minister in 1999 and later as the President in 2000. Putin’s rule has become characterised with more aggressive and affirmative foreign policy and attempts to restore Russia’s former domination on the former Soviet space (Zakaurtseva in Akihiro 2007; Allison 2004, p.277). During Putin’s first and second terms as the President, Russia’s capacity to assert influence and re-establish itself in the Central Asian region was constrained by its limited financial and economic means (Allison 2004, p.277). Nowadays, against the background of the wealth accumulated during the high oil prices period in the 2000s,

Russia has become capable of backing its policy in the region with significant financial means in the form of both “carrots” (grants, loans, investment) and “sticks” (military involvement). Thus, the current Russian policy towards Central Asia has arrived to the point when it has both strong political will to assert influence and means to enforce this will.

The contemporary foreign policy discourse in Russia is characterised with increasing animosity against the West and the Western agenda in the former Soviet area. The NATO expansion to the East, the EU’s eastern enlargement and the subsequent creation of the European Neighbourhood Programme (ENP) have long been seen as signs of the Western threat to Russia and blatant demarches against its legitimate interests in the region (Russia Today 2008). The construction of Western threat has been systematic and consistent, and to a certain degree it has become a publicly supported semi-official discourse.

In 2013, President Putin warned Western NGOs to avoid meddling in Russian affairs, and warned that FSB is prepared to thwart foreign attempts to derail the plans of integrating Russia and former Soviet countries (Isachenkov 2013). His threats were further confirmed by the FSB. At the 2014 meeting of the CIS national security agencies in Minsk, the head of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) Bortnikov declared that the forces attempting to undermine the security and to overthrow legitimate governments in the CIS are often sponsored by the West. General Bortnikov informed that these “destructive” forces are unwelcomed and the FSB will act strictly to prevent the “destructive” forces from affecting situation in “our countries” (as cited in News of Armenia 2014), i.e. the FSB declares commitment to protect the current regimes not only in Russia but throughout the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Russian President Putin’s speech at the 11th meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club on 24 October 2014 deserves particular attention. Having stood by his promise to speak “directly and frankly”, President Putin described the Western powers as self-declared victors in the Cold War, who have attempt reshaping the world to suit their own needs and interests and committed “many follies” while doing so. Putin blamed the

West for supporting “a very dubious public ranging from open neo-fascists to Islamic radicals”. He conflated the allegations of Russia’s quest for the great power status, but demanded to take the Russian interests into consideration and to respect the Russian position. Putin described the Western democracy promotion in the former Soviet Union as creating a “controlled chaos”, which he a likened to “letting the genie out of the bottle” (Putin 2014, no pagination).

Foreign Minister Lavrov went further in explaining the Western threat and extended its alleged range of damage far beyond the Russian and the CIS declaring that the West poses a threat to the international order stability:

The attempts to impose one’s own designs for internal reforms on other peoples, which don’t take into account national characteristics, to ‘export democracy’, impact destructively international relations and multiplies the number of flashpoints on the world map (Sergey Lavrov as cited in Russia Today 2014)

More importantly, Russia demonstrates that it is ready to back the antagonistic rhetoric of its leadership with decisive action. The current Ukrainian crisis has proven that Russia regains its influence and control over near abroad and willingly uses brute force to do so. Despite economic sanctions, tense geopolitical situation, incurring direct and indirect costs of the Ukrainian operation (support of the rebels, humanitarian aid, refugees etc.), Russia persists enforcing what it sees as legitimate interests in the region. Ukraine’s association with the EU has been seen as a hasty backstage decision by President Putin (Putin 2014, no pagination). He explicitly stated that the EU’s meddling with Ukraine touched on the Russian interests and triggered a chain of reactions, which resulted in the current political crisis and violent conflict in Ukraine and the deterioration of the Russian-Western relations.

Russia actively reminds nearby countries of consequences they might ensue in case they go off the Russian orbit – the war with Georgia in 2008 and the Crimean crisis of 2014 has become some very harsh reminders for Georgia and Ukraine. In addition, both crises has become clear messages to the Western actors and to its “backyard” countries in the CIS, including

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan – Russia's southern backyard, that any close cooperation with the West or flirting with democracy comes at high costs for former Soviet republics. This demonstrative punishment was obviously noted throughout the CIS.

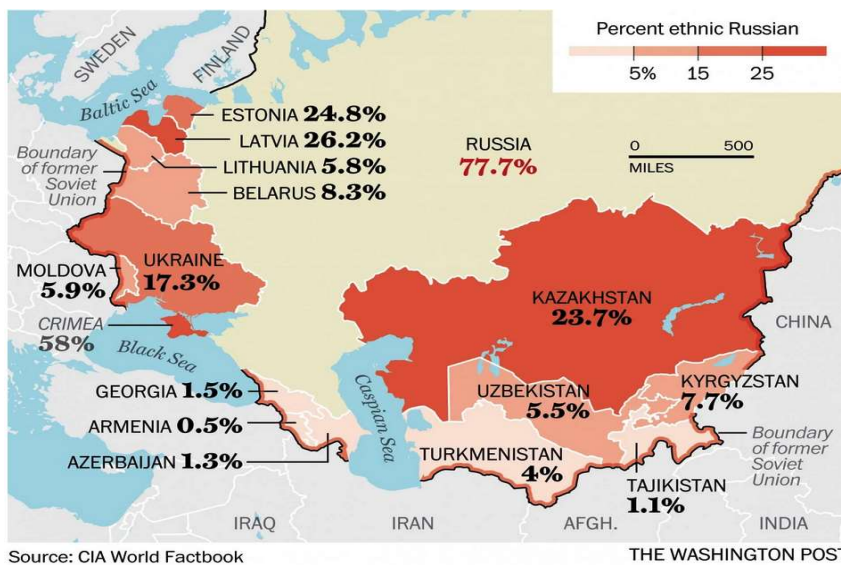
The crisis in Ukraine highlighted a number of regional dynamics, which might affect EU democracy promotion in the region. Firstly, Ukrainian crisis demonstrated that Russia is unhappy with the growing European influence in its backyard. Moreover, Russia is ready for decisive and aggressive actions when it feels that its interests are disregarded or undermined. Moscow has now assumed the right to decide for itself what is right and what is wrong in the affairs of the world, and to reinterpret such concepts as genocide, humanitarian intervention and responsibility to protect (Trenin 2011, p.34). Secondly, in the multilateral stand-off on Ukraine between Russia and the West, Europe looked weak: lack of solid unified response on sanctions could not compare to Russia's decisive actions and solid position.

Against the background of this demonstration of power (or lack of thereof), the Central Asian governments must be aware of the costs of non-compliance with the Russian demands to take into consideration its interests and to avoid getting too close to the EU. The costs of non-compliance can be very high in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan as Russia has a variety of leverages over these countries. Due to the Soviet legacy and geographic proximity, Kazakhstan hosts Russia's largest military presence abroad. Based upon bilateral agreements, Russia currently leases 7 military facilities, including the vital for the Russian aerospace programme Baikonur space complex, a variety of multi-service proving grounds, and few other military infrastructure objects. While the Russian military personnel in Kazakhstan is not large, the territory Russian military facilities occupy are impressive: 11 million hectares (RIA News 2014). In Kyrgyzstan, Russia has 3 military facilities and a joint aviation proving ground. The Russian military airbase in Kant constitutes a part of the Rapid Deployment Forces of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, but the equipment and the personnel of the base are exclusively Russian (Russian Embassy to the Kyrgyz Republic 2015). Russian military presence in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan might be

limited in scope, but given that this is the only foreign military presence on the territory of both countries and Russia is geographically very close, it should be taken into consideration as a factor contributing to the Russian leverage in the region. In this regard, presence is power.

In addition to the military presence, Russia has another important asset: large Russian diasporas in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Given that Russia's official reason for getting involved in the Ukrainian crisis was partly explained with the discrimination of Russian speakers in Ukraine, the presence of the large ethnic Russian minority in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan is an important factor for the governments of both countries. Thus, ethnic Russians account to 21.47% of the total population in Kazakhstan and 6.4% in Kyrgyzstan.

Graph 8: Ethnic Russians in the former Soviet republics



In addition to high costs of non-compliance with the Russian interests, Central Asian states take into consideration another important factor – the availability of alternative sources of development assistance. As Axyonova states “Availability of such alternative options to the target states brings the potential success of the EU’s conditionality policies close to zero” (Axyonova 2011, p.140). The availability of generous Chinese assistance that comes with easy conditions (usually not recognizing Taiwan and not helping the Uyghur separatists in Xing Jiang) is an attractive option for Central Asian states. Against this alternative, the EU assistance comes across as “really

small” and “unsubstantial” in the eyes of local politicians (interview 27, Kyrgyz MP, 22 April 2013). A Kyrgyz MP compared EU assistance to Chinese assistance, which in his eyes is both generous and better spent: “China provides much more and invests in infrastructure - building roads, bridges etc. and energy sector. The Chinese assistance is incomparable to the European, but the Chinese do not make their assistance headline of every newspaper” (interview 27, Kyrgyz MP, 22 April 2013). On the other hand, he noted that the EU can provide substantial assistance if it is willing to do so. In this regard, he referred to the EU assistance to Georgia, which amounted to 800 million USD (ibid). While his number proved to be wrong, his comparison with the EU assistance to Georgia is actually valid. In 2007-2013, the EU assistance to Georgia amounted to 452 million euros (European Commission 2014a), which is a generous allocation against the background of the 750 million euros for all five Central Asian republics allocated for the same period.

China

China offers both development assistance and investment to Central Asian republics. At that, the Chinese conditionality is minimal and hardly ever politically sensitive. Most of the conditions only require repaying loans and using funds on the agreed projects. The lack of political conditionality is probably the most attractive feature for Central Asian governments, who struggle with meeting Western requirements on democratic governance and respect to human rights. Western assistance is often accompanied with requirements to reduce corruption, increase transparency and ensure accountability in target countries. Meanwhile, local political elites and state bureaucracy prefer increasing countries’ economic potential, and avoid limiting their own ability to benefit from their positions. Political conditions often require political reforms, which might either limit their power or provide other domestic actors with plausible opportunity to compete for the access to state resources and powers. As a result, local elites are reluctant to proceed with substantial political reforming required as a part of Western assistance,

but welcome anything else that could improve economic performance of their countries (Gleason 2004, p.41).

The Chinese assistance indirectly affects the conditionality mechanism employed by the EU to encourage local governments adopt and implement democratic principles of good governance, rule of law, human rights protection, and transparency. Beneficiaries in Central Asia receive from China substantial amounts of resources required for social and economic development. This gives the local governments an opportunity to lessen their dependence on or completely avoid Western assistance with its political conditionality, which accompanies virtually every cent of Western donor assistance. Having an alternative to the Western assistance, local rulers feel less constrained in their authoritarian policies.

This generous and versatile support does not come free and it is not free from self-interest, but to a large extent, the Russian, Chinese and Central Asian interests converge on many important points, including the provision of security and development in the region. The EU is interested in the same, but it lacks the capacity and commitment to ensure effective implementation. In addition, democratic ways of doing things are not always the most effective ones. Through authoritarian means, some things can be done quicker and with less bureaucracy.

In addition, China has become an important alternative to the Western liberal ideas of development and governance. China is an example of other ways of doing things: different understanding of the global order, different development discourse, and different governance (Breslin 2011, p.1324). Illiberal state capitalism, which is widely practiced in China and to lesser extent in Russia, is particularly attractive for Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan's energy riches as well as other more or less important sectors are controlled by the state-owned corporations: KazMunaiGaz and the National Railway Company to name few.

Thanks to the significant financial input in the region, China is seen as more generous actor in the region. China deliberately builds its image of an honest international power without hidden agendas: "China never uses foreign aid

as a means to interfere in recipient countries' internal affairs or seek political privileges for itself" (The State Council of the People's Republic of China 2014). Western (European and the US) powers appear as ungenerous actors with obscure geopolitical and political objectives. As Chair of the Kyrgyz Parliamentary Committee on International Affairs notes the Chinese assistance "is incomparable to the European, but the Chinese do not make their assistance headline of every newspaper". Even at the policy making level, Western democracy promotion is often perceived either as a façade covering selfish interests or as an unnecessary whim included to the regional and bilateral cooperation agenda because Western powers have to stick to normative agenda in their foreign policy.

As the Chinese White Paper on foreign aid indicates, "China's foreign aid falls into the category of South-South cooperation and is mutual help between developing countries" (The State Council of the People's Republic of China 2014). Such horizontal positioning of a donor, who humbly acknowledges that it is equal to the aid recipient in terms of development level and willing to offer mutual help, sounds more appealing than the Western conditional aid, from the developed countries to developing countries, based upon "best practices" and "international", i.e. US and European, standards and expertise. Meanwhile, despite European and US efforts to avoid mentoring tone, the nature of its aid conditions and overall rhetoric, often cause less than responsive reactions from local governments in Central Asia. While Kyrgyzstan, one of the poorest countries in the region, cannot afford criticising its donors, the petro-wealth of Kazakhstan allows it to be more vocal in its reluctance to accept the Western mentoring tone. In response to British Prime Minister David Cameron's attempts to raise the issue of human rights violations in Kazakhstan, Kazakh President Nazarbayev clearly expressed his opinion: "Nobody has a right to instruct us how to live" (as cited in The Economist 2013).

Despite the EU efforts to frame its cooperation offers in the terms that emphasise the partnership component and avoid vertical relationship patterns, it is possible to trace a certain degree of annoyance with the EU rhetoric in the area of democracy, human rights and rule of law. Kazakhstan

and Kyrgyzstan, as well as other countries in the region, are expected to comply with normative requirements in hope to improve relationships with the EU. However, the logic behind this mechanism is ambiguous: it creates an impression that the EU is a much-desired international actor, whose lifestyle and best practices are so universally attractive that other countries have to agree with a set of conditions to get access to them. It is assumed that others seek partnership with the EU and this partnership is granted in case if the suitors meet the criteria. The EU rhetoric does not state this explicitly, but this is what the Central Asian actors read between the lines. Such reading of the EU approach to external action is not inherent solely to Central Asia. As Averre observes Moscow interprets the EU's approach as "seeking to exert political influence over less powerful countries on its periphery via rigidly imposed norms" (2005, p.181).

Meanwhile, Russia positions itself as a traditional, reliable partner, who understands and accepts the autocratic Central Asian leaders (Allison 2004, p.279). Russia demands to be "equal partners, not consumers of EU blessings" and offers a similar position to Central Asian governments (Chizhov as cited in Averre 2007, p.174). In addition, being BRIC members and participants of other multilateral organisations, China and Russia offer socialisation with "the Rest" without demanding an open confrontation with "the West". This is perfect for Kyrgyzstan and Kazkhstan, whose foreign policy are multi-vector.

The crisis in Ukraine and the Central Asian reactions to the crisis highlighted few regional dynamics, which might affect EU democracy promotion in the region. Firstly, Ukrainian crisis demonstrated that Russia is unhappy with the growing European influence in its backyard. Moreover, Russia is ready for decisive and aggressive actions when it feels that its interests are disregarded or undermined. Moscow has now assumed the right to decide for itself what is right and what is wrong in the affairs of the world, and to reinterpret such concepts as genocide, humanitarian intervention and responsibility to protect (Trenin 2011, p.34). Secondly, in the multilateral stand-off on Ukraine between Russia and the West, Europe looked weak: lack of solid unified response on sanctions could not compare to Russia's

armed forces, jets and tanks on the Ukrainian territory and occupation of Crimea. This weakness could not pass unnoticed by the regional actors: the costs and benefits of close cooperation with the EU were clear for Central Asian governments, and this might further deter the regional leadership and the public from getting too close to Europe and adopting liberal democracy as promoted by the Western powers.

There is quite solid understanding of the power play that on the ground. A leading international politics expert Nargis Kasanova, KIMEP, has aptly summarised the local views on the EU-Russian power play in Central Asia: "Europe is not interested in a stand-off with Russia, especially in Kazakhstan or because of Kazakhstan" (Muminov 2014).

Russia casts shadow not only on the responsiveness of local Central Asian governments to external Western democracy promotion projects, but also might inform the EU's reluctance to push harder and oppose authoritarianism in the region. Bolder statements from Russia are partly have become possible thanks to the rising oil and gas prices and growing European dependence on Russian energy resources (Wesley 2007), Russia now has sufficient *means* for more assertive foreign and regional policy. As a result of increased economic capacities, Russia has achieved a lot in the recent years: the enormous oil wealth triggered economic development and amassed considerable currency reserves. The economic boom backed the assertive foreign policy: Russia regularly challenges the global hegemon – the US both in its periphery (former Soviet Union) and internationally; applies divide and rule tactic to the EU; leads and promotes alternative to the West regional and international organisations – BRIC, CSTO, and SCO are just a few example

With its rich energy resources and its transportation network, managed by the state-owned monopoly Transneft, Russia is a major oil and gas supplier to several European countries (Bahgat in Wesley 2007, pp.119-121). Despite certain pessimism about Russian supply of energy resources, Russia's proven reserves of natural gas are higher than those of any other state, amounting to 27 % of the global total, and its oil accounts for between

6 to 13% of global reserves (Naughten in Wesley 2007, pp.133-134). Given the growing insecurity of Middle Eastern supply, Russian is likely to remain a crucial supplier of oil and gas to Europe. In this case, knowing about Russia's reluctance to accept foreign influence in its neighbourhood, European countries might be less willing to anyhow confront Russian regional policy in what Europe calls "neighbours of our neighbours".

Regional Authoritarian Environment

It used to be that it was mainly the liberal democracies who banded together in defence of their values. No longer.

Alexander Cooley, the League of Authoritarian Gentlemen,
Foreign Policy, 30/01/13

Central Asian countries and the wider Central Eurasian neighbourhood demonstrate surprisingly strong unity in consolidating the regional authoritarian environment. Promotion of autocratic norms might take both unintentional and deliberate forms and involve domestic and regional actors. Russia and China contribute to fostering regional authoritarian environment both directly and indirectly through a variety of mechanisms. Possibly one of the most efficient mechanisms is autocracy promotion through regional organisations, which serve as transmitters of norms, soft, and hard power (Jackson 2010, pp.112-114). Russia and China, together and independently from each other, play a significant, if not decisive role, in establishment and strengthening of regional political and security organisations, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, Collective Security Treaty Organisation, and the Commonwealth of Independent States structures (Swanstron 2004). A recent Russian-Kazakh initiative of establishing the Eurasian Union, another integration bloc on the CIS territory, speaks for the more proactive Russian position in the region. Although, Russian President Putin emphasized that the new Union would expand its cooperation with the EU and China, it is clear that the Union is "rather about Russia solidifying and institutionalizing its resurgence in its former Soviet periphery" (Eurasianet 2011). Russia, and to a certain extent China, "are both able and willing to hinder regional organisations that they do not control and thus stop them from becoming too

powerful” (Swanstron 2004, p.49). For Central Asian leaders, membership in these organisations is viewed as positive because it is not-burdened with democracy and human rights issues, and provides an alternative to evade Western pressure (Jackson 2010, p.114).

One can have a closer look at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) to draw on just one example of regional institutional mechanisms of autocracy promotion. The SCO, in its declarations and activities, highlights what is “appropriate and legitimate within the region” (Ambrosio 2008, p.1322), and the latter often does not match with what the general Western and European discourses of good governance and rule of law. This difference is considerable: for the West, humanitarian intervention might seem as a reasonable response to certain cases, but a recent SCO declaration unambiguously opposes armed intervention or forced “regime change” and invites to “respect the independent choice of the countries and peoples in the region” (Declaration of the Heads of State of the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on Building a Region of Lasting Peace and Common Prosperity 2012). Similar divergence in prioritisation of values is characteristic for other issues as well: state sovereignty and non-interference in other countries' internal affairs are cornerstone principles for SCO member states and are central to the SCO documents and declarations. The Declaration on the SCO creation (2001) and the SCO Charter (2002) are abundant with references to sovereignty and non-interference, but never express any commitment of member states to democracy.

The SCO sets, codifies, and legitimises the regional rules of the game, where the importance of security (read regime security), stability (read regime stability), and sovereignty is paramount, and human rights and freedoms are of secondary, if not tertiary importance. Regular summits often revolve around the three ‘evils’, which undermine security, stability and sovereignty: terrorism, separatism and extremism. While all six SCO member states have varying forms of these evils, they use “counter-evil” rhetoric to crack down on domestic human rights and freedoms in a similar way. The SCO is an attractive multilateral instrument for local authoritarian

regimes to maintain their grip on power. SCO statements reiterate the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs, which is often used as an argument against Western criticisms on human rights violations or poor governance record. The SCO accepts no other actor, but the legitimate state leadership, where “legitimate” implies the authoritarian ruler in power with no regard to the way this power was gained and maintained. Moreover, SCO contributes to legitimisation of parliaments, presidents and governments in the region by sending its formal missions (just like OSCE), which steadily fail to see any electoral violations (RIA News 2012a and 2012b; Trend News Agency 2010). Regional multi-lateral organisations, including the SCO, regularly exchange favourable electoral observations thus helping local government-loyal mass media to report that international observers find elections fair and democratic. Elections in Kazakhstan, that are usually characterised as failing to “meet key democratic principles” (OSCE/ODIHR 2012), are well-accepted by regional actors. Turkic Parliamentary Assembly noted that 2012 parliamentary election was transparent, democratic and fair (Trend News Agency 2012); CIS observation mission praised the election as “free and genuine” (International Elections Observation Missions 2011). Russia provides political support and extra legitimisation to the Central Asian regimes and their leaders: Russian institutions and politicians regularly congratulate the Central Asian presidents after their elections, encourage their policies and never criticise their governance style (Jackson 2010, p.110).

In addition to these rather unfeasible dynamics of autocracy promotion, institutional mechanisms assert direct impact on the human rights and democracy situation in the countries of the regional. An NGO in Bishkek reported how the Chinese security services requested the Kyrgyz security services to interrupt Bir Duino human rights film festival through SCO channels. This NGO invited famous Chinese human rights activist of Uyghur origin Ms Rebiya Kadeer to attend the festival. Once the Chinese security services learned about this, they used informal channels to get in touch with the Kyrgyz security services and requested not avoid Kadeer’s participation in the festival and screening of “10 conditions of love”, a documentary about

Kadeer and her struggle for Uyghur rights in China (Lukashov 2010, no pagination). Kyrgyz National Security Service did interrupt the festival.

6.5 Conclusion

Promoting democracy in an authoritarian country with little democratic experience is a challenge, and it is important to acknowledge that. It is even more important to identify and highlight issues, which might impede the democracy promotion. As the paper demonstrates there are few factors inhibiting European democracy promotion. European factors impeding democracy promotion include the multi-faceted nature of the EU as an international actor, lack of leverage, and resulting weak position of the EU, reluctance to use some available instruments and mechanisms of democracy promotion, and prioritisation of various interests, which might affect normative interests. Local factors impeding democracy mostly revolve around consequences of the Central Asian historical and political development. By the present, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have formed distinct types of political regimes. While Kyrgyzstan demonstrates better democracy scores than Kazakhstan, its political and economic performance are significantly impeded by continuous instability. Kazakhstan represents a strong authoritarian presidential rule based on the personality of President Nazarbayev, oppressive regime, and sound economic performance.

Given the shared Soviet past, current regional interconnections, and access to information in Central Asia, the regional environment is an important contextual factor. Unfortunately for external democracy promotion agents, Central Asia is not a great playground for democracy promotion exercise. The initial domestic conditions are not democracy-friendly: the majority of the regional states have not seen any change of power for decades, and are solid “not free” authoritarian dictatorships with the exception of the “partly-free” Kyrgyzstan (Freedom House 2015). Democratic spill-over effect is challenging given that the regional powers with strong economic, political and cultural connections to the region, China and Russia, are as far from being democratic as they could possibly be.

Within broader regional framework, Russia and China are two undisputed regional powers, whose opinions and interests cannot be significantly disregarded or disrespected. Russia and China do not only push Europe out of the region politically, but also reduce the economic involvement of the EU in the region. Given this very much feasible dependence, the local governments are not likely to diverge drastically from the forms and modes of political and economic partnership China and Russia has to offer to the region. This might potentially affect any further close cooperation with Europe, especially in political matters. As the recent Ukrainian crisis demonstrated building closer ties with Europe and declaring commitment to liberal democracy might involve the political and socio-economic costs that are too high for the former Soviet republics.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

Political realism does not require, nor does it condone, indifference to political ideals and moral principles, but it requires indeed a sharp distinction between the desirable and the possible - between what is desirable everywhere and at all times and what is possible under the concrete circumstances of time and place.

Morgenthau and Thompson 1985, p.7

There are places and situations where the EU could be effective, and there are places and situations where this is less possible.

A Central Asia desk officer, EEAS (interview 20, 11 March 2013)

In the eyes of democracy promotion agents, liberal democratic principles are desirable everywhere and at all times for a variety of reasons ranging from the belief that democracy ensures peace to an assumption that democracy facilitates economic development and reduces transnational security threats. However, the possibility to promote democracy in certain places can be limited by the democracy promotion agent's approach, the target countries' local context, and other factors.

This thesis has evaluated EU democracy promotion efforts in Central Asia through a comparative case study of EU democracy promotion policy implementation in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. It sought to establish whether or not EU democracy promotion has been successful in these two target countries and to identify factors which have impeded successful democracy promotion. This chapter serves to highlight the key findings by directly answering the research questions in the next two substantial sections. In addition, it emphasises the academic contribution of this thesis and identifies potential avenues for future research on the basis of this thesis.

7.2 To what Extent has EU Democracy Promotion been Successful in Central Asia?

The intensification of EU-Central Asian relations in the 2000s and the adoption of the EU Strategy towards Central Asia in 2007 raised some hope and aspiration that the EU would become an important agent of democratic change in the largely authoritarian region. The Strategy promised an important reinforcement of EU policy in the region and presented a significant declaration of the scope and goals of the EU engagement with the region. The Strategy defined the EU's strengthened approach to the region and set up seven priority cooperation areas, including human rights, rule of law, good governance and democratisation as a priority area. In contrast to previous documents guiding the EU-Central Asian relations, the 2007 Strategy emphasised the horizontal, partnership-based nature of the renewed cooperation with the region.

In reality, the EU policy towards Central Asia was characterised by a large gap between the highly normative rhetoric and predominantly self-interested behaviour in the region. Democracy promotion was one of the top priority areas according to the EU Strategy towards Central Asia, but its implementation was characterised with lack of effort and inconsistency.

The evaluation of EU democracy promotion policy's design, implementation and results in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in this thesis demonstrated that **EU democracy promotion has not been successful**. In order to evaluate the success of EU democracy promotion I used an analytical framework which focused on democracy promotion mechanisms and instruments. This decision was made to avoid three obstacles every researcher in democracy promotion studies encounters. First obstacle is the difficulty to measure democratic progress. Being a blurred concept, democracy can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Its substance can be scaled down to very basic procedural-institutional features or scaled up to the broad notion of democracy that incorporates deep socio-cultural features. Second, an evaluation of democracy promotion often encounters the problem of attribution. Due to the variety and diversity of domestic and external actors and factors that affect democratisation process in the target country, it is

extremely difficult to identify what changes or lack of changes can be attributed to the activities of a specific democracy promotion agent. Third, democracy promotion strategy and tactics can vary from country to country and it is important to develop a tailored approach to each case under examination. For these reasons, the most convenient and productive option was to concentrate on whether specific EU democracy promotion mechanisms available in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were implemented to their full extent and achieved what they were supposed to achieve in compliance with the general EU strategy towards Central Asia.

The EU has three main democracy promotion mechanisms, which are used to various extent in different target countries. First, strategic calculation is a conditionality-based mechanism that operates on the premises that target governments are rational actors, who engage in a cost-benefit analysis in order to decide whether or not to accept the democracy promotion agent's proposals to allow for democracy conducive changes. In order to be successful, a strategic calculation mechanism is required to offer significant rewards for compliance with the democracy promotion agent's will or to involve considerable punishment for the failure to comply. Second, normative suasion employs the power of "better argument" and is based on gradual and persistent process of persuasion aimed to change the perceptions and convictions of the ruling elites in target countries. Third, democracy empowerment targets non-state and local actors and creates socio-cultural conditions required for successful democratisation through educating non-state actors and raising awareness of democracy related issues. Strategic calculation can be successful in short-term, but normative suasion and democratic empowerment are believed to be more efficient in long term perspective. They are expected to ensure genuine internalisation of democratic principles and norms as opposed to temporary acceptance under the strategic calculation framework and, as such, are more sustainable and allow for a greater degree of local ownership in the democratisation process.

In exploring the implementation of each democracy promotion mechanism, a lack of consistency and overall reluctance to use available instruments were noted. Each democracy promotion mechanism has a set of specific

instruments that are related to the EU's specific leverage and capacity to induce change. In case of Central Asia, the EU employs only some of the instruments to a limited extent and this significantly affects the achieved results. Firstly, from among all conditionality-based (strategic calculation) instruments, the EU membership is considered the most powerful, but its application is severely limited with the capacity of the EU to accept new member states. Privileged relations with the EU, such as the European Neighbourhood Policy, are considered second most attractive reward, but again, its implementation is limited to the 16 immediate neighbours of the EU. This leaves the EU with two positive conditionality instruments, trade opportunities and development aid, and two negative conditionality instruments, the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement's human rights clause and sanctions for violation of human rights and democratic principles. The EU has been consistently reluctant to use any negative conditionality instruments despite the fact that there were several cases when the sanctions or suspension of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement was justified. These cases included the violent handling of oil workers' strike in Zhanaozen, Kazakhstan, numerous human rights abuses committed by President Bakiev's regime in 2007-2010 in Kyrgyzstan, and the systematic encroachment of the state on a range of political rights and civil freedoms in both countries. The remaining positive conditionality instruments, development aid and trade opportunities, were only used to a limited extent.

It was possible to identify an important difference in using these instruments in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Kazakhstan, as the top trade partner in Central Asia, was more interested in developing trade opportunities with the EU. Kyrgyzstan, as a poor donor-dependent country, had more interest in receiving donor aid, including the much needed sectoral budget support. These rewards were reasonably appealing for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, but the EU had limited the conditionality attached to these rewards. The target governments often needed to only demonstrate a commitment to comply with the normative requirements. In the absence of clear and significant conditions, the conditionality based instruments were not used to their full extent and, in the case of EU democracy promotion in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, these opportunities have been largely missed.

Secondly, similar issues were discovered in the application of the normative suasion instruments - human rights dialogue platform, political dialogue platform, and common foreign and security policy instruments (resolutions, joint declarations and other collective EU statements aimed to raise the issues of democracy and human rights in Central Asia). The CFSP instruments were hardly ever used and had little bearing on the behaviour of the governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan as they were often limited in scope. Political dialogue and human rights dialogues could have been powerful instruments of normative suasion, but they have turned into a game of asking and promising. The EU asked for certain commitments and the target governments promised to commit themselves to the cause of democracy and human rights. In reality though, the process did not go beyond formal declarations and commitments. In addition, normative suasion instruments have had unintended negative effects on the overall democratisation process in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In Kazakhstan, the intensification of bilateral and multilateral contacts with the EU and its member states was used to legitimise and consolidate the ruling regime of President Nazarbayev. The willingness of the democratic Europe to cooperate with Kazakhstan more than any other country in the region was interpreted and presented to the domestic audience as a sign of the international respect to the regime. In other words, the increased EU-Kazakh cooperation was instrumentalised to highlight the international recognition, legitimacy and success of the ruling regime and its activities. This has become an indirect contribution to the consolidation of the authoritarian power in Kazakhstan.

In addition, the dialogue platforms transformed with the course of time. They started as an instrument of normative persuasion and socialisation of local elites, but got entangled in the process of reverse socialisation. Hard security threats narratives have gradually overtaken the discourses of democracy and human rights. The local governments were successful in convincing their European counterparts that democracy and human rights are not as important and urgent as the issues of security and stability. Gradually, this conviction spread to the extent that security had become the primary focus of these dialogues, and democracy and human rights

transformed into a “box to tick” during the dialogue rounds. Reverse socialisation can be understandable given the seriousness of transnational security threats in the larger Central Asian region, but it has detrimental effects on the intrinsic purpose of democracy promotion. The incorporation of shared security concerns into bilateral and multilateral cooperation might be beneficial in order to raise and address security-related issues. The securitisation of EU-Central Asian dialogue stretches the focus this cooperation and shifts priorities to non-normative issues. As an outcome, democracy and human rights receive less political attention and less opportunities to be promoted at the state level.

Thirdly, while strategic calculation and normative suasion were directed to change the perceptions and behaviour of the state actors, democratic empowerment aimed to increase the societal capacity to produce, endure and sustain democratic changes. Democratic empowerment potentially could have had long-lasting effects on democratisation processes in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan if it has not been associated with several controversies and difficulties. A significant part of the EU efforts in this area involved capacity building of the civil society sector in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. However, the reality on the ground, combined with the donors’ approach to the local civil society, resulted in the increasing domination of GONGOs (government organised non-governmental organisations) in Kazakhstan and BONGOs (business oriented non-governmental organisations) in Kyrgyzstan.

In Kazakhstan, the state adapted to the perceived threat of democratisation through external means by sponsoring its own civil society, one which does not undermine and criticise the ruling regime’s legitimacy and actions. This is hardly a liberal democratic type of civil society, which could induce genuine democratic change. Nevertheless, in the absence of alternatives, the EU worked with and supported these half-democratic half-authoritarian alliances. In Kyrgyzstan, the civil society sector is dependent on the external funding to the extent that it has turned into a special kind of entrepreneurship. In pursuit of foreign grants that are vital for their survival, local NGOs eagerly follow the donors’ agendas and expectations with less regard to the actual local needs and realities. This practice has already

resulted in divisions within the Kyrgyz civil sector. On the top of the sector there are large and experienced NGOs that receive most of the funding and know how to please the donors. The overwhelming majority of other NGOs have limited access to grants and less opportunities to develop their activities as they cannot possibly meet the technical and administrative requirements of the donors, among which the EU stands out with one of the most complex and bureaucratized application procedures. As an outcome, democratic empowerment is available only for a small part of the civil society sector in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and this part does not necessarily reflect the actual needs and expectations on the ground.

To summarise the answer to the primary research question, it should be noted that from among the range of democracy promotion instruments available to use in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, only some were used to a limited extent. These instruments included offering trade opportunities to Kazakhstan and development aid to Kyrgyzstan, dialogue platforms, and, capacity building. However, these instruments largely lacked conditionality attached to them, and were distorted by the target governments to serve their own needs. As an outcome, none of them worked as intended. Strategic calculation lacked substantial conditionality. Normative suasion reversed its direction and diverted the cooperation discourses to security. Democratic empowerment compartmentalised the civil society sector and consolidated a bubble of privileged NGOs. The EU is not to blame for the state of affairs in the civil society sector in the region of course, but it is important to bear in mind that its approach sustains this state of affairs.

The EU's policy in Central Asia in general can be described as an act of balancing where the EU strives to demonstrate its commitment to normative principles while keeping the Central Asian governments engaged. This balancing does not always work as intended and such engagement has its costs: continuous abuse of human rights and consolidation of undemocratic political regimes in the Central Asian republics.

7.3 Why has EU Democracy Promotion not been Successful in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan?

The existing literature on EU democracy promotion often places the blame for less than successful implementation progress either on the unfavourable conditions in the target countries (Warkotsch 2011) or on the flaws of the democracy promotion agent (Axyonova 2014). While this is surely a legitimate explanation, the local context and the flawed approaches of democracy promoters constitute a part of the reason why EU democracy promotion not been particularly successful in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. This thesis identified three sets of factors, which affected the implementation of EU democracy promotion policy in Central Asia. One set of factors relates to the difficulties on the EU side. The second set focuses on the local context and conditions for democratisation. A third set acknowledges the role of regional powers and environment in countering democracy promotion efforts in the region.

On the EU side, there are multiple gaps between the EU normative commitments and individual EU member states' interests and priorities. The reluctance of some EU member states to get engaged more in external democracy promotion Central Asia stems from their non-normative interests. EU member states, whose troops participated in the ISAF campaign in Afghanistan were predominantly interested in keeping the ISAF air bases and air corridor in Central Asia. EU member states with a significant level of dependence on external energy imports prioritised the region's rich energy resources above normative objectives. This partial reluctance affected the efficiency and productivity of the EU institutions' efforts because member states are important actors and sometimes they have more leverage than the EU.

Normative and non-normative interests might not be mutually exclusive, but due to the limited resources and political will, the urgent *Realpolitik* interests took precedence over abstract norms and values. When the subject matter is political or sensitive, achieving unity of the consolidated EU position, opinion, view, etc. is extra challenging as inconsistencies and contradictions

exist not only in the rhetoric and action of EU institutions, but also at the level of individual European politicians. In this regard, the thesis adds to the literature on the values vs. norms dichotomy in EU democracy promotion abroad. As the Central Asian case studies demonstrate, normative objectives are in place, but they are often overtaken by the *Realpolitik* interests of key EU stakeholders.

It is important to acknowledge that there are significant obstacles on the ground. Central Asia is one of the most authoritarian regions in the world, and Kazakh and Kyrgyz societies have not had any experience of independent statehood or liberal democracy until 25 years ago. As a result, there are objective historic impediments rooted in the local legacies and socio-political idiosyncrasies, which affect external democracy promotion. These local factors contribute to the distortion of democracy promotion process and shape ambiguous results of democratisation. Central Asia does not represent a fertile ground for democratisation due to the limited local experience in institutional state-building and democratic governance, a solid record of authoritarian rule, and increasing state rentierism. Some efforts such as political and economic reforms, formal separation of powers, and nominal commitment to human rights and freedoms have been made by Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to meet the expectations of the international community represented by international organisations, state and international non-state actors. The extent of these efforts and the genuine commitment to democratic principles on the ground remains limited as both the state and civil society have mastered the art of mimicking democracy façade.

Finally, regional factors affect external democracy promotion in direct and indirect ways. Powerful regional actors such as Russia and China often inform the trajectories of domestic and foreign policies in the broader region. They contribute to the endurance of the authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes in Central Asia through offering alternatives. They offer an alternative set of authoritarian values, where the key norm and objective is regime stability, regime security and survival. Under these normative trends, democracy and human rights, as well as other elements of liberal

understanding of democracy get secondary if not tertiary importance in the eyes of governments and societies. Second, Russia and China offer an alternative source of investment, development aid and other material gains to Central Asian governments. This offer does not affect EU democracy promotion directly, but it does make EU conditionality based instruments less efficient by diversifying available options for the target governments in the region. Thus, Kazakhstan has more trade opportunities and Kyrgyzstan more development aid and grants with less strings attached. The Russian and Chinese aid and trade do come with certain conditions, but these conditions are easier to meet as they are less politically sensitive, i.e. do not require political changes or increased transparency or accountability. With China and Russian increasing their strategic engagement with Central Asia, the EU stands even less chance to be successful in promoting liberal democratic principles. China and Russia offer alternatives to the EU offers: alternative source of development assistance, alternative set of norms and principles, and alternative socialisation with the conditions that are easier to meet for the authoritarian Central Asian leaders.

It is difficult to weigh these sets of factors against each other as their contribution to impeding EU democracy promotion is dynamic and depends on current local, regional and international trends. The EU factors are crucial as they set the direction of democracy promotion. The local contextual factors might shift when the ruling elites change, but in the short-term perspective the non-democratic factors on the ground are likely to stay intact. Regional factors gain more importance due to the recent international developments. Russia's assertive and sometimes aggressive policy towards the EU sends a message across the region. The recent crisis in Ukraine is a threatening signal to the Central Asian governments as well. It messages that a closer engagement with the EU might cause an overreaction from the Russian side. In addition, Chinese economic expansion in the region makes the EU offers of trade opportunities less attractive thanks to the scale of the Chinese economic might and the conditions, which are convenient to follow for the Central Asian elites.

7.4 Avenues for Future Research

Despite the uneven implementation progress of the EU Strategy towards Central Asia and significant flaws in the EU democracy promotion policy in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the EU efforts to incorporate democratic principles into the cooperation agenda in the region made an important contribution to shifting perceptions in the region. Thanks to the EU and other international actors raising the issues of democracy, rule of law, good governance and human rights, the Central Asian political elites accepted these issues as an inevitable part of external relations. This acceptance might be shallow at the moment, but its implications are important. Shallow democratisation and formal acceptance on both democracy promotion agent's and target countries' sides does not contribute much to building a genuine democracy at the moment, but it does normalise the discourses of democracy in local societies and makes the concept of democracy less alien in the eyes of the general public.

The lack of immediate meaningful results should not put off the external actors involved in democracy promotion as the key to success is continuity and consistency. External democracy promotion is an inter-active multi-dimensional dynamic process, where a variety of intra-state, state, and external factors affect the policy formation, implementation and outcomes. These factors change and there might be more windows of opportunity to pursue normative objectives in Central Asia. What is crucial here for both policy makers and academics is to stay informed and alert in order to be ready for the next window of opportunity. This thesis covered many issues and raised some questions, which could serve as the ground for further research in the field of democracy promotion studies. In particular, further research could use the analytical framework to study EU democracy promotion in other three Central Asian republics, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The EU has slightly different sets of normative and non-normative interests in each of these countries, and an analysis of how these interests affect and shape democracy promotion policies in these target countries would be interesting.

7.5 Academic Contribution

The thesis has made several original contributions to the existing research on EU democracy promotion. First, it adds to the existing research on democracy promotion mechanisms and provides a comprehensive analytical framework for evaluation of democracy promotion, inclusive of factors which may facilitate or impede democracy promotion in Central Asia. This thesis aggregates the existing analytical frameworks and attempted to incorporate a participatory approach to provide a versatile analysis of EU democracy promotion. It did not focus only on one set of factors or another, but took into consideration a broad range of factors, which might affect EU democracy promotion.

Second, this thesis demonstrates the validity of a holistic approach to analysing factors impeding democracy promotion. The existing research on EU democracy promotion in Central Asia often focuses only on a set of factors, usually either on the EU or on the local context, prioritising it over others. This research acknowledges that a variety of diverse factors affect external democracy promotion and their impact can vary as international, regional and domestic conditions change.

Third, two original case studies were presented and analysed with taking into consideration relevant contextual conditions, which might affect the design, implementation and outcomes of EU democracy promotion. Case study approach offers a highly contextual solution to examining external democracy promotion. It allows for a depth of analysis and adds to the existing body of literature, which usually either focuses on individual democracy promotion projects or provide a shallow overview of EU activities in Central Asia. The choice of two case study countries allowed to ensure both depth of analysis and breadth of findings. In addition, an analysis of two case study countries provided an opportunity for the comparative dimension and a platform to see how different the EU's approach can be. Examining two countries, where the EU has very different levels of interest, helped contribute to the debate on the interplay of values and norms in the EU motivation to get engaged in democracy promotion abroad. The thesis focused on the stable and rich authoritarian Kazakhstan and poorer

Kyrgyzstan prone to political instability but also to democratic openings. The case studies represented the country with more strategic importance for the EU (Kazakhstan) and the country with less strategic importance for the EU (Kyrgyzstan) in order to see how non normative interests interfere with normative interests.

Democratic norms lie at the core of the EU identity as an international actor and a democracy promotion agent. Narratives of democracy, human rights, rule of law and good governance are embedded in what the EU represents to the extent that it is unthinkable to conduct any EU activities without references to these liberal democratic norms. International relations is no exclusion to this rule: democratic rhetoric has become an integral element of the EU's cooperation with third countries. However, this does not make the EU a pure normative power. The normative dimension of EU external action and development aid can dominate in the areas and at times, where it is possible, i.e. where it does not affect other, non-normative interests. Otherwise the EU acts as a pragmatic international actor.

Despite the long history of pooling sovereignty and developing supranational governance, the EU member states remain the primary international actors in the matters of strategic importance such as security, trade and foreign policy. Due to its unique nature, states are not the only actors involved in external action. The EU presents a complex, multi-layered entity with numerous centres of power and many voices. The *sui generis* nature of the EU has both positive and negative effects on its democracy promotion efforts. On one hand, the voices of 28 nations, if channelled in one direction, potentially could make a significant difference. On the other hand, the crucial and sensitive decisions are often made in the capitals of EU member states, which have different, even opposite interests and priorities with regard to the external action. This results in a disarray and half-hearted efforts when it comes to external democracy promotion - a challenging task that requires a great deal of political will and commitment from the part of democracy promoter.

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List of Abbreviations

ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific countries
ADAM	Automated Donor Assistance Mechanism
BOMCA	Border Management in Central Asia
CA	Central Asia
CABSI	Central Asian Border Systems Initiative
CADAP	Central Asian Drug Action Programme
CAREC	Central Asia Regional Environment Centre
CARICC	Central Asia Regional Intelligence and Coordination Centre
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CICA	Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organisation
CU	Customs Union of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan
DCI	Development Cooperation Instrument
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EC	European Communities
ECA	European Court of Auditors
ECHO	European Commission's Directorate General for Humanitarian Assistance
EEAS	European External Action Service
EIB	European Investment Bank
EIDHR	European Institute for Democracy and Human Rights
EMECW	Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
ENPI	European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument

EnvSec	Initiative Environment and Security Initiative
EU	European Union
EurAsEC	Eurasian Economic Community
EUSR	European Union Special Representative
EUWI	European Union Water Initiative
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
GAERC	General Affairs and External Relations Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GSP	Generalised System of Preferences
HR for FASP	High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
IBPP	Institution Building Partnership Programme
ICG	International Crisis Group
IFI	international financial institution
IfS	Instrument for Stability
IGC	Intergovernmental Commission
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INOGATE	Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe Programme
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
IT	Information Technology
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSA/LA	Non-State Actors and Local Authorities in Development
NSCI	Nuclear Safety Co-operation Instrument
ODA	Official Development Aid
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OPPD	Office for Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
PCD	Policy Coherence for Development
PFM	Public Financial Management
RSP	Regional Strategy Paper
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
SME	Small and Medium-Size Enterprises
SPSP	Sector Policy Support Programme
TEU	Treaty on the European Union
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
TACIS	Technical Assistance for Commonwealth of Independent States
TEMPUS	Trans-European mobility scheme for university studies
TRACECA	Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia Programme
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WTO	World Trade Organization

Appendix A Ethical Consent Form

Title of Research Project: **EU democracy promotion in Central Asia:
implementation in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan**

Name of Researcher: **Aizhan Sharshenova**

Initial the box if you agree with the statement to the left

- 1 I confirm that I have read and understand the information letter dated *[insert date]* explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.
- 2 I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.
- 3 I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.
- 4 I agree to have my interview audio recorded.
- 5 I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research
6. I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the principal investigator should my contact details change.

Name of participant	Date	Signature
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Aizhan Sharshenova Researcher	Date	Signature
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To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Copies:

Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/pre-written script/information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be kept with the project's main documents which must be kept in a secure location.

Date: _____ Name of Applicant: _____

Appendix B List of Interviews

Interview 1

31st July 2012, Bishkek

Kyrgyz President's Administration, Foreign Policy Department

Interview 2

3rd August 2012, Bishkek

Kyrgyz Ministry of Economy

Interview 3

3rd August 2012, Bishkek

Kyrgyz Ministry of Finance

Interview 4

10th August 2012, Bishkek

The Delegation of the EU to the Kyrgyz Republic, Officer 1

Interview 5

10th August 2012, Bishkek

The Delegation of the EU to the Kyrgyz Republic, Officer 2

Interview 6

13th August 2012, Bishkek

POLIS-Central Asia Analytical Centre Expert

Interview 7

15th August 2012, Bishkek

Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society NGO, an EU grant recipient

Interview 8

17th August 2012, Bishkek

An EU-funded project in Kyrgyzstan 1, Project Manager

Interview 9

17th August 2012, Bishkek

Member of the Kyrgyz Council on Selection of Judges

Interview 10

17th August 2012, Bishkek

Citizens against Corruption NGO, three Programme Officers

Interview 11

18th August 2012, Bishkek

Kyrgyz Prime Minister' Office, National Coordinator for Cooperation with the EU

Interview 12

21st August 2012, interviewed via Skype

National Defence University, Washington, Researcher in Security and State-Building in Central Asia

Interview 13

12th September 2012, Bishkek

St. Andrew's University, Researcher in Organised Crime in the post-Soviet Space

Interview 14

12th September 2012, Bishkek

Kyrgyz Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Division of Multilateral Cooperation

Interview 15

13th February 2013, interviewed via email

German Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Interview 16

10th March 2013, Brussels

EUCAM expert 1

Interview 17

10th March 2013, Brussels

European People's Party, Office of the Head Service, Central Asia and Mongolia Delegation

Interview 18

10th March 2013, Brussels

EEAS, Central Asia Unit, Country Desk Officer 1

Interview 19

10th March 2013, Brussels

EEAS, Central Asia Unit, Country Desk Officer 2

Interview 20

11th March 2013, Brussels

EEAS, Central Asia Unit, Country Desk Officer 3

Interview 21

11th March 2013, Brussels

EEAS, Human Rights Unit, Programme Officer

Interview 22

12th March 2013, Brussels

Staffer at the Permanent Representation of Lithuania to the European Union

Interview 23

12th March 2013, Brussels

EEAS, Central Asia Unit, Thematic Programme Manager

Interview 24

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12th March 2013, Brussels
European Commission, DG Trade

Interview 25

12th March 2013, Brussels
European Commission, DG DEVCO, Geographical Coordination Central
Asia, Middle East/Gulf, Asia Regional Programmes, Country Desk Officer 1

Interview 26

12th March 2013, Brussels
European Commission, DG DEVCO, Geographical Coordination Central
Asia, Middle East/Gulf, Asia Regional Programmes, Country Desk Officer 2

Interview 27

22nd April 2013, Bishkek
Kyrgyz Parliament, MP, Member of the Parliamentary Committee on
International Affairs

Interview 28

22nd April 2013, Bishkek
Externally funded (non-EU) good governance project in Kyrgyzstan, Expert
in Rule of Law

Interview 29

23rd April 2013, Bishkek
The Delegation of the EU to the Kyrgyz Republic, Officer 3

Interview 30

24th April 2013, Bishkek
An EU-funded project in Kyrgyzstan 2, Senior Expert

Interview 31

30th April 2013, Bishkek

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ)
Representation in the Kyrgyz Republic, Expert

Interview 32

30th April 2013, Bishkek
UNDP Governance Programme, Officer

Interview 33

8th May 2013, Bishkek
Department for International Development (DFID) in the Kyrgyz Republic,
Officer

Interview 34

14th May 2013, Astana
The Delegation of the EU to Kazakhstan, Officer 1

Interview 35

14th May 2013, Astana
The Delegation of the EU to Kazakhstan, Officer 2

Interview 36

14th May 2013, Astana
The Delegation of the EU to Kazakhstan, Officer 3

Interview 37

15th May 2013, Astana
Parliament of Kazakhstan, MP and Head of a Parliamentary Faction

Interview 38

15th May 2013, Astana
Parliament of Kazakhstan, MP

Interview 39

15th May 2013, Astana

German Embassy to Kazakhstan

Interview 40

17th May 2013, Astana

The Delegation of the EU to Kazakhstan, Officer 4

Interview 41

17th May 2013, Astana

Opposition political party 1, leader

Interview 42

17th May 2013, Astana

Opposition political party 2, deputy leader

Interview 43

11th July 2013, interviewed via Skype

Member of the European Parliament

Interview 44

22nd December 2014, interviewed via email

An EU-funded regional, programme manager.


Appendix C Map of Central Asia

Source: United Nations 2011. Map no.3763, revision no.7. Cartographic Section. Available at <http://ow.ly/SeXwC> (Accessed: 31 December 2015)



Appendix D ISAF Troop Contributing Nations












Source: NATO 2013. Available at <http://ow.ly/Sf0tR> (Accessed: 31 December 2015)





International Security Assistance Force

Troop Contributing Nations

	Albania	11		Germany	1,707		Poland	65
	Armenia	121		Greece	9		Portugal	57
	Australia	271		Hungary	84		Romania	317
	Austria	3		Iceland	3		Slovakia	12
	Azerbaijan	94		Ireland	7		Slovenia	2
	Bahrain	0		Italy	1,400		Spain	181
	Belgium	55		Jordan	616		Sweden	13
	Bosnia & Herzegovina	8		Republic of Korea	0		The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia ¹	152
	Bulgaria	320		Latvia	18		Tonga	0
	Croatia	153		Lithuania	72		Turkey	367
	Czech Republic	227		Luxembourg	1		Ukraine	14
	Denmark	149		Malaysia	2		United Arab Emirates	35
	El Salvador	0		Mongolia	40		United Kingdom	2,839
	Estonia	2		Montenegro	25		United States	24,050
	Finland	90		Netherlands	16	Total	Total	34,512
	France	90		New Zealand	1			
	Georgia	755		Norway	58			

Note on numbers: Numbers of troops should be taken as indicative as they change daily.

1 Turkey recognises the Republic of Macedonia with its constitutional name

2 In line with ISAF's planning and in coordination with NATO, Singapore has completed its contribution to ISAF on 22 June 2013, Canada on 31 March 2014.

6 October 2014