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THE EU'S ENGAGEMENT WITH CENTRAL ASIA: ASSESSING ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROSPECTS FOR COOPERATION

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In terms of geopolitics, trade, and security, Central Asia is attracting the attention of political actors around the world. Accordingly, major international powers interests intersect in this region. Each power develops its unique strategy for building relationships with the countries in Central Asia. There is a growing activity of the countries in close geographical proximity to the region, such as Russia, which is one of the key players in the global energy market and the major supplier of energy, and China with a rapidly growing economy and increasing energy consumption. The US is among the prominent geopolitical actors that significantly impact the region. No less important are the other regional players, such as Türkiye, Iran, and India. Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Central Asian states remained politically and economically tied to Russia thanks to the prevalence of the Russian language, media, and the significant movement of goods and people between Russia and Central Asia, which positioned Moscow as the key external actor in the region. Chinas influence, on the other hand, stems primarily from its aid, trade, and development programs with Central Asian countries. Meanwhile, the EUs normative power in the region is less visible. Central Asian states, in their pursuit of foreign policy equilibrium and the development of multi-vector strategies, have attempted to balance their options after gaining independence.

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