

Region Emergent: Crossing the Landbridge to Central Asia

8 An Interview with Lord Waverley, Chairman of the All-Parliamentary Committees for Central Asia in the United Kingdom's House of Lords. These seven parliamentary groups include Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, the regional group for Central Asia, and Vice Chair of the Azerbaijan Group, recently added, as a gateway to Central Asia.

Autor: Lord Waverley

How did you first become interested
in Central Asia?

Mystery and a heightened realisation of its impending post-independence importance first drew me to Central Asia. Having travelled and read widely, I felt immediately that this was a part of the world that must be better understood, not fully understanding the detail as to why.

The opportunity presented itself to travel to the region, notably Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. An early trip was to Nagorno-Karabakh because it seemed to me that opinion was very one-sided and I wished to contribute to the setting out of anchors and actors to this conflict.

A highlight in the early days of my regional tours to Central Asia would be to visit both capitals and rural areas and immerse myself in the individual national cultures. Since then I have also travelled back adding Tajikistan and Turkmenistan with Kyrgyzstan next month, which have been most elucidating and enjoyable.





Photo of signature in Tajikistan of Inter-Parliamentary Group Memorandum of Understanding in autumn 2009

What is the role of the Central Asia Parliamentary Group?

Thank you for this question because it goes to the heart of my engagement with the individual countries of Central Asia. The decision to create and chair each of these groups was deliberate, from one who believes that the individual countries of the region must express their interests and find their voice. Parliamentary groups monitor issues of key concern to members and the Government, lending good offices and tradition of reasoned policy advice.

An explanatory twelve-point Inter-Parliamentary Group Memorandum of Understanding setting out guiding principles states the following: Recognizing our desire to strength-

en Parliamentary cooperation and being committed to Political, Economic and Social Understanding and Development, we are pledging to do the following on a direct and active basis: 1. Facilitate inter-parliamentary dialogue, 2. Foster contacts, co-ordination and the exchange of experience among Parliamentarians, 3. Promote ideals of democracy and good governance, 4. Recognize the need to defend and promote human rights and rule of law, 5. Contribute to enhanced understanding of representative institutions and their further development, 6. Work for regional security and stability, 7. Consider questions of bilateral and regional interest,



8. Encourage regular high level Governmental and Sector exchanges, 9. Contribute to climate change and environmental awareness, 10. Highlight importance of regional and global energy and water security, 11. Deepen economic development, trade and inward investment, and 12. Promote cultural and educational exchange.

As the catalyst behind the creation of the Parliamentary Groups, I can say that the intention is to bring greater understanding to the region in terms of geo-politics, energy security and development. The role of government is to ensure that the right environment is created to allow all sectors that make up a bilateral relationship to thrive. All societal sectors that comprise bilateral relations are equal partners in that process.

Why is it important for the UK to build links with Central Asia?

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The economic, civil and political well-being for Central Asia is an imperative of utmost importance to the United Kingdom and the world at large. Central Asia is a crucial competitive energy alternative to Middle Eastern supplies. The West's dependence on energy, and so by extension regional stability and security, makes Central Asia an important, if not essential, relationship for the United Kingdom. Improving long-term investment opportunities and laying solid foundations for its enhanced role in regional security is mutually beneficial. Key figures in Central Asia however remain to be convinced of the priority the United Kingdom attaches to these bilateral relationships.

What do you see as the biggest challenge currently facing the Central Asian republics?

Central Asia's economic, civil and political well-being is an imperative. An economically stable Central Asia, in a region of increasing strategic significance, is of the utmost importance to us and to the world at large. We must play our part in helping to achieve those vital goals.

Surely the litmus test must be the extent to which state affairs are governed by self-interest or excessive expediency. What levels of accountability exist? Are the interests of the state and the majority of its citizens best served by current arrangements? What form of transparency and accountability in governments will be embraced? How is civil society going

Another aspect of our activities is to facilitate inward visitors. For example, I had the honour of hosting a seminal working lunch for Central Asia's Foreign Ministers participating in January's London Afghanistan Conference. Insights shared were extraordinary. A full-year's program of Parliamentary exchanges are being established to coincide with the new Parliament in the United Kingdom following the forthcoming national elections. In some ways, I feel vindicated because, Kazakhstan has the chairmanship of 2010 OSCE. Uzbekistan is chairing the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) this year and other developments will follow.



Photo: OSCE chairman upbeat on nagorno-karabakh peace prospects

It must be understood that Britain already has considerable investment interests in Central Asia. Protection of long-term investment is in the interest of everyone. Part of our parliamentary responsibilities is the protection of those investments. This spans perceptions of financial rule of law and any signs of weakening of stability clauses, which protect investors from changes in legislation; the weakening of the right to seek international arbitration and subsequent enforcement; and the weakening of protection from nationalisation and consequent revaluation of assets, as examples. A message I like to give is that whilst Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan look attractive on paper, it is essential that interest and engagement be given to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, as economic development is in the interest of all, and small plays, well done, build prospects for regional commerce and infrastructure.

to be playing its part in the evolution of the region? I am in no doubt that each these countries can add a positive contribution to our global village – and can unlock many unresolved and pressing issues. We must all play our part in helping to achieve those vital goals.

It must be said, however, that much has been done of late to develop Central Asian legal systems, but there remains the problem of lack of uniformity in the interpretation and application of laws. Investment laws need to be clear and unequivocal if targets and objectives are to be achieved.



Can you envisage a 'New Silk Road' in Central Asia? If so how will this change the region?

I believe we might wish to consider a new meaning to the Silk Road. An expression that I have become attached to is that of Central Asia now having become a multi-directional "landbridge". The foundations for that bridge are now in place but the block-building is still a project in process. Central Asia could play a crucial role in regional security and co-operation to enhance the stability and prosperity of the whole region and to assist in the fight the problems of drugs, extremism, illegal migration and organised crime. There are also a number of major environmental problems with diverse and serious implications for the region's future.

An important area for co-operation and conflict avoidance is water sharing, and regional leaders are meeting for serious discussion and negotiation to resolve pressing

With Kazakhstan Chairing the OSCE is this the first sign that Central Asia is gaining global political importance?

The message should be that the world post 9/11 will never again marginalise regional issues. The new era of global leaders will have to adopt qualities that foster pragmatic strategic partnership. This means not looking down, but rather across the table at each interlocutor and listening carefully. The countries of Central Asia are now recognized as being of strategic importance, both politically and economically – and not only for energy but for intrinsic merits of individual histories and significant abilities to inform, and enforce, solutions to regional stability. Each has a voice and that voice must now be heard, not as proxies of great powers but as independent actors and stabilizers. The combination of Central Asia's regional importance, together with Kazakhstan's chairmanship of the 2010 OSCE, are an example in point.

Kazakhstan's OSCE Chairmanship has caught global attention and is characteristic of a string of developments that have involved years of preparation. Kazakhstan desires and deserves to host an OSCE summit, logical when a full summit has not been held since 1999 and might help remedy the devolution of some proceedings into two tiers of members rather than insistence on equality of members. The recent announcement that Kazakhstan is putting its chairmanship behind resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is an act of great statesmanship.



Photo: Shanghai_Five_Leaders

water issues. The new Silk Road is different to the old one. Clearly Central Asia is back on the map, no longer landlocked and inaccessible as the interim centuries between its Silk Route heyday and the present. The region has re-entered global commerce as a key multi-directional actor. The once clearly defined, colorful and myriad trade routes linking Asia and the Middle East across this vast "landbridge" are not the global centre of attention but the region and its different countries are a very worthwhile strategic focus for attention. The Central Asian states have completed their transition phase from independence. It is a New Game now and in this case, a positive one.

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