

PROGRESSING STEP BY STEPPE

Lord Waverley identifies new horizons for British-Central Asia relations

Central Asia's economic, civil and political well-being as an emergent region of strategic significance is an imperative. As the West increasingly appreciates the ascendancy of the East, so Central Asia plays a pivotal role as a multi-directional 'land-bridge' between powerful regions. Recent endeavours by both the UK and Central Asian states have recognised and prioritised the need for renewed impetus to deepen the relationship, although some key figures remain unconvinced of the priority the United Kingdom attaches to these relationships.

Engagement is essential. The mutual economic benefits, the need for Europe to be a recipient of much-needed gas, the need for stability sustained in an environment of appropriate governance and a growing realisation that solutions to Afghanistan's internal affairs lie within Central Asia are paramount. Unfolding events in Kyrgyzstan demonstrate the necessity of special attention by the West to assist not only that country, but also Tajikistan, with economic development and capacity. Failure to do so will come to haunt British global policy.

The foundations for the 'land-bridge' are in place but the block-building is still a project in process. Central Asia could play a crucial role in security and co-operation that would enhance regional stability and prosperity and assist in the fight on drugs, extremism, illegal migration and organised crime, as well as major environmental problems with serious implications. Whilst much has been done, challenges do remain. The development of Central Asian legal systems, whilst positive, does lack uniformity in interpretation and application of laws. Investment laws should also be clear and unequivocal if targets are to be achieved.

Kazakhstan's 2010 chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is being successfully handled with many advocating a concluding summit. The priorities of Afghanistan and Nagorno-Karabakh, together with advancing dialogue on European security through the Corfu process, beyond the political, military and economic dimensions are consistent

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Lord Waverley signs the parliamentary MOU on Tajikistan

with promoting a theme of inter-ethnic and religious tolerance. Similarly, Uzbekistan's presidency of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has achieved considerable results in developing the international contacts and legal framework, as well as implementing initiatives to strengthen security and stability. The joint declaration on co-operation between the UN and SCO secretariats, and the rules on admission of new members, were signed. All this, together with the helpful engagement on Afghanistan and the large-scale energy and business opportunities that Turkmenistan presents, make Central Asia a vibrant region to which the UK must react. A missing link to our bilateral relationships has been the lack of parliamentary interaction. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are actively considering doing so. This would be unusual in so far as only few common documents have been signed by all Central Asian states.

The MOU sets out guiding principles recognising the desire to strengthen co-operation and commitment to political, economic and social understanding, and development: (1) Facilitate inter-parliamentary dialogue; (2) Foster contacts, co-ordinate and exchange experience among parliamentarians; (3) Promote the ideals of democracy and good governance; (4) Recognise the need to defend and promote human rights and the 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 awareness of climate change and the environment; (10) Highlight the importance of regional and global energy and water security; (11) Deepen economic development, trade and inward investment; (12) Promote cultural and educational exchange.

The region has caught the attention of forward-thinkers as a key actor. The launch of inter-parliamentary initiatives is strengthening the framework for dialogue and relationship building; and given Central Asian states have completed their transition stage from independence, 20 years on it is now a 'New Game' and a positive one. 🇺🇰