



The Spanish EU presidency and Central Asia

Interview with Luis Felipe Fernández de la Peña, Director General for Europe & North America, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Cooperation

By Nicolas de Pedro, EUCAM Expert, Madrid

Question: Will the Spanish EU Presidency in the first half of 2010 devote specific importance to Central Asia?

The Spanish EU Presidency will pay a great deal of attention to Central Asia. That attention is fully justified by a number of factors, such as the geo-strategic importance of the region, energy security, Afghanistan, etc.

The basic priorities of the Spanish EU Presidency with respect to Central Asia are to:

- Re-energise and assess the implementation of the EU Strategy for Central Asia, which is multidisciplinary in nature,
- Devote special attention to coordination with the Kazakh OSCE Chairmanship and the Uzbek SCO Chairmanship and
- Stimulate contacts with civil society in the countries of the region. In particular, one idea is to organise an encounter between European think-tanks and their counterparts from Central Asia.

Question: Are there political objectives or coordinated events planned in linking the Spanish EU Presidency and the Kazakh OSCE Chairmanship in 2010?

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Coordination between the OSCE Kazak Presidency and Spain's EU Presidency began from the very moment Kazakhstan obtained the 2010 OSCE Presidency, in the Madrid OSCE Ministerial Council of November 2007. There have been frequent coordination meetings by the foreign affairs ministers of Spain and Kazakhstan regarding the two presidencies. The last of these took place this year in September in New York during the UN General Assembly. Likewise, numerous coordination meetings between permanent ambassador representatives from Spain and Kazakhstan have been held in Vienna, where the OSCE headquarters are based.

On 2 November 2009, the Vice Minister of Kazakhstan Foreign Affairs, Konstantin Zhigalov, paid an official visit to Madrid in order to continue coordination of the EU and the OSCE Presidencies with the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Furthermore, Kazakh Foreign Affairs Minister, Kanat Saudabayev, is expected to make an official visit in the near future for the same reason.

Question: For Astana, the OSCE Chairmanship is a national priority of the highest order. What do you expect?

Kazakhstan's OSCE Chairmanship is going to be the first carried out by a state from the post-Soviet space. Unfortunately, it is going to take place in quite complicated economic circumstances. Nevertheless, the Kazakh government is working intensively in the preparation of its chairmanship and several EU member states are helping them in this task, including Spain.

Kazakhstan wants all three dimensions of the OSCE to be further developed during its Chairmanship. Moreover, the possibility of organising a high-level conference on tolerance and a summit of heads of state and government is being considered. Kazakhstan wants the OSCE's legal status to be formally fleshed out, and it proposes that this should be done by means of a

constitutive Charter.

Question: What role does Central Asia play in Spain's foreign policy?

Central Asia occupies a very prominent place in Spanish foreign policy activity, despite the distance. There have been a number of contacts throughout history, such as Rabbi Benjamín of Tudela (from the 12th century), the first European on record to have visited Central Asia, via the Silk Route, or the famous embassy of Castilian Ruy González de Clavijo to the court of the great Timur at the beginning of the 15th century.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the region of Central Asia became a 'centre of gravity of the Euro-Asiatic space' or a 'point of geo-strategic friction between three geo-strategic tectonic land masses'. Central Asia requires our full attention in various areas: at the geo-strategic level, concerning energy, the threat of terrorism, drug trafficking but also in terms of development, etc.

It is for these reasons that the Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation has made four official visits to the Central Asia region.

Question: What are Spain's main objectives in the region?

Spain's objectives in Central Asia basically coincide with those of the European Union Strategy for Central Asia, adopted in June 2007. That Strategy aims to raise stability and prosperity levels in the region through peaceful interaction. We aim to re-energise this Strategy during the Spanish EU Presidency. The Spanish EU Presidency will further promote political dialogue between foreign ministers of the European Union and the Central Asian states.

Question: Do you think Spain can improve its presence in the region?

Owing to various factors – official visits by His Majesty the King of Spain, the 2007

Spanish OSCE Chairmanship, the 2010 EU Council Presidency, and so on – Spain has enjoyed a healthy presence in Central Asia for a number of years now and Spain's prestige is growing in the region. The question that arises now is how to go about taking advantage of the increased visibility we enjoy. Certainly we will try to increase economic cooperation.

But there is more to do. For instance by setting up a second embassy in the region (preferably in Uzbekistan) or the opening of *Aulas Cervantes* (Cervantes cultural centres) and boosting the number of grants for students from the region to study in Spain. These are steps we hope to take as soon as budgetary circumstances allow us.

In addition, in 2009, an Ambassador-at-Large for Central Asia was appointed to take on the task of ensuring proper coordination of Spanish activities in Central Asia.

Question: Recently there have been rumours about a possible Spanish Royal visit to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. If true, what would be the objectives?

For the time being, no official visit to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan has been announced. If a high level official visit were to take place later in 2010, then the objectives, as is customary, would be to strengthen personal ties with the leaders of the host countries and the continuation of bilateral cooperation in the political, economic and cultural areas. Besides, on official visits, special attention is always paid to democratisation processes and increased respect for human rights and fundamental liberties.

Question: One of the most pressing problems in Central Asia is the absence of regional cooperation. Do you envisage Spain using its friendly relations with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan as a way to build bridges in the region?

Obtaining an excellent relationship between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan has an 'ex post' dynamic dimension rather than an 'ex ante' static dimension. It will be the ultimate outcome of a process that both Spain and the above-mentioned EU Strategy for Central Asia aim to take forward.

In Central Asia, a balance in

bilateral and regional approaches needs to be applied. The regional approach is very fitting to tackle common challenges, such as organised crime, arms trade, drugs and human trafficking, terrorism, non-proliferation, inter-cultural dialogue, energy, the deterioration of the environment, control of water, migration issues, border protection or transport infrastructure. Both Spain and the EU are helping the countries of Central Asia to carry out effective regional cooperation in these areas.

Question: Besides logistical support, do you think Central Asia has something further to offer in resolving the Afghan conflict?

We should remember that Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have a common border with Afghanistan which is over 2,000 kilometres long. According to the UN, 21% of the opium Afghanistan produces – and it is the biggest producer in the world – crosses Central Asia via the 'northern route'. So it is important that the governments of these countries control their borders very tightly to prevent consignments from getting through. The EU is helping these governments with this task through the BOMCA programme. Around 1,500 customs officials and police officers from Central Asian countries have been trained thanks to this programme.

It may be true that the countries of Central Asia have no desire to send soldiers to Afghanistan again, after having been part of the Soviet Union effort in the 1980s. Nevertheless, they are prepared to collaborate with Afghanistan in areas such as energy and transport.

At the OSCE Ministerial Council in Madrid in November 2007, the 56 states taking part agreed to identify ways to support Afghanistan. The five Central Asian states are amongst those 56 countries. The same can be said of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), which includes all of the countries of Central Asia except Turkmenistan. In the SCO conference that focused on Afghanistan held in Moscow in March 2009, it was agreed that the organisation would get more involved in Afghanistan, above all in the area of security. In this regard, it was agreed to boost cooperation in the fight against terrorism, drug trafficking and organised crime.



The Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE), Spain, in co-

operation with the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), Belgium, has launched a joint project entitled "EU Central Asia Monitoring (EUCAM)". The (EUCAM) initiative is an 18-month research and awareness-raising exercise supported by several EU member states and civil society organizations, which aims: to raise the profile of the EU-Central Asia Strategy; to strengthen debate about the EU-Central Asia relationship and the role of the Strategy in that relationship; to enhance accountability through the provision of high quality information and analysis; to promote mutual understanding by deepening the knowledge within European and Central Asian societies about EU policy in the region; and to develop 'critical' capacity within the EU and Central Asia through the establishment of a network that links communities concerned with the role of the EU in Central Asia.

EUCAM focuses on four priority areas in order to find a mix between the broad political ambitions of the Strategy and the narrower practical priorities of EU institutions and member state assistance programmes: Democracy and Human Rights; Security and Stability; Energy and Natural Resources; Education and Social Relations

This monitoring exercise is implemented by an Expert Working Group, established by FRIDE and CEPS. The group consists of experts from the Central Asian states and the members countries of the EU. In addition to expert meetings, several public seminars will be organised for a broad audience including EU representatives, national officials and legislators, the local civil society community, media and other stakeholders.

EUCAM is sponsored by the Open Society Institute (OSI) and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The project is also supported by the Czech Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and the United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office.



FRIDE is a think tank based in Madrid that aims to provide original and innovative thinking on Europe's role in the international arena. It strives to break new ground in its core research interests – peace and security, human rights, democracy promotion and development and humanitarian aid – and mould debate in governmental and nongovernmental bodies through rigorous analysis, rooted in the values of justice, equality and democracy.



Founded in 1983 in Brussels, The Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) is one of the most experienced and authoritative think tanks operating in the European Union today. CEPS serves as a leading forum for debate on EU affairs. It aims to carry out state-of-the-art policy research leading to solutions to the challenges facing Europe today and to achieve high standards of academic excellence and maintain unqualified independence.