



EUCAM WATCH

EU-CENTRAL ASIA MONITORING

Harvesting the 'White Gold'

Check your sweater

How do you know that your sweater has not been made of cotton harvested by Uzbek children or produced by their counterparts in a Bangladeshi workshop? You don't. Many companies do not carefully check through a 'track and trace' system if their products are produced by forced or child labour. At the same time many governments do not follow the labour laws that they signed up to. The sad truth is that fashion demands in the West still largely prevail over human rights in developing countries.

But there is progress. This month 60 clothing firms agreed to boycott products with Uzbek cotton until hard proof exists that Uzbekistan has stopped child labour. This applies at least to those products in which Uzbek cotton can be traced which is often not possible yet because the link between cotton traders and Asian factories is often not clear to Western brands. The pledge of the clothing industry was spurred by the decision of the organisers of New York's fashion week to cancel Gulnara Karimova's show due to concerns over child labour. Unknowingly the Uzbek president's daughter and ambassador to Spain and the UN in Geneva has helped to highlight her country's human rights shortcomings.

Uzbekistan occupies a special place in this debate because child labour in its cotton fields is not driven by criminal groups or by parents in desperate poverty forced to use their children to make ends meet. It is the government that mobilises and organises by force (including administrative and law-enforcement agencies) an annual campaign where children are sent to pick cotton instead of studying in classrooms. While being a signatory to a number of international human rights and labour agreements, Uzbekistan denies the use of coercion in the cotton fields and maintains that the hard work is performed on a voluntary basis or initiated by individual families.

Uzbekistan is among the largest cotton producers and exporters in the world: its economy is dependent to a substantial degree on a successful harvest. But the industry is plagued by problems of which child labour is the

most worrying among a series of shortcomings, such as health hazards due to the use of toxic chemicals and defoliants to speed up the maturation process. Another substantial problem is the monoculture that does not allow farmers to engage in an open supply and demand cycle because the government sets the price and severely underpays the farmers. This practice eventually leads to rural poverty and families moving to urban areas with few prospects.

Cotton being a water-intensive crop, its mass-production has led to a number of negative environmental side-effects due to excessive irrigation. This has led not only to the slow but steady disappearance of the Aral Sea, but also has had an impact on the soil, increasing salt levels and diminishing the agricultural potential of the land. The irrigation systems are outdated and more than half the water is lost. This is a strain on Uzbekistan's water supplies and further fuels regional tensions over scarce water resources.

Increased international attention to the Uzbek cotton industry was spurred by a 2007 BBC documentary that showed children working long hours in bad conditions in Uzbekistan's cotton fields. Since then several civil society watchdogs have been monitoring the cotton fields and exposing the practices of child labour in Uzbekistan. A positive result of the increased exposure of these human rights violations has been an increased awareness among retail companies in Europe and the U.S., although no international system is in place to check the origin of the cotton. This has been a headache for the Uzbek government who did adopt in 2007 a National Plan of Action for Securing Child Welfare in Uzbekistan and the following year an explicit prohibition on child labour. Nonetheless, children and students have continued to be dispatched to the countryside in the years following these measures.

September and October is cotton harvest season in Uzbekistan. A good reason to devote an EUCAM Watch to this substantial agricultural industry. Joanna Ewart-James of Anti-Slavery

International and Miriam Saage-Maaß of the European Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR) give their view on forced child labour in Uzbekistan. EUCAM researchers Marlène Laruelle and Sébastien Peyrouse write about broader agricultural difficulties in Uzbekistan and our programme manager Tika Tsertsvadze looks into the EU Generalised System of Preferences in relation to Uzbekistan.

*Editorial by Jos Boonstra
EUCAM head of programme*

Exclusive interviews

Part I: Joanna Ewart-James, Supply Chain Programme Coordinator, Anti-Slavery International

talks about the European campaign to end forced labour in the Uzbek cotton industry

1. How does Anti-Slavery International try to influence policies and counter slavery?

Anti-Slavery has specific programmes that focus directly on regions and forms of modern-day slavery across the world. Through a mixture of research on the issue, typically collected in conjunction with our partners based locally, we are able to determine specific policy tasks to eradicate the problem. We push these demands either through direct lobbying at the international level, such as with the United Nations, or with the relevant national governments. This is backed up through media work to expose both the problem and the lack of official efforts to address it. We also work to encourage business to take a more active role in eradicating slavery. We actively campaign to the public, encouraging thousands, even tens of thousands of ordinary people to express their outrage as well as determination to demand real improvement in the lives of people in slavery.

2. Slavery in the agricultural sector is widespread in many countries. Why is the slavery in the cotton industry in Uzbekistan special?

It is true that slavery exists in many countries' cotton industries but our campaign is initially focusing on eradicating forced labour in Uzbekistan's cotton industry because of the scale and the role of the authorities in forcing adults and children to work.

Hundreds of thousands of children and adults are sent to the cotton fields every year in the harvest season. Many schools are closed down in rural areas by government officials as children, some as young as ten years old, are forced to pick cotton by hand for up to three months in order to fill the shortfall in voluntary adult labour. They receive little, if any, pay. Headmasters are given quotas which are passed onto the children dictating how much each student is to harvest. Those who fail to meet their targets, or who pick a low quality crop, are reportedly punished by beatings, detention or told that their grades will suffer. Children who run away from the cotton fields, or who refuse to take part, can face expulsion from school.

3. What share of Uzbek cotton enters the European market?

Uzbekistan is the 6th largest producer and 3rd largest exporter of cotton in the world. According to the UN data the majority of Uzbek cotton exports end up in Europe. This includes raw as

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well as processed cotton. Europe is therefore the single biggest market for garments produced with Uzbek cotton.

4. Do you think coherent conditionality from the EU's side will help eradicate child labour in the cotton fields?

It is more likely that the government of Uzbekistan will take meaningful and credible steps to end the use of forced labour during the cotton harvest when the EU sends clear and consistent messages through all its policies and engagement with Uzbekistan indicating that the use of forced labour is unacceptable.

The EU has a number of opportunities to do this, including by opening an investigation into Uzbekistan's benefit from preferential trade tariffs for exports into the EU and also by applying conditions to the Protocol to the EU-Uzbekistan Partnership and Cooperation Agreement to extend its provisions to the trade in textiles. This Protocol is currently before the European Parliament and we hope that it will not be passed unless the government of Uzbekistan ends the use of forced labour.

Besides the EU and its member states, there are many other European actors that can influence the government of Uzbekistan to end this practice, including retailers, traders buying cotton in Uzbekistan and investors supporting the cotton industry. Following calls from Uzbek human rights activists, a number of European retailers, including Burberry, C&A, Marks and Spencer and Tesco have taken action to ban Uzbek cotton from their products and install a system to trace the origin of cotton used in their products. However many other retailers have yet to make this commitment.

5. What should this conditionality entail?

An end to the use of forced labour should be included as a condition in all engagement with the government of Uzbekistan. As a start the Uzbek government should allow a high-level tripartite International Labour Organisation (ILO) mission to monitor the cotton harvest and Uzbekistan's compliance with the ILO conventions to which Uzbekistan has signed up. This monitoring mission should have full and unfettered access to the cotton fields, complete freedom of movement and timely access to all situations and relevant parties.

6. What will be the implications for the local economy and the lives of people working in Uzbekistan's cotton industry if Western companies ban all products produced with Uzbek cotton?

We rarely call for a boycott of goods or countries and we are

careful before we do as boycotts can make the situation worse and risk making the people in slavery-like conditions more vulnerable. However in the case of cotton from Uzbekistan, children and adults are being coerced into working by the state and are not in the fields to support their families as may be the case in other child labour situations. The children would otherwise be in school. The beneficiary of the sale of cotton is the very government that is organising the use of forced labour. The government generates over \$1 billion annually from the export of cotton; this revenue is not passed down to the farmers or workers in the field. Therefore a boycott is an effective way of sending a message to the government that this practice must stop.

7. What are best practices Anti-Slavery could share with the governments and businesses in tackling slavery?

There is a worldwide lack of political will to implement and enforce domestic and international laws designed to tackle slavery, and allow victims to seek justice. Governments should prioritise protecting people from slavery by addressing these gaps whenever they occur.

Slavery remains a hidden problem so it is necessary for both businesses and governments to actively look for the indicators of slavery. Vigilance of forced labour would greatly improve if employers and the authorities would be vigilant to matters such as confiscation of identity documents, restriction of movement, confinement to the workplace, debt bondage, the threat of denunciation to authorities, excessive wage deductions, the threat of physical harm and workers not being paid.

8. What other countries have been practicing forced child labour or any other forms of forced labour in the cotton industry?

According to the U.S. Department of Labor cotton is produced with a high incidence of forced labour in nine countries: Burkina Faso, Benin, China, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and in India's cotton-seed industry. Whilst Anti-Slavery International calls for an end to the use of forced labour in all countries' cotton industries, we are focusing on Uzbekistan where the numbers coerced are much higher and the state itself organises the coercion.

Part II: Miriam Saage-Maafß, Programme Director, European Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR)

talks about holding European cotton traders accountable for complicity in human rights offences.

1. What does ECCHR do in relation to cotton produced through forced child labour in Uzbekistan?

ECCHR is a Human Rights Organisation that uses legal tools to hold state as well as non-state actors legally accountable for human rights offenses. Concerning child labour in Uzbekistan, ECCHR has focused on the role of cotton traders in supporting the state sponsored system of child labour.

Between October 2010 and January 2011 ECCHR submitted seven complaints to OECD Contact Points in Switzerland, France, Germany and Great Britain. These complaints that targeted European traders that deal in Uzbek cotton were submitted in collaboration with the Uzbek-German Forum for Human

Rights (UGF), Sherpa and a German attorney. ECCHR and its partners accused the corporations of violating OECD guidelines for multinational corporations by purchasing Uzbek cotton and thereby contributing to the continuation of the exploitative system of child labour. In March 2011 the British Contact Point agreed to examine the question in more detail, prompting two British firms to announce their willingness to participate in mediation proceedings.

2. Child Labour is widespread in many parts of the world. What is particular about child labour in Uzbekistan's cotton fields?

In Uzbekistan the families of the children do not profit from the exploitation of their children whereas in other regions of the world children work to help sustain their families. In Uzbekistan child labour is completely state sponsored and it is the ruling elites that almost exclusively benefit from the revenue.

3. What is your view on those that sell forced child labour in Uzbekistan as part of the culture?

There are international treaties like the Convention on the Rights of the Child and several ILO Conventions which are widely ratified, including by Uzbekistan (the ILO Conventions). This shows that severe forms of child labour, as they are on the cotton fields, are neither accepted by the international community nor by the Uzbek government itself. You cannot argue that child labour is part of the culture while at the same time signing international agreements to stop this practice.

4. Could you elaborate on the agreement that ECCHR reached last July with British cotton traders Cargill Cotton UK and ICT Cotton UK on future corporate policy?

This agreement is just one step towards more corporate accountability. The fact that a case which involves mere trading in goods, which were produced through human rights violations, was accepted by four National Contact Points of OECD countries is a good sign. It is not an undisputed matter whether corporations are obliged for the impact of their trade relationships under the OECD guidelines for multinational enterprises. The agreement we reached in the mediation phase in the UK involves a commitment of the respective traders to undertake certain steps in regard to the situation in Uzbekistan. Also the traders acknowledge the problem of child labour in Uzbekistan, which they did not necessarily do before our complaint.

5. What could be the role of European governments in dealing with this issue?

European governments should be using their diplomatic channels in addressing the issue with Uzbekistan. They should also strongly support the efforts of the ILO to establish a mission of inquiry into the problem of child labour in Uzbekistan which should lead into an official ILO report.

European governments should ensure that EU trade policies do not encourage the use of child labour. For example, currently goods imported from Uzbekistan profit from the EU GSP-tariffs preference system. Also, Europe should encourage and regulate businesses to ensure that they are not facilitating or profiting from child labour in Uzbekistan.

EUCAM analysis/views/comments

Uzbekistan's agricultural challenges

By Sébastien Peyrouse and Marlène Laruelle, EUCAM Researchers

Uzbekistan produces mostly cotton, but also fruit, vegetables, cereals, rice (in west Karakalpakstan and Khorezm) and livestock. These products are intended primarily for domestic consumption, although some are also exported to neighbouring countries. The Uzbek agricultural industry has multiple structural, political and social problems to address.

Agriculture is controlled by the ruling elites, who are concerned with pocketing the foreign currency benefits from cotton revenues, maintaining a regional balance and controlling domestic stability. The conditions of storage, processing and packaging often render local food uncompetitive with imports. Meanwhile the country is increasingly affected by unemployment: deliberate de-mechanisation ensures the use of the largest possible number of individuals, thus reducing the risks of social tension. The share of the mechanised harvest fell to 57 per cent in 1990, to 35 per cent in 1993, and stands at roughly less than 20 per cent today. In addition, Tashkent has been slow to establish a genuine textile industry that would provide work for urban populations and generate export revenues far greater than those for the raw product.

Uzbekistan also faces environmental hazards linked to agricultural production. The main problems are the poor condition of irrigation structures, which have particularly high loss rates; overuse of water by farmers; difficulty in demanding payment for its use, because of the low rural standard of living; high salinity; and the degradation of soil quality and its impact on public health. Land degradation has contributed to declining production and falling cotton quality, which is deemed inferior to that of many other cotton-producing countries. Since independence, cotton production has been in steady decline. Most visible are the progressive disappearance of the Aral Sea and the exhaustion of the Amu-Darya River.

Uzbekistan has to deal with a fundamental contradiction. It can either focus on cotton and be guaranteed substantial foreign exchange earnings for the state budget, or choose to develop vegetable and grain production for the sake of food self-sufficiency. This has become a sensitive political issue. Indeed, the climate risks (cold winters, excessive rainfall and drought during the growing season) that make harvests unpredictable, combined with the rising world prices of basic foods in the second half of the 2000s, have a direct impact on Central Asia's fragile populations. Uzbekistan has been seeking cereals autonomy since independence and claims to have attained it in the 2000s. Today, with an annual wheat production of more than 6 million tons, it even exports some of its production. However, wheat shortages have increased in recent years, particularly in 2008, a year in which Kazakhstan agreed to a moratorium on exports, and 2010, after massive fires in Russia destroyed a large share of its production and forced Moscow to impose a moratorium on cereal exports. The price of bread has risen in Uzbekistan and flour is sometimes unavailable.

In Uzbekistan fear that privatisation might lead to massive unemployment has paralysed all reform efforts in advance; no non-agricultural compensatory economy seems to have developed in rural areas. Moreover, land is a substantial financial resource and an object of desire. The best land has generally been allotted to former party elites or former directors of collective farms. The farmers themselves often express reluctance towards privatisation. Rural areas have borne the brunt of declining state involvement in social benefits to collective and state farms, and are sometimes unwilling to let go of the last remaining collective bodies, which stand as symbols of minimal assistance.

Farmers' autonomy remains extremely limited. The so-called private operators cannot choose which crops to plant and many are forced to cultivate cotton or wheat almost exclusively. The state may also repossess land as a punishment for poor performance. In practice, the confiscation of land is part of a system of pervasive corruption in which the best land is being redistributed to members of the elite. Whatever the status of land use, the selling price of products is fixed by the authorities, usually at about one-third of the market price; only the surplus can be sold at maximum price. Private farmers have only small farms (0.2 hectares) with leases for periods of 10 to 50 years. Despite their small size, these farms are more efficient than the large ones. They represent only 10 per cent of the agricultural land in Uzbekistan, but produce about 40 per cent of its agriculture.

The farmers located at the very beginning of the supply chain benefit little from their work. They have minimal control over their earnings. Banks routinely confiscate state-paid monies and only pay fixed cash sums for the purchase of equipment or inputs, but not salaries or profit. The money is often paid late and is not adjusted for inflation. In some cases the Uzbek farmers are paid in kind with oil or flour.

Most cotton is sold to the state-controlled company Uzpakhtasanoat, which then sells it to government-approved import and export enterprises. Officially private, these companies are under the thumb of the ruling elites, especially the SNB (Committee for National Security). A large majority of private cotton exporters are actually members of the ruling clan and manage their businesses through offshore companies registered in the British Virgin Islands and Cyprus. They give themselves the highest quality cotton, leaving the inferior quality materials to Uzpakhtasanoat. Although a share of revenue is supposed to be redistributed to the agricultural sector via three state banks (Pakhtabank, Ghallabank and Zaminbank) this redistribution is limited and not transparent. According to the International Crisis Group, only 10 to 15 per cent of revenues earned through the sale of cotton return to the domestic agricultural sector.

Agriculture remains a key element of social stability in Central Asia. The issue is especially important as food security is not assured and the risk factors are growing in number. The spiral of deindustrialisation and the over-specialisation in primary resources is directly linked to the opportunities for the local development of textile factories and agribusinesses, the only guarantee of a more profitable economic future. Furthermore, the extreme corruption of state apparatus linked to agriculture aggravates the feelings of injustice and the loss of state credibility.

No more blank cheques? Review of the EU Generalised System of Preferences

By Tika Tsertsvadze, EUCAM Programme Manager and Outreach Officer

Uzbekistan is a beneficiary of the EU's Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) and also benefits from a GSP with the United States. While the latter is using the GSP mechanism as a political tool for leverage, the EU regards its GSP foremost as an incentive aimed at helping poverty reduction in developing countries by using tariff preferences to assist them in obtaining international trade revenue. Nonetheless, the GSP is one of the key trade instruments the EU has at its disposal to further human rights (including labour rights), reduce poverty and promote sustainable development and good governance in developing countries.

EU officials frequently refer to the incentive aspect of the GSP and prefer to avoid bringing the issue to a political level. But it should. Uzbekistan earns \$1 billion in revenue annually from cotton production. The people who are compelled to grow and harvest the cotton receive little or no benefits from the revenue the state earns. The EU trade incentive for the 'countries most in need' does not seem to have found fertile soil in Uzbekistan since the regime enslaves its people while pocketing the revenues.

The current EU GSP regulation provides the option for 'temporary withdrawal' in cases of serious or systematic violations of core UN and International ILO conventions. However, this should be done based on the findings of relevant monitoring bodies, such as the ILO.

For several years the ILO has been seeking unfettered access to the cotton fields of Uzbekistan in order to monitor the harvest. During the visit of President Karimov to Brussels in January 2011, European Commission President José Manuel Barroso urged the Uzbek president to allow an ILO mission to the country but so far the request has not been met with a positive response from Tashkent. The current GSP agreement expires at the end of December 2011, and the Commission has come forward with a proposal to review the existing agreement. The package tabled last May envisages concentrating on the countries that are most in need of a GSP and would really benefit from the trade arrangement with the EU in terms of reducing poverty. But

this will only work if the EU has a comprehensive assessment mechanism to identify the countries whose economic indicators and performance implies 'most in need', one that can also assess the responsiveness of governments like that of Uzbekistan.

In a speech by EU Trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht last May he stated that 'there is no blank cheque'. De Gucht pushed for a monitoring process that is strengthened and transparent. For this to work the Commission is obliged to operate closely with the European Parliament which now also plays a role. Despite numerous calls from civil society organisations for the EU to pursue a coherent strategy in allowing monitoring missions to the cotton fields of Uzbekistan results have not been forthcoming.

A revised GSP is expected to be finalised and in force from January 2014 onwards. Will Uzbekistan receive a blank cheque again as the EU turns a blind eye to gross violations of children's rights or will Brussels realistically assess Uzbekistan's case and take a unified line on forced child labour?

EUCAM Publications

Policy Briefs

Involving Central Asia in Afghanistan's Future – What Can Europe Do?

Marlène Laruelle, EUCAM Policy Brief No. 20, August 2011

The EU argues in its Central Asia policy that it wants to take greater account of Afghanistan. But what does this mean in practice? There is a case for engaging the Central Asian states beyond agreements over supply and material transport routes to Afghanistan. Central Asian states themselves have the most to gain from a stabilised Afghanistan. Cultural ties and the increasing economic linkages between Central Asia and Afghanistan need to be taken into consideration so that Central Asian states can be assisted in playing a positive role in Afghanistan together with Western actors.

Download: http://www.eucentralasia.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF/Policy_Briefs/PB_EUCAM_20.pdf

The European Parliament and Uzbek cotton

The EU and Uzbekistan concluded a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) in 1999. The agreement contains a provision that states that the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) treatment does not apply to the trade in textiles: this trade is regulated by a separate agreement between both parties. This agreement lapsed on 31 December 2004 but the trade in textile products continued as before. Because Uzbekistan is not a member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) it can increase tariffs and import duties while the EU can apply MFN treatment to all countries in the world.

In 2010 the European Commission, authorised by the European Council, successfully concluded negotiations with the government of Uzbekistan to amend the PCA with a view to removing the provision that trade in textiles between the EU and Uzbekistan is not part of the PCA. As a result the PCA will need to include a protocol that regulates the trade in textiles.

In order for the Council decision to enter into force the consent of the European Parliament is needed. This August the Committee on International Trade of the European Parliament produced a Draft

Interim Report. This report recommends the Council and the Commission to take into account that in Uzbekistan there is still wide-spread forced child labour in the cotton fields and advises them to investigate the temporary withdrawal of GSP preferences until an ILO observer mission has taken place. Basically the draft report concludes that the European Parliament will only consent to the Council decision when the recommendations set by the Parliament are addressed by the Commission, the Council and the Uzbek government. The vote is scheduled for November in the European Parliament.

Kyrgyzstan: Balancing on the Verge of Stability

Anna Matveeva, EUCAM Policy Brief No. 19, July 2011

Following the 'revolution' in April 2010, the subsequent interethnic violence in June and the recent international inquiry into these events, Kyrgyzstan is not in safe waters yet. The coming period leading up to the Presidential elections will be important for the country's stability. What is the current situation in the South of the country, which saw clashes between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, and what are the expectations for the presidential elections? Is Kyrgyzstan on the road to democracy, and what role can external actors play?

Download:http://www.eucentralasia.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF/Policy_Briefs/PB_EUCAM_19.pdf

The EU's Rule of Law Initiative for Central Asia: From Initiative to More Substance?

Martin Schuster, EUCAM Policy Brief No. 18, June 2011

All five Central Asian states are weak in terms of rule of law, good governance and democracy. In 2007 the EU chose to devote special attention to the rule of law with its proposed regional Rule of Law Initiative. Now it will set up a Rule of Law Platform project to give this initiative more substance. This policy brief evaluates progress in developing the Initiative and assesses what action could be taken to make a real impact on Central Asia's rule of law track-record.

Download:http://www.eucentralasia.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF/Policy_Briefs/PB_EUCAM-18-1.pdf

Commentaries

Supporting Civil Society in Central Asia: What Approach for the EU?

Vera Axyonova, EUCAM Commentary No. 17, September 2011

Download:http://www.eucentralasia.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF/Commentaries/Commentary_17.pdf

EU Development Ministers Discuss Approach to Central Asia

Jos Boonstra and Jacqueline Hale, EUCAM Commentary No. 16, July 2011

Download:http://www.eucentralasia.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF/Commentaries/Commentary_16.pdf

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Established in 2008 as a project seeking to monitor the implementation of the EU Strategy for Central Asia, EUCAM has grown into a knowledge hub on broader Europe-Central Asia relations. Specifically, the project aims to:

- Scrutinise European policies towards Central Asia, paying specific attention to security, development and the promotion of democratic values within the context of Central Asia's position in world politics;
- Enhance knowledge of Europe's engagement with Central Asia through top-quality research and by raising awareness among European policy-makers and civil society representatives, as well as discuss European policies among Central Asian communities;
- Expand the network of experts and institutions from European countries and Central Asian states and provide a forum to debate on European-Central Asian relations.

Currently, the broader programme is coordinated by FRIDE, in partnership with the Karelian Institute and CEPS, with the support of the Open Society Institute and the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The main outputs of the project are a series of policy briefs and comprehensive reports on key issues facing the Europe-Central Asia relationship.

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FRIDE is a European think tank for global action, based in Madrid, which provides fresh and innovative thinking on Europe's role on the international stage. Our mission is to inform policy and practice in order to ensure that the EU plays a more effective role in supporting multilateralism, democratic values, security and sustainable development. We seek to engage in rigorous analysis of the difficult debates on democracy and human rights, Europe and the international system, conflict and security, and development cooperation. FRIDE benefits from political independence and the diversity of views and intellectual background of its international team.



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Founded in 1971, the Karelian Institute is a unit of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Business Studies of the University of Eastern Finland. It engages in basic and applied multi-disciplinary research, supports the supervision of postgraduate studies and researcher training, and participates in teaching. It focuses mainly on three thematic priorities: Borders and Russia; Ethnicity and Culture; and Regional and Rural Studies.



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The Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) in Brussels is among the most experienced and authoritative think tanks operating in the European Union today. 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. CEPS provides a forum for discussion among all stakeholders in the European policy process.