

Introduction

In his 1997 book *The Grand Chessboard*, Zbigniew Brzezinski, one of the most important advisors in the service of U.S. Foreign Policy, emphasizes the exceptional geostrategic importance of Central Asia and evokes a “New Great Game” in which major world powers are engaged in order to control the Eurasian landmass.¹ By doing so, he mobilized a historical term describing the nineteenth-century struggle for influence between Russia and the British Empire on the Eurasian continent. Intendedly or unintendedly, Brzezinski provoked a real “New Great Game” hype in the aftermath, and almost every book as well as every media and academic article dealing with Central Asia’s international role has been employing the term. Indeed, major global powers such as the United States, Russia, and China are involved in the region, joined by many other actors such as Turkey, Iran, India, Japan, and the European Union. Certainly, the “Great Game” metaphor is somewhat lurid but has considerably shaped the view on Central Asia as a new arena of geopolitical contest at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

While the geopolitical dimension of these actors’ involvement has been widely accepted, only the European Union is in denial about taking part in this geopolitical game—regardless of the fact that it had carved a specific Central Asia Strategy in 2007. During an interview with the Russian newspaper *Nezavissimaya Gazeta* in 2009, the then EU Special Representative for Central Asia Pierre Morel resolutely rejected any interpretation that the EU might be just another actor in the New Great Game: “The approach of the EU has been fundamentally a cooperative one. It would be nonsense to play a new ‘great game’” (Morel 2009a).

The narrative of the EU being a “distinct actor” is highlighted and reproduced by many politicians and actors from the EU institutions. It has also inspired many scholars and triggered different research programs that sought

to understand the EU's appearance as an external actor.² The EU stepped on the global scene in the first decade of the 2000s, especially after the successful EU round of enlargement in 2004, followed by the launch of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Thanks to the enlargement rounds, the EU enjoyed high levels of self-confidence during this period and initiated a number of partnerships and strategies with a wide range of third-party actors (for example, Brazil, India), thus extending its global outreach. The academic assessment of this quest and the performance of the European Union in this regard reflects a wide spectrum of opinions, ranging from "superpower" attributions (for example, Cameron 2007, cit. in Thomas 2011, 3; McCormick 2007) and optimism (for example, Ginsberg 2007; Leonard 2005; Moravcsik 2010; Orbie 2008)³ to skeptical acknowledgment (for example, Toje 2011; Youngs 2014a, 2014b).

Opinions diverge over how to conceive the peculiar nature of the EU's global actorness, which many authors have attempted to portray by employing various labels and prefixes. Thus the EU has been described as a "normative power" (Manners 2002), a "risk averse power" (Laïdi 2010), a "civilizing power" (Sjursen 2006b, 169), an "ethical" (Aggestam 2008) or "responsible power" (Mayer and Vogt 2006), a "gentle" (Padoa Schioppa 2001) and "small power" (Toje 2011), a "silent global player" (Knodt and Princen 2003, 1), an "imperial" power (Neyer 2012), a "transformative power" (Leonard 2005, 35), and even as a "metrosexual superpower" (Khanna 2004). This creative but diffuse aggregation of labels is reflective of the difficulty of assessing the EU's nature as a global actor.

Almost all these attributes suggest that the EU is a distinct actor in international politics, but it seems impossible to identify a common denominator. This is probably due to the fact that the EU performs differently on the global stage depending on the sphere of activity or the geographical zone. For instance, even if Brussels has acted as a transformative motor for the democratization and stabilization of several former communist countries in Eastern and Central Europe, there is no evidence to assume that the EU has generally had a positive impact on democratization in the world. Consequently, no determinate conclusion of the EU's external performance can be made from one case to another because domestic, geopolitical, and historical conditions and variables differ between the cases. That said, each context and case study still contributes to the broader picture of the EU's multifaceted global actorness and helps to better understand the capacities and limits of its external action. The argument here, therefore, is that the EU's policies need to be assessed within the different contexts of its engagement.

This book proposes to study the EU's actorness within a context called a "challenging geopolitical environment." This is an environment in which the EU's norms are contested and in which major global powers compete for influence. The Central Asian region (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan,

Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan)⁴ provides an excellent area for the analysis. The focus on these countries allows examination of the EU's capacities and influences in a region both beyond its immediate neighborhood and in the midst of the Russian, Chinese, and US "spheres of influence." Moreover, from a geostrategic point of view, Central Asia is an important region due to its considerable hydrocarbon reserves and its proximity to conflict areas such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran. Central Asia mirrors important regional and international dynamics and serves as a stage for the emergence of powerful regional alliances shaping a new global order, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization or the Eurasian Economic Union. Borrowing Melvin's words, it can be said that "if the EU is not present and influential on Central Asia issues, it is to a large degree giving up on its ambitions to be a global actor" (2012, 5).

Importantly, Central Asia borders the EU's eastern periphery and Europe's security is vitally linked to the stability of this region, which itself faces numerous security risks. What is more, the post-Soviet space, more than any other area on the world map, has best reflected the ambitions, opportunities, shortcomings, and even the evolution of European foreign policy since the early 1990s (Delcour 2011, 148). Indeed, the launch and the improvement of the EU's external action instruments coincided with the opening up of a vast area in Europe's near and wider neighborhood after the collapse of the USSR, which granted the EU a historic opportunity to witness both its pull and limits as an external actor. Within this space, Central Asia holds a distinct position as both the remotest region from Europe and the most exposed to a wide range of competing external influences.

Significantly, Brussels has not enjoyed the same level of attractiveness in Central Asia as in other postcommunist countries, which is a qualitatively new situation for the EU. As Kavalski convincingly argues, "Central Asia is perhaps one of the few global locales where it is the EU that needs to learn to adapt rather than the regional partners of the EU" (2012, 84). Consequently, Central Asia provides a test for the EU's capacity for concerted external action and for its ability to impact policies in one of the most dynamic and geopolitically most strongly contested regions in the world.

Any analysis of Central Asia and its interaction with external partners would, however, be "incomplete without an understanding of the strategic value the region holds for the world's largest powers" (Hwang 2012). Indeed, there are few regions on the world map that concentrate to a comparable degree the interests of virtually all of the world's leading state actors. This study therefore includes an analysis of the role that the three major actors play in Central Asia, namely the United States, Russia, and China. This scope provides a fruitful framework for understanding the means through which the EU is attempting to establish itself as a relevant actor in a context

in which its norms and policies are subjected to great contestation and competition.

While the results of this empirical framework do not claim direct validity for other regions, as comparable as they may be in terms of geopolitical nature, they could, however, help to understand the EU's global actorness. Since Central Asia reflects a wide range of dynamics of current international relations, be it the weight of old and new world powers or the emergence of new alliances and political models, the region serves as a suitable yardstick for measuring the extent of the Union's global outreach.

This book aims to analyze the potential and the limits of the EU's external approach in the specific context of geopolitical norm contestation and competition. Hence, the guiding question addressed in this study is: *How does the EU exert influence in a context in which its norms are contested and in which it risks being marginalized by other actors?*

Three subquestions emanate from this main research question.

1.) *How does the EU position and project itself as a global actor?*

This question refers to the EU's self-conception with regard to its global role. One major reason for the wide range of labels and conceptions of the EU's global actorness stems from the fact that the European Union itself has diverging notions and ideas of the role it wants to play. This research endeavor explores this question with regard to Central Asia. Therefore special attention is to be paid to the images the EU seeks to convey of itself in this region where the EU has limited leverage and a reduced ability to impose conditionality.

2.) *Which instruments and strategies does the EU apply in order to exert influence in Central Asia?*

An examination of the type and relevance of the EU's external toolbox reveals the technical approach aiming at fostering the EU's political influence abroad. This dimension looks at the formulation and implementation of policies and assesses their coherence on the basis of defined criteria.

3.) *To what extent is the EU acknowledged as a significant and legitimate partner in Central Asia?*

Finally, the third subquestion investigates the influence dimension of the EU's external action in Central Asia. A central argument in this book is that the influence of an external actor should be viewed as "influence in context." In other words, the extent of the EU's influence depends on how its policies are received and the extent to which it is acknowledged as a significant and legitimate partner by the target actors, here the governments in Central Asia. Consequently, an analysis of the reception of the EU's policies in Central Asia will be an essential part of this thesis because it is notably this aspect that unveils the possible limits of the EU's external actions. The claim is to avoid only understanding Central Asia as a passive recipient of EU policies

and to acknowledge its agency, which has a strong impact on the implementation of EU policies, as will be shown throughout the study.

These questions are informed by several underlying assumptions, the first being that the European Union has less leverage in Central Asia than other external actors, but that it nevertheless seeks to exert influence. Moreover, these research questions place special emphasis on the “context,” meaning the challenging geopolitical environment, and on the “influence” or impact of being a “relevant actor.” These two elements are central for several reasons and require further explanation.

In order to understand the meaning and stakes of a “challenging geopolitical environment,” we need to turn to the concepts of contemporary geopolitics introduced by Modelski (1987) and Flint (2012). On a general level, geopolitics is concerned with “sources, practices, and representations that allow for the control of territory and the extraction of resources” (Flint 2012, 35). This basic understanding of geopolitics, however, needs to be complemented by the fact that, beyond the control over territory and resources, it also reflects “a way of ‘seeing’ the world” (ibid., 33) that refers to the identity of a geopolitical agent and his normative beliefs. These claims of control and interpretations of the world collide or compete in an environment in which several actors are present and interact. Geopolitical agents therefore have to cope with the interests of other agents and try to assert their own visions and interests. That said, leadership in such context is ensured by the agent that is most able to influence events in a specific territory and who provides a “‘big idea’ for how countries should exist and interact with each other” (Flint 2012, 199; Modelski 1987). Accordingly, a “challenging” geopolitical environment refers to a situation in which several geopolitical agents claim this type of leadership in a specific territory or region.

The research questions suggest that the EU should be understood as a geopolitical actor like any other state or actor in the international community in general and in Central Asia in particular. This statement is not as trivial as it may seem at first glance because, as Klinke observes, in “terms of its geopolitics the EU is in denial” (2012, 936). The case of Central Asia will show how the EU is eager to construct an image of being a neutral partner without any geopolitical interests. Moreover, the existing literature on EU foreign policy contributes to the narrative according to which the EU is an exceptional international actor, devoid of geopolitical ambitions. The lack of analyses on the Union precisely through geopolitical lenses is striking (Bengtsson 2008; Haukkala 2011; Klinke 2012; Youngs 2014a; and Zielonka 2008, 2013 provide noteworthy exceptions). This is why the present study proposes to view the EU’s external action as a process of geopoliticization of the EU, thus providing a different reading of the EU’s role in its immediate and wider peripheries.

A major element in the assessment of the research questions is, significantly, the assumption that the region of Central Asia not only serves as a passive context but that the local view and reaction to EU policies also considerably shapes both the nature of EU policies and their outcomes. Local perceptions of the EU and the complex regional dynamics in Central Asia thus require thorough consideration in this study and will be consistently addressed in order to provide a complete picture of the EU's influence potential.

As far as the timeframe is concerned, this study particularly concentrates on the EU policies carried out in Central Asia from 2007 to 2013, namely the period that spans the launch of the EU Strategy for Central Asia in 2007 and the strategy's first seven-year budgetary plan.⁵ Because pre-2007 policies were not formulated within a specific Central Asia framework but rather implemented within programs focusing on the whole post-Soviet space, they are not sufficiently instructive of the current EU approach to Central Asia and will therefore receive only marginal attention.

Moreover, the purpose of this study, as explained earlier, is to examine the "EU's external policy" in Central Asia, which is a term that also needs to be clarified. In both academic and political circles, the differentiation between "EU external policy" and "European external policy" is blurred, with both terms often being used interchangeably. "European external action" is both the most used and the vaguest label because it can encompass various actors: EU member states, non-EU member states, EU candidate countries, or, to a lesser extent, other European organizations such as the Council of Europe or the OSCE. Thus in order to be more precise, this study uses the term "EU external action" that is understood as the output of the EU's multi-layered governance system, including EU institutions and EU member states, in the realm of international affairs.

Moreover, it needs to be clarified that the aim of this study is to characterize the EU's role and actorness in the challenging geopolitical environment of Central Asia. It does not aim to assess the *effectiveness* of the EU's external action in this region, understood as the achievement of previously formulated objectives and policy outcomes (Blum and Schubert 2009, 129–31); this study is not concerned with a simple input-outcome assessment of EU policies or, to put it bluntly, a "before-after" comparison. Given the fact that the empirical case studies refer to ongoing, long-term programs, a performance-centered analysis approach would yield a premature and incomplete assessment.

Finally, the present study embeds Central Asia in its broader geopolitical context in which other external actors are involved. Their role is indispensable for completing the analytical framework. Although the region has attracted the interest of a great number of regional and extraregional actors such as India, Iran, Turkey, Japan, and South Korea, an examination of all

these actors, as considerable as their influence may be, would go beyond the scope of this work. Thus, the focus lies on the three main external actors in Central Asia, namely Russia, China, and the United States. At the same time, this study does not provide a comparative analysis of the EU with these three powers in Central Asia. Rather, Russia, China, and the United States serve as references to illustrate the challenges and limits as well as the comparative advantages the EU's external actions enjoy in Central Asia.

The topic of this study is mainly supported by two bodies of literature: On the one hand, it is embedded in increasingly extensive academic scholarship on the EU's external action and actorness, while on the other hand, it joins a growing body of literature on politics in Central Asia and on the role of external actors in the region.

The first strand has caught the attention of scholars from different schools of thought but does not reflect a homogenous research program. This broad strand of research simultaneously draws on literature concerning European integration and on International Relations theory. Petiteville distinguishes three groups of academic work on the EU's external policies: (1) publications that examine the institutionalization of European foreign policy, (2) academic work on the impact and nature of key EU policies in third partner countries, and (3) academic endeavors theorizing on the EU's external action (2006, 15–17). This has resulted in a large number of conceptual and theoretical attempts to capture the complex nature of the EU's external actorness (for example, Bretherton and Vogler 2006; Carlsnaes, Sjørusen, and White 2004; Tonra and Christensen 2004; Ginsberg 1999, 2001; Hill and Smith 2011; Laidi 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2010; White 2001). The question of “What *kind* of international actor” the EU is has therefore substantially expanded over the past two decades (for example, Smith 2003; Sjørusen 2006b) and has generated dynamic debates on the nature of the EU's external action, its external identity, its policy- and decision-making processes, the role of institutions, and the effectiveness of its external policies.

The body of literature on the EU's external action started to frame the European Union as a particular, untypical, unique, and thus *sui generis* international actor very early on due to the fact that its position is somewhere between a supranational intergovernmental organization, a regional organization, and a European federation. The booming scholarship on the EU's international actorness, as Hill and Smith argue, “reflects both the empirical importance of the EU in the international arena and the analytical challenge of dealing with what is a distinctive if not unique type of internationally acting body” (2011, 4). This *sui generis* assumption, which will be discussed throughout the study, has begun to occupy an increasingly important space in the literature and generated idealist notions of the EU. The most prominent notions have been those concepts that view the EU as a “civilian” (Duchêne 1972) or “normative power” (Manners 2002; Forsberg 2011; Laidi 2008b;

Sjursen 2006b), the latter of which will be intensely discussed in chapter 2. The EU has thus been acknowledged as a global actor while it is still a very challenging task to define and conceptualize its global actorness.

While this debate is certainly important in order to better understand the European Union's role in international affairs, the focus on the different interpretations and labels is sometimes excessive (see also Bickerton 2011; Schunz 2010) and often insufficiently grounded in empirical evidence. What is more, conceptual work on the EU's external action tends to extract the EU's foreign policy from the broader context of world politics and focuses instead on the internal logics of action, type of instruments applied, or institutional policy-making processes (for example, Bauer and Rieger 2012; Sicurelli 2010; Wassenberg and Faleg 2012). In other words, the EU's external policy has been mostly conceptualized from an "inside" perspective rather than from an "outside" perspective. This study proposes to place an equally strong emphasis on the context in which the EU conducts its foreign policy and thus highlights the mutual interrelation of agency and structures. In line with Hill and Smith's claim "to combine an understanding of the EU's internal character with an analysis of its international situation" (2011, 5),⁶ the aim of this book is to provide an in-depth empirical study of the EU's actorness within a difficult environment in and around Central Asia and thus to shed light on how the external context contributes to shaping the "internal character" of the EU's actorness. This approach differs from other empirical case studies on the EU's external action insofar as it incorporates both the regional context (Central Asian republics) and the broader context (the value that Central Asia holds for other world powers) in the analysis.

Scholarly attention to an empirical analysis of EU external policies has so far predominantly focused on the question of the effectiveness of the EU's external policies that has often been assessed in input-outcome terms and, above all, without sufficiently taking into account the specific domestic logics of a country or region (for example, Del Biondo 2012; Krüger and Ratka 2014; Sicurelli 2010). As Keukeleire criticizes, "the academic analysis of EU foreign policy . . . is often, ironically, not 'foreign' at all" because the presence of non-Western scholars, approaches, and views in publications on EU external action are rather limited (2014, 228). He proposes, instead, to take an "outside-in" perspective that implies "that the foreign policy analysis examine foreign policy from the perspective and within the context of the region, country, society, elites or populations that are the subject . . . of the given foreign policy" (*ibid.*). This is why this study puts a strong empirical emphasis on the reception of the EU's policies in Central Asia.⁷

As far as literature on EU relations with Central Asia is concerned, this topic received an increasing scholarly attention after the launch of the EU Strategy for Central Asia in 2007 with publications and analyses reaching the highest peak between 2007 and 2010. Prior to this, Central Asia only re-

ceived scant attention from scholars of both International Relations and European foreign policy. The renewed academic interest has been somewhat ambiguous, however: While prominent publications comprehensively examining the EU's external relations systematically neglect the region of Central Asia on the one hand,⁸ there is a clear increase in the publication of policy and working papers on EU–Central Asia relations provided by think tanks and research institutes—such as FRIDE, the Brussels-based EUCAM (EU–Central Asia Monitoring), or Carnegie Europe—on the other. Moreover, it should be stated that the literature on EU–Central Asian relations predominantly focuses on the normative consistency of the EU's policies and the effectiveness of the promotion of democracy and human rights. Although programs in these areas just started a few years ago, scholarly expectations seem to have been very high, as is reflected through the strong focus on this topic. In fact, most authors unequivocally criticize the relatively limited impact of the EU's policies in these areas, identifying Brussels's alleged trade-off between normative goals and strategic interests as a major reason for this failure (Bossuyt and Kubicek 2011; Boonstra 2012b; Cooley 2008; Crawford 2008; Hoffmann 2010; Melvin 2012; Voloshin 2014a; Warkotsch 2009, 2010). Such assessments, however, are too premature and need to be more strongly embedded in both the domestic context of the Central Asian republics and the geopolitical environment that strongly impact the reception of the EU's policies and norms in the region.

At this stage, it should be stated that the literature hardly views the EU as a security actor in Central Asia, mostly owing to the aforementioned dominant focus on “value-driven” policies such as democratization and the promotion of human rights.⁹ This stands in stark contrast to the empirical fact that the EU has not launched any genuine democracy promotion programs, but has implemented several programs in the security sphere (see part III). This is another hint that the concept of Europe as normative power strongly dominates the literature on EU foreign policy and overlooks the many other facets of external activities the EU takes part in. The scant scholarly attention given to the EU's development and human security programs, such as the water and environment initiative or the border management program in Central Asia, for instance, is disproportionate to the salience of these programs. This observation brings us to Zwolski's (2009) critique of the literature's major incoherence on the EU as a security actor. He has shown that a large part of this literature still predominantly adopts a narrow, military-oriented concept of security even though the EU's own security vision as well as that from the contemporary security studies literature have broadened the traditional security term to include, for instance, environmental issues (Zwolski 2009, 82–83). This work seeks to provide an empirical study of the EU's policies in the sphere of “human security” using the example of Central Asia to reduce the “hard” power focus in the existing literature.

As far as the literature on international politics in Central Asia is concerned, it is noteworthy that this region was strongly neglected by both scholars and policy makers in the first decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The attacks of 9/11, the subsequent NATO intervention in neighboring Afghanistan, and the growing demand on energy brought the region to the international spotlight and increasingly caught the attention of scholars; this attention, however, is particularly concentrated on the question of the role of external powers in Central Asia. Mostly labeled under the aforementioned catchy term of the “New Great Game,” a whole bulk of literature provides insight into the strategies and interests of Russia, China, the United States, India, Iran, etc., in Central Asia (for example, Cooley 2012; Godehardt 2014a, 2014b; Kavalski 2012; Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013c; Laruelle et al. 2010; Mankoff 2013; Marketos 2009; Wacker 2011; Von Hauff 2013). A second strand of literature on Central Asia in international politics strongly focuses on security risks either emanating from the region or threatening the region itself, such as Islamist terrorism or organized crime (Chaudet 2008; Cooley 2012; Khalid 2013; Kleveman 2004; Olcott and Udalova 2000; Rashid 2002), thus creating a keen “discourse of danger” (Heathershaw et al. 2010) that has strongly marked the reading of Central Asian politics since the 2000s, among both policy makers and scholars. Few authors, however, have provided more differentiated analyses of the stakes of international politics in Central Asia by examining domestic political, historical, and socioeconomic factors (exceptions include Balci 2013, 2014b; Chuvin, Letolle, and Peyrouse 2008; Cummings 2012; Heathershaw 2009; Ferrando 2010, 2011; Laruelle 2008, 2013; Laruelle and Peyrouse 2010, 2013a; Peyrouse 2011, 2012a; Thorez 2013a).

One further major shortcoming in literature on Central Asia is the tendency to present the Central Asian republics as objects rather than subjects of international politics. Little attention has been paid to the agency of Central Asia, although the republics, as will be shown, are very active in bargaining and choosing how they engage with external powers. This book therefore attempts to give an increased consideration of the view from Central Asia via interviews and the publications of authors from the region.

This research endeavor relies primarily on qualitative analysis and employs two main methodological strands to respond to the research objectives: data collection based on document analysis, field work, and literature on the one hand, and the case study method on the other.

Four sources form the basis for the empirical data: secondary literature on EU–Central Asian relations, document analysis from Europe (EU institutions, member states) and Central Asia (national ministries as well as project and program publications), interviews, and observation material gathered in the course of field work in Europe and Central Asia as well as media coverage. Primary data sources from Europe and Central Asia particularly span-

ning the period from 2007 to 2013 were analyzed by drawing on the methodology of discourse analysis, which includes an examination of terminology, emphasis, consistencies, and structure of text bodies (see Hansen 2006; Larsen 1997, 2004; Rasmussen 2009; Wæver 2005). Regarding the European side, official documents were used, including policy documents, speeches, and press releases issued by EU institutions (Council of the European Union, European Parliament, European Commission, EEAS, and EU Delegations in Central Asia) and member states (especially foreign ministries and cooperation agencies). Because this study places a strong emphasis on the Central Asian view and reception of EU policies, documents and speeches from representatives of the four Central Asian republics were also included. All official documents have been used for two purposes: gathering information and, in particular, discourse analysis, which allows for capturing long-term identity structures and normative visions that shape the actor's political choices.

In line with Keukeleire, who argued that a foreign policy analysis “cannot just be based on primary and secondary Western literature and data, but that data also have to be obtained in the target country, region or society itself” (2014, 234), a considerable bulk of the empirical primary data were gathered during extensive field research. Five rounds (two in 2010 and in 2011 respectively, and the last round in 2014) of semidirectional interviews with representatives of European institutions and local “elites,” including officials, diplomats, political analysts, scholars, and civil society activists, were therefore carried out in Central Asia. The interviews were conducted in Kazakhstan (Astana, Almaty, Kustanai), Kyrgyzstan (Bishkek), Tajikistan (Dushanbe), Uzbekistan (Tashkent), and Russia (Moscow). Turkmenistan is not part of this study because of extremely restrictive visa regimes and control mechanisms, which made genuine research work impossible. Several additional telephone interviews ensured contact with experts from Central Asia beyond the research trips and filled gaps in data gathering. While the conversational atmosphere was constructive, open, and critical in Kyrgyzstan and to a lesser extent in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, field research in Uzbekistan was rather restricted and limited.

The data gathered in Central Asia generally provided a better understanding of local dynamics between the EU and Central Asia and, in particular, the views and perceptions of the EU in the region. It is salient to note here that the examination of the reception of EU policies does not aim at providing a fully representative, quantitative enquiry of public opinion on the EU in Central Asia; this would go widely beyond the scope of this work. It is, however, used to gain insight into how Central Asian elites tend to view the EU in order to evaluate the opportunities and level of approval of EU policies in Central Asia. The focus on the Central Asian elite—members of public administration, academics, civil society representatives, and analysts—is

both a pragmatic choice in terms of feasibility scope of this research endeavor and a thematic choice because these are the groups dealing directly with EU policies.

A considerable number of interviews were also conducted in Europe, particularly in Berlin, Brussels, Paris, Bonn, and Strasbourg. Most of the interview partners in Europe were diplomats and officials from EU institutions (Council of the EU, European Parliament, European Commission, and the EEAS), from the member states, or were analysts and scholars. These data were particularly helpful in understanding logics of action, decision-making processes, policy choices, and social narratives of the actors involved in EU–Central Asia relations. The interviews were completed using data gathered through participant observation and informal talks during a number of political and academic conferences, round tables, and cooperation forums in both Europe (Brussels, Berlin) and Central Asia (particularly Almaty and Astana).

Besides, this research work employs the case studies method that draws on the assumption that social science is not able to produce general and predictive theories and that only case studies provide context-dependent knowledge and evidence for causal claims (Crasnow 2012; Flyvbjerg 2006; Stake 1995). Case studies are therefore crucial in order to not only validate theoretical and conceptual assumptions, but also for generating new hypotheses and findings.¹⁰ The aim of this research work, as outlined earlier, is precisely the context-dependent assessment of EU external policy. Instead of verifying abstract concepts against empirical data or making general assumptions, it takes empirical examples as an initial framework to deduct theoretical and practical conclusions.

In order to show how the EU behaves in the challenging geopolitical context of Central Asia, and thus in one of the most insecure regions worldwide, this research work relies on a general case study, namely the EU policies in the security sphere in Central Asia, which is divided into three specific case studies: (1) The border management programs BOMCA and CADAP, (2) the Rule of Law Initiative, and (3) the Water Initiative. The choice of these three case studies was empirically driven as they constitute the largest EU programs in the region and two of them, the Rule of Law Initiative and the Water Initiative, have been upgraded to so-called Key Initiatives in the framework of the EU Strategy for Central Asia.¹¹ What is more, they reflect the EU's comprehensive security policy approach, which highlights governance as well as socioeconomic and environmental factors very well.

This book is divided into three parts. Part I addresses the conceptual challenges in analyzing the EU action and develops the analytical framework for the study. Parts II and III empirically examine the EU's policy in Central

Asia. Part II aims at understanding the principal parameters, guidelines, and challenges of EU engagement in Central Asia. In order to concretely examine the EU's influence in Central Asia and, more precisely, in the security sector, part III provides three case studies that reveal the limits of EU engagement stemming from the Central Asian domestic context and from internal inconsistencies of the program.

NOTES

1. Brzezinski takes clear inspiration from British geographer Halford's Mackinder's Heartland Theory (1904), according to which the control of Eurasia is the key to control world's politics. Brzezinski applies this idea on today's Central Asia whose domination he believes to be the key to global preeminence.

2. External actorness is here defined as "the capacity to behave actively and deliberately in relation to other actors in the international system" (Sjöstedt 1977, 16).

3. Ginsberg, for instance, claims that the "EU matters in international affairs" and that it "has powers of attraction that are empirical (for what the EU is), normative (for what the EU represents) and putative (for what the EU is becoming)" (2007, 3); Moravcsik states that "in many ways Europe is optimally suited to project power in the contemporary global system" (2010, 153); Orbie considers the EU as being an actor that "wield[s] effective power over peace and war as great as that of the United States" (2008, 13).

4. Turkmenistan is not part of the empirical study due to the impossibility of conducting research and interviews in this extremely isolationist republic.

5. The seven-year budget plans are called Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) with the current and last period being 2014–2020 and 2007–2013 respectively. According to the European Commission it is a spending plan that translates the EU priorities into budgetary terms and provides a political as well as financial framework for the different political fields. For more information, see European Commission (2013).

6. Niemann and Junne (2011) also criticize the fact that the largest bulk of research does not sufficiently embed the EU's external action into the worldwide, hegemonic structures and examines the EU impact solely from the EU's perspective.

7. Keukeleire also criticizes that analysts and scholars "are often specialized in the EU's foreign policy towards a specific country or region, but are in many cases not at all specialized in the country, region or society that is the subject of the analysis" (2014, 228).

8. Cameron (2012), for instance, has provided one of the most complete books on the EU's external relations, yet there is no chapter on Central Asia. Similarly, Hill and Smith (2011) have published a remarkably rich study on *International Relations and the European Union* but do not mention Central Asia at all. No less surprisingly, the collected edition *Democracy and the Rule of Law: American and European Strategies Promoting* edited by Magen, Risse, and McFaul (2009) gives interesting insight on how the United States and the EU try to promote their norms in different regions of the world. Although they dedicate one chapter to the countries of the former Soviet Union, the Central Asian region is barely mentioned. One of the few exceptions in this regard is Bossuyt's (2011) chapter on EU–Central Asia relations in Wunderlich and Bailey's Handbook on *The European Union and Global Governance*.

9. Exceptions include Boonstra, Marat, and Axyonova 2013; Boonstra and Shapovalova 2012; Peyrouse, Boonstra, and Laruelle 2012.

10. For a discussion on the research methodology of case studies, see Flyvbjerg (2006).

11. The third key initiative of the EU's Strategy for Central Asia, the Education Initiative, is not part of this study because it does not have an obvious link to security and, above all, because it has so far remained at an embryonic stage.