



Aijan Sharshenova

THE EUROPEAN UNION'S DEMOCRACY PROMOTION IN CENTRAL ASIA

*A Study of Political Interests, Influence, and Development
in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in 2007–2013*

With a foreword by Gordon Crawford

ibidem

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ibidem-Verlag
Stuttgart

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

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ISSN: 1614-3515

ISBN-13: 978-3-8382-7151-4

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Stuttgart 2018

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Abbreviations

ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific countries
BOMCA	Border Management in Central Asia
CADAP	Central Asian Drug Action Programme
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organisation
DCI	Development Cooperation Instrument
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EC	European Communities
ECA	European Court of Auditors
EEAS	European External Action Service
EIDHR	European Institute for Democracy and Human Rights
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
ENPI	European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument
EU	European Union
EurAsEC	Eurasian Economic Community
EUSR	European Union Special Representative
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HR for FASP	High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
ICG	International Crisis Group
IFI	International Financial Institution
IfS	Instrument for Stability
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation

NSA/LA	Non-State Actors and Local Authorities in Development
NSCI	Nuclear Safety Co-operation Instrument
ODA	Official Development Aid
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OPPD	Office for Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
RSP	Regional Strategy Paper
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
TEU	Treaty on the European Union
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
TACIS	Technical Assistance for Commonwealth of Independent States
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WTO	World Trade Organization

Foreword

The role of external democracy promotion has become a key topic of research within democratization studies, as well as within political science and international relations more generally. For almost a quarter of a century, democracy promotion has been recognised as a significant element of the post-Cold War political landscape, with much attention given to the roles of major Western actors, notably the United States government and the European Union. The EU has made democracy promotion a key component of both its foreign and international development policies as a distinctly normative agenda. Academic analysis of EU democracy promotion has focused on its role in the accession countries in Central and Eastern Europe, now EU member states, as well as in more challenging contexts in neighbouring countries on the EU's Eastern and Southern borders in Eastern Europe and the Middle East and North Africa respectively. Much less attention has been given to democracy promotion policies in the former Soviet republics in Central Asia, and Aijan Sharshenova's work is a very valuable addition to research literature on EU democracy promotion in that region.

Dr Sharshenova poses the crucial question: 'To what extent has EU democracy promotion in Central Asia been successful, and why?', and answers this question through an in-depth examination of EU policy implementation in two Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. These two country cases provide an excellent comparative study within the region, contrasting policy implementation in relatively rich, politically stable but autocratic Kazakhstan, with that in much poorer, politically unstable Kyrgyzstan, yet more open to democratic opportunities than elsewhere in the region. The two countries also contrast in terms of their strategic importance for the EU, much greater for Kazakhstan with its rich energy deposits, and much less so for Kyrgyzstan, enabling an assessment of how such self-interests interfere with the application of a supposedly normative policy.

Sharshenova offers comprehensive analytical frameworks, firstly, for an examination of EU policy implementation – divided into the three-fold measures of strategic calculation, normative suasion and democratic empowerment – and secondly, for an evaluation of EU democracy promotion policies, inclusive of contextual factors which may facilitate or impede democracy promotion. Her findings are drawn from detailed document analysis and supported by empirical evidence from in-depth interviews with relevant officials and other experts. Findings indicate that EU democracy promotion has not been successful on the whole, and Sharshenova accounts for this by highlighting a variety of factors that affect external democracy promotion, including a lack of political will and consistency on the part of the EU itself; the generally unfavourable authoritarian context in Central Asia; and the role of other powerful regional actors, namely Russia and China, in countering EU efforts. Politicians, officials and policy analysts interested in Central Asia will all benefit from the insights offered in this book.

Prof. Gordon Crawford

Introduction

In 1991, on the eve of the Gulf War, Belgian Foreign Minister Mark Eyskens characterised the European Communities in unflattering terms as “an economic giant, a political dwarf, and a military worm” (as cited in Whitney 1991, no pagination). In this way, he gave expression to a problem, and, albeit unintentionally, provided a catalyst for more than two decades of intense activity aimed at harmonising the interests and policies of the EU member states and establishing functional mechanisms to articulate, consolidate and pursue EU interests worldwide.

In the course of more than 20 years the European Communities (EC) transformed into the European Union (EU); a unique international actor consisting of 28 member states and characterised by a complex multi-dimensional governance system. The EU now has the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), an authorised official to speak on itself behalf – namely the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR for FASP), and a foreign policy body – the European External Action Service (EEAS 2015a, no pagination). While the EU’s external foreign policy might still lack effective implementation mechanisms and unity in decision making, one should admit that the EU is no longer a “political dwarf”, but a regional power with a global ambition and a normative agenda. The EU’s ability to assert political influence has proven itself in the ambitious enlargement rounds, but its capacity to impact the countries beyond its immediate borders remains limited. In this regard, EU efforts to promote democratic principles in Central Asia deserve particular attention as they take place in an unfamiliar and largely authoritarian region, which does not have any accession prospects.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union the five Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan faced the daunting challenges of nation-building, state-building, drastic political and socio-economic reforming, and find-

ing their niche in the international system. The Central Asian countries have taken different pathways in their pursuit of new statehood. Some of them chose a quick transition to a market economy and underwent “shock therapy” reforms (Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan), while others preferred a gradual and partial transition from a command economy to a market economy (Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) (Blackmon 2011, pp. 15–28). Kyrgyzstan sought to integrate into the international community as much as possible and joined a variety of international organisations. Turkmenistan, on the other hand, declared “positive neutrality” and virtually abstained from participation in any globalisation processes or regional integration efforts (Kavalski 2010, pp. 184–185).

Most Central Asian countries declared their commitment to building democracy and incorporated such key democratic principles and institutions as the separation of powers and regular elections into their constitutions. However, none of them can be considered free or democratic at the time of writing. Democratisation efforts vary from dynamic in Kyrgyzstan, scant in Uzbekistan, and non-existent in Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan regularly find themselves at the bottom of international democratic ratings (Bertelsmann Transition Index 2015b; Freedom House 2015); Kazakhstan and Tajikistan are in a slightly better position, but still rated not free (Bertelsmann Transition Index 2015b; Freedom House 2015). Kyrgyzstan seems to display more willingness and effort to democratise, but has not yet been able to build a sustainable or stable democratic system. These processes have been accompanied by the increasing involvement of external powers, which in one form or another have attempted to get acquainted with the region, explore the possibilities for cooperation, or even assist political change by promoting the principles of Western liberal democracy. The EU has become one of the most visible external normative actors in the region.

In 2007, under the German presidency, the Council of the EU issued a strategy document regarding Central Asia, which outlined the seven priority areas of the EU’s bilateral and regional cooperation with Central Asia: human rights, rule of law, good governance

and democratisation, youth and education, economic development, trade and investment, energy and transport links, environmental sustainability and water, common threats and challenges, and intercultural dialogue (Council of the EU 2007, no pagination). While Central Asian governments and the EU share an interest in some of these cooperation areas, democracy-related activities are often considered sensitive and challenging.

Due to historical and political circumstances democracy promotion has become an integral and almost obligatory component of EU foreign policy or, as it is often called, external action. The creation and development of the EU have been closely interrelated with a set of values lying at the core of its identity. The principles of human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law are attributed to the all-encompassing inheritance of Europe and serve as the normative foundation of the EU's existence (Treaty on the European Union 2012, Preamble, Art. 2). In compliance with the Treaty on the European Union (TEU), the European Union's external action should be guided by democratic principles (article 21, European Union 2012b). Democracy is seen as both an objective and a condition of meaningful cooperation with third countries (European Council 1991).

In Central Asia, EU efforts to promote democracy are conditioned with a variety of contributing motives. Firstly, the EU is driven by the general motive to foster liberal democracy in the world (Kotzian et al 2011, pp. 995–996) and extend its normative power beyond its borders (Manners 2008, pp. 570–571). As mentioned earlier, democracy lies at the core of the EU's identity and promotion of this identity abroad is a natural progression of domestic democracy consolidation policy. Secondly, the European Security Strategy identifies the spread of democracy as a strategic foreign policy objective: “The best protection for our security is a world of well-governed democratic states” (European Council 2003, p. 10). Thirdly, democracy is instrumentalised in development policy thanks to the wide-spread, yet contested, assumption that democracy helps facilitate the development of a peaceful and

prosperous international system. In this regard, the EU mainstreams democracy into its development policy (Schraeder 2002, pp. 15–55). Finally, the EU's involvement in the region might also owe something to non-normative interests. The rich energy supplies of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan might play a substantial role in the EU's motivation to engage in the region (Denison 2009, pp. 5–7).

Democracy promotion in Central Asia has become a litmus test for the EU's capacity to assert influence beyond the immediate European neighbourhood. The EU has developed a range of instruments to promote democratic principles in third countries (Kotzian et al. 2011, p. 997–1003), but the most effective ones are related to the prospects of membership in the EU. Since the EU cannot offer membership to the Central Asian states it has to rely on other instruments: positive conditionality instruments (e.g. development aid, closer cooperation, trade privileges); negative conditionality instruments (sanctions, critical statements); and, normative suasion through dialogue and persuasion (Schimmelfennig and Scholtz 2008; Warktosch 2008; Axyonova 2011; Axyonova 2014). EU democracy promotion in Central Asia is spread across various budget lines (the Development Cooperation Instrument—DCI; European Institute for Democracy and Human Rights—EIDHR), and is implemented by a variety of actors, including Brussels-based officials at the DCI and European External Action Service (EEAS), the EU Special Representative for Central Asia, and EU Delegations to the respective Central Asian states (Urdze 2011).

Despite the fact that the EU has made significant effort to support democratic development in Central Asia, the EU's democracy promotion record remains uneven. There are two diverging views on the effectiveness and success of EU democracy promotion efforts in Central Asia and the line of disagreement lies between the policy makers and academic communities. On one hand, the European Commission' and Council's joint progress reports (2008, 2010, 2012) continuously emphasise the positive advances made in the area of democracy promotion. On the other hand, the majority of the exist-

ing research on EU-Central Asian relations indicates that the progress of EU democracy promotion has been uneven and weak (Matveeva 2006; Warkotsch 2011; Hoffman 2010; Axyonova 2011 and 2014). Monitoring data provided by third party international organisations such as the International Crisis Group and Human Rights Watch, report a steady record of human rights violations, abuses of power, distorted justice, inequality and all-pervasive corruption, and thereby demonstrate rather flawed democratic development in all five Central Asian republics (International Crisis Group 2010a, 2010b, 2012, 2013, and 2015; Freedom House 2015; Human Rights Watch 2015a and 2015b; Bertelsmann Transition Index 2015). While each Central Asian republic displays a unique political setting, varying degrees of freedom and openness, and differing levels of human rights observation, they share one important feature – none of them are democratic. The entire region is among the most authoritarian areas in the world (Boonstra 2015, no pagination). Under these circumstances, EU democracy promotion presents a curious case, which might provide certain insights into the broader field of democratisation studies, Central Asian studies and EU studies.

About this Book

This book analyses EU democracy promotion efforts in Central Asia within the framework of the EU's Strategy towards Central Asia 2007–2013 and in relation to its implementation in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. It aims to reveal a holistic picture of the state of affairs on the ground taking into account the EU, local Kazakh, Kyrgyz and wider regional contexts. An analysis such as this makes an up-to-date empirical contribution linking the well-researched EU studies with the under-developed area of Central Asian studies through the lenses of democratisation and external democracy promotion studies. Based upon original interview data collected during a series of fieldwork research trips to Belgium, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and a wide range of secondary sources, the book addresses the underlying reasons behind the EU's involvement in Central Asia; discusses and evaluates EU democracy promotion

policy and its implementation; examines local conditions in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan; and, identifies EU, domestic Kyrgyz and Kazakh, and wider regional factors which might impede the successful implementation of EU democracy promotion activities in a highly authoritarian setting like that of Central Asia.

In order to address the effectiveness of EU democracy promotion policy in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and the factors which might have impeded its implementation, I endeavour to find an answer to the following research question: To what extent has EU democracy promotion in Central Asia been successful, and why? This research question helped establish the research design (discussed further in this chapter) and defined the methods of data collection and analysis. The question was intentionally left open-ended to ensure a sufficiently large research frame for what is a genuinely big picture on the ground.

The book finds that EU democracy promotion has not been successful in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan due to three sets of factors. The first set of factors is the EU-related factors. As a democracy promotion agent, the EU often lacks political will, leverage and consistency in the implementation of democracy-related programming. In addition, the divergence and different prioritisation of normative and non-normative interests by various EU stakeholders makes democracy promotion in Central Asia challenging. The second set of factors impeding EU democracy promotion in Central Asia stems from regional political idiosyncrasies, the stability of Kazakh authoritarianism and the general political instability in Kyrgyzstan, and other local factors. The last set of factors relates to the larger regional framework and the ongoing opposition of key regional powers—China and Russia, who are less than happy with what they consider a Western ideological intervention into their legitimate backyard.

The book provides a thorough and tailored analytical framework for the evaluation of democracy promotion in general, and the factors which might impede democracy promotion in Central Asia in particular. Two original case studies are presented and analysed, taking into consideration the relevant contextual conditions

which might affect the design, implementation and outcomes of EU democracy promotion. The book demonstrates the validity of a holistic approach to analysing factors impeding democracy promotion. The existing research on EU democracy promotion in Central Asia often focuses only on one set of factors, usually on either the EU *or* the local context, prioritising it over others. This research acknowledges that a variety of diverse factors affect external democracy promotion and that their impact can vary as international, regional and domestic conditions change.

For the purposes of this research project I apply exclusively qualitative research methods. Semi-structured elite interviews, as well as key treaties, policy documents and declarations are the core primary sources for analysis. In addition, this book builds its argument upon the existing research on the EU as a democracy promotion agent, general Central Asian studies research, and the democratisation and external democracy promotion literature. EU democracy promotion in Central Asia is a recent political development, which has not yet been examined to its full potential. Nevertheless, there is an emerging body of literature, which focuses on various aspects of EU action or inaction as a democracy promotion agent in Central Asia. Notable researchers include Vera Axyonova, Fabienne Bossuyt, and Alexander Warkotsch. In addition, the EU-Central Asia Monitoring Project (EUCAM) provided a broad range of empirically rich material and well-informed analysis.

Case Studies

In an attempt to strike a balance between depth of analysis and breadth of utilised data, the research uses a dual case study design focusing on EU democracy promotion in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan between 2007 and 2013. The period under examination corresponds with the timeframe of the EU's ambitious Strategy for Central Asia, which established the support of democracy, human rights, the rule of law and good governance as one of the priority cooperation areas and provided the impetus to EU democracy promotion activities in the region (Council 2007). External democracy

promotion involves a variety of actors and is informed by a multitude of factors. At the most basic level, an external democracy promotion case should involve at least two parties: a democracy promotion agent and a target country. Here, the EU is analysed in its capacity as a democracy promotion agent in the two target countries of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

The governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan demonstrate varying degrees of formal declarative acceptance of the concepts of human rights, rule of law, good governance and democratisation. Generally, their declarations and legal acts indicate that they might share European values (see Kazakhstan's strategy paper "Path to Europe 2009–2011" issued in 2008, and the Constitutions of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan). However, the situation as regards democracy, human rights, and rule of law has not changed significantly since the Soviet period, despite the adoption of liberal laws, democratic declarations and general openness to the "outer" world. Instead, the region remains largely authoritarian with the exception of Kyrgyzstan, where a degree of democracy does exist when compared to its immediate neighbours, though not as consolidated and liberal as compared to Europe. So, may one speak of successful democracy promotion, as advanced by such external actors as the EU, in Central Asia, and why has it been successful or unsuccessful? This book will attempt to provide possible answers and explanations, and contribute to the general understanding of democracy promotion processes in post-authoritarian societies and hybrid regimes.

These two Central Asian countries were chosen as the case studies for this book for several reasons. Kyrgyzstan represents a good case to demonstrate the EU's role and strategy in the light of the interplay between a normative mission and security interests. It is a poor country with security problems that might indirectly affect the EU: political instability, illegal migration, drug and human trafficking, porous borders, and proximity to centres of extremist activity. Therefore, democracy here is considered not only as an aim in itself, but also as a means to facilitate EU domestic security and stability, and to contribute to regional and global security. Kazakhstan

is the largest and richest Central Asian country and the principal hydrocarbon exporter from Central Asia with developed gas fields and substantial reserves of oil (Denison 2009, p. 4). As such, Kazakhstan serves as a good case to demonstrate how the prioritisation of non-political issues might affect democracy promotion.

Secondly, the overall context of each of the two countries differs significantly and as such may contribute to a more holistic understanding of the region. Both countries are often labelled as hybrid regimes; political systems that combine elements of autocracy and democracy. However, if one imagines a scale of hybrid regimes stretching from authoritarianism to democracy, Kazakhstan is located closer to the authoritarian extreme, while Kyrgyzstan tends to vascilate towards the democratic end of the scale. Kazakhstan is an authoritarian state with a stable economic and social situation thanks to the Caspian petro-wealth and gas, whereas Kyrgyzstan is one of the poorest Central Asian countries with an unstable political situation and prospects for further social unrest, but strong democratic tendencies (International Crisis Group 2010a).

Third, despite significant differences in economic and political setting, both countries share similar experiences of post-Soviet state-building and democracy-building. In addition, they share a common foreign policy feature: they are relatively open to cooperation with global and regional powers. Kazakhstan once claimed its commitment to a European path of development (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, 2008), but in reality it has adhered to a multi-vector foreign policy which refers to a pragmatic, interest-based policy aiming to maintain good relations with as many international actors as possible without any explicit prioritisation of strategic partnerships (Ipek 2007, p. 1183). For less wealthy Kyrgyzstan a multi-vector foreign policy is a matter of necessity. As a small, low income, landlocked country, Kyrgyzstan has to take the need to rely on external resources into consideration in its foreign policy decision-making (Foreign Policy Concept of Kyrgyzstan 2007, no pagination). Given the considerable experience of cooperating with Europe, including joint efforts to consolidate democracy,

there is a sufficient volume of information for an analysis of the EU's democracy-related activities in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Despite covering various aspects of EU democracy promotion in Central Asia, official EU reports and research publications do not fully illustrate the complexity of pursuing ambitious goals in a challenging environment with limited resources and leverage in the democracy promoter's hands. Dry institutional narratives fail to reflect the intricate reality of continuous challenges, competing perspectives of the institutional and individual actors involved, and hidden implications of EU activities on the ground. In addition, the relevant reports are often limited by institutional constraints: they have to cover certain aspects and possibly ignore others. Academic publications, on the other hand, do not always have enough space to fully uncover the complicated topic. For this reason, the narratives of the officials and experts directly or indirectly involved in EU democracy promotion in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan or in monitoring these activities represent an invaluable source of information and complement the official narratives and research. In this regard, elite interviews offer a useful means of acquiring a more sophisticated picture by offering insight into the various perspectives of the institutions and actors in question. In interviewing elites in relevant policy-making, executive and expert circles, I opted for semi-structured interviews with flexible questions tailored to each group of interviewees. Semi-structured interviews are often used in elite interviewing and are instrumental in providing detail, depth, and an insider's perspective, while at the same time allowing hypothesis testing (Leech 2002, p. 665).

On Data Collection

The data collection period began in July 2012 and was completed by June 2013. In total, 42 interviews were conducted during five fieldwork trips to three locations: two trips to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan; a trip to Astana, Kazakhstan; and, two trips to Brussels, Belgium. Interviewees can be divided into three key groups. The first, the largest and the most open group includes EU-related participants:

Brussels-based staffers at the European External Action Service, the European Commission, and the European Parliament, as well as EU officials working in Bishkek and Astana at the EU Delegations and EU-funded projects. This group also includes several diplomats and clerks working in national representations of the EU members states in Brussels, in Central Asian units in the EU member states' foreign affairs ministries, and European diplomats in Central Asia. The second group – the smallest and the least open – includes relevant officials from Kyrgyz and Kazakh ministries, state agencies and other state bodies, as well as representatives of local political parties and civil society organisations. Finally, international, European and local Central Asian experts and think tanks provided an invaluable contribution by sharing their professional opinions on various subjects related to EU democracy promotion in Central Asia.

The following criteria guided the selection of potential interviewees. Firstly, they needed to be directly or indirectly involved in EU democracy promotion activities in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (first group). Secondly, they had the capacity to comment on national policies and interests on the ground and on the overall democratisation process in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (second group). Finally, to ensure an effective information cross-check and a variety of opinions, I included third parties, namely experts and think tanks, to the list of potential interviewees.

After a preliminary list of potential interviewees was compiled, they were contacted through formal and informal channels. The mechanism of establishing contact with each interviewee was informed by accessibility considerations. The first group (EU-related participants) were contacted through formal channels, i.e. publicly available work phone numbers and emails. In the course of the research field trips to Astana, Bishkek and Brussels in 2012–2013 I interviewed a variety of officials working for the European Commission and its general directorates, namely the Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development and the Directorate General for Trade, the European External Action Ser-

vice and its delegations to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and the European Parliament. I sought their views and opinions on the effectiveness of the EU's democracy promotion efforts in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and hear their story of whether EU democracy promotion has or has not been successful, and why. Prior to conducting interviews in 2013, I expected to see some differences in the opinions of the EU officials in Brussels and the EU Delegations in Astana and Bishkek. My expectations were based on an assumption that officials dealing with democracy-related projects on the ground come into direct contact with the local context and see what policies and mechanisms do or do not work in the local setting. However, both Brussels-based and Central Asia-based EU officials were equally aware of the situation on the ground and expressed views and opinions on the success of the EU democracy promotion initiatives in the region that fit into the official discourse expressed in joint progress reports. The difference was in some minor details: EU Delegation officials could comment more on the responsiveness of local partners or on the technical peculiarities of delivering projects, while Brussels-based EU officials were more defensive when asked about cooperation and dialogue with authoritarian regimes.

The second group of interviewees—Central Asian officials, political and civil society activists, were contacted through mixed means. In some cases, formal channels were sufficient to arrange a meeting, but this channel proved to be time-consuming and less effective. I repeated the European Court of Auditors' selection of sources for interviews (ECA Report 2013), in order to carry out their review of the EU's development assistance to Central Asia. The auditors interviewed EU delegation staff, representatives of national authorities, Member States' embassies, technical experts, civil society organisations, other donors and stakeholders (ECA Report 2013, p. 13). However, my capacity to access this selection of interviewees was limited by financial, time and bureaucratic constraints. In addition, the auditors examined 21 support programmes, both country specific and regional, and I examined 29 projects (17 in Kazakhstan and 12 in Kyrgyzstan) listed under the category of governance, democracy, human rights and support for economic and

institutional reforms. Again, my access to the information on the projects was not as broad as the ECA's; I mostly used publicly available information on the projects and secondary sources.

The data collection process encountered some issues in Central Asia. Most of these issues were related to the sensitive nature of the research topic and the individual anonymity and security concerns of interviewees, particularly civil servants.

Several civil servants and civil society representatives found it difficult to believe that I was a researcher and suspected that I was a journalist or a foreign agent seeking to promote a certain agenda. Woliver (2002, p. 677) explains how she experienced a certain bias from a group of her interviewees due to her affiliation with academia and a specific programme. I experienced a range of similar preconceptions on the part of my interviewees in the civil service; having learned that I come from a Western university and study democracy promotion they assumed my research is part of a Western ideological agenda. In most cases, I managed to convince the interviewees that my research is agenda-free and I am not paid by any interest groups. However, some of the prejudices regarding my affiliation were strong to the extent that some of the interviewees were not convinced I was a researcher. This resulted in a certain lack of openness in some of their responses.

Another issue was related to the unequal availability of sources. Due to the different levels of openness and access to the information in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, I was able to collect more data from Kyrgyzstan than from Kazakhstan. Despite my assurances of anonymity and confidentiality, I found it difficult to interview state officials in Kazakhstan as they felt insecure when asked democracy-related questions and could not fully trust me, suspecting I was an undercover journalist trying to expose them. Meanwhile, in Kyrgyzstan, state officials and civil society representatives were less suspicious and more willing to talk under the condition of anonymity. In addition, thanks to my being a Kyrgyz citizen and having some personal and professional connections I managed to gain more trust and, as a result, more information from a wider variety of local civil servants and expert community. My

work on judicial and parliamentary strengthening projects prior to starting this research project expanded the range of my professional contacts in Kyrgyzstan, who vouched for me and assisted with getting access to the interviewees. This slight imbalance in the availability of primary data in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan was tackled through using the method of triangulation, which also helped to ensure the validity of the data and mitigated potential bias on the part of the interviewees. I cross-checked information through various sources and filled in potential gaps in primary sources from Kazakhstan by using a wide range of relevant secondary sources.

Finally, there was the issue of less than explicit answers. While the majority of interviews were largely informative and the interviewees were quite generous about sharing their knowledge and opinions, sometimes they were reluctant to comment explicitly on sensitive issues such as the state of democracy in Kazakhstan or on the potential implications of conducting political dialogue with undemocratic regimes. The EU officials often repeated the official institutional narratives without adding too much to what I had already discovered during the preparation stage. Nevertheless, this reluctance to discuss these sensitive issues and their reaction to specific questions can be informative in and of itself’.

Book Structure

This book concentrates on the success of the EU democracy promotion policy under the framework of the EU’s Strategy towards Central Asia 2007–2013 and seeks to understand what factors might have impeded its successful implementation in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. This book identifies and analyses the key stakeholders in the process: the EU as a democracy promotion agent; Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan as target countries; and the wider regional environment. It discusses and evaluates EU democracy promotion policy and its implementation and examines the factors, which might have impeded, distorted or undermined EU efforts to promote democracy in Central Asia. In order to do so, the book is structured as follows.

Chapter two reviews the literature on democratisation, external democracy promotion, the EU and Central Asia. There is a shared view within the limited circle of academics researching EU-Central Asian relations (e.g. Vera Axyonova and Alexander War-kotsch) that EU democracy promotion efforts have been unsuccessful, and the fault is often placed either on the EU as a half-hearted democracy promotion agent, or on Central Asia as soil unwelcoming for democracy. However, there is an important gap, which this book attempts to fill in. EU democracy promotion is a multi-faceted process with a variety of explicit and hidden actors and shaping factors, which intersect, collide, converge, and change on a regular basis. In order to identify and explain these actors and factors, it is necessary to employ a variety of tools. The democratisation and democracy promotion literature offers a variety of approaches and analytical tools, which could be instrumental in addressing the issue of EU democracy promotion in Central Asia.

Chapter three serves to explain the local context and the existing socio-political and economic conditions in the two case study countries, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Understanding the local contextual background and its differences in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan is crucial for understanding what external democracy promotion agents such as the EU face when striving to promote democracy abroad.

Chapter four examines EU efforts to promote democratic principles and norms under the framework of the EU Strategy towards Central Asia. In this chapter, I investigate the EU's actors and their objectives in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan; map the EU legal and normative framework in relation to its external democracy promotion policies; and focus on specific projects and activities aimed to promote democracy in Kazakhstan in Kyrgyzstan.

Chapter five analyses the existing evaluation of EU democracy promotion policies and tests it against the primary and secondary data I collected. In addition, I develop a set of evaluation criteria to see whether the democracy promotion objectives as set by the EU-CA Strategy have actually been met.

Chapter six makes the use of the existing literature, original interview data and other sources to identify and explore the range of factors impeding EU democracy promotion. It employs a three-dimensional structure to analyse how local contextual conditions, EU-related factors and the broader regional setting affect EU democracy promotion efforts in the target countries. In doing so, the chapter addresses the second part of the primary research question: Why EU democracy promotion has (or has not) been successful?

Chapter seven summarises the key findings and arguments of the research and discusses venues for future research and policy implications based upon the implementation outcomes of EU democracy promotion activities in 2007–2013.

External Democracy Promotion: Promoters and Targets

There are several researchers in English-speaking academia, who have directly addressed the topic of EU democracy promotion in Central Asia. One of them is Vera Axyonova, whose recent book examines EU democracy promotion in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan at the micro level (Axyonova 2014). Publications by Warkotsch (2011, 2008), Hoffmann (2010), Crawford (2008), Fabienne Bossuyt and Paul Kubicek (Bossuyt and Kubicek 2011, 2015), and a few others provide certain insights and helpful directions for further research. The Europe-Central Asia Monitoring Programme, a joint project by *Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior* (FRIDE; Madrid) and the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS; Brussels), presents another valuable source of relevant discussion and analysis on the topic, but from a slightly different, policy-relevant angle (EUCAM 2015). However, the overwhelming majority of relevant publications is limited in scope and is only able to partially cover such a complex and multidimensional issue as EU democracy promotion in Central Asia. In order to support the scarce research on EU democracy promotion in Central Asia, this book aggregates the existing fragmented publications on EU democracy promotion in Central Asia, and makes use of the original primary data collected for this research project in 2012–2013.

This chapter identifies and maps three broader areas of research, which serve as the foundation of this book, namely Democratisation Studies, EU Studies, and Central Asian Studies. Bearing in mind the research question, the basics in the three areas will be discussed with the primary focus on the selected issues and debates. This will provide a platform to examine the case of EU democracy promotion in Central Asia and make sense of the primary data presented in the subsequent analytical and empirical chapters. Therefore this chapter is structured into three sections, each addressing a relevant area of research.

The first section is devoted to the largest of all three areas, namely Democratisation Studies. Prolific authors and heated intellectual debates are abundant in Democratisation Studies. Using the book objectives and research questions as guides, key concepts, issues and debates will be discussed including definitions of democracy, the interplay between democracy, stability and development, democratisation processes, the external dimension of democratisation, external democracy promotion, and democratisation and democracy promotion in post-communist countries. The second section examines the EU in its capacity of a global democracy promoter. The focus will therefore be upon examining the EU's concept of democracy, its developmental approach to democracy promotion, and the normative vs. realist debate with regard to the EU's motivation to promote democracy abroad. In addition, the most relevant publications on EU democracy promotion in Central Asia seek to examine the Central Asian political landscape and identify local contextual factors, which might be useful for understanding the two case study countries of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The field of Central Asian Studies is currently recovering after the major disruption to the academic research experienced during the Soviet era. While there is a plethora of publications on Central Asia, only a section of them fits into the scope of this book. For this reason, I concentrate on the existing research publications capable of explaining the local political landscape in Central Asia.

Democracy and Democracy Promotion: Theory and Practice

Democracy is the world's new universal religion.
Paul Corcoran (1983, p. 15)

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the formal acceptance of democratic principles in post-communist countries fuelled a triumphant mood among Western academic and policy making circles as liberal democracy was deemed "one competitor standing in the ring as an ideology of potentially