

Report from Germany by Rainer Apel

Central Asia's Great Potential

German politicians have begun to discover the importance of a Eurasian perspective for great projects.

So far, Germany's political elite has neglected serious work on the broader perspective of Eurasian economic and political development. At the Asian end of the Eurasian Land-Bridge, in China, German politics did invest remarkable efforts, over recent years. But the expanse between China and Europe still is a huge blank on the German foreign policy map. Two exceptions are India and Iran, where Germany has cultivated relations continuously, but never envisaging both nations as an integral part of the Eurasian Land-Bridge; nor do most German foreign policy experts pay attention to the fact that the Central Asian nations, along with India, Iran, Russia, and China, maintain very intense diplomatic activity among them.

Fortunately, this is slowly beginning to change: In early April, Berlin announced a special new program to modernize power generation and transmission, and to upgrade medical care in the three Caucasian republics of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, with 100 million deutschmarks in funding, to be handled, predominantly, through the German state-owned Reconstruction Bank (KfW, in Frankfurt). And, on May 20-25, Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer will undertake a six-day tour of Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kazakstan, and China.

In preparation for his tour, the Foreign Ministry planning staff, under its chairman Achim Schmillen, issued a memorandum on the importance of Central Asia for German foreign policy, which was published on May 15, in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the government's semi-official mouthpiece. The memo re-

flects recent warnings from the foreign intelligence agency BND, regarding the threat of the spreading drug trafficking and terrorism, and of organized crime in general, in Central Asia, and its implications for stability in the entire region.

The Schmillen report begins with a worried look at what Central Asia would look like by 2015, if Europe and Germany only focus their political energies on internal European affairs: The Taliban regime in Afghanistan would establish military control of the strategic Ferghana Valley, and hold Europe's interests in Central Asia oil and gas supplies hostage to this "new Great Game."

Schmillen continues that Central Asia has "enormous importance for international security in the 21st Century," not least because of its vast reserves in oil and gas, and hence, deserves more attention. Stability and the fight against Afghanistan's Taliban-controlled poppy production are also in the interest of Russia and China, meaning that only international cooperation can secure the transport and trade routes. Against a new destabilizing "Great Game," this cooperative approach, with substantial European economic involvement, is the only viable alternative. Cautiously criticizing the American (actually, the Anglo-American) role, the memorandum refers to U.S. policy over the past years as "diffuse," and being neither beneficial to the region, nor to long-term American economic interests. The Europeans "should encourage companies that are active in the region, to build up a future-oriented gas and oil industry as well as a multipolar

pipeline system, and to include Russian companies," the report states, adding that in addition to Russia, China and, ultimately, the United States have to be won over to a cooperative approach to Central Asia.

This is a useful memorandum, although it only represents a timid first step toward what could, and should be done. Somehow, miraculously, the memorandum makes no mention of the role that Iran could play in such a broader cooperation—although the Iranians are the crucial southern connection, between the Caucasus and Central Asia. This seems to reflect the fact that German foreign policy designers still have no fully coherent view on the inter-connection of developments along the entire range of Eurasia.

Furthermore, economic stability can not and must not rest exclusively on the development of gas and oil for export: Central Asia needs huge investments in its transport infrastructure, in its own power supplies, and in an industrial production of its own. Kazakstan's ailing railway grid for example, was a topic of discussions at an international congress in the capital city of Almaty, on April 25-27. It was mentioned that although a rail route from China to Europe would be the shortest, therefore more cost-efficient, the route through Kazakstan is problematic, because its rail tracks are in such poor shape that freight trains can go no faster than 60 kilometers per hour. By comparison, the longer route, via Russia's Trans-Siberian Railroad, permits speeds of 120 kph. However, without great improvements in transport infrastructure (and especially deploying German technology in magnetic levitation), a sound economic development of the Central Asian countries, radiating from the transport corridors into the vast inland, is not possible.