

## **Comments on the occasion of the Launching of the Eurasian Council of Foreign Affairs**

1. Let me say a few words. I – and I suppose all of us – listened very carefully to Minister Idrissov’s sophisticated and thoughtful speech and let me say that we all welcome – at least I hope we all welcome – the launching of the Eurasian Council of Foreign Affairs. We would like to thank you, Mr. Minister, for inviting us to be part of it, and for organizing this gathering.

2. I believe we – who came here – consider the expansion of ties and contacts between Europe and Central Asia, and specifically Kazakhstan, to be a positive, productive and highly welcome development. The current world is – in many aspects – rather fragmented and any effort at improving mutual understanding and international relations should be highly appreciated. This is – by the way – the reason we came here.

3. I like Minister Idrissov’s metaphors but I was rather surprised hearing that he wants “to place the Central Asian region at the very heart of the European Union”. I am afraid, Mr. Minister, that the EU doesn’t have a heart. The EU has ambitions, interests, as well as problems, but no heart. If there is a heart in Europe, it must be in its geographical midpoint, in the Czech Republic, in Prague. Nevertheless, I am – together with you – convinced that the EU should have a better understanding of Central Asia as well as closer relations with it. I myself would be very much in favour of it.

4. Mr. Minister, the EU is a complicated structure with many competing interests and very different historical memories. To stress here tonight the battle of Waterloo is – I am afraid – pleasing just part of our today’s audience.

5. Minister Idrissov mentioned – among the tasks of the Eurasian Council of Foreign Affairs – “to bridge the cultural and psychological gulf between Europe and Asia” and that “for too many, Central Asia is still a mystery”. I agree. The communication – and not only communication – gap evidently exists. We are still experiencing a lack of understanding and in some circles a lack of will to understand. We expected that it would slowly vanish. Regretfully, as current Ukrainian crisis demonstrates, it is not getting better. On the contrary, it is getting worse.

6. We should look at the world with open eyes and without aprioristic prejudices. And with sufficient respect to other countries and regions. We shouldn’t overplay the universalistic interpretation of the world, we should respect differences, we should resist all kinds of temptations to make us all uniform. We are not an unstructured bundle of individuals belonging to the Homo sapiens family. I don’t think Europe and Central Asia should be degraded or narrowed to merely geographic notions. In this spirit I agree with Minister Idrissov that we have “to promote the principles of tolerance” and I really hope this forum, the Eurasian Council of Foreign Affairs, can play a meaningful role. Thank you for bringing us together.

Václav Klaus, Steigenberger Grand Hotel, Brussels, November 12, 2014.