

EU – Central Asia Meeting: in Search of Joint Solutions for Regional Problems



The European Union – Central Asia Foreign Affairs Ministerial Meeting took place in Astana on December 21, 2015. The Kazakh delegation was headed by Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov, the EU delegation – by High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini. Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan were represented by Foreign Ministers Abdulaziz Kamilov and Erlan Abdyldayev respectively. Tajikistan and Turkmenistan were represented by deputy foreign ministers.

Prior to this meeting, the EU – Central Asia ministerial meetings had not taken place for the last two years (the previous meeting was held in 2013 in Bishkek.) However, the growing threat of terrorism and religious extremism at a global level, emergence of new hotbeds of instability in the world, growth of illegal migration make it necessary to find new ways to jointly confront common challenges. The discussion of these issues and convergence on specific problems were on the agenda of the ministerial meeting.

During the plenary meeting the Foreign Ministers of the EU and Central Asia exchanged views on topical issues of mutual interest: update of the EU Strategy for Central Asia, cooperation between the EU and Central Asia in

border management, education, economy, investment and environment protection. Particular attention was paid to cooperation in regional security – coordinated counter-terrorism and counter-extremism efforts, illegal migration, drug trafficking, etc.

Moreover, the discussion touched upon international issues such as the situation in Afghanistan, settlement of the situation concerning Iran's nuclear program, situation in Ukraine, challenges of migration flows to Europe and others.

In his opening speech, Minister Idrissov paid particular attention to the need to strengthen cooperation in countering modern threats to peace and stability in Central Asia and the EU. The need to further develop economic and trade relations between the EU and the countries of the region was highlighted. Having noted that today the EU is the second largest trading partner in Central Asia after China, the Kazakh Foreign Minister called on the participants of the meeting to work on removing trade barriers and jointly creating a competitive regional market in Central Asia.

Minister Idrissov provided the participants with details regarding the main international initiatives of Kazakhstan, including President Nazarbayev's new initiatives voiced during the 70th Session of the UNGA, the preparations for the International Specialized Exhibition EXPO-2017 in Astana, the establishment of the official development assistance organization KazAID, which is planned to be focused on cooperation with interested Central Asian countries.

The Minister paid special attention to the reforms in Kazakhstan and recent domestic initiatives of President Nursultan Nazarbayev – Plan of the Nation «100 Concrete Steps to Implement Five Institutional Reforms». Minister Idrissov announced plans to develop Kazakhstan's transport infrastructure within Nurly Zhol program. It aims not only at expanding and developing Kazakhstan's transport arteries, but also increasing the number of transport routes linking Central Asia with the rest of the world.

The Foreign Minister stressed the great potential of the cooperation with the European Union in the field of vocational technical education, which is one of the priorities outlined in the President's Address to the people of Kazakhstan of November 30, 2015.

Following the event, the representatives of foreign ministries of the Central Asian countries and the European Union came to a conclusion that it is necessary to further expand multifaceted and mutually beneficial cooperation.

The Joint Meeting Communiqué of the participating countries was adopted (the text transmitted to the media).

**EUROPEAN UNION - CENTRAL ASIA
FOREIGN AFFAIRS MINISTERIAL MEETING**

Astana, December 21, 2015

