

**Remarks by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan  
Roman Vassilenko at the conference "EU Global Strategy and Central Asia: Vision  
and Instrument"**

*1st April 2016*

**Dear Mr. Chairman, Mr. Minister!**

**Dear colleagues!**

First of all, I would like to thank the Latvian side for the warm hospitality and the excellent organisation of the event. I want to also express my gratitude to the Latvian colleagues for the consistent and targeted effort to promote the Central Asian agenda in the EU, which undoubtedly contributes to the enhancement of cooperation between the European Union and our region. I also appreciate the active work of the Latvian party in organizing events with the participation of delegates from several countries including Kazakhstan. All these steps contribute to building closer relations between the European Union and Central Asia.

Just two days ago the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, met with the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker in Brussels. They announced the imminent completion of the internal procedures which would very soon open the way for the provisional application of the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between Kazakhstan and the EU, signed in December 2015 in Astana. We expect the provisional application to begin on May 1, 2016, which will be a landmark event in our relations.

Our meeting today is very important in terms of getting better and thorough understanding of the expectations of the Central Asian states in relations with the European Union, including the conditions and modalities of cooperation at the regional and bilateral levels in the framework of the EU Strategy for Central Asia.

This is the second high-level meeting on this subject over the past five months. During the EU-Central Asia ministerial meeting held in Astana last December, with the participation of the EU High Representative Ms. Federica Mogherini, we thoroughly discussed the EU Strategy and made suggestions for its further implementation.

The Kazakh side, from the early beginning of the realisation of the Strategy, has consistently supported its full implementation and pushed for further expansion of its scope.

We contributed to the assessment of the strategy last year and outlined our vision on a number of aspects related to its further implementation. It is gratifying that our proposals were taken into account during the preparation of the European Council's conclusions. We sincerely hope that the updated proposals, reflected in the conclusions of the Council, will help bring our cooperation to a new level.

We welcome the fact that the updated Strategy, we can call it version 2.0, states that "the depth of relations will also depend on the ambitions and needs of individual Central Asian countries to take forward our bilateral relationships" and that "the EU will take full

account of the growing differences in socio-economic development and ambitions to engage in cooperation with Europe between the five countries”. We also agree that “more flexibility on a demand-driven basis ... could increase even further the impact and effectiveness of EU programmes and cooperation frameworks”.

Inter-regional cooperation with the European Union absolutely is one of the priorities of the foreign policy of the Central Asian countries, and we want to ensure our cooperation stays mutually beneficial and fair.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen!**

In our time, the geographical distance between our regions is not as relevant as before and we need and can increase cooperation across a broad spectrum. Taking into account the economic power shift to Asia and, as a consequence, the revival of trade relations, market growth and new directions of development, our location at the heart of the new fast-paced world should become the defining factor.

The size and the unique geography of Kazakhstan and the entire Central Asian region provide us with an opportunity to build a land bridge, connecting the economic powers of the west and east, north and south. Facilitating real “connectivity” between Europe and Asia should be on the agenda of the EU-Central Asia cooperation.

At the 70th session of the UN General Assembly last September, President Nazarbayev proposed a number of initiatives aimed at transforming the world. He stressed that it is vital for the international community to choose the path for our planet, using an arsenal of modern political, economic, technological, spiritual and moral tools. This will allow for the formation of an integrated system with industrial-innovative and environmental principles which can form the foundation of the modern world.

**“Big Eurasia”, the integration project of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is an especially important proposal. Given Kazakhstan’s chairmanship in the Eurasian Economic Union in 2016, it is possible to consider the possibility of starting work on building constructive cooperation between the European Union and the Eurasian Economic Union and to search for the optimal areas for development of mutually beneficial cooperation.**

**The integration potential of the Eurasian Economic Union and the implementation of the “Silk Road Economic Belt” project, together with China, demonstrate Kazakhstan’s position as a key business partner and a hub in Eurasia.**

Today, Eurasia plays an important geo-economic and geopolitical role in world politics. The interests of all the global players – including the EU, the U.S., Russia, China, India, Iran, Turkey and others – meet here. **We firmly believe geopolitical games, mutual economic sanctions and other out-dated elements of the Cold War era should belong to the past. Building a peaceful, stable, prosperous and economically strong Eurasia will have a significant positive effect on global growth and will be beneficial for everyone.**

The revival of the transit-transport routes through Central Asia, just like during the Silk Road era, will not only halve the time of transportation of goods between China and

Europe, as well as to the ports of the Persian Gulf, but will also give additional impetus to the development of markets, private businesses and the civil society.

**Our common goal should be to ensure that Central Asia is transformed from being landlocked into becoming land-linked through large-scale development of the national infrastructure of land trade routes.**

For instance, establishing a logistics base in Latvia for trade with Europe seems to be a promising initiative. Access to the EU's logistics centres will enable Kazakhstan and our neighbours to efficiently ship their cargo, and possibly the cargo of other CIS countries, as well as China, through Latvian ports to European markets and vice versa. There is an opportunity to utilise the new prospects thanks to the process of European integration, which creates a common market. One of the key factors determining the efficiency of the region as the "Gate of the Baltic Sea" is the quality of and accessibility to transport infrastructure.

Furthermore, strengthening the capacity of the private sector in the Central Asia countries also remains a promising area.

In this regard, we could consider a possibility of establishing a new, fourth platform of cooperation within the EU Strategy under the working name "Private sector development – Employment". This will contribute to the improvement of national legislations of the countries in the region, harmonisation of legal and other standards, and the creation of more favourable conditions for business and employment.

**Dear colleagues!**

I would like to join in condemning the terrorist attacks that took place on 22 March in Brussels and in expressing condolences to those who lost their loved ones. The very fact that the terrorist attacks took place near the EU headquarters indicates the danger and the arrogance of these criminals. The civilised world must react. Modern societies should not live in constant fear. International cooperation against terrorism can be effective if countries cooperate on the global, regional and bilateral levels. Coordinated cooperation between the countries and their special services and law enforcement agencies should be aimed at overcoming the contradictions existing between national legal systems and international law. Kazakhstan has initiated many initiatives on counter-terrorism. We have also repeatedly called for the adoption of a UN Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism, which would establish a clear classification of international terrorism, as well as forms and methods of countries' activities against this evil. That is why the President of Kazakhstan proposed the establishment under the UN auspices of a global counter-terrorism coalition (network) and to that end develop and adopt this comprehensive document.

**Ladies and gentlemen!**

We are aware that Central Asia, perhaps, is not a top priority for the EU. Particularly today, when Europe is in the process of dealing with the immigration crisis and faces considerable security challenges, both within and outside its borders.

At the same time, in light of the recent events in the Middle East, we must not forget about Afghanistan. The situation in that country remains complex. States in the region

are fulfilling their duties to stabilise the country and contribute to its development. We believe this issue also concerns the EU and we look forward to a meaningful and inclusive cooperation. In this regard, Kazakhstan welcomes the EU-Afghanistan Conference scheduled for October, and intends to participate actively in it.

We believe it is necessary to intensify the work of the High-Level Security Dialogue. We understand not all the countries are similarly optimistic about the effectiveness of such a dialogue and prefer to cooperate on a bilateral basis. We believe it is necessary to discuss this issue more closely.

There are a number of examples of successful cooperation in this field. The Programme of Border Management in Central Asia (BOMCA) has entered its ninth stage. Central Asia Drug Action Programme (CADAP) is in its sixth stage. At the same time we would like to mention that the Central Asian countries have highlighted the issue regarding the need for the expansion of financing of these programmes.

**Education is one of the key instruments to be used against radicalization and extremism.** In order to increase competitiveness of the region, governments urgently need qualified professionals. The European Union and Central Asian countries have a huge potential for cooperation in this area. The creation of an effective education system with European standards in the professional technical field is one area worth considering. It is no wonder that in the Baltic Assembly in 2016, Latvian representatives chose education as one of the key priorities for collaboration between the Baltic States.

In this context, we support the proposal to establish a dialogue platform that will deal with education.

**Another important subject that I want to focus on is environmental and water management issues.** We fully support the continuation of the implementation of the EU Water Initiative (EUWI-EECCA). We believe that main efforts should be focused on resuming direct dialogue between Central Asian countries, as well as the development and implementation of an agreement between these Central Asian countries on exchanging hydrological information.

In addition, we have proposed to consider the establishment of an investment fund for water issues in Central Asia with the assistance of external donors, as well as the International Centre for Water Resources Assessment in Almaty.

**A separate area of cooperation could be the development of and an increase in the efficiency of public services and local government.**

I would like to stress that Kazakhstan is ready for close cooperation in the framework of the Strategy, including in areas of technology, science, agriculture, construction, the oil and gas sector, metallurgy, pharmaceutical, defence industries, telecommunication infrastructure, energy conservation, energy efficiency and alternative energy.

The responsibility for providing real substance for the EU Strategy for Central Asia rests on us. We must achieve this objective in the interests of our people.

**Dear colleagues!**

In conclusion, I would like to express hope that the expansion of the EU's cooperation with Central Asian countries, especially, with Kazakhstan, will remain a priority for the EU and for Latvia.

Even though our countries are divided by a long distance, our people are connected by the common wish to live in peace, by the aspiration to strengthen friendship and mutually beneficial cooperation.

Latvians have a very good saying: "Reach out your hand if you want to reach the spoon". So I encourage all the participants to join efforts in building stronger ties between the EU and Central Asia. And of course, to take part in the discussions and ask our speakers and experts many questions.

Thank you for your attention.