

**Speech by Dr. Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Chair of the Advisory Council of the Eurasian Council on Foreign Affairs, on occasion of its Second Annual Meeting on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2015 at the Imperial Hotel, Vienna**

**Embargoed until 9:30pm CET, Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2015**

*[Introduction by the Rt. Hon. The Lord Lamont of Lerwick, Moderator]*

Thank you very much indeed, Lord Lamont, for your warm introductory remarks, for which I am grateful.

My Lord, Your Excellencies, Ladies, Gentlemen and distinguished guests!

I take great pleasure in welcoming you all to the Imperial Hotel this evening, for the Second Annual Meeting of the Advisory Council of the Eurasian Council on Foreign Affairs.

The ECFA is a new European institution dedicated to inspiring independent, vibrant debate on Central Asia's growing role in global affairs, particularly in relation to the countries of the European Union. As Chair of the ECFA Advisory Council, I am proud to have overseen the organisation's launch and watched the considerable progress it has made since we met for the first time last year<sup>1</sup> in Brussels.

It is truly gratifying to see representatives from so many distinguished institutions and many Ambassadors of European and Central Asian nations gathered here in my home country.

Austria has always sought to cultivate strong links with Central Asia, and I have taken a great personal interest in the region since my first visit in 1999 ahead of Austria's chairmanship of the OSCE, where we focused on Central Asia. Since then, Austria has considered Central Asia to be an important area. I was struck, then and now, by the industry and ambition of the countries in the region. These are the qualities that have seen them rise from a very challenging start to becoming confident players on the world stage that we see today. And I can think of no better setting for this Second Annual Meeting than Vienna, a historic city on the crossroads of Western/ Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.eurasiancouncilforeignaffairs.eu/blog/2014/11/13/featured-story/>

Before I go further, I would like to extend a special thank you to Erlan Idrissov, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan and first Honorary President of the ECFA. Without his personal support, the ECFA would have remained an ambitious idea rather than a concrete reality. His speech to the Advisory Council earlier this evening was an inspiration to all of us who have come to know his country and believe that Kazakhstan has the energy, commitment and stability to be the engine for growth for the Central Asian region.

I would also like to thank the ECFA's Director, Mr. Zhanbolat Ussenov, for his untiring efforts to develop and expand the organisation in the past year. I am indebted, also, to the Members of the Advisory Council who have joined us here in Vienna today. All of them are highly distinguished statesmen and experts committed to the development of the ECFA as a forum for discussion of Central Asian issues.

As these distinguished names clearly show, the ECFA has become a truly international organisation, boasting a wealth of political and academic experience drawn from all over Europe, including from Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Kazakhstan, Norway, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain and the United Kingdom<sup>2</sup>.

I would also like to extend a special welcome to H.E. Kayrat Sarybay, Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan to Austria, as well as the other distinguished Ambassadors to Austria in attendance this evening from Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.

My Lord, Your Excellencies, Ladies, Gentlemen and distinguished guests, I am truly delighted to see you all!

The ECFA launched in Brussels in November of last year. Given the pace of international events since then, it has proven to be a timely forum for the discussion on Central Asia's relationship with the European Union. Since its launch, the organisation has published a series of informative Occasional Papers<sup>3</sup> and Newsletters to a substantial and ever-increasing readership, and initiated invaluable partnerships with other European think tanks, representatives of which are present here tonight. The ECFA is particularly grateful to Mr. Thomas Wanker, Secretary-General of the Austrian-Kazakh Society, for his contribution to the success of this

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<sup>2</sup><http://www.eurasiancouncilforeignaffairs.eu/the-council/advisory-council/>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.eurasiancouncilforeignaffairs.eu/publications/occasional-papers/>

evening. On behalf of the ECFA, Sir, I thank you for your interest, and look forward to working with you further in the months and years to come.

The ECFA's marked progress seems to me to be a fitting microcosm of Central Asia as a whole, which has advanced in leaps and bounds since the fall of the Soviet Union.

I remarked back in 2006 that the region was "young, full of promise and already attracting attention on the world stage"<sup>4</sup>. The five Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are each year making greater contributions to global dialogue on energy security, the environment, people and drug trafficking, and counterterrorism. All these issues are of critical importance to the West, but still there is relatively little information about the achievements of these nations circulating among the informed public.

Kazakhstan remains committed to a multidimensional foreign policy and has even become a member of ASEM (Asia- Europe- Meeting) in 2014 as the only Central Asia Country.

This year alone, Kazakhstan is running for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council between 2017–18, the first time for a Central Asian nation and we wish you good luck!

You have also agreed to host an International Nuclear Fuel bank, affording safe access to nuclear materials for neighbouring countries and helping to curb the worrying trend of nuclear proliferation<sup>5</sup>. This is just the latest of a number of concrete measures taken by Kazakhstan against the spread of nuclear weapons, starting with its voluntary disarmament of its Soviet-era nuclear arsenal in 1991, and leading in October to the announcement that Uzbekistan, among other states, is now officially declared free of High-Enriched Uranium.

Under the leadership of President Nursultan Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan has, in the last year, joined the World Trade Organisation<sup>6</sup> and signed an Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the European Union<sup>7</sup>— the latter a landmark agreement which underlines the importance

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<sup>4</sup>[http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_SPEECH-06-615\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-06-615_en.htm)

<sup>5</sup><http://www.eurasiancouncilforeignaffairs.eu/blog/2015/08/19/official-ceremony-launch-international-nuclear-fuel-bank-kazakhstan/>

<sup>6</sup><http://www.eurasiancouncilforeignaffairs.eu/blog/2015/06/20/kazakhstan-finalizes-accession-world-trade-organization/>

<sup>7</sup><http://www.eurasiancouncilforeignaffairs.eu/blog/2015/01/21/eu-kazakhstan-conclude-enhanced-partnership-cooperation-agreement/>

of Central Asia to the EU, now more than ever. As you all know the EU is the largest foreign Trade Partner (50% share in its total external trade and the largest investor in Kazakhstan 60%).

We all support the further improvement of the business and investment Climate in your Country which benefits European companies.

Under the Latvian presidency of the EU in the first semester of 2015, a new EU strategy for Kazakhstan and Central Asian Countries has been designed, emphasizing more on the different economic and social development of them.

About Kazakhstan, the Chair of the EP Delegation on Kazakhstan and the other Central Asian countries, Mrs. Iveta Grigule said that the Kazakhstan foreign policy is “very balanced” and that it is “realising the policy of multi-vector diplomacy very correctly, constructively and pragmatically”.

It is important that Kazakhstan is increasing its support to Afghanistan on improving security capabilities through training, promoting economic development and funding of the education of its brightest young people in Kazakhstan Universities.

Your initiative to host the Triennial Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions already for the 5<sup>th</sup> time in Astana is a significant contribution of Kazakhstan’s to promoting respect and understanding between religions.

Just last month, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and US Secretary of State John Kerry completed unprecedented bilateral tours of Central Asia – marking the first visit by a Japanese PM to Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan among others – and President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan met with PM David Cameron and President François Hollande to discuss trade agreements, accentuating the region’s growing importance to the traditional world powers.

In the past months, Kazakhstan’s capital, Astana, has played host to a major anti-extremism conference as well as talks with Syrian opposition representatives in an attempt to help resolving the conflict that is taking place in the Middle East. This follows from the important role that Astana played as mediator in bringing Iran to the negotiating table with the West concerning its own nuclear ambitions.

Kazakhstan has built a harmonious society where citizens of many different faiths and backgrounds live in peace and tolerance within the country, but also Kazakhstan, conscious of the fact that violent fanaticism is a growing threat within the region, recognises the importance of collective efforts to tackle extremism and its causes and is determined to play its full part in diminishing it. After the atrocious terrorism attacks in Paris, Tunis, Mali and other parts of the world it is absolutely indispensable that we all gather to fight Djihadism by all forms, i.e. by using military, political, economic and social measures. As former Austrian Foreign Minister I am very happy to see that Vienna and just this Hotel Imperial where we are staying tonight was host to the Conference on Syria several times trying to find a Diplomatic Solution to this very complex conflict.

The international community is grateful that you step up your efforts within your country and with your international partners to root out and counter terrorism.

Furthermore, in support of the UN Initiative “Sustainable Energy for all” an international EXPO on the theme “Future Energy” will be held in Astana on 2017.

From the fight against nuclear proliferation to the development of a stable Afghanistan in the post-war period, Central Asia is a vital ally to the West. In this age of mutual exchange and interconnection, no man is an island: it is essential that information should be shared by everyone for the benefit of all. In the words of one our most distinguished guests and a Member of the ECFA Advisory Council, Mr. Olzhas Suleimenov, “we always roam towards ourselves by recognizing ourselves in the other”<sup>8</sup>. This is why the work of the ECFA is so timely and necessary, and I hope that the next year will see as much work and progress as has been achieved by Zhanbolat Ussenov and his colleagues in the last year.

To report on these achievements, let me tell you this:

- To date, the ECFA has published eight Occasional Papers on subjects ranging from Eurasia’s evolving links with the EU to the region’s growing role in the War on Terror. These publications have been prepared by a team of doctoral thesis experts on Central Asia and we are very pleased with the quality, depth of research and insight demonstrated therein.

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<sup>8</sup>Olzhas Suleimenov, “*Green Desert – The Life and Poetry of Olzhas Suleimenov*”

- We have distributed in total over one million e-mails announcing our most recent Publications and events to a growing, high-level readership of key academic, political and media decision-makers throughout Europe and Central Asia.
- Our readership has grown significantly since last year's launch and we now circulate our material to a database of 64,000 readers each month. We are always actively seeking new areas of collaboration and funding as the organisation moves forward, and welcome contributions from everyone gathered here tonight.

I hope you enjoy the rest of this evening and continue your support for the Eurasian Council on Foreign Affairs.

Please visit our homepage on a regular basis, read our Publications, send us e-mails with your ideas for new research, meetings and events, and subscribe to the mailing list for news of further Papers and announcements. I am pleased to let you know that the ECFA is planning a series of seminars around Europe in the coming year, and we will of course meet for our Third Annual Meeting of the Advisory Council at the same time next year. I look forward to welcoming you all then too!

My Lord, Your Excellencies, Ladies, Gentlemen and distinguished guests.

As Abai, the great Kazakh poet wrote, "I call on young hearts to have high aspirations; I put humanity on top of all things."<sup>9</sup> Here in the City of Dreams, I believe that the ECFA will continue to go from strength to strength along with the region that it represents at the heart of the European Union. I am extremely proud and excited to be a part of it going forward.

*[Q & A Session]*

*[Vote of Thanks by The On. Sen. Antonio Martino]*

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<sup>9</sup><http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2004/05/200405281457371cjsamoht1.384914e-03.html?CP.rss=true#axzz3pm5M8aHW>