

H.E.
Dr. Benita FERRERO-WALDNER
Chair of the Eurasian Council on Foreign Affairs

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Dear Dr. Ferrero-Waldner,

It is a pleasure to follow-up on the letter of Austrian Foreign Minister Dr. Kneissl with regard to the substantive report that the Eurasian Council on Foreign Affairs intends to prepare on the topic of the new EU Strategy for Central Asia.

As indicated in the letter of Minister Dr. Kneissl we are indeed very pleased to share with you a few Austrian thoughts and ideas on the new EU Central Asia strategy as follows:

A new EU strategy for Central Asia is definitely a good opportunity for stock-taking and evaluation in the first place – and **a chance to generate fresh momentum for the EU-Central Asian partnership.**

Basically, we see four main purposes of the new strategy:

- To adapt the strategy to new geopolitical realities.
- To react to positive new developments in the region, in particular to the reform policy in Uzbekistan and to new opportunities for regional cooperation.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of current structures and tools for dialogue/cooperation.
- To refocus EU programs and activities.

We welcome the comprehensive consultation process initiated by the EU on the new CA strategy, in particular the close involvement of CA partners. It is our impression that CA partners, in particular Kazakhstan, have reacted to this open consultation process very positively and have provided very useful input. **CA ownership** as well as openness of individual CA countries to implement reform policies are of utmost importance for the new EU CA strategy.

Austria during its EU Presidency in the second half of 2018 intends to contribute to this consultation process by co-organizing together with the EEAS and EUSR Burian a workshop on the role of the private sector (18 September, Brussels). The workshop is expected to provide input and food for thought for the new EU strategy.

There appears to be a broad emerging consensus that the **new EU strategy needs to narrow its focus and set a few, clear priorities**. This is a recurrent message in most contributions and in most discussions and workshops held so far. Austria fully supports ideas to **concentrate EU priorities on two or three main clusters (for instance on sustainable economic development and on security & resilience)**.

Furthermore, EU cooperation and dialogue with Central Asia should in our view become more **result-oriented and needs-based**. This is also a point that CA partners keep raising. In general, it would be preferable to shift cooperation from a conference and dialogue-centred to a more practical and operational approach. The inclusion of some sort of road-map in the new strategy with concrete targets, timelines and possible deliverables would be desirable.

There are some areas of cooperation that we particularly advocate and which hopefully can be prioritized under the umbrella of the main clusters mentioned above:

- **Private sector development**, especially with respect to small and medium sized enterprises and women entrepreneurship, is an area where EU-CA cooperation could be enhanced, also in terms of job creation and strengthening productive capacities, but also in terms of economic governance and modernisation. CA partners have repeatedly highlighted their interest in private sector development.
- **Green economies**: projects and cooperation activities with a green economy focus deserve particular attention and priority. In particular, EU capacity building and technical assistance can make a difference, also when it comes to support in setting up the legal and institutional framework for sustainable economies.
- **Focus on youth and education**: Due to its immediate job relevance vocational education/training seems an important area of cooperation, ideally giving special attention to girls/women. The promotion of programs such as Erasmus plus is another useful element to foster people-to-people contacts and could contribute significantly to the positive image that the EU enjoys, particularly among the younger generation in CA. EU support for intraregional educational institutions such as the OSCE-Academy in Bishkek, which actively promote regional contacts and exchange, could be strengthened. In this context, efforts to counter Violent Extremism and Radicalization (VERLT) should be certainly kept on the radar screen and prioritized.
- **Support for regional cooperation** should figure prominently in the new strategy. Promoting connectivity, trade and economic links has considerable potential. Border management is a further important element in this regard. Prospects for regional programs have significantly improved. This paradigm change is an opportunity to increase attention and support both in the form of projects and political backing.

Finally, in light of the overall geostrategic context, the new strategy should emphasize that the **EU is not interested in any geopolitical games in the region** and that it is looking for synergies with other partners with a view to creating win-win solutions for Central Asia.

I very much hope that you find these few thoughts useful and look forward to your own recommendations and substantive report on the new EU-Central Asia strategy.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'K. Wieser', is centered below the text 'Yours sincerely,'.

Katharina Wieser
(Director for Eastern Europe, South Caucasus,
Central Asia, Eastern Partnership)