European Commission - Press release

17th EU-Central Asia Ministerial Meeting – Turning Challenges into Opportunities

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Today, High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell and Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta Urpilainen took part in the 17th EU-Central Asia Ministerial meeting, in Dushanbe (Tajikistan). The meeting was chaired by the High Representative Borrell and hosted by the Foreign Minister of Tajikistan, Sirojiddin Muhriddin, with the participation of the Foreign Ministers of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and the Deputy Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan.

In a joint press statement participants confirmed their commitment to strengthen EU-Central Asia cooperation to support a green and sustainable post-COVID-19 recovery and to work together to tackle some of the challenges emerging from developments in Afghanistan.

High Representative Borrell said: "The countries of Central Asia have made remarkable achievements since their independence 30 years ago. The EU has high stakes in seeing Central Asia develop as a more resilient, prosperous and more closely interconnected economic and political space. The EU and Central Asia share a strong commitment to intensify cooperation to build back better following COVID-19. We also want to step up joint efforts to manage some of the common challenges stemming from the situation in Afghanistan. The EU can make a strong contribution to the future of the region if Central Asian states show determination in their commitment to reform and democracy."

Commissioner Urpilainen added: "The partnership between the EU and Central Asia builds a joint path to a green, resilient, inclusive and sustainable post-COVID-19 recovery. We want to strengthen cooperation on climate, connectivity, trade and investment, energy, and security. And we will engage with civil society and the youth, to develop a closer partnership."

The Ministerial meeting took place just a few days after High Representative Borrell chaired the Foreign Affairs Council in the Development formation, with the participation of Commissioner Urpilainen, where they discussed challenges related to water and sustainable development in Central Asia.

During the Ministerial meeting, the EU informed of its priorities for regional cooperation, in line with the 2019 EU Strategy on Central Asia: promoting resilience, prosperity and regional cooperation. The meeting also provided the opportunity to exchange on the implementation of a number of EU-funded programmes, including the Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA) and the counter-terrorism project Law Enforcement in Central Asia (LEICA), as well as to propose new initiatives, including a new inter-regional dialogue on international labour standards. The EU and Central Asia look forward to organising in the course of 2022 a High-level Conference on Connectivity.

During their visit to Dushanbe, High Representative Borrell and Commissioner Urpilainen will also hold consultations with representatives of the Tajik government and civil society to promote closer cooperation and efforts to manage Afghanistan-related challenges, including the humanitarian situation, stability, security, radicalisation, terrorism, and illicit drugs trafficking. Following COP26 and in light of the vast hydro-power capacity of Tajikistan, the EU will also discuss ways to advance cooperation with the country and broader region on water, energy and climate.

Background

In 2019, the EU adopted a new Strategy on Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), which highlights the growing strategic relevance of the region for the EU. The EU has significant stakes in Central Asia, given the strategic geographical location and pivotal role of the region in Europe-Asia connectivity, its vast energy resources (Kazakhstan is the EU’s fourth supplier of crude oil), significant market potential (70 million inhabitants, 35% of whom are under the age of 15), and our interest in regional security and migration, in particular in the light of developments in Afghanistan.
For More Information

Factsheet on EU-Kazakhstan relations
Factsheet on EU-Tajikistan relations
Factsheet on EU-Uzbekistan relations
Factsheet on EU-Kyrgyz Republic relations
Factsheet on EU-Turkmenistan relations

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