

Concept note

Informal Economic Forum VTC

“EU-Central Asia Dialogue on Partnership for Prosperity”

7 December 2020, 09:00 (Brussels time)

- During the previous EU-Central Asia Ministerial meetings and also within consultations on the new EU Strategy on Central Asia, all the Central Asian countries have reiterated the necessity to establish another high level platform for interregional economic cooperation.
- In response to this call, and taking into account one of the main priorities of the EU Strategy on Central Asia, foreseeing the EU support for transformation of economies of the region, the EU welcomed the Kyrgyz initiative to hold the first EU-Central Asia Economic Forum this year in Bishkek.
- It was agreed that the Forum would not be a stand-alone event but rather launch a new platform for interregional dialogue between the EU and Central Asia on issues of strengthening interregional economic cooperation. It would mark the beginning of a results-oriented process leading to a better understanding of what it needs to create a sustainable business-enabling environment and to boost regional economic cooperation. The Forum would give special attention to promotion of innovative and sustainable approach to economic and business development, with a focus on greening the economy in all its aspects. Thus, the Forum would greatly contribute to the implementation of the EU Strategy on Central Asia, which focuses on further development of partnership for prosperity.
- The COVID-19 pandemic prevented organization of the Economic Forum this year, as planned. Therefore, it has been suggested to organize a VTC high level event involving high level representatives of the European Commission and Deputy Prime Ministers of Central Asian countries to launch a high level dialogue in preparation for the Economic Forum and to discuss opportunities for interregional cooperation in post-COVID-19 recovery. This idea has been welcomed and endorsed by the Central Asian partners also during the VTC discussion between the Central Asian Foreign Ministers and the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission on 12 June 2020.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has had a marked impact not only on health systems but also on national economies, businesses and jobs. The online event could provide an opportunity for discussion on the prospects the current crisis offers for pursuing more sustainable and diversified economic models within the framework of “Building Back Better”. In particular, it could be utilized for highlighting and discussing how key EU initiatives, in particular, the European Green Deal, EU’s supported UN-Partnership for Action on Green Economy (PAGE), the new ambitious Digital Agenda, and the overall EU post-COVID-19 Green recovery plan can benefit the EU-Central Asia partnership. As the EU, given its role of a global leader in transforming the economy for a sustainable future while leaving no one behind, is committed to transfer these engagements also to its external dimension.
- The discussion could also allow to look into detail, how the existing and future EU regional programs can be utilized for strengthening economic reforms, connectivity, digitalisation and legal convergence - conducive to improvement of business environment facilitating the inflow of investments, technologies, private sector development and managing of green transition in Central Asia in a sustainable manner.
- Moreover, the high level event could serve as a catalyst for strengthening intraregional cooperation and creating elements of a rules-based space in Central Asia. Presentation of national and regional initiatives of Central Asian partners could greatly contribute towards this goal.

Suggested Agenda

High Level discussion (approx. 1h 15min) to set steps and priorities in preparation for the first EU-Central Asia Economic Forum.

- **“Priorities for strengthening EU-Central Asia Partnership for Prosperity in the context of the post COVID-19 recovery – the way forward, modalities of future high level interregional economic dialogue”** (Presentation of the main EU initiatives and priorities of the EU programmes in support of economic reforms, innovative and sustainable approach to economic and business development, with a focus on greening the economy and the role of digitalisation and mobilisation of green finance for the post-COVID-19 recovery, competitiveness, connectivity (including digital), legal convergence and regional trade.)

Keynote speaker from the EU side: Executive VP of the European Commission Mr. Valdis Dombrovskis.

- **“Post Covid-19 recovery as an opportunity for moving to more sustainable economic models”**. (Presentation on the EU Strategic Foresight contribution to the implementation of the European Green Deal, i.e. Europe’s post-COVID-19 crisis recovery and growth strategy at the centre of the EU’s ambition for climate neutral and digital society and economy.)

Keynote speaker from the EU side: VP of the European Commission Mr. Maroš Šefčovič.

- Central Asian DPMS’ presentations and discussion of their perspectives on regional and national initiatives and opportunities for strengthening interregional and intraregional cooperation for sustainable post-Covid-19 recovery, including transitioning to competitive, sustainable and circular economy, with a focus towards the first EU-CA Economic Forum in 2021.

Senior officials/expert level discussion (3 hours) to initiate further and deeper exchange about cooperation within specific sectors to be addressed during the first Economic Forum - circular economy, green finance, digitalisation.

- **Session I: Moving to the green recovery agenda in regional economic development cooperation** - to discuss EU approaches and policies (European Green Deal, Team Europe), including circular economy/sustainable consumption and production, sustainable food systems as well as digitalisation issues.
 - interventions by DG Devco, DG Trade, DG Energy, other DGs on EU approaches and policies;
 - interventions by high level experts from Central Asian governments (deputy ministers, directors of departments, investment committees, etc.).
- **Session II: Digital Transformation as a driving force for economic development** - digitalisation as a tool for building back better (including education digitalisation, women entrepreneurship, role of SMEs, and potential risks of digitalisation).
 - interventions by the EU experts;
 - interventions by high level experts from Central Asian governments (deputy ministers, directors of departments, investment committees, etc.).
- **Session III: Priorities for sustainable and efficient business environment in Central Asia** - addressing challenges to promote sustainable and efficient/ rules-based business environment; share experience in implementing regional programs; share views, how those and other programs can be utilized towards a results-oriented Economic Forum; and also

address the existing needs and challenges in pursuing improvement of green/sustainable business environment and investment climate.

- intervention by OECD;
- interventions by EU partners, who implement regional programs;
- interventions by international financial institutions;
- interventions by experts on standardization/certification issues;
- interventions by experts on fight against corruption issues;
- interventions by private sector representatives;
- interventions by high level experts from Central Asian governments (deputy ministers, directors of departments, investment committees, etc.).

Conclusions: way forward to results-oriented EU-CA Economic Forum.

The Economic Forum next year will be informed by a series of roundtables dealing with concrete topics in more details, utilizing current regional programs (tbd).