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prev. doc.	11453/12
Subject :	Council conclusions on Central Asia

Delegations will find attached the conclusions on Central Asia as adopted by the Council (Foreign Affairs) on 25 June 2012.

Council conclusions on Central Asia

The Council approved a Progress Report on the implementation of the EU Strategy for Central Asia with an Implementation Review and outline for Future Orientations.

On the Fifth Anniversary of the adoption by the European Council of the EU Strategy for a New Partnership with Central Asia the Council welcomes the progress made in implementing the strategy and the strengthening of EU relations with Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The Strategy has proven itself and remains valid.

The EU has developed its diplomatic presence in the region while the number of high level visits has been increasing. The EU welcomes the interest of Central Asian countries to further deepen our partnership. The EU is ready to deepen our dialogue and to build on the progress achieved in implementing the goals set out in 2007.

All priority areas of the strategy remain important: human rights, rule of law, good governance and democratization; youth and education; economic development, trade and investment; energy and transport; environmental sustainability and water; combating common threats and challenges.

The early EU response and contribution to overcome the crisis in the Kyrgyz Republic in 2010, through political engagement and financial assistance, is one example of the even-handed role the EU can play in the region in order to ensure long term development, regional cooperation, stability and peace.

At the same time the region is facing increasing and new challenges, notably as regards developments in Afghanistan, and security issues have come to fore in relations with the EU. Central Asia and the EU share a common aim to promote a secure Afghanistan and a prosperous region as a whole. Close cooperation of Central Asian States with Afghanistan is an important element in promoting security as well as encouraging cross-border trade and people-to-people contacts. In order to enhance our ability to jointly tackle these challenges the EU is proposing a strengthening of co-operation in the security area, including through a regular High Level EU-Central Asia Security Dialogue, as part of the regional political dialogue.

Thanks to its reinforced presence in the region, the EU will be in position to assist partners and implement projects aiming at promoting long term security and stability.

While the Strategy remains valid there is scope for more targeted EU efforts in the framework of the priorities set out in the Strategy. Pursuing common interests and priorities in this strategic region should contribute to increasing the visibility and impact of EU actions and co-operation efforts and draw on the lessons learnt from implementing the Central Asia Strategy so far.

EU actions in relations with Central Asia over the coming years will focus in particular on:

- Reinforcing EU actions in the region in the key initiative areas of education, the rule of law, and environment and water, including through newly established support Platforms and targeted assistance.
- Enhancing support for the monitoring, promotion and protection of human rights, judicial independence, good governance, inter-community relations and civil society development. Continue to make the bilateral human rights dialogues more results-orientated taking into account best practices. Encourage democratic reforms and the development of national democratic reform agendas and support implementation by sharing EU experiences.

- Continuing to promote regional co-operation and to improve neighbourly relations in the region, including by support for confidence building measures as appropriate. Contributing to reduce possible tensions arising from disputes over the supply and use of water in the region.
- Consolidating energy cooperation, promoting diversification of energy supply and export routes and integration of energy markets. Concluding an agreement between the EU, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan featuring a legal framework for the Transcaspian Pipeline project as an important contribution to support the opening of a Southern Gas Corridor; in parallel mobilise private sector engagement for infrastructure realisation and promoting broader regional co-operation for Caspian basin development and further strengthen participation of Central Asia partners in the enhanced INOGATE programme, the Energy Charter Treaty and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative.
- Strengthening and consolidating EU support actions for regional cooperation in Afghanistan and its neighbourhood, in close coordination with Central Asian states and international actors, to promote security and development between Afghanistan and its neighbours and in the region generally.
- Strengthening dialogue and cooperation on security matters of common concern, in particular through the establishment of a regular EU-Central Asia High Level Security Dialogue in a regional format. Strengthening co-operation on counter-terrorism, including through support for the implementation of the Joint Plan of Action to implement the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia.
- Strengthening cooperation on border management, migration and asylum, combating organised crime, including drug and human trafficking.

- Encouraging Kazakhstan to make the necessary final steps for swift WTO accession; supporting Tajikistan in their efforts to achieve accession and work with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan to advance their accession negotiations and applications.
- Promoting economic diversification, inclusive growth and sustainable regional development policies addressing poverty reduction, business services and SME development; stepping up co-operation to strengthen our economic relations.
- Consolidating the network of EU Delegations in Central Asia by opening a Delegation in Turkmenistan as soon as possible; strengthening co-operation between EU Delegations and the embassies of EU Member States.

Through implementing the recommendations for action proposed by this review the EU aims to strengthen its political dialogue and co-operation with Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan bilaterally and regionally, to work on common security challenges over the coming years, and to give new impetus to political, trade and economic relations and reforms.

The EU is committed to continue to promote its policy objectives in Central Asia in co-operation with international actors and international and regional organisations active in the region, including international financial institutions.

The Council wishes to thank outgoing Pierre Morel for his outstanding work to develop and implement EU policies in favour of Central Asia during his six years as EU Special Representative.

The EU welcomed the appointment of Patricia Flor as the new EUSR for Central Asia.
