

**PARTNERSHIP  
BETWEEN  
THE EUROPEAN UNION  
AND UZBEKISTAN**

**The Cooperation Council**

**Brussels, 21 April 2023  
(OR. en)**

**UE-UZ 4502/23**

**DRAFT MINUTES**

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Subject: 16th meeting of the EU-UZBEKISTAN COOPERATION COUNCIL  
(Brussels, 16 November 2021)

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## SUMMARY

### Opening Statements

#### 1. Texts presented to the Cooperation Council:

- Agenda of the 16th EU-Uzbekistan Cooperation Council as set out in document UE-UZ 4502/21;
- Minutes of the 15th EU-Uzbekistan Cooperation Council held on 11 November 2019 as set out in document UE-UZ 4501/21;

#### 2. General and Political Matters (including the status of negotiations on the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, internal reforms, justice & home affairs, human rights and rule of law issues)

#### 3. Trade, economic and investment issues (including aspects related to Uzbekistan's GSP+ status, WTO accession, connectivity, and energy)

#### 4. Regional and international issues

#### 5. Any other business

### Closing remarks

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The Cooperation Council between the European Union and the Republic of Uzbekistan held its sixteenth meeting on 16 November 2021 in Brussels.

The meeting was chaired by H. E. Mr. H. E. Abdulaziz KAMILOV, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan.

The EU delegation was led by H. E. Mr. Augusto SANTOS SILVA, Minister of State and Foreign Affairs of Portugal.

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Mr. SANTOS SILVA opened the meeting and made the opening statement contained in Annex 3.

Mr. KAMILOV made the opening statement contained in Annex 4.

### **1. Texts presented to the Cooperation Council**

The Cooperation Council approved the agenda, as set out in document UE-UZ 4502/21, and the minutes of the 15th Cooperation Council, as contained in document UE-UZ 4501/21.

### **2. General and political matters (including the status of negotiations on the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, internal reforms, justice & home affairs, human rights and rule of law issues)**

Mr. KAMILOV introduced this item with the remarks contained in Annex 5.

Mr. SANTOS SILVA made additional remarks contained in Annex 6.

Mr. KAMILOV made the additional remarks contained in Annex 7.

Mr. SAIDOV made the additional remarks contained in Annex 8.

Mr. IKRAMOV made the additional remarks contained in Annex 9.

Mr. KAMILOV made the additional remarks contained in Annex 10.

### **3. Trade, economic and investment issues (including aspects related to Uzbekistan's GSP+ status, WTO accession, connectivity, and energy))**

Mr. DEVIGNE made remarks contained in Annex 11.

Ms. RINALDI made the additional remarks contained in Annex 12.

Mr. SCHULTZ made the additional remarks contained in Annex 13.

Mr. DEVIGNE made the additional remarks contained in Annex 14.

Mr. KAMILOV made the additional remarks contained in Annex 15.

Mr. KHAKIMOV made the additional remarks contained in Annex 16.

### **4. Regional and international issues**

*This agenda item was discussed in the restricted session.*

## **5. Any other business**

*There was no other business.*

## **Closing remarks**

Mr. KAMILOV made the closing remarks contained in Annex 17.

Mr. SANTOS SILVA made the closing remarks contained in Annex 18.

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**List of participants of the delegation of Uzbekistan**

1.	Mr. Abdulaziz KAMILOV	Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Head of Delegation, Co-chair of the Uzbekistan-EU Cooperation Council
2.	Mr. Akmal SAIDOV	Director of the National Center for Human Rights of the Republic of Uzbekistan / First Deputy Speaker of the Lower Chamber of Parliament (Oliy Majilis)
3.	Mr. Ismatulla IRGASHEV	Special Representative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan for Afghanistan
4.	Mr Muzraf IKRAMOV	Deputy Minister of Justice of the Republic of Uzbekistan
5.	Mr. Nodir GANIEV	Head of the Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan
6.	Mr Aslam AKBAROV	Head of Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan
7.	Mr. Otabek VALIEV	Assistant to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan
8.	Mr. Oybek SHAKHAVDINOV	Head of Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan
9.	Mr. Dilyor KHAKIMOV	Ambassador, Head of Mission, Mission of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the EU
10.	Mr. Ravshan MAMATOV	Minister-Counsellor, Mission of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the EU
11.	Mr. Maman ISMAILOV	Counsellor, Mission of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the EU
12.	Mr. Anvar MUMINOV	Counsellor, Mission of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the EU

**List of participants of the EU Delegation****Presidency of the Council:**

H. E. Augusto SANTOS SILVA	Minister for Foreign Affairs of Portugal
Madalena FISCHER	Ambassador, Directorate-General for Foreign Affairs, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Portugal

**European External Action Service:**

Luc DEVIGNE	Deputy Managing Director, EURCA
Charlotte ADRIAEN	Ambassador, Head of EU Delegation, Tashkent
Dietmar KRISSLER	Head of Division, Central Asia Division, EURCA
Chris KENDALL	Uzbekistan Desk, Central Asia Division

**EU Special Representative:**

Terhi HAKALA	EUSR for Central Asia
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**European Commission:**

Sarah RINALDI	Head of Unit - Middle East, Central Asia, DG INTPA
Arunas VINČIŪNAS	Policy Coordinator, DG TRADE
Luis SCHULTZ	International Relations Officer, DG ENER

**Council Secretariat:**

Assen INDJIEV	Political Administrator, DG RELEX, Unit 2A
Marco SOLAINI	Political Administrator, DG RELEX, Unit 1C



**OPENING REMARKS BY MR. SANTOS SILVA**

Good morning Minister and welcome to Brussels.

On behalf of the European Union, let me welcome you and your delegation to this Cooperation Council. Welcome also to colleagues from the European Union's institutions and from EU Member States. Their presence this evening bears witness to our commitment to EU-Uzbekistan relations. My colleague, the Foreign Minister of Slovenia, Mr Anže LOGAR, was to have co-chaired this meeting but unfortunately a medical emergency has prevented him from doing so. I am sure I speak for us all when I wish him a speedy recovery to full health. Let me also take the opportunity to wish you a very happy birthday, dear Minister. Many happy returns, and I extend this wish to another member of your delegation who I understand is also celebrating his birthday today, Mr Shakhavdinov. Happy birthday!

I am very happy that we have this opportunity to discuss relations between Uzbekistan and the EU. It is two years now since we last met in this format, and a lot has happened in the world in the interim. On behalf of the EU side, I apologise for the difficulties we have experienced in scheduling this physical meeting, but the circumstances have indeed been extraordinary. Nevertheless, the timing of today's meeting, coming so soon after your country's Presidential election, is fortuitous, and I look forward to hearing about the President's programme for his second term. We are keen to discuss the progress in Uzbekistan's ambitious reform programme since the last Cooperation Council, and to look ahead to its next phase.

Uzbekistan's important and welcome reforms are the backdrop to the growing warmth between the European Union and your country. This warmth was evident when Uzbekistan joined the EU's Generalised System of Preferences Plus, the GSP+, in April this year. It has been evident during the pandemic, when I am pleased to say that we were able to show strong solidarity with the people of Uzbekistan through concrete support measures, as well as through contributions of vaccines. Our plans for an Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between us also demonstrates that warmth. We have been able to make considerable progress in these negotiations since our last meeting, including through the pandemic, and I look forward to reviewing this progress with you over the course of our meeting today. If, as we hope, we are able to finalise the new EPCA in the

near future, this will be the foundation of an even stronger and deeper relationship between the European Union and Uzbekistan.

Let me briefly introduce the members of our delegation: Ambassador Madalena Fischer, the political Director from the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ambassador Charlotte Adriaen, the Head of the EU Delegation in Tashkent; and Deputy Managing Director Mr Luc Devigne, our chief negotiator for the EPCA, both of whom you know well. Ambassador Terhi Hakala, our EU Special Representative for Central Asia, is about to come. He will join us for the restricted session over lunch. Let me also present Mr Dietmar Krissler, who is Head of the Central Asia Division in the External Action Service; Ms Sarah Rinaldi, Head of Unit for Middle East and Central Asia in the Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships; and Mr Matteo Governatori, of the Commission's Directorate-General for Energy. Also in our delegation are Mr Arunas Vinciunas of the European Commission's DG TRADE; and Mr Assen Indjiev and Mr Marco Solaini from the General Secretariat of the Council.

And now I give you the floor, dear Minister. Thank you.

**OPENING REMARKS BY MR. KAMILOV**

I would like to welcome you on behalf of the Uzbek Delegation, the participants of the 16th meeting of the Cooperation Council Uzbekistan and EU and I would like to express my hope that our work is going to be fruitful and that we will have an open dialogue on all issues on the agenda. It is great that we are having this physical meeting in this difficult time. It is a great pleasure to meet my Colleagues, the representatives of the EEAS, the Council of EU and EU Commission

It will be great to discuss all the issues that are of common interest to us. The timeliness of our meeting is especially evident because there is the need to rebuild our economies in the near future. It is also topical because of the events happening in our region, specifically in Afghanistan.

Let me introduce the members of my Delegation, which is composed of Representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice and National Centre for Human Rights and Mission of Uzbekistan to the EU. Mr Saidov, First Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament, Director of the National Centre for Human Rights. Mr Ikramov, Deputy Minister of Justice. Mr Khakimov, Ambassador, Head of Uzbekistan's Mission to the EU. Mr Ganiev, Head of Department within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Mr Mamatov, Advisor to the Embassy. Mr Shakhavdinov, Head of Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Mr Ismailov, Advisor of Embassy in Brussels. Mr Makhmedov, Advisor of Embassy in Brussels.

Dear Colleagues, for Uzbekistan the European Union is one of the key international partners making a huge contribution to the promotion of universal values of democracy, rule of law, human rights, consolidation of peace, stability, and sustainable development. Since our previous meeting a lot has happened in the situation in our region and the international arena at large. In Uzbekistan, not long ago we had very important political events unfolding, I mean the presidential elections. We are going to discuss this later. In brief, I would like to say that a totally new agenda has been formed which is extremely busy, extremely rich. Mr Minister has already mentioned a number of events that lines too for us, including the planned visit of our President Mr Mirziyoyev to Brussels next year and the conclusion of our new version of the Agreement on Cooperation and Partnership in the enhanced format. I hope that these and other important issues will be thoroughly discussed over the course of our meeting. At lunch we will be prepared to exchange opinions on the current situation in the region and Afghanistan in particular.

**REMARKS BY MR. KAMILOV****(Item 2: General and Political Matters (including the status of negotiations on the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, internal reforms, justice & home affairs, human rights and rule of law issues))**

As you know, on the 25th of October, we had presidential elections in my country. The voters, local and international observers, and journalists, who took part in the elections, pointed out many times that the elections were held in complete compliance to national law, international criteria and standards as well as universally recognized democratic principles of openness, transparency, freedom and justice. About 1000 observers followed the elections, representing around 20 international organisations including ODIHR, the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE, the European Parliament, the Interparliamentary Assembly of the CIS, the Council of the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic-Language Countries as well as 50 foreign countries. Such a wide scale participation of foreign observers and mass media was organised for the first time in the history of elections in Uzbekistan.

I would like to point out specifically, that for the first time the European Union sent an official delegation of the European Parliament to observe the elections. This testifies to the consolidation and strengthening friendship of mutual trust between Uzbekistan and the European Union in recent years.

Now, we are going through a very important phase of our development, we are modernizing the country, we are ensuring rule of law and human rights, we are establishing a new democratic image of Uzbekistan, we are pursuing pragmatic and active international policy. Our cooperation with foreign countries and international organizations is growing. I would like to share with you the vision of further cooperation between the EU and Uzbekistan. 27 Years ago, diplomatic relations were established between Uzbekistan and the European Union. It happened on the 16th of November 1994. I would like to congratulate everyone here with this important milestone. Over the past several years, our relations with the EU have become comprehensive and acquired a nature of open and constructive dialogue. I would like to confirm the mutual interest of both parties to further intensifying the cooperation. We had telephone conversations between the President of Uzbekistan, Mr. Mirziyoyev, and the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, in April 2020. Mr. Borrell also visited Tashkent to participate in the International Conference for Connectivity in Central and South Asia. Next week we are going to have another very important meeting - EU

Central Asia - that will take place in Dushanbe and we do hope that we will see Mr. Borrell once again in Central Asia and exchange opinions on a whole range of issues on our mutual agenda.

With regard to the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement we do not have practically any outstanding issues that would not be resolved by now with regard to political cooperation. Issues with trade and economic cooperation will perhaps be further discussed and we will do our utmost to make sure that in the near future we will complete the work on this draft and this draft agreement will be ready to be signed in the course of the presidential visit next year - the visit of our President to Brussels.

Structural dialogue is an important mechanism for our cooperation. In the recent period we had meetings of the Committee for Cooperation on Security, Internal Affairs, Human Rights and many other institutions. We would like to continue our efforts aimed at establishing favourable conditions for the development of trade and investments as was the case with regard to granting Uzbekistan the status of a GSP+ party. Our cooperation is particularly important taking into account our experience in interacting in the field of tourism in particular. We hope that in the future this will also become a topical and important part of our cooperation and for this we have all the necessary preconditions in place.

**REMARKS BY MR. SANTOS SILVA****(Item 2: General and Political Matters (including the status of negotiations on the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, internal reforms, justice & home affairs, human rights and rule of law issues))**

Thank you very much for your detailed contribution to this discussion on general and political matters. As you know we very much welcome your government's ambitious reform agenda, and we wish you every success in achieving this agenda. I particularly wish to underline the importance of the rule of law, the business climate, protection of the environment, governance, civil society, and human rights issues in this context.

Despite the disruption caused by the pandemic, we have been able to maintain our regular rhythm of meetings over the past year. Our Cooperation Committee met virtually this year. We have also held two meetings of the Sub-committee on Justice and Home Affairs, Human Rights and Related Issues; two meetings of the Sub-committee on Development Cooperation, and one meeting of the Sub-committee on Economy, Trade, and Investment Relations.

We were also able to maintain our high level contacts, including through several regional events. We held our EU-Central Asia Ministerial meeting online in November last year. We also held two High Level Political and Security Dialogue meetings, one virtually in April and another physically which you hosted in Tashkent last July. Let me also mention in this context the very successful Regional Connectivity Conference which you hosted in Tashkent also in July, which the HRVP was able to attend and which allowed him to hold valuable bilateral discussions with you, Minister, and with your President. Then let me also mention the EU-Central Asia Economic Forum, in the margins of which the Commission's Executive Vice-President Dombrovskis held a meeting with your Prime Minister.

Our last Cooperation Council, in 2019, was held just before the new College of European Commissioners took office, led by President Ursula von der Leyen and Josep Borrell as High Representative. A top political priority of this College is to deliver the European Green Deal, which has as its overarching objective the aim of making Europe the first climate neutral continent by 2050. While the pandemic has disrupted business as usual, in fact there is a lot of synergy between the European Green Deal and the EU's pandemic response. I believe we share a vision of building back from this pandemic in a greener, more sustainable way.

The economic recovery is underway in the EU and its start has been stronger than anticipated. Thanks to an improving health situation and vaccination progress - still, we have some problems, economic growth has resumed more forcefully than expected. The reopening is continuing to support growth, especially in services sectors and tourism.

The recovery is set to be uneven across our Member States, as were the output losses last year. This reflects several factors including differences in the structure of each economy, particularly the relative importance of tourism from abroad.

The green and digital transitions form the core of the EU recovery strategy, and we believe successfully achieving these changes is key to Europe's future prosperity.

The Green transition means transforming the Union into a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy. The EU's commitment to carbon neutrality by 2050 underpins our confidence in this approach.

The pandemic has shown us the importance of global cooperation and solidarity. Accelerating vaccination campaigns everywhere is the key to unlocking a sustainable global recovery and we are committed to that. To this end, we need to ensure early access to vaccines, diagnostics and treatments. The EU is fully playing its part and we have been leading the multilateral response.

In this regard, we invite Uzbekistan to support our call for an international treaty on pandemic preparedness and response in view of the Special Session of the World Health Assembly to be held in a couple of weeks, we think we can win support for the establishment of a negotiation process to lead to such a treaty. We think that this treaty is very important and expect Uzbekistan to support this effort.

On the other side, "Team Europe" is a leading contributor with over €3 billion for the COVAX Facility. So far, over 388 million doses have been delivered by COVAX to 144 countries. This is a great collective achievement.

In total, we will secure 500 million doses for sharing by Team Europe by the middle of 2022, including 2.2 million doses for Uzbekistan.

So far, we have shared nearly 900,000 vaccine doses with Uzbekistan, provided by France, Germany and Poland. And Europe stands ready to provide further assistance to Uzbekistan in overcoming the pandemic.

We would be interested in your views on how the pandemic has impacted Uzbekistan, including in the areas of governance, civil liberties, human rights, the economic situation, and social vulnerabilities, in particular for women and girls. This can help us to adjust our policies to address the most critical needs and risk factors.

We read with interest Ambassador Adriaen's report on the speech given by President Mirziyoyev at his inauguration. We very much welcome the strong commitment which the President made to the irreversibility of these reforms, to democratisation, and to delivering an open market-based economy. You yourself also very importantly underlined these commitments in your introductory remarks to this meeting.

We were happy that you invited the OSCE to deploy a full ODIHR mission to observe the presidential election last month, and that you extended, for the first time, this invitation also to the European Parliament. We were also grateful for the warm welcome given to the election observers and for the good cooperation which they were shown.

The preliminary findings of the observers were that there was a lack of meaningful competition in this election, and that independent candidates were excluded which was contrary to international standards and OSCE commitments. Observers also noted procedural regularities on election day itself.

While the election result undoubtedly represents a strong public endorsement of the President's reforms, the irregularities which were observed could give potential critics an opportunity to challenge this mandate. For this reason, while we strongly support the reforms, we believe that it remains essential to follow ODIHR's recommendations, including as regards the freedom of the media, embracing substantial pluralist democratic discourse, and opening up party registrations, with a view to establishing the full democratic legitimacy of these reforms. So allow me to ask you, how does Uzbekistan plan to address the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations?

Now that Uzbekistan will enter a new phase of structural transformation, after October's presidential elections, it is essential that you stay on the path of reform, notwithstanding the special circumstances brought about by the pandemic and the situation in Afghanistan which we will address in our restricted session later.



We have the impression that the rhythm of reforms in Uzbekistan has decreased, perhaps due to reform fatigue. We hope that the President's re-election will give a new dynamic to continue moving in the reform path.

Uzbekistan has witnessed major changes in the past five years, but some reforms are still needed in key areas, such as the rule of law, good governance and fight against corruption. Other sectors, like public administration, justice, the economy, social affairs, and security matters may also deserve further attention and modernisation.

The EU acknowledges that reforming a country is a long process and is ready to support Uzbekistan in this process. The EU's priority areas for cooperation with Uzbekistan, for the next programming period (2021-2027), will be support to democratic governance and digital transformation; inclusive, digital, and green growth; and the development of a smart and eco-friendly agri-food sector. The total budget for the first 4 years of the programming period will be 76 million euros.

We have heard of your plan to create a friendlier legal environment for civil society, in particular as far as the registration process is concerned. In his inauguration speech, President Mirziyoyev announced his firm intention to continue democratic reforms, including to establish the conditions "for a free functioning of the civil society". So, let me ask you if you can please update us on the status and content of the new NGO Code? We look forward to its speedy introduction and we count on it fully reflecting Uzbekistan's international commitments, especially as regards freedom of expression and registration of CSOs.

Allow me now to encourage you to adhere to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, as well as the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. And it will not come as a surprise to you when I share our hope that Uzbekistan will adhere also to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

We very much welcome the ratification by your country of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on 18 May. It was a very important step from you. We also witness with pleasure that you are taking this ratification seriously and have already organised a number of events and taken some concrete measures to implement the Convention. Thank you for that.

The EU has supported Uzbekistan's application to the UN Human Rights Council and we are happy to work hand in hand with you in international fora. Uzbekistan's membership is a great opportunity

and responsibility for your country to actively contribute to the improvement of Human Rights in the world. We appreciate the constructive cooperation between our both teams in Geneva.

We also welcome your close cooperation with the OSCE in all its three dimensions. We encourage you to continue to cooperate actively with the OSCE Project Coordinator in Tashkent, in particular during this pandemic and in the context of current developments in Afghanistan, which we will discuss later.

The establishment of a National Preventive Mechanism for monitoring places of detention is a very positive step. It is critical to fight against Torture and is in line with President Mirziyoyev's determination to eradicate torture. To be fully operational, a National Preventive Mechanism should be well funded and well-staffed. We would also like to encourage you to continue close cooperation with independent Civil Society organisations in the work of the Mechanism.

President Mirziyoyev announced, in his speech at the UN Human Right Council that Uzbekistan intends to ratify soon OPCAT and, to this hand, to invite the UN Rapporteur Against Torture. So please allow me to ask you if you can you please update us on the state of play of this invitation?

I would also like to call for a renewed commitment to non-discrimination including on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, notably by the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The adoption by Uzbekistan of a Gender equality strategy is a welcomed step to foster women and girls empowerment in all spheres. The EU appreciates that decision of you and is ready to support you in its implementation.

We have seen worrying reports on increasing gender-based violence during the pandemic. The trend is unfortunately similar in Europe and this challenge should be taken very seriously.

Gender equality will be a core part of our new programming for the next seven years, as women's and girls' empowerment is critical for any society to develop and thrive.

We acknowledge that, over recent years, Uzbekistan has shown commitment and taken significant steps to improve its labour standards.

We commend in particular the elimination of systematic and systemic child labour, confirmed by the latest ILO Third Party Monitoring of the 2020 cotton harvest (released in January 2021). And we hope that this year's report will confirm this trend.

We recall that the EU is committed to a zero-tolerance policy on child labour, both internally and with partner countries. The UN Sustainable Development Goals aim to end child labour in all its forms by 2025, and we encourage Uzbekistan to continue working towards the full eradication of child labour with a view to meeting the target.

We commend the efforts made by Uzbekistan to prevent and tackle forced labour during the 2020 cotton harvest, which led to a further decline of forced labour cases as compared to the previous harvest.

We note, however, that the results of the ILO Third Party Monitoring of the 2020 cotton harvest still show that a significant number of pickers – 4% – were subject to direct or perceived forms of coercion. According to the Third Party Monitoring Report, forced labour cases continued to occur also outside the cotton harvest.

We want to stress the need for Uzbekistan to sustain and pursue its efforts to fully eradicate forced labour.

Finally, let me turn to the state of play of our EPCA negotiations. You have also referred to that so I can be very brief. We will discuss the trade part of these negotiations under our next agenda item. I am very happy to note that all other parts of the agreement have now been finalised. Let me stress how important it is to bring these negotiations home after three years. We know that the world is watching. We are close, as you have mentioned there is no real issue separating us, so I think we can be happy with that.

Thank you very much, Minister. I hand the floor back to you in case you would like to respond to any of the points I have raised.

**REMARKS BY MR. KAMILOV****(Item 2: General and Political Matters (including the status of negotiations on the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, internal reforms, justice & home affairs, human rights and rule of law issues))**

Thank you, Minister. I just wanted to note that we are deeply grateful to the EU, the European countries, for the great assistance that is provided to Uzbekistan in overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic. The vaccines, the medicines, consultative assistance and many other ways you are helping us. Thank you once again on behalf of the government to the entire EU.

In your speech you raised a number of issues regarding our human dimension cooperation. You talked about our reforms and democratic transformation of Uzbekistan. You talked about our efforts to human rights protection, developing civil society and on all these matters I would like a Colleague to talk about. He can also answer other points you have raised. So I would like to ask our Colleague the Head of Human Rights Centre, Mr. Saidov, to speak. And then the Deputy Minister of Justice will talk about matters of Justice, Internal Affairs and Rule of Law.

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**REMARKS BY MR. SAIDOV****(Item 2: General and Political Matters (including the status of negotiations on the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, internal reforms, justice & home affairs, human rights and rule of law issues))**

Your Excellences, Ministers, Colleagues, it is very nice to see some familiar faces. I would also like to congratulate us all with the 27th anniversary. In fact, 25 years ago in 1996, the Declaration on Tolerance was adopted and Uzbekistan is showing an example of tolerance towards ethnic minorities and towards representatives of different religious confessions. Over 130 ethnic groups live in Uzbekistan and 16 religious confessions.

I would like to thank our European colleagues with two events. First of all, in 2020, members of the EU supported our nomination during elections for the UN human rights council. I agree with you, I think that was a very obvious support to our reforms in the sphere of human rights but it is also a huge responsibility to us. This year, upon our initiative on the last human rights session of the UN General Assembly a resolution was adopted on protecting the rights of the youth during the pandemic. And all the representatives of European countries supported this initiative of Uzbekistan. For this again, I thank you.

I would also like to thank you for your active participation in the latest presidential elections. A few numbers - Charlotte Adriaen watched the elections with her team. 15 European Parliament MPs were watching and also 50 observers from European Union countries. So overall the delegation of the EU observing our elections was over a hundred strong. That is the first in our history. You were right in saying that this time officially, the European Parliament sent their observers to our elections and we thank them sincerely for that.

You raised a number of matters. First of all, what is the strategic direction of our President elect Mirziyoyev. Now, the slogan is as follows: "From action strategy to the strategy of developing a new Uzbekistan". We used to have five priorities, now we have seven. The first priority is to develop our civil society. This is our overarching priority. Our second priority is to ensure fairness and rule of law. Our third priority is to develop our economy. Our fourth priority is to undertake fair and equitable social policy. The fifth priority is to develop our spiritual and moral and ethical basis. And finally, ensuring safety, security and undertaking active and pragmatic active foreign policy.

These are the main priorities of the new Uzbekistan in the new environment. I agree with you, we have entered a new stage of Uzbekistan's development and there will be no deviations from our strategic line to democratisation. Democratic reforms in Uzbekistan are now irreversible in their nature. Now, I will just follow the logic of your speech and echo some of the things you said.

In terms of the observation of our elections, out of three European organisations, the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE, ODIHR and the EU, 390 foreign observers were there. This is a historic first. Altogether there were about a thousand observers.

What is our attitude to ODIHR recommendations? Of course, we will look at them very very carefully. We have already talked to the Director, Mr Matteo Mecacci and we said that when a final draft of the report is ready we shall undertake a joint presentation of ODIHRs recommendations. I underline the word joint. We shall follow all the recommendations that echo our national interest very closely. I have to say, and I will always openly say, that some recommendations are unacceptable to us. At the same time, we shall work constructively and closely with ODIHR on elections and on other human dimension aspects.

I am absolutely convinced that the reforms will not slacken. In his inauguration speech, the President said that human rights is not a stop on a way. Not a single country in the world has ensured human rights absolutely and in full. It is a process and we will work along this way. I do not feel any fatigue from reforms and our nation has demonstrated its will by voting during the elections. They demonstrated that they fully support the reforms undertaken under the leadership of president Mirziyoyev. Civil Society and the new code will be talked about by Mr Ikramov.

In terms of the Convention against Torture, this is one of the main thrusts of our human rights activity. We want to ratify the voluntary protocols to the Convention against Torture. We have introduced a national preventive mechanism, we have ratified the Convention of the Rights of People Living with Disabilities and, during the presidential election, every and all necessary conditions for people living with disability were created. Ramps, voting documentation etc. And all the observers have noted this. We will continue working with OSCE countries in ODIHR structures

In terms of inviting the Special Rapporteur on Torture, there was an agreement now. The Special Rapporteur on Torture will visit Uzbekistan in April next year. But I also wanted to mention that towards the end of November, early December, Uzbekistan will be visited by another UN Special Rapporteur on Terrorism and Human Rights. She will spend ten days in Uzbekistan and we are

working on the programme already. So we will cooperate with all Special Rapporteurs and mechanisms available to us.

In terms of our gender policy, that is another priority. We have adopted a National Strategy on Gender Policy and created a National Commission on Gender headed by the chairman of the senate, of our parliament. So again, we stand ready to cooperate very closely with our European partners.

In terms of how we are coping with the pandemic. Last year, at the very height of the pandemic, we have consulted with all the diplomatic representatives of the UN, EU, OSCE. We visited various locations and held a major forum on "Human Rights Protection and Conditions of the Pandemic" and we published a book in three languages "The Pandemic and Human Rights". Uzbekistan has learned to live and work during the pandemic.

In terms of child labour, yes, there are huge changes. You can ask us why did you hold your elections in October and not in December. Five years ago, at this time of year, everybody, the children, the doctors and the teachers, were in the cotton fields. But this year, all the observers noted that it was different. We had a principle of clusters and each farmer is harvesting himself. In the past, six or seven million of our citizens participated in our cotton harvesting campaigns every year. We are aiming at zero tolerance of child labour. We shall work to get rid of forced labour and you can be sure that we will not give up and move forward to these targets.

The same can be said about positive shifts in combatting people trafficking and corruption. A National Council on Corruption Prevention is being set up, a special agency was also set up, a UN agency was ratified, a law was adopted. But, unfortunately, we have not yet been able to get rid of the corruption mentality of many officials. We are undertaking a reform in construction and state procurement and in many other spheres where we are trying to rid ourselves of corruption in our economy.

We are also combatting the phenomenon of statelessness. We supported the Secretary Generals initiative on combatting statelessness. Our President talked to the Parliament twice. First, he said that 50'000 people had the opportunity to apply for citizenship. The next year he said 20'000. Now today over 56'000 people have achieved citizenship. They had spent over 15 years in Uzbekistan. Of them 22'000 for the first time participated in presidential elections.

Another matter, once we have joined GSP+, we have started to undertake a monitoring effort how we implement 27 UN Conventions on human rights including ILO conventions. In the last two

years we ratified 6 ILO Convention recommendations on labour rights and relations and will carry on working on these aspects. We are always ready and willing to participate in close cooperation with our European colleagues and here I wanted to draw on two matters. Deputy Minister of Justice will talk about this. Thank you.

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**REMARK BY MR. IKRAMOV****(Item 2: General and Political Matters (including the status of negotiations on the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, internal reforms, justice & home affairs, human rights and rule of law issues))**

Dear Minister, dear participants of the meeting, in addition to what was said before, I would like to point out that at present in Uzbekistan we are carrying out systemic work aimed at supporting civil society institutions. We are working on strengthening their role in the society and in this regard I can give you the following data. Since 2018, in the Ministry of Justice, we have been working with NGOs, we have been registering their articles of association, we are overseeing their activities and the data shows that in 2018 we had 9'860 NGOs registered, while in 2020 we had 10'502 NGOs registered. So we have seen a rather significant growth in the number of NGOs in Uzbekistan.

With regard to our progress in this field I would like to point out that the year 2021 has become a very significant year in terms of adopting new legislation. In March this year, we saw two important Presidential Decrees on the support of NGOs. We adopted a law on the freedom of consciousness, the freedom of religious organisations. In March this year, we approved an important strategy paper for the development of civil society until 2025. In particular, we have introduced certain criteria or parameters geared towards significantly improving the volume of state support. In 2019 we allocated about 30 Billion, in 2020 we are going to allocate around 40 Billion, and in 2021 our plan is to allocate about 90 Billion Soms from the state budget for the support of NGOs and civil society institutions. This is just one area of our work.

In terms of enhancing the role of civil society institutions, here I would like to draw your attention to the fact that our government has been giving special preferences and through the same decree we significantly decreased various obstacles such as reregistration of NGOs. Now all these reregistration processes take two weeks rather than one month as was the case before. NGOs dealing with people with disabilities have been freed from any government duties and charges. Through the same decree we introduced the post of the Special Representative of NGOs in the lower house of the Parliament. This official is charged with providing consultancy to the Parliament in terms of legislation in this field.

You also mentioned the preparation of our code in this field. We have established a large scale working group, which includes representatives of state bodies as well as almost 20 officials, members of non-state NGOs. We are now studying the international experience and are trying to streamline our legislation and law enforcement practices. We are currently continuing our work on this code of NGOs. We are discussing it chapter by chapter, section by section, and we do hope that in the beginning of this year we will be able to approach the stage of finalisation of this code. We will start the discussion document and in this regard it would be great if we could hear your proposals and your advice.

Not long ago we also adopted a law on the freedom of consciousness and freedom of religious organisations. We also provided significant preferences, we decreased the number of documents that need to be submitted when registering such organisations. We have removed the process for obtaining a permit for an assembly of citizens. Before, if you wanted to create a religious organisation you had to have 100 people, now we have decreased this number of people to 50. In this area the work is in full swing. Thank you for your attention.

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**REMARK BY MR. KAMILOV**

**(Item 2: General and Political Matters (including the status of negotiations on the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, internal reforms, justice & home affairs, human rights and rule of law issues))**

Dear Minister, dear colleagues, we are fully aware of the fact that in recent years a lot of progress has been achieved in terms of building democratic institutions in the Uzbek society, in protecting human rights, in establishing a civil society, providing safeguards and guarantees of religious freedoms. All of this has been recognised by the international community.

But at the same time, we do understand and we do agree with you Mr. Minister and your colleagues from the European Union, that there is a lot of room for improvement. A lot still needs to be done. And here we are prepared to cooperate with you very closely on the basis of the principles of transparency, mutual respect and recognition of mutual interest. Of course this topic is extremely ambitious and large scale. We could continue this discussion and we will probably continue this exchange in a working mode. This probably concludes the exchange of our opinions on this item of the agenda and I would like to take up item three on the agenda: Trade, Economic and Investment Issues.

In accordance with the agenda I am giving the floor to the European side for introducing this item on the agenda.

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**REMARK BY MR. DEVIGNE****(Item 3: Trade, economic and investment issues (including aspects related to Uzbekistan's GSP+ status, WTO accession, connectivity and energy))**

Trade and economic relations between the EU and Uzbekistan are continuing on a positive trend in line with Uzbekistan's political opening. During the period between 2017 to 2020, our trade volume has increased by over 61% which is significant. All this was discussed in detail during our Sub-Committee on Economic and Trade Relations, but I wanted to underline as there are not so many countries with whom despite the pandemic we had positive economic dynamics.

The trade relations are depending on basically three items that we can discuss. First, the evolution of our bilateral negotiations. Secondly, the evolution of your multilateral negotiation to join the WTO and thirdly, the unilateral scheme GSP+. We see these three elements as part of a whole and mutually reinforcing themselves and even if our bilateral agreement that we are negotiating is not of a preferential nature and will not change the tariffs, nevertheless we believe very much that it should go beyond what we call WTO+ because of course by definition we do not make bilateral agreements to merely copy paste what is the lowest common denominator amongst all the members of the WTO. Particularly, because in terms of market access we have unilaterally opened the EU market by granting Uzbekistan GSP+ and we are not asking the reciprocity in terms of market access - but we are asking other things.

We have invested a lot into these negotiations. We have had nine rounds, which is quite significant and I hope following the discussions in July between Executive Vice-President Dombrovskis and Deputy Prime Minister Umurzakov that we will be able to solve, possibly in the margins of the ministerial meeting in Geneva where both Ministers will be present, the remaining issue.

I think I can focus on four items. The two clearly most important ones being the export duty and public procurement market. And then two other issues: the state owned enterprises and the competition chapter and the services investment. It is important to keep in mind, because this is an preferential agreement, because we have unilaterally granted market access to the EU through the GSP+ scheme, we do need to have arguments to show also to our member states, the population and the European Parliament, that this agreement will improve trading conditions between the two. There is no contradiction between saying that it does have added value and it is not preferential.

On the WTO accession we have also devoted substantial resources and financial support to support you. We certainly welcome the commitment which has been shown by Uzbekistan in this process as well as to the information provided to our questions. We think that bilaterally we need to have an improved market access for goods and services by Uzbekistan. But we will be ready to engage bilaterally on this basis and also in December at the WTO multilateral working party.

One word on GSP+ which entered into force in April this year. Again, we congratulate Uzbekistan for this successful outcome. We do realize that there were significant efforts made to reach that success. Of course, unsurprisingly considering the past history that many members of the delegation know well, there was a very vivid interest in the European Parliament and in the Member States for this GSP+ application, particularly in relation to the issue of human rights. It is of course important to continue demonstrating the clear commitment and further progress on these issues covered by the 27 international conventions needed to benefit from GSP+. GSP+ is a relationship of trust and long term trust between the EU and Uzbekistan. It is the trust by the EU that Uzbekistan will continue its reforms, a policy of sustainable development as well as to strengthen our relations. As you know GSP+ includes a monitoring process, we have already integrated Uzbekistan into our monitoring process. We are hoping to have a monitoring visit in 2022 and we will continue to pay particular attention to a number of ongoing legislative reviews. Particularly those relevant to human rights and labour rights and I am thinking of the draft labour code, the NGO code, the law on rallies and demonstrations and the criminal code. All of these of course, should be fully aligned with your international commitments that are referred to in GSP+.

Finally, I want to inform you that we are in the process of reviewing this GSP+ scheme. There are discussions in the Parliament and with our member states on the base of a proposal which the Commission adopted on 22nd September this year. The main difference will be that we will add six conventions to the existing 27. There will be a transitional period mechanism. I think that Uzbekistan is for the time being in a good position for meeting these requirements because it has already ratified these six additional conventions. And in any case we will be ready to help you.

One last word on the general, if you want, business climate and our trade investment relations, which we discussed on our Cooperation Committee in February. And thank you for the opportunity to also raise several particular cases. But in general we have raised concerns on increase of customs duties, import duties, that Uzbekistan introduced in 2020 and we asked that Uzbekistan consider revising certain products in this regard. We also raised certain concerns on the proposed Uzbek procurement legislation. Unfortunately, these concerns were not taken into account and last but not

least, in terms of business climate, you know we have raised the particular case of the EU largest single investor in your country, European chemical company Maxam. This has been discussed between Executive Vice-President Dombrovskis and Deputy Prime Minister Umurzakov. To the best of our knowledge, the matter was not yet solved despite some commitments made by Prime Minister Aripov in September, so we hope that this will be followed.

Thank you Minister.

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**REMARK BY MS. RINALDI****(Item 3: Trade, economic and investment issues (including aspects related to Uzbekistan's GSP+ status, WTO accession, connectivity and energy))**

First of all, thank you very much, Minister, for the warm welcome two weeks ago in Tashkent at the occasion of the 4th meeting of the EU-Uzbekistan Sub-Committee on Development Cooperation. Together with Deputy Minister Vafaev, we discussed the current and future priorities of the Government of Uzbekistan to ensure that EU support be well targeted and used to its best.

Regarding our ongoing cooperation I think we can say that the previous cooperation programme can be considered as a success. Let me reiterate some already well known figures. Our support has considerably exceeded the EUR 168 million allocated for the period 2014-2020 thanks to the use of funds from the Investment Facility for Central Asia (IFCA) for blending operations.

With EUR 33 million of EU grants, we leveraged a total of EUR 963 million to fund crucial investments for environmental sustainability and energy efficiency.

Together with EU Member States in a Team Europe approach we also mobilised EUR 36 million to support Uzbekistan address the COVID-19 pandemic and to mitigate its socio-economic consequences.

In addition, we have been working with the World Health Organisation to support the vaccination process and resilient vaccination systems in Central Asia in addition to EUs contributions to COVAX. We are glad that Uzbekistan is progressing with the vaccination.

Over and above our bilateral cooperation, which has focused on rural development, including through budget support, we have supported ambitious investments in the areas of water, environment and sustainable energy through our regional cooperation.

We are also the leading donor to the UN Multi-Partner Human Security Trust Fund for the Aral Sea region. We are keen to see tangible impacts from the projects under implementation and would like to hear your views on these green investments.

We appreciate your active engagement in regional programmes, including those on border management, drug prevention, rule of law, and education through ERASMUS+, and we welcome Uzbekistan's participation in the programme providing education to Afghan women in Kazakhstan

and Uzbekistan. In this respect, thank you for your efforts to provide solutions for the Afghan female students who are now studying in Tashkent.

Building on the results achieved through our existing cooperation and on the lessons learned during the pandemic, we will propose for our future cooperation green and digital solutions to build back better, in a Team Europe approach with our EU member states and leveraging funds from the private sector.

Following consultations with your government and civil society, the private sector, and other development partners, the new phase of our bilateral cooperation will focus on three priority areas:

1. Effective governance and digital transformation; 2. Inclusive, digital and green growth; 3. Development of a smart, eco-friendly agri-food sector.

The digital transformation presents immense opportunities, but also challenges – the worsening of existing inequalities, the creation of an environment conducive for control and manipulation, and cybersecurity risks – which we are ready to help address with our cooperation programme. How does your government perceive these challenges?

We are aware of Central Asia's vulnerability to climate change, highlighted by the major drought the region is facing. As part of our bilateral cooperation, we are putting forward a Team Europe Initiative on supporting modern and sustainable agri-food sector and resilient livelihoods. It will involve France, Germany, the European Investment Bank, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

Just as in the past, Uzbekistan will also benefit from the regional programme which will strongly reflect the EU Strategy for Central Asia and will complement the bilateral programmes. The two initial actions under the regional programme, to be adopted before the end of this year, will support recovery from the pandemic across the region, the first with the WHO by providing support to effective vaccination processes and resilient immunisation systems, and the second with the European Training Foundation through enhancement of technical and vocational education systems in support of youth employment and economic diversification.

Again, we wish that our bilateral and regional support should also leverage direct investment through the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+), continuing the blending of grants and loans, and using for the first time an External Action Guarantee system.

In addition, Uzbekistan will continue to benefit from Erasmus+ to equip the next generation to successfully meet future challenges of globalisation.



Finally, I would like to reiterate what was discussed yesterday with Commissioner Urpilainen regarding your request for further support to the Training Centre for Afghan in Termez. Following our visit on the spot two weeks ago, we are indeed looking at it positively and exploring solutions to contribute to its financing, and to support vocational training of many more Afghan students in this training centre.

Thank you.

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**REMARK BY MR. SCHULTZ****(Item 3: Trade, economic and investment issues (including aspects related to Uzbekistan's GSP+ status, WTO accession, connectivity and energy))**

We welcome and support Uzbekistan's efforts to pursue a transition to a sustainable energy system, improve energy efficiency and resilience, and modernise energy infrastructure.

We encourage you to realise its potential for the take up of renewable energy sources, and welcome the adoption of ambitious targets and market-based mechanisms to that effect.

We welcome also the measures taken in the last couple of years, such as the creation of an energy ministry, the “unbundling” of the electricity network operator and the opening of generation investments to foreign investors, and we are glad to see first renewable energy investments by EU companies in Uzbekistan.

However, we caution against continued reliance on coal-fired power plants in the long-term even if for a modest share of your energy mix. This runs counter to our shared emissions reduction objectives. As we stated in the Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions on Climate and Energy Diplomacy, the EU calls for a global phasing out of unabated coal in energy production and an end to financing new coal infrastructure in third countries, while supporting international initiatives to pursue a just transition away from coal towards climate neutrality.

In this regard we encourage Uzbekistan to fully explore your country's huge potential for solar and wind, and to avoid stranded assets. The EU experience has shown that there is no contradiction between achieving Paris Agreement objectives while maintaining energy security.

The European Green Deal is not only the EU strategy to fight against climate change but also our growth strategy. Our post-COVID economic package puts sustainable energy investments at the heart of the recovery in the EU and we would encourage others to take the opportunity to invest in the energy systems of tomorrow and on digitalisation.

In this respect, let me emphasise the potential for industrial and investment cooperation in clean energy and technologies between the EU and Uzbekistan.

As regards your plan to build nuclear power reactors, we consider nuclear safety, as well as nuclear safeguards and security, to be of the utmost importance. The EU again strongly encourages Uzbekistan to join international conventions on nuclear safety and to continue seeking assistance from the IAEA. We also encourage Uzbekistan to adopt and use the stress tests assessments methodology developed by the European Nuclear Safety Regulators Group (ENSREG) in assessing the new plant's safety with regard to impact of external events.

The EU is prepared to cooperate with you in this regard and within the framework of our nuclear cooperation agreement. A good example of our continued cooperation is the EU's regional flagship programme for the Environmental Remediation of uranium legacy sites in Central Asia.

We invite Uzbekistan to join international efforts to detect and reduce methane emissions along the fossil fuels value chain, such as the Global Methane Pledge launched at the COP26 just two weeks ago, including the collective target to reduce methane emissions by at least 30 percent from 2020 levels by 2030.

We also look forward to implementing the new EU Programme for Sustainable Energy Connectivity in Central Asia (SECCA), which will provide additional opportunities to realise projects facilitating the adoption and implementation of clean energy practices in your country and region.

One last point. The modernisation of the Energy Charter Treaty is a very important process, to which both the EU and the Central Asian countries are fully committed, in order to make the Treaty fit for the future.

We appreciate our good cooperation with Uzbekistan in the Energy Charter and look forward to your support in the negotiation on its modernisation.

The EU has tabled a proposal on the definition of economic activity in the energy sector in line with our decarbonisation objectives and the Paris Agreement. This proposal was presented to the Contracting Parties at the beginning of the year and discussed during the rounds of negotiations of June, July and September/October.

We are keen to work with you on this important file and would be ready to offer bilateral consultations to further explain our position, if necessary.

Delivering on modernisation will require a strong leadership team, and we would encourage Uzbekistan to support the EU candidate to lead the Energy Charter Treaty Secretariat.

The EU is committed to rules-based multilateralism and supports openness, transparency, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness in all multilateral institutions, including collaborative approaches, good governance and transparency in the system.

After the successful completion of the appointment of the Deputy Secretary General of the Energy Charter, the EU counts on the constructive engagement and cooperation of Uzbekistan in the finalisation of the process of appointing the next Secretary General at the Energy Charter Conference on 14-15 December.

Thank you very much.

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**REMARK BY MR. DEVIGNE****(Item 3: Trade, economic and investment issues (including aspects related to Uzbekistan's GSP+ status, WTO accession, connectivity and energy))**

On these three topics, first on environment: we welcome Uzbekistan's participation in the EU–Central Asia Working Group on Environment and Climate Change. We believe this forum has a potential to further tighten regional cooperation in Central Asia.

We would like to encourage Uzbekistan to take forward domestic policies in the area of the environment. Particularly to tackle major challenges such as water management, pollution, the circular economy, and good environmental governance - particularly meaning to have environmental impact assessments when you produce legislation and when you integrate it into other sectors, such as public finances, energy, transport and agriculture.

2022 will also be a key year for action on biodiversity. We need to reach an agreement at the 15th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) on an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework with clear, measurable and realistic goals. We count on Uzbekistan's support to that end.

Secondly, on climate change and green recovery. As you know the European Green Deal and our growth strategy are priorities with equal importance. To move away from a carbon intensive economy towards a low carbon economy, will become the growth engine of the EU and hopefully others.

Under the Paris Agreement, we have all promised to reach climate neutrality in the second half of this century. In the EU, we have decided to set a good example by already doing it by 2050. In order to ensure that this will happen, we have decided to enshrine this target into legislation through a climate law. We encourage other parties to the Paris Agreement to follow suit as soon as possible.

We have also agreed on revised mid-term goals, where we have committed to increase our target for greenhouse gas emission reductions to 55% by 2030. We submitted this increased target to the UNFCCC and our revised nationally determined contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement ahead of COP26. We were happy to see Uzbekistan's new offer with a revised NDC committing to 30% emissions reduction.

Obviously the EU with only 8% share and falling cannot address the global climate challenge alone. We have all heard encouraging signals from China, Japan, Korea and USA in that respect. We strongly encourage all our partners to put in place ambitious policies to drive the transition to a net zero emissions economy with an aim to reach climate neutrality by 2050. It is for the sake of our citizens' health, wellbeing and prosperity.

Our climate neutrality target and the enhanced 2030 target provide a strong signal to our investors and partners. The challenge to build back after COVID-19 is significant, but given the urgency of climate science, we cannot invest in old technologies. So we need to seize this opportunity to build back better and greener. And that means investing into low carbon and climate resilient solutions.

This means investing in low-carbon and climate resilient solutions. In other words, not subsidising the production of fossil fuels or constructing new coal fired power plants. Those are technologies of the past, which are no longer viable or even fair for future generations. The next 10 years will be decisive for the future of our planet.

Thirdly and lastly, the item of connectivity, which I know is important for your double landlocked country. Sustainable connectivity is one of our key priorities globally. In fact, the European Commission will tomorrow adopt its new EU "Global Gateway" Connectivity Strategy which will give new impetus to our connectivity actions.

Definitely Uzbekistan, and broader Central Asia, is considered by us as a key partner and the natural connectivity hub between Europe and Asia. We want to explore the development of physical infrastructure (digital, transport and energy) links with you and to work jointly on the regulatory environment to promote this connectivity.

We certainly appreciate Uzbekistan's efforts aimed at promoting connectivity with the EU and in the region. As the Minister has already said, we consider that "Central and South Asia: Regional Connectivity" Conference hosted by your government in July was a great success. And I know High Representative Borrell was extremely pleased by this conference as well. It forms an excellent basis for further cooperation. We therefore very much looking forward to the EU-Central Asia Connectivity Event which you propose to organise next year. We hope it will provide an opportunity to give our bilateral and regional cooperation a more concrete character.

As you know, we have already agreed with also other partners to work on EU-Asia Connectivity. I am thinking of the partnership that we have concluded with Japan, the so called EU-Japan Connectivity Partnership, which will have positive impact on Central Asia.

And also with India, we have the EU-India Connectivity Partnership, which will then be more North-South oriented, while the one with Japan will be more East-West oriented.

And within the G7, we are currently working on establishing a common approach to promoting sustainable connectivity and quality infrastructure. An infrastructure that also benefits the countries that are crossed and not just the countries, which are at both ends of the route. So we will be very interested to hear from you Minister what your expectations are of the EU when it comes to connectivity.

Thank you.

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**REMARK BY MR. KAMILOV**

**(Item 3: Trade, economic and investment issues (including aspects related to Uzbekistan's GSP+ status, WTO accession, connectivity and energy))**

Thank you Minister and I also thank all our colleagues. Thank you for your invaluable proposals and in particular I would like to note our very productive cooperation with Ms Rinaldi, with all of you who are participating in our meeting.

We are very grateful of the European side for the detailed review of the status and future of our cooperation. This speaks to the fact that we have a lot to do together, we have a rich agenda and we are indeed already cooperating with good results on many matters. But there is a lot to be done.

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**REMARK BY MR. KHAKIMOV****(Item 3: Trade, economic and investment issues (including aspects related to Uzbekistan's GSP+ status, WTO accession, connectivity and energy))**

Good morning and thank you dear Minister and colleagues. Trade and economic cooperation of Uzbekistan with the EU is a key matter for us. As its already been noted by Mr Devigne, it has in turn a number of key elements and the first one I wanted to note today is that Uzbekistan has joined WTO and on behalf of our Minister for Investment and Foreign Trade which is the key department in this respect we would like to thank the EU for your support for our accession to the WTO and for the joint project of assisting Uzbekistan's accession, which was financed by the EU.

During our accession process we have completed all the preparations and we have submitted all the documents for the 5th working group meeting, a factological resume, a plan of legislation and a number of other documents. We are planning to hold the meeting of the working group from 13th to 15th of November - December, sorry - and the meeting of the Commissioner and our Deputy Minister has already been talked about today and we are hoping that the matter will be decided positively.

In the beginning of November we have submitted our new proposal as to the access to the service market. In terms of proposals on goods we are continuing to negotiate bilaterally with various countries and as soon as we have proposals from a number of interested parties we shall be able to move on. We would like to suggest that we hold a bilateral meeting with the EU to discuss our revised proposals on services and to hear your opinions on the tariffs on goods that we have proposed when we were looking at renewed offers on goods.

At the same time, given the fact that we are a country with lower than average income according to the World Bank, we are hoping that you support us in our efforts to achieve the status of a developing country and all our bilateral and multilateral negotiations with the WTO.

We are also very grateful on another key matter that has already been mentioned, the Cooperation and Partnership Agreement. We are grateful for the very effective 9th round of negotiations in September this year. It was a breakthrough in fact - a breakthrough round.

At the same time I have to note that there is still a number of issues that have already been mentioned but once again I will raise them given the opportunity. Some issues to do with trade. We hope to resolve all the unregulated matters during forthcoming expert video conferences and negotiations. As far as the trade block we have to jointly tackle a number of matters dealing with

goods and services, state enterprises and public procurement. The ministry for Investment and Trade has sent its proposal to the European side with a list of goods and organisations for chapter 8. We note that the list is much wider and we have also reflected the EU comments which we heard during the 9th round. We hope that these new reviewed offers will accelerate negotiations on this chapter and will lead us to an agreement.

The Uzbek side is also hoping that the EU will show flexibility and understanding during this negotiations given the fact that Uzbekistan is actively acceding to the WTO. From our side, I would like to assure you that Uzbekistan will do everything to adopt the provisions that will ensure developing bilateral trade and economic relations and will not damage our negotiations in the framework of WTO.

It has already been mentioned today and discussed in detail that we are looking - to get the GSP+ status. Once again, thank you for your assistance. We intend to assist you in your monitoring of our implementation of 27 conventions defined in GSP+. We are taking decisive measures to actively implement all the relevant provisions. It has already been mentioned that we are also happy to implement six additional conventions.

In terms of financial and technical cooperation, thank you very much for the recent visit of Madame Rinaldi and for the negotiations with our Deputy Minister. Once again, thank you for the successful implementation of previous technical cooperation programs to the tune of 168 Million Euros. It has been underlined today that our priorities remain unchanged for our cooperation with the EU. We are ready to implement all new programs. We think that the 4th Sub-Committee that took place in Tashkent was very productive. We support your initiative to jointly develop the new cooperation programme for 2021 - 2024. We hope it will very soon be adopted so that we can go on implementing joint projects.

Thank you in particular for your support within COVAX and bilaterally for our anti-COVID measures.

**REMARKS BY MR. KAMILOV****(Closing remarks)**

We can of course continue our discussion for a long time, but I think we are limited in terms of our schedule. So I would like to thank our European colleagues for the open and friendly nature of our discussions today throughout our agenda. We managed to discuss a wide range of issues reflecting our bilateral relationship. Today's fruitful exchange of views will of course enhance our mutual understanding and will promote various productive links between our sides.

Friends, colleagues, I would like to note that we have a new spirit and a new political climate in our cooperation that has a lot to do with the positive shifts and changes underway in our country, implementation of our democratic reforms. And of course this development is also linked with the fact that we have together, in close cooperation, managed to remove various irritants from the agenda - to do with the situation on the human factor aspects. I have already mentioned that we will of course carry on working on these matters but we have raised a number of questions on the last item: trade, economics, investments, change of investments climate, change of climate on our planet, energy, connectivity, and the complicated and controversial matter of nuclear energy.

We have indeed got in our agenda a possibility - in fact, we are closely studying the possibility of building a nuclear power plant - so it would be very interesting for us to study the European experience of assuring safety and security of energy supply and of nuclear power stations in particular. Of course, we will listen to you very very closely and we shall use your experience and follow your recommendations.

Dear colleagues, very soon we are having a meeting in Dushanbe in the 5+1 format, Central Asia plus the EU. We are looking forward to seeing our colleagues, Mr. Borrell, Mr. Devigne and others. And I hope we shall be able to continue our discussions and exchange of views on very important matters including regional matters. On this, may I close the exchange of views. On our agenda, next thing awaiting us, is a press conference. Then we can continue our exchange on regional matters and on Afghanistan in particular. But now once again, may I thank Mr. Santos Silva, our colleague, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Portugal and give him the floor for final words.

**REMARKS BY MR. SANTOS SILVA****(Closing remarks)**

Thank you very much Minister and allow me to thank you for your presence and to highlight the very warm atmosphere under which we had this meeting. And if you allow me I will make just three brief points.

The first one is on the negotiation of our Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. Our review this morning has shown that we are very close to finalising this agreement, which will be a landmark agreement. Of course, the final mile is the hardest to achieve. But I think we will have a very good result at the end.

My second point is to thank you for all your briefing on your Presidents priorities for his second term in office. You know that we the Europeans strongly support your reform agenda and we believe that the new bilateral agreement will help to cement your reforms. We would very much welcome the long awaited visit of your President to Brussels and perhaps this can coincide with the ceremony to initiate the EPCA once we have found agreement on the whole of the text.

My final point is that I would like to highlight that we share the determination to rebuild from the pandemic in a sustainable green way. There is a great deal that we can do together bilaterally, regionally, multilaterally to advance this agenda. Linked to this is the important work on connectivity on which your country is taking the lead.

Thank you very much and now we shall have our joint press conference.

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