



Concept Note

EU-Central Asia Economic Forum

5 November 2021

Bishkek

Context

The EU has been actively supporting **Central Asia's transition towards a sustainable, climate-neutral growth model** and is working to help Central Asia's governments diversify their economies, boost trade, modernise regulatory frameworks for businesses with particular focus on SMEs, and reinforce the rule of law. Given the common history and challenges faced by the region's economies as well as their interconnectedness, closely **co-ordinated regional responses will bring additional value** when pursuing these objectives. The European Union-Central Asia Economic Forum ('the Forum') provides a platform for intra- and inter-regional dialogue on shared solutions, that will help translate the goals of resilience, prosperity and regional cooperation, set out in the EU Strategy on Central Asia, into action.

Objectives

The Forum aims at discussing and **developing coordinated economic response in support of green and resilient recovery from the devastating socio-economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, building on the value-added of increased regional integration.** Concrete solutions and new approaches will be examined/reviewed to help Central Asian partners build back better. The Forum will allow to strengthen sustainable connectivity and promote regulatory approximation in the economic area between the EU and Central Asia countries, which is so vital for better business environment and safe investment climate. It will also provide an opportunity to display all the efforts underway in the region to create a more integrated and interconnected regional market. The discussion will be based on the outcomes of last year's Online Economic Forum. A research document "[Beyond Covid-19: Prospects for Economic Recovery in Central Asia](#)" prepared by the OECD and financially supported by the EU Central Asia Invest Programme as well as discussions organised by the EU Member States in view to the Forum will feed into the Forum's exchanges and deliberations.

Deliverables

The Forum will focus on challenges and opportunities in **three priority areas – green recovery, digitalisation, better business environment** – based on the EU initiatives, including the European Green Deal, Digital Agenda, EU regional and bilateral programmes in line with the new programming cycle for 2021-2027 as well as initiatives and technological solutions offered by the EU private sector. The discussion will build on national strategies developed by Central Asian governments highlighting a number of crucial areas for future reforms.

Format and participation

The Forum is to be **hosted by the Kyrgyz Republic and foresees a restricted high-level in-person meeting in Bishkek.** The Forum, from the EU side, will be led by the Executive Vice President of the European Commission Valdis Dombrovskis. It aims to gather Prime Ministers and ministers of the Central Asian countries as well as high-level representatives of the EU Member States, International



Financial Institutions (e.g. EIB, EBRD) and partner International Organisations (e.g. OECD, ITC), private sector representatives, experts and civil society representatives. Possibility of stakeholders' online participation is also ensured in order to feed the discussions.

High-level in-person meeting in Bishkek on 5 November 2021

(Forum to be attended in-person only by high-level representatives of the EU, EU Member States, Central Asia, International Financial Institutions and International Organisations. The meeting will be accessible on-line for a wider list of experts and other stakeholders.)

Plenary session (13:30 - 15:00 Bishkek time)

Goal: During the Online Economic Forum 2020 high-level representatives of Central Asian governments and EU institutions as well as private sector expressed their **commitment to enhancing regional co-operation to support a post-COVID-19 recovery that also serves long-term structural objectives**, including resilience, sustainability and the diversification of employment, production and exports. Governments in the region have developed national strategies, which highlight a number of crucial areas for future reform agendas. Therefore, the opening session will set the stage for a more in-depth discussion on the main challenges and opportunities in three priority areas of the Forum - **green recovery, digitalisation, better business environment**. The discussion will be based on solutions and approaches in line with EU initiatives, notably the European Green Deal, Digital Agenda, EU regional and bilateral programmes in line with the new programming cycle for 2021-2027, as well as initiatives and technological solutions offered by the EU private sector.

Opening speech: *H.E. Ambassador Terhi Hakala, EU Special Representative for Central Asia*

Welcoming speeches:

- *H.E. Mr. Sadyr Japarov, President of the Kyrgyz Republic*
- *H.E. Ms. Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission (online)*

Keynote speech: *H.E. Mr. Valdis Dombrovskis, Executive Vice-President of the European Commission*

Address by: *H.E. Mr. Akylbek Japarov, Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Kyrgyz Republic (TBC)*

High-level interventions by:

- *H.E. Mr. Askar Mamin, Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan*
- *H.E. Mr. Qohir Rasulzoda, Prime Minister of the Republic of Tajikistan (TBC)*
- *H.E. Mr. Abdulla Aripov, Prime Minister of the Republic of Uzbekistan (TBC)*
- *H.E. Mr. Serdar Berdimuhamedov, Deputy Prime Minister of Turkmenistan (TBC)*
- *Representative of the EU Council Presidency (TBC)*
- *Representative of European Investment Bank (TBC)*
- *Representative of European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (TBC)*
- *Representative/-s of the EU Member States (TBC)*

Moderated by: TBC

Session I (15.30 – 16:40 Bishkek time)



Theme: Transitioning to a green, sustainable, climate and ecologic friendly-neutral economy. Low-carbon energy generation, more energy-efficient agricultural and industrial production with the implementation of environmental protection measures, and better water and waste management can support green and inclusive economic recovery and adaptation to climate change. After decades of insufficiently addressed industrial and agricultural pollution, there is a need to ensure that public and private investment helps Central Asia green some of its most valuable sectors. Over 80% of the European Investment Bank's engagements are now combined with climate change objectives, which is indicative of the European Union's determination to mainstream climate objectives into its development priorities for Central Asia.

Goal: *Presentation of results from the EU-supported OECD research document indicating possible way forward in co-operation in green recovery area. **Presentation of the main EU and Central Asian initiatives, programmes, solutions offered by public and private sector in support of this goal.***

Speakers: Representatives of the EU, OECD, IFIs, Central Asian Ministries of Economy, Finance or other related field, high-level representative of the Energy Charter, EU and CA private sector/business representatives etc.

Moderated by: TBC

Session II (16:40 – 17:50 Bishkek time)

Theme: Digitalisation. A coherent approach to digitalisation can enhance regional integration, help business recovery, and support the greening of regional economies. One silver lining of 2020 was that it demonstrated the value of digitalisation to governments and businesses. To achieve successful digitalisation, the region needs more investment into digital infrastructure, interoperable and harmonised IT systems, and digital upskilling programmes.

Goal: *Presentation of results from the EU-supported OECD research document indicating possible way forward in cooperation in digitalisation area. **Presentation of the main EU and Central Asian initiatives, programmes, solutions offered by public and private sector in support of this goal.***

Speakers: Representatives of the EU, OECD, IFIs, Central Asian Ministries of Economy, Finance or other related field, EU and CA private sector/business representatives etc.

Moderated by: TBC

Session III (18:00 – 19:10 Bishkek time)

Theme: Creating a sound business environment. Stalled structural economic reforms have undermined the region's business climate. Despite recent efforts by governments, the regulatory framework needs to be further simplified, digitalised, and enforced to become attractive to business and investment, including foreign investment. Economic empowerment of women and youth, development of decent work and jobs are also critical, for reasons of both equity and efficiency. In addition, effective structural and regional co-operation will be essential to improving the business environment and facilitating faster income/productivity convergence. In some cases, the implementation of joint projects could promote this end.

Goal: *Presentation of results from OECD research document indicating possible way forward in pursue of improving business environment. **Presentation of the main EU and Central Asian initiatives, programmes, solutions offered by public and private sector in support of this goal.***



Speakers: Representatives of the EU, OECD, IFIs, Central Asian Ministries of Economy, Finance or other related field, Chambers of Commerce, high-level representative of the World Customs Organization, Business ombudsman, EU and CA private sector/business representatives etc.

Moderated by: TBC

Closing session (19:10 – 19:30 Bishkek time): next steps

This 2021 Forum in Bishkek would be the occasion for the EU and the Central Asian states to identify the goals to achieve and the steps to follow.

The Forum will give impetus for a regular follow-up and review of progress in each of the three priority areas.