



## CONCEPT NOTE

### 2<sup>nd</sup> EU-Central Asia Economic Forum

18-19 May 2023, Almaty

#### Context

The cooperation between the EU and Central Asia has increased substantially in political importance, potential and ambition. Both sides share a strong commitment to intensify cooperation within Central Asia and between Europe and Central Asia in many strategic sectors: strengthening energy security through the development of alternative energy supply routes, enhancing sustainable and secure digitalisation including digital sovereignty, improving transport connections, and transitioning to a green, sustainable, climate-neutral economy that creates jobs for people. Increased sustainable connectivity supports our shared goal of a prosperous and secure Central Asia.

The launching of the EU Global Gateway in December 2021 underscores the commitment by the EU and its Member States to boost smart, clean, and secure links in digital, energy and transport, and to strengthen health, education, and research systems across the world. It is in this spirit that the EU will continue supporting Central Asia's transition towards sustainable, socially resilient and climate neutral growth. The two Team Europe Initiatives and Global Gateway Flagships on Water, Energy and Climate Change, and Digital Connectivity launched at the EU-Central Asia Connectivity Conference in Samarkand have the potential to contribute to Central Asia's sustainable economic and human development and its resilience against climate change-induced threats. They demonstrate the EU's intention to work with Central Asia to achieve the mutually shared objective of sustainable and rules-based connectivity.

The Economic Forum, the regional platform for economic dialogue between the EU and Central Asian partners, builds on the EU Strategy on Central Asia and was first launched in December 2020. It aims at strengthening EU-Central Asia economic relations, supporting the region in accelerating inclusive and sustainable development by further diversifying Central Asian economies, boosting intra- and interregional trade, reinforcing the rule of law and modernising regulatory frameworks.

Central Asia offers massive business and investment opportunities. This is why this Forum will also host a business event on 18 May aimed at exchanging views with private sector representatives and facilitating business contacts between the EU and Central Asia. It is our joint interest to unlock the potential of this region by accelerating indispensable structural reforms, building an attractive business environment and safe investment climate, and integrating the region in a wider global economy, especially in view of current global/geopolitical challenges.

## Objectives

The Forum aims to **deepen and operationalise the engagement by both the EU and Central Asia in three key priority areas – green and digital transition, better business environment, as well as trade and connectivity**. Building on the conclusions of the Economic Forum held on 5 November 2021 in Bishkek, it will take stock of progress made so far and discuss ways forward on policy, programmes, and investment needed to develop a more integrated and interconnected regional market engagement. 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 a better business environment and a safe investment climate.

## Deliverables

The **Forum will focus on challenges and opportunities on the above-mentioned key aspects of sustainable growth and connectivity** based on EU initiatives, including the Global Gateway, 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 in crucial areas for future reforms.

**The EU Study on Sustainable Transport Connections between Europe and Central Asia**, implemented by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), will also be presented, and will feed in discussions at the Forum.

The Forum will provide recommendations for **further engagement with the private sector** and cooperation among enterprises from both regions.

## Format and participation

The Forum is **a high-level meeting hosted by the Republic of Kazakhstan in Almaty**. The Forum, from the EU side, will be led by the Executive Vice President of the European Commission Valdis Dombrovskis.

The Forum will gather high-level government officials, the European Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, other bilateral and international financial institutions, representatives of the private sector and members of civil society. It is organised in partnership with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

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