

**Report of Farah KARIMI (Netherlands) OSCE PA  
Special Representative on Central Asia to the  
32<sup>nd</sup> OSCE PA Annual Session  
(Porto, 29 June – 3 July 2025)**



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## I. Overview of Key Regional Developments

This section aims to provide an overview of a number of key developments in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) as well as Mongolia in order to provide a context for the activities of the Special Representative on Central Asia. It is by no means comprehensive. Rather it aims to highlight significant achievements and remaining challenges as well as areas in which there has been enhanced regional co-operation.

During the past decade there has been a growing appetite for closer ties between the countries of the region, spurred by a desire to stand stronger as a united region and to jointly address multiple common security challenges. The Taliban takeover in Afghanistan in August 2021 gave further impetus to strengthen regional co-operation. This trend has accelerated since Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine. Co-operation on common challenges has been fuelled by initiatives launched by Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan including on transboundary issues such as climate change, water scarcity and the Aral Sea disaster. At the same time, the heterogeneity of the Central Asian countries as well as major internal divisions between cities and rural regions should be borne in mind.

### A. Impact of Major Geopolitical Developments on Central Asia

#### ❖ Afghanistan and Relations with the Taliban

Security concerns in relation to Afghanistan increased following the 2021 Taliban takeover, in connection with a surge in the trafficking of illicit drugs, transnational organized crime, human trafficking, radicalism and extremism. Following an initial cautious approach, most Central Asian countries adopted a pragmatic approach, seeking to address these issues but also to expand trade and transit routes through Afghanistan. Uzbekistan was among the first to host Taliban delegations and has signed security and trade protocols, exchanged diplomats, and expanded economic ties. Kazakhstan removed the Taliban from its list of terrorist groups, emphasizing trade and economic co-operation. Kyrgyzstan, too, removed the Taliban from its list of terrorist organizations and has been exploring trade and connectivity opportunities. At the same time, it expresses concerns about the situation of ethnic Pamir Kyrgyz in Afghanistan. Turkmenistan maintains a cautious relationship, characterized by both humanitarian engagement and security concerns. Securing the Taliban's commitment to the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline project, which it is actively pursuing, is a priority.<sup>1</sup> While it hasn't officially recognized the Taliban government, it maintains de facto diplomatic relations, allowing them to operate an embassy in Ashgabat.

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<sup>1</sup> Turkmenistan is eager to accelerate construction of the *Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) Pipeline*, a 1,800 km-long gas pipeline to sell its natural resources to the energy-starved countries of Pakistan and India, and Afghanistan. Turkmenistan has completed construction of its

Tajikistan, which shares the longest border with Afghanistan, has been much more reluctant to engage. It has not formally recognized the Taliban which it considers an extremist group and the Taliban continue to shelter members of the ethnic Tajik, extremist group *Jamaat Ansarullah*. Relations have nevertheless begun to improve. Cross-border markets along the Panj river have reopened and a high-level Taliban delegation visited Dushanbe in summer 2024. The two countries are also developing economic ties, having concluded a deal for Tajikistan to provide electricity to Afghanistan.



Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan in particular are concerned about the Qosh Tepa canal being built in Afghanistan which is expected to drain significant amounts of water from the Amu Darya river, exacerbating concerns over water scarcity in these two downstream countries. The canal is also expected to indirectly impact the Syr Darya river, with direct

consequences for the already depleted Aral Sea and accelerated ecological degradation in Kazakhstan's downstream regions.

#### ❖ **War in Ukraine**

Most Central Asian countries aim to pursue a so-called multi-vector foreign policy, in which they are open to working with as many partners as possible. This policy received a new impulse after the launch of Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine in February 2022, pushing Central Asian states to reassess their reliance on Russia and to seek closer diplomatic relations with other global powers such as China, Türkiye, or Western countries. They have faced disrupted supply chains and increased inflation due to the sanctions on Russia, prompting diversification of trade relationships. There has also been a notable increase in Russians relocating to Central Asia (primarily Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan), while thousands of Central Asians are being recruited or coerced to fight in Ukraine.

#### ❖ **Impact of US Foreign Policy**

The second Trump presidency, characterized by an "America First" policy and a preference for bilateralism rather than multilateralism, has triggered a geopolitical shift which is expected to have significant repercussions also for Central Asia even though the region does not appear as a priority in the US's foreign policy agenda. The effects of the sudden suspension of US funding are already being keenly felt by non-governmental organizations and independent media in Central Asia, as well as international organizations including the OSCE. There will no doubt also be

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segment. Following security assurances by the Taliban, construction began in September 2024 on the Afghanistan segment.

indirect effects as a result of changing relations between the US and Central Asia's main partners – Russia, China and the European Union.

In recent months, the US has started discussions with authorities in Tashkent and Astana to explore opportunities to support exploitation of their critical raw mineral reserves. In addition to bilateral relations, the new administration appears ready to support the B5+1 initiative, a counterpart to the C5+1 diplomatic platform mainly focused on the business dimension.

### ❖ ***Situation in the Middle East***

It remains to be seen what impact the June 2025 conflict between Israel and Iran will have on Central Asia. It could exacerbate geopolitical tensions. There could also be an economic impact through fluctuating global oil prices, as well as disruption to trade routes via Iran (e.g. the Chabahar Port project, located in Iran on the Gulf of Oman, this is a crucial infrastructure project for India to connect with Central Asia via Iran and Afghanistan without crossing Pakistani territory and offers an alternative pathway to the conventional Silk Road).

So far, the Central Asian countries have reacted cautiously. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have issued safety advisories for their citizens. Kyrgyzstan's foreign ministry also expressed deep concern over the escalating tensions between Israel and Iran on 13 June. Tajikistan issued a strong condemnation on 15 June of the military strikes by Israel and expressed "deep concern about the escalation of the situation in the Middle East as a disregard for the generally recognized norms of international relations".<sup>2</sup> Tajikistan also condemned the US and Israeli strikes on 22 June against Iran's nuclear facilities. In a statement on 13 June, the Turkmen foreign ministry stated that "[a]s a state with the status of positive permanent neutrality recognized by the United Nations, Turkmenistan does not accept the use or threat of use of force as a way of resolving political and other issues".<sup>3</sup> It has also expressed its readiness to take part in the resolution of the current situation in the Middle East.

A prolonged conflict could also create significant migratory pressure. Central Asians and citizens of some other countries have been transiting through Turkmenistan – the only Central Asian country which shares a border with Iran – and have been provided with support such as meals, essential items and accommodation in Ashgabat. While Iranians have been heading primarily to Türkiye, Armenia and Azerbaijan, other Central Asian countries could see an influx of refugees, notably Tajikistan, due to their linguistic and cultural affinity.

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<sup>2</sup> Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan (13 June 2025), at: <https://new.mfa.tj/en/main/view/17172/statement-of-the-ministry-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-tajikistan>.

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, Message for the Media (13 June 2025), at: <https://www.mfa.gov.tm/ru/news/5309>.

The UN Mission in Afghanistan, headed by the former President of Kyrgyzstan Roza Otunbayeva, has expressed concern regarding the 3.5 million Afghans in Iran. Thousands are returning at the rate of about 10,000 a day due to the conflict. These movements come on top of the more than 600,000 Afghans who have already returned or been deported from Iran and Pakistan due to the change in policies in those countries. Communities and Afghan authorities are trying to absorb returnees, but there is need for further international assistance.

## **B. Enhanced Bilateral and Regional Co-operation in Central Asia**

A number of positive developments took place at the beginning of 2025 in the area of bilateral and multilateral relations with potentially wide-ranging impacts for the countries directly involved and the region as a whole. These positive developments have taken place against the backdrop of enhanced regional co-operation. Especially since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Central Asia has increasingly grown as a region, reflecting a desire of the Central Asian countries to set their own agendas, to jointly address a number of common challenges and to reduce their dependency on Russia and China primarily.

### **❖ *Agreements on the Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan Border***

In February 2025, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan signed the final protocol on the delimitation of their border, followed by the signing in March of an agreement on the demarcation of their shared frontier by the presidents of the two countries. The two sides also agreed to the exchange of several disputed land plots. These developments marked the end to a long-running conflict that had seen dozens killed over the border around the town of Batken in Kyrgyzstan in 2021 and 2022, culminating in a six-day conflict in September 2022. The deal also provided for the reopening of road, rail and air transport links between the two countries.

### **❖ *Khujand Declaration***

Also in March 2025, a historical agreement was signed between the Presidents of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The Khujand Declaration on the demarcation of the tri-state border and the formal declaration of friendship marked a major turning point in regional politics and laid the basis for further economic and infrastructural co-operation. In recent years, trade turnover between Uzbekistan and both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan has increased more than tenfold, with nearly half of this volume attributed to border areas. Customs checkpoints at the borders need to be expanded and modernized. There is also a need for modern trade and logistics infrastructure.

### **❖ *Consultative Meetings of Heads of State of Central Asia***

Since 2018, the Heads of State of the five Central Asian countries have gathered in consultative meetings offering a constructive platform to discuss and address critical regional issues. These meetings have brought together the leaders of the

Central Asian countries to discuss and co-ordinate policies on security, economic development, environmental sustainability, and cultural exchange. Outcomes include agreements on enhancing border security, facilitating trade and investment, and jointly managing water and energy resources. These high-level gatherings have also fostered a spirit of co-operation and mutual trust.

Kazakhstan hosted the sixth such meeting in August 2024. At the meeting, Kazakhstan proposed developing a long-term comprehensive mechanism of collaboration in the area of water resources and hydropower that would consider the interests of all countries in the region. One outcome was a Joint Statement and a “Concept of Development of Regional Co-operation ‘Central Asia – 2040’”. The next consultative meeting is due to be held in Uzbekistan in 2025.

#### ❖ ***Central Asia Plus Meetings***

In recent years, the countries of Central Asia have increasingly developed joint positions and presented their policies as a cohesive region, a trend evident in the “**Central Asia Plus**” (C5+1) format consisting of a series of dialogues and co-operative frameworks that include external partners such as the United States, Russia, China, Japan, South Korea, and the European Union. These meetings aim to strengthen bilateral and multilateral relations, address regional challenges, and promote co-operation on economic, security, and cultural matters. They provide a platform for Central Asian countries to engage with major global powers, leverage foreign investment, act as a unified region and gain support for regional initiatives.

#### ❖ ***EU-Central Asia Relations***

Greater regional co-operation paved the way for the **first EU-Central Asia Summit** in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, on 4 April 2025. Bringing together the five Central Asian Heads of State as well as European Council President António Costa and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, it resulted in a Joint Declaration<sup>4</sup> in which the signatories reaffirmed their commitment to co-operate for peace, security and democracy, and to fully respect international law and to uphold the principles of the OSCE. The Declaration also recognized significant efforts made to foster closer partnerships within Central Asia to ensure prosperity, sustainable development and to accelerate the energy transition and decarbonisation. Relations with the EU were upgraded to a strategic partnership. The EU also expressed its readiness to support further regional integration.

The inaugural EU–Central Asia Summit also marked an important point in interregional co-operation. For the first time, leaders from the EU and Central Asian nations gathered to chart a long–term partnership focused on connectivity, economic integration, and sustainable development. Central to this agenda was the launch of a €12 billion Global Gateway investment package, with transport

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<sup>4</sup> See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/04/04/joint-declaration-following-the-first-european-union-central-asia-summit/>.

infrastructure as a flagship pillar – most notably the development of the **Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor (TITR)**, also known as the **Middle Corridor**. Stretching from China, through Kazakhstan, across the Caspian Sea to Azerbaijan and Georgia, then through Türkiye into Europe, it consists of a combination of 4,250 km of railway lines and 500 km of maritime links across the Caspian and Black Seas, aiming to diversify trade routes and bypass traditional routes through Russia and Iran. The Middle Corridor has gained strategic importance following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine as the traditional overland routes through Russia have become politically unstable for many European businesses. In this context, the Middle Corridor offers an alternative – one that connects Europe with China and Central Asia while circumventing the Russian heartland. As a follow up, the EU–Central Asia Economic Forum and a TITR Investors’ Forum are scheduled to take place in Uzbekistan later in 2025.

#### ❖ ***Consultative Meetings within the Framework of the OSCE***

A similar format is also developing in OSCE fora. In 2024, OSCE Secretary General Helga Maria Schmid met with environmental ministers from Central Asian countries to discuss the implications of climate change for regional security and stability, focusing on issues such as transboundary water management, energy security, and disaster risk reduction. These discussions are the continuation of the meeting between Central Asia Foreign Ministers and the OSCE Secretary General in 2023 and part of the OSCE's broader efforts to support sustainable development and security in the region. The same approach is being pursued in the area of border management since 2023 as a Forum of the OSCE Secretary General and Central Asia Border Commanders, the latest meeting being held in Istanbul in June 2025<sup>5</sup>.

#### ❖ ***Inter-Parliamentary Co-operation***

At the fourth consultative meeting of Heads of State (Kyrgyzstan, July 2022), a decision was made to hold an **Inter-Parliamentary Forum of Central Asian states**. The role of parliamentarians in maintaining good neighbourly relations and in promoting regional co-operation was underlined at the first Forum in Turkistan, Kazakhstan, in February 2023, which was attended by parliamentarians from all five Central Asian states. Kazakhstan’s Senate Chairman Maulen Ashimbayev, who also heads the OSCE PA Delegation, has advocated holding this forum annually outside of the capitals, in cities of historical and cultural significance.

The second Forum (Khiva, Uzbekistan, September 2024) reaffirmed the countries’ commitment to strengthen inter-parliamentary ties and develop new formats of co-operation to address shared challenges. Ashimbayev emphasized the need to establish a legal framework to develop a common economic space, expand trade, foster industrial co-operation, and enhance transport and logistics

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/593504>.

infrastructure. He also highlighted the crucial role of parliamentary oversight in implementing the SDGs. Uzbekistan Senate Chair Tanzila Narbaeva called for strengthening co-operation at the local representative body level to enhance oversight over high-level agreements. She also emphasized the importance of engaging women and youth in socio-economic processes. The third Inter-Parliamentary Forum is due to be held in Kyrgyzstan later in 2025.

Uzbekistan hosted the 150th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), including a Forum of Women Parliamentarians and a Forum of Young MPs, in Tashkent from 5-9 April 2025. The final declaration focused on the theme of “Parliamentary Action for Social Development and Justice”. OSCE PA President Pia Kauma addressed the IPU on 8 April, reaffirming the PA’s commitment to multilateralism and co-operation, and underlining the responsibility of parliamentarians to ensure that multilateralism remains effective and responsive.

Stronger ties are being established between women parliamentarians in the region with the aim to advance women's economic, social, and political empowerment in Central Asia and across the Asian continent. There are also initiatives to connect women parliamentarians in preventing and countering violent extremism. The Central Asian Women Leaders’ Caucus, launched in 2020 by Uzbekistan Senate Chair Narbaeva and the UN, includes women political leaders from across the region. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), while not limited to Central Asia, also hosts an annual Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament.

### **C. Mitigating the Impacts of Climate Change, Addressing Water Scarcity**

Mitigating the multifaceted impacts of climate change and addressing water scarcity have become key drivers of regional co-operation in Central Asia, one of the most climate-vulnerable regions in the world. More than 80 per cent of Central Asia’s water resources originate from glaciers, which have shrunk by approximately 30 per cent over the past 50 years. By 2050, water resources in the Syr Darya basin are expected to decline by 5 per cent, while those in the Amu Darya basin could decrease by 15 per cent. The Qosh Tepa canal in Afghanistan is further exacerbating water scarcity. With Central Asia’s population projected to reach 100 million by 2050, concerns over water security and potential conflict could rise, highlighting the urgent need for regional co-operation and robust water diplomacy frameworks. These challenges also pose serious risks to food security. According to World Bank forecasts, agricultural yields in Central Asia could decline by 20 to 40 per cent by 2050 due to climate change.

Central Asian states are increasingly taking the lead in advancing the global climate agenda, proposing major international initiatives focused on adaptation

and mitigation. In parallel, Central Asian countries are actively engaging in international co-operation through platforms provided by the United Nations.<sup>6</sup>

All five countries are members of the **International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS)**, an inter-governmental organization established in 1993 to address the ecological crisis and socio-economic issues in the Aral Sea basin. The **Aral Sea disaster** is a tragic example of how a man-made crisis has been exacerbated by the effects of climate change. Once the world's fourth-largest lake, primarily due to Soviet-era irrigation projects diverting its source rivers – the Amu Darya and Syr Darya – for cotton cultivation, it has shrunk dramatically, losing approximately 90 per cent of its water volume and 87.85 per cent of its area over the past six decades. By 1989, the Aral Sea had split into two separate bodies of water: the South Aral Sea (Uzbekistan) and the North Aral Sea (Kazakhstan). The South Aral Sea continues to shrink, while the North Aral Sea has seen some stabilization and even slight increases due to conservation efforts. This has resulted in devastating environmental, economic, and health consequences, particularly for the local population in the Karakalpakstan region of Uzbekistan but also the region as a whole. The loss of the moderating influence of the Aral Sea has also led to more extreme temperatures and drier conditions in the region.

A similar fate could also face the world's largest landlocked body – the **Caspian Sea**, where a decline in water levels threatens the livelihoods of more than 15 million people living around the Caspian coast, in Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkmenistan. The decline in water levels is being exacerbated by human factors like altered river inflows and water utilization. Without urgent action, as many as five million people could be displaced from the Caspian basin already by mid-century. The Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea ('Tehran Convention') signed in 2003 by all five Caspian littoral states – Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan – provides a cornerstone for regional co-operation on this issue.

Over the next three years, the region will host several high-profile events on water and climate issues. Samarkand hosted an international conference on Central Asia and climate change in April 2025. Kazakhstan plans to host a similar regional climate summit in 2026, in partnership with the UN, to drive co-operation and solutions for water management in Central Asia. It has also agreed to establish a **Project Office for Central Asia on climate change and green energy** in Almaty. Other notable regional initiatives include the **Dushanbe Water Process** – a series of high-level international conferences throughout the Water Action Decade (2018-2028), and the **One Water Summit** (3 December 2024) co-organized by

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<sup>6</sup> Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are furthermore parties to the *Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes* ('Water Convention'). Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are also parties to the *Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses* ('Watercourses Convention'). Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have not acceded to either of the two conventions.

French President Macron, Kazakhstan President Tokayev and the World Bank in Riyadh, a key theme of which was transboundary water co-operation and the urgency of collaborative water management.

Climate change and water scarcity were high on the agenda at the **EU-Central Asia Summit** (Samarkand, April 2025), where the EU and Central Asian countries recognized the need for joint action for the full and effective implementation of the Paris Agreement. They agreed to continue to implement innovative approaches in water–energy co-operation to foster the efficient use of water resources; and to strengthen co-operation to improve the situation in the Aral Sea region. The importance of efforts to improve the effectiveness of IFAS were also recognized.

Mongolia, too, is severely impacted by climate change and extreme weather events such as *dzuds*, consisting of extreme winters characterized by freezing temperatures, heavy snow and ground so frozen that animals cannot reach pasture. Droughts and dust storms further threaten the livelihoods of nomadic herders, ecosystems, and food security. Approximately 77 per cent of Mongolia's land is degraded due to overgrazing and climate change, contributing to desertification and impacting agricultural productivity.

Mongolia is actively addressing climate change through its National Action Programme on Climate Change, updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) with a 22.7 per cent greenhouse gas emission reduction target by 2030, and mitigation and adaptation measures like reducing emissions from coal stoves, promoting water harvesting, and enhancing early warning systems for herders. Ulaanbaatar will host the 17th session of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification's (UNCCD) Conference of the Parties in 2026, further solidifying Mongolia's commitment to sustainable land management and climate action.

#### **D. The Green Energy Transition**

The green energy transition in Central Asia is gaining momentum, with a focus on renewable energy development and regional co-operation, driven by climate change impacts, resource depletion, and growing energy demands.

Although most Central Asian nations are heavily dependent on fossil fuel production and exports, they are aiming to significantly increase the use of renewable energy, hoping to eventually become crucial suppliers of so-called green electricity to Europe. The **Caspian Green Energy Corridor** – which aims to supply green electricity from Central Asia to Azerbaijan and further to Europe – remains the region's most ambitious project.

Kazakhstan is actively pursuing a green energy transition, aiming for carbon neutrality by 2060, by reducing its reliance on fossil fuels, and increasing the share of renewable energy sources like wind, solar, and hydropower. The country has also set a target to generate 15 per cent of its electricity from renewables by 2030

and 50 per cent by 2050. By the end of 2024, Kazakhstan had built a network of 148 renewable energy facilities, generating nearly 3,000 megawatts of clean power, with the share of renewable energy sources reaching 7 per cent. It plans to launch nine renewable energy facilities with a combined installed capacity of 455.5 megawatts in 2025. A nationwide referendum in October 2024 approved the construction of Kazakhstan's first nuclear power plant. The country is also focusing on expanding gas-based power generation.

Uzbekistan declared 2025 the Year of Environmental Protection and the Green Economy. By 2030, it plans to increase the share of renewable energy sources to 54 per cent; greenhouse gas emissions are to be reduced by 35 per cent.

Kyrgyzstan, too, is pursuing a green energy transition, aiming to phase out coal and developing hydropower and solar energy and potentially also wind power. At the COP29 climate conference in Baku in November 2024, the Kyrgyzstan pavilion hosted an event on "Just Transition in Central Asia: Pathway to Climate Resilience and Social Justice" which identified strengthening the transparency of climate initiatives and the active involvement of civil society in monitoring and developing climate strategies as key conditions for a successful transition.

Tajikistan aims to generate all its electricity from green energy sources by 2032 and is implementing measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, including the completion of the Rogun hydropower plant which will double clean energy production capacity.

Turkmenistan is diversifying its energy mix. While reliant on natural gas and oil, it is exploring the potential of hydropower and actively investing in renewable energy sources such as solar and wind.

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are the primary Central Asian countries actively pursuing renewable hydrogen, also known as green hydrogen, produced through a process which uses electricity generated from renewable sources like solar, wind, or hydropower, with minimal or no greenhouse gas emissions. Tajikistan also has ambitious targets for renewable hydrogen production by 2040.

Mongolia, where coal contributes over 90 per cent to electricity generation, is also actively pursuing a green energy transition by setting ambitious renewable energy targets, implementing supportive legislation, and investing in wind and solar farms. It aims to increase renewable energy capacity to 30 per cent by 2030.

## **E. Economic Growth, Transport and Digital Connectivity**

### **❖ Economic growth**

Central Asia is expected to continue its robust economic growth, although forecasts have been slightly revised down, due to a weaker expansion of the oil sector in Kazakhstan, declining exports and remittances inflows, and extreme weather, which resulted in severe flooding in Kazakhstan. Nevertheless, the

economic growth forecast for Central Asia is expected at around 4.7 per cent in 2025-26. The economies of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in particular were expected to grow in 2025 at around 6.8 per cent and 6.5 per cent respectively, followed by Uzbekistan (5.9 per cent) and Kazakhstan (4.5 per cent).

Sustained remittance inflows, higher wages and greater international tourism interest in the region have been the main contributors to this growth. The region's demographic profile, with a young and growing population, contributes to its positive growth outlook.

Inflation is expected to increase slightly in the region, reaching 6.9 per cent in 2025, before moderating to 5.9 per cent in 2026. Unemployment in 2024 ranged from 3.3 per cent in Kyrgyzstan to 11.6 per cent in Tajikistan, with Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan showed similarly low unemployment rates, with figures of 4.3 per cent, 4.5 per cent, and 4.8 per cent, respectively.

#### ❖ **Transport connectivity**

Central Asia is actively working to improve connectivity, both internally and with the rest of the world, through various infrastructure and digital initiatives. These efforts aim to unlock the region's economic potential, facilitate trade, and enhance regional integration. Challenges include geographical barriers, high costs, and the need for further infrastructure development.

Transport connectivity is being boosted by projects such as the *Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)*; the *Middle Corridor* or *Transcaspian International Transport Route (TITR)*; and the *Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) Pipeline*.

#### ❖ **Digital connectivity**

Digitalization holds vast potential for economic growth, modernization, and integration into the global digital economy. However, Central Asia is facing a number of challenges that slow the transition to a digital economy. One of these is limited internet access, especially in rural and remote areas. This digital divide is exacerbated by not only economic but also infrastructural challenges. Installing fibre optic cables in mountainous and remote areas presents difficulties due to geographical conditions and the distance from major transmission routes.

Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan are actively advancing digitalization through national strategies. Kazakhstan ranks among the top 25 countries in e-government with 92 per cent of government services provided electronically. Uzbekistan aims to more than double the size of its digital economy by 2026, achieving 70 per cent digitalization of industry, financial, and banking sectors, and 100 per cent provision of government services through e-government. Kyrgyzstan's digitalization strategy for 2024-2028 focusses on further development of e-government, infrastructure improvement, and strengthening cybersecurity.

The EU has been providing support for the development of Central Asia's digital economy. It is developing a high-capacity internet network through satellite technology. A financial package of nearly €60 million was announced in March 2025 by the European Investment Bank and the European Commission for these initiatives which are expected to enhance the access of women, youth and marginalized groups, and enhancing socio-economic inclusion.

## **F. Migration**

The Russian Federation remains a key destination for migrants from Central Asia with an estimated 10 million labour migrants, many of whom are not officially registered for work, with the proportion of unregistered women higher than that of men.

The Crocus City Hall terrorist attack in March 2024, reportedly carried out by Tajik nationals, sparked police raids and harassment of Central Asian citizens. Since then, Russia has continued to curtail the number of workers from Central Asia. In June 2025, Russia announced that it was preparing to launch a new system in September in Moscow and its surroundings to monitor foreign nationals who enter without a visa, combining biometric registration, location tracking, and intensified police oversight. Critics view it as part of a broader strategy to pressure foreign workers into signing military contracts. Undocumented migrants from Central Asia are being lured with false promises of fast-track Russian citizenship or pulled straight from detention centres to fight in the Russian army. There have been joint raids aiming to identify migrants who have received Russian citizenship but failed to register for military service. Legislation came into effect in April 2025, effectively barring migrant children who don't speak Russian from attending Russian schools.

This unprecedented pressure, combined with the economic impact of the sanctions on Russia, are causing an outflow of Central Asian migrant workers with implications not only for the Russian labour market – which is facing shortages – but also for the Central Asian economies. Remittances account for up to 40 per cent of Tajikistan's GDP, and more than 20 per cent of the GDPs of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. In response, Central Asian governments are looking to facilitate labour migration to other countries such as Türkiye, South Korea, and the Gulf states. Europe is also increasingly a destination. In September 2024, Germany announced a deal with Uzbekistan to enable the migration of skilled workers as well as the return of failed asylum seekers.

Central Asian migrants are also being returned from the United States. In April 2025, over 100 citizens of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan were deported to Uzbekistan. They were allegedly undocumented migrants who had violated visa requirements or whose legal stay had expired. US authorities have also begun deporting migrants including Central Asian and Afghan citizens to Panama and Costa Rica as part of a crackdown on irregular migration.

## **G. Democratisation, Fundamental Rights and Freedoms**

### **❖ Elections**

On 27 October 2024, Uzbekistan held parliamentary elections for the 150 Member lower (legislative) chamber of the *Oliy Majlis*. Conducted under a new mixed electoral system, these elections completed a reform cycle following the adoption of a substantially amended Constitution and revisions to the electoral legal framework. Seventy-five members were elected in single-mandate constituencies under a majoritarian plurality system, and another 75 from a nationwide constituency under a closed-list proportional system with a 7 per cent threshold. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (LDPU) of President Mirziyoyev increased its share by 11 seats to a total of 64. It was followed by the National Revival Democratic Party (NRDP) (29 seats); the Social Democratic Party *Adolat* (SDP) (21 seats); the People's Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (PDPU) (20 seats); and the Ecological Party of Uzbekistan (EPU) (16 seats). The gender quota for candidate lists was increased from 30 to 40 per cent, translating into an increase in the number of women in the legislative chamber from 48 to 57.

The OSCE PA deployed a 54-member election observation mission together with the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). According to the Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions<sup>7</sup>, "Uzbekistan's 27 October parliamentary elections, took place amid ongoing reforms, including significant amendments to the Constitution, but the political environment remained constrained, not providing voters with a genuine choice. While the electoral framework has gradually evolved, and elections were technically well-prepared, significant challenges in meeting international standards for democratic elections persist in such areas as political party registration, the right to stand, campaign finance transparency, citizen observation, and the publication of polling station results. Fundamental freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression remain disproportionately limited both by legislation and in practice. Positively, women were well represented among candidates and in election administration. All five registered political parties were able to campaign freely and with legally enforced equal conditions, but their campaigns were low-key and devoid of real challenges to the policies of the ruling party or to each other. Media coverage was limited by restrictions on free expression, resulting in minimal access for voters to diverse viewpoints. Election day was calm and orderly but negatively affected by numerous cases of identified violations, malfeasance, and procedural and technical problems. Important safeguards were repeatedly disregarded during voting, counting, and tabulation, challenging the integrity of the process and undermining transparency."

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<sup>7</sup> OSCE ODIHR and OSCE PA, Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/uzbekistan/573727>.

The final report<sup>8</sup>, published on 26 February 2025, contains 21 recommendations, calling upon the authorities to *inter alia* guarantee the right of individuals and groups to establish political parties; to comprehensively revise the legislation governing fundamental rights and freedoms to ensure that any restrictions comply with the principles of legality, legitimacy, necessity and proportionality; to revise media legislation to provide effective protections for the freedom of expression; and to intensify efforts to prevent the recurring problems of multiple voting, proxy voting, and ballot box stuffing.

In March 2025, Tajikistan held elections to both chambers of the *Majlisi Oli*. Following elections on 2 March according to a mixed electoral system, five of the six registered parties in the country gained representation in the lower chamber – the *Majlisi Namoyandagon* (Assembly of Representatives). The ruling People’s Democratic Party retained a majority, winning 52.5 per cent of votes (49 out of 63 seats). These were the first elections since 1995 without international observers: the OSCE announced on 3 February that it was withdrawing its team, citing the lack of assurance by the authorities that observers would be accredited and able to carry out their work. On 28 March, 25 members were indirectly elected to the 33 seat upper chamber – the *Majlisi Milli* (Supreme Assembly), while a further eight were appointed by President Rahmon.

#### ❖ **Participation of Women in Public Life and Combating Gender Based Violence**

Promoting gender equality is high on the political agenda in Central Asia. However, traditional gender roles and gender stereotypes persist, with women often facing barriers in accessing education, finance, and employment opportunities, hindering their economic empowerment and participation in public life. In political campaigns, women face disproportionate challenges, both financially and in terms of time commitment. Unpaid care and domestic responsibilities place women at a significant disadvantage from the outset.

Three countries – Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan – have legislated gender quotas to enhance the participation of women in parliament. However, these quotas only apply to the candidates in the proportional races. As all three have adopted mixed electoral systems, the overall effect is mitigated.

Following a change in legislation in **Uzbekistan**, the gender quota for candidate lists was increased from 30 to 40 per cent. Following the October 2024 elections, the number of women in the legislative chamber increased from 48 to 57 out of 150 members – representing **38 per cent**. The share of women in the indirectly-

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<sup>8</sup> OSCE ODIHR, Republic of Uzbekistan, Parliamentary Elections 27 October 2024, ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report (26 February 2025), at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/uzbekistan/573727>.

elected 65-member Senate, whose speaker is a woman, Ms. Tanzila Narbaeva, is 24.6 per cent.

**Kazakhstan's** 30 per cent gender quota further encompasses young candidates and persons with disabilities. The quota also applies to the distribution of seats. Nevertheless, following the March 2023 elections held according to a new mixed system, the share of women decreased from 26 per cent to **18 per cent**. The share of women in the indirectly-elected 50-member Senate is 20 per cent.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, the 30 per cent gender quota only applies to the candidates in the proportional race. Due to the low share of women candidates in the majoritarian races, the overall share of women in the *Jogorku Kenesh* (parliament) formed after the November 2021 elections was **21 per cent**.

Although there are no gender quotas in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, the share of women MPs in both countries is higher than in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The share of women in Tajikistan's lower chamber of parliament following the March 2025 elections increased to **28.6 per cent** (18 out of 63), up from 23.8 per cent following the March 2020 elections, and 19 per cent following the 2015 elections. In **Turkmenistan**, the share of women in the 125-member unicameral *Mejlis* after the March 2023 parliamentary elections was **25.6 per cent**. The Speaker is also a woman: Ms. Dunyagozel Gulmanova.

**Mongolia** recently introduced a 30 per cent gender quota for all candidates, gender parity on proportional lists, and financial incentives for increased participation by women. The parliament elected on 28 June 2024 saw the share of women increase from 17.3 to **25.4 per cent**.

For reference, the global average for the share of women in parliament according to the IPU is 27.1 per cent. Regional averages are as high as 35.3 per cent for the Americas, 31.6 per cent in Europe and 22.1 per cent in Asia.

Prominent Central Asian women, such as Uzbekistan Senate Chair Tanzila Narbaeva, have been instrumental in unleashing the power of networking and elevating emerging women leaders. The **Central Asia Women Leaders' Caucus (CAWLC)**, launched by the Senate of Uzbekistan and UN agencies in December 2020, actively identifies and addresses barriers to gender equality in non-governmental areas (business, science, IT, sports and culture, mass media); combats gender stereotypes; and devises initiatives within government agencies to substantially elevate the status of women across all regions. The most recent meeting of the CAWLC was held in Tajikistan in May 2025, within the framework of the High-Level International Conference on Glacier Preservation and discussed a critical role of women in climate adaptation and mitigation. A key outcome was the adoption of the CAWLC Action Plan for 2025, including strengthened engagement on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), climate resilience, and regional co-operation. Presidency of the CAWLC will revert to Uzbekistan in 2026.

### ❖ ***Combating Gender Based Violence***

Kyrgyzstan was the first country in the region to criminalize domestic violence and has been working to strengthen its legal framework. In July 2024, it enhanced legal protections for women against rape, sexual assault, and bride kidnapping. Legal gaps remain in ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and girls with disabilities who are victims of domestic violence.

In Uzbekistan, the concerted actions of women rights activists and human rights defenders resulted in the adoption in 2023 by the Senate of a package of amendments to the country's Criminal and Administrative Codes, criminalizing domestic violence as a separate offence and providing women and children with additional protection mechanisms.

In April 2024, Kazakhstan adopted legislative amendments that advanced women's rights and strengthened protections for women and children, including domestic violence survivors. Still, the legislation does not explicitly criminalize domestic violence as a stand-alone offense.

Neither Tajikistan nor Turkmenistan have legislation explicitly criminalizing domestic violence. Some legal protections exist in Tajikistan's criminal code, while in Turkmenistan family abuse is mainly addressed through the criminal and administrative codes.

The lack of sufficient state support for victims across Central Asia, including shelters, especially in rural areas, exacerbates the challenges for survivors of domestic violence. Investment in specialized training for police and judiciary in survivor-centred response is also needed.

### ❖ ***Participation of Youth in Public Life***

Young people under the age of 35 represent 65 to 70 per cent of the population in Central Asia, about 52.7 million people in total. Recognizing the importance of this demographic in shaping the future, governments across Central Asia are taking steps to promote youth participation in political and public life through legal frameworks, policy initiatives, and multilateral co-operation.

Some (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan) have introduced legal quotas for candidates nominated by parties. Various youth-targeted programs and legislative initiatives also aim to foster political engagement among younger citizens. Even though it does not have a youth quota, Turkmenistan leads in terms of the share of youth in parliament with 54.8 per cent of members of the Mejlis aged 40 or younger. Like Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Mongolia do not have legally-mandated youth quotas. Youth representation in Uzbekistan's legislative (lower) chamber is 23.3 per cent. There is no data on the current share of youth in the parliament of Tajikistan. In Mongolia, the share of youth (under 40) is 15.9 per cent while the share of MPs aged 45 or lower is 40.5 per cent.

In Kazakhstan, at least 30 per cent of deputies on party lists must be representatives of women, people with disabilities or youth (under the age of 35). The share of members of the lower chamber under the age of 40 is 25.5 per cent. Kyrgyzstan requires political parties to include a minimum of 15 per cent youth candidates on their lists, with at least five young candidates among the top 65. Youth representation (40 or younger) in the Supreme Council is 27.8 per cent.

Uzbekistan has a youth parliament under both chambers of parliament; these youth parliaments serve as advisory bodies to protect youth interests and support their initiatives. The youth parliament under the Senate consists of 100 members, 30 per cent of whom are women and 95 per cent having higher education. The new youth parliament under the Senate held its first meeting in February 2025.

In Kazakhstan there is a Youth Policy Council established by presidential decree in 2008 with the aim to improve implementation of the state's youth policy. The ruling *Nur Otan* party also has a youth wing – *Zhas Otan*.

On 12 March 2025, Kyrgyzstan's Cabinet of Ministers adopted a National Action Plan for 2025–2027 to implement UNSCR 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security. The plan was officially launched on 17 April 2025, during a national presentation that brought together government bodies, international partners, and youth organizations to discuss strategies for empowering young people in conflict prevention and sustainable peace efforts. Kyrgyzstan is the only country in the OSCE area apart from Finland to have adopted such a National Action Plan.

Youth priorities have been integrated into Kazakhstan's National Adaptation Plan. In Turkmenistan, the leadership of the national parliament pledged to include youth empowerment in the new National Human Rights Action Plan. Young parliamentarians from Turkmenistan have also been nominated for inclusion in the OSCE PA's Network of Young Parliamentarians.

Countries have furthermore boosted regional co-operation and dialogue in the area of youth. In April 2025, a Central Asia Youth Dialogue was held at the UN ECOSOC Youth Forum in New York, establishing a rotating youth engagement mechanism and preparing an upcoming youth forum in August 2025, as part of the Third UN Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries in Turkmenistan. In May 2025, IOM organized the first-ever Central Asia Youth Migration Forum in Tashkent, launching a regional Youth Advisory Board on Migration. The Central Asian Youth Forum on Combating Human Trafficking in November 2024 supported by the OSCE, provided young Central Asians with a platform to share good practices and to strengthen co-operation against human trafficking. The October 2024 EU–Central Asia Young Leaders Conference in Tashkent and the Youth for Resilience in Central Asia Forum in Almaty further advanced youth-led climate and water governance. At COP29 in Baku (November 2024), youth from all five Central Asian countries joined regional consultations to present joint proposals on environmental education and green employment.

### ❖ *Rights of Persons with Disabilities*

While all Central Asian countries except Tajikistan have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), challenges persist in ensuring full inclusion and participation for individuals with disabilities. While progress is being made, contemporary understanding and practices in some countries are still influenced by historical medical approaches to disability, which often involved institutionalization.

Uzbekistan, which ratified the CRPD in 2021, is taking steps towards implementation through a national action plan based on a comprehensive diagnosis involving in-depth analysis of quantitative, qualitative, and legislative information across nine crucial sectors, including accessibility, employment, education, and health. Among the measures introduced is the prioritization of employment for persons with disabilities to foster economic inclusion.

In Kazakhstan, where there are an estimated 725,000 persons with disabilities (4 per cent of the total population), legislative measures and a legal framework have been adopted to ensure implementation of the UNCRPD which was ratified in 2015. These include a 2021 inclusive education law which removed problematic medical exams as a prerequisite for mainstream schooling. There are also employment quotas for persons with disabilities in companies with 50 or more employees. A 30 per cent joint quota for women, youth and persons with disabilities for candidates put forth by parties, which also applies to the distribution of seats, seeks to enhance the representation of persons with disabilities in parliament. Following the March 2023 elections, 71 deputies with disabilities were elected in local representative bodies as well as seven in the national parliament.

Tajikistan signed the UNCRPD in 2018 but has not yet ratified it. A more inclusive policy adopted by Tajikistan in recent years has helped improve the living conditions of the approx.-. 140,000 persons with disabilities, as well as to broaden the understanding and respect of the public. Disability inclusion is now a recognized priority for many institutions, and more children with disabilities are gaining access to education. While women with disabilities still face challenges, they now have more opportunities for empowerment.

Kyrgyzstan has taken a number of steps to uphold the rights of persons with disabilities through two key laws, one on the rights and guarantees of people with disabilities (2008), and another on protection from domestic violence (2017). However neither of these includes specific provisions to protect women and girls with disabilities from domestic violence. In February 2025, Kyrgyzstan's Parliament passed a bill introducing harsher penalties for sexual violence committed against persons with disabilities. Survivors and advocacy groups have welcomed this as a significant step forward but also called for more comprehensive measures to address underreporting, difficulty identifying

individuals at risk, and high attrition rates in cases of sexual violence (referring to the loss of cases in the criminal justice chain).

In Mongolia, financial incentives are provided to political parties to increase the participation of persons with disabilities.

Across the region, while a variety of measures are implemented to facilitate the access of persons with disabilities to polling stations, persons declared incompetent by a court decision as a consequence of intellectual or psycho-social disability are not allowed to cast their vote, contrary to international standards.

#### ❖ ***Freedom of Expression, Freedom of the Media***

Developments have not been as positive in the area of freedom of expression and freedom of the media. Throughout the region, governments are enacting laws or using existing legislation to exert greater control over online content, including blocking access to independent media and social media platforms, while journalists, human rights defenders and civil society representatives continue to be targeted. Furthermore, independent outlets such as Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) are facing an unprecedented economic crisis exacerbated by the abrupt halt of American aid. All five countries have scored lower in the 2024 World Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders.<sup>9</sup> Kyrgyzstan in particular has seen its score go down by 12 points, due to a reported upsurge in pressure on the media, with the government trying to extend its control to privately-owned media outlets. Human Rights Watch has called attention to the criminal charges of “public calls to mass unrest” against two journalists from Kloop Media, a leading independent media platform.<sup>10</sup>

## **II. Activities Implemented (2024-2025)**

During the second year of my mandate, I visited the two Central Asian countries which I had not yet visited in my capacity as Special Representative on Central Asia: Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. I also returned to Turkmenistan in November 2024 to moderate a session at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ashgabat Conference on “Parliamentary Diplomacy in the OSCE Area: Dialogue as a Tool for Building Bridges for a Secure and Peaceful Future.” The practice of hosting co-ordination meetings of the OSCE PA delegations of Central Asia on the sidelines of OSCE PA statutory meetings continued, with two such meetings during the Autumn Meeting in Dublin (October

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<sup>9</sup> Kazakhstan (141/180), Kyrgyzstan (144/180), Uzbekistan (148/180), Tajikistan (153/180) and Turkmenistan (174/180). See: <https://rsf.org/en/index>.

<sup>10</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Kyrgyzstan: Drop Charges Against Kloop Media Journalists” (3 June 2025), at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/06/03/kyrgyzstan-drop-charges-against-kloop-media-journalists>.

2024) and the Winter Meeting in Vienna (February 2025). A third meeting is planned on the sidelines of the Annual Session in Porto (29 June 2025).

I regret that I have not yet managed to visit Mongolia but hope to have the opportunity in the near future and, until then, I look forward to engaging with members of the delegation of Mongolia on the sidelines of OSCE PA meetings.

#### **A. Co-ordination Meetings of OSCE PA Central Asian Delegations**

A regular practice of co-ordination meetings of Special Representative with Central Asian delegations was established in 2023 on the margins of OSCE PA Statutory Meetings in order to align priorities and strengthen co-operation within the OSCE PA framework. These meetings have helped shape a thematic and inclusive agenda that reflects shared regional concerns. It was based on our discussions in 2023 that I identified three core priorities for our work:

- Mitigating climate change and addressing water scarcity
- Enhancing women's and youth participation in public life
- Advancing regional parliamentary co-operation and diplomacy

In 2024-2025, I continued to facilitate these co-ordination meetings on the sidelines of the Autumn Meeting (Dublin, October 2024) and the Winter Meeting (Vienna, February 2025).

The meeting in Vienna, attended by all five delegations, provided an opportunity to discuss follow up to the resolution on “**Addressing the Multifaceted Impacts of Climate Change and Water Scarcity in the Central Asian Region through Enhanced Regional Co-operation and Parliamentary Dialogue**” adopted in Bucharest in 2024. The resolution focusses on the major challenges which the countries of Central Asia are currently facing and how they are being addressed, highlighting joint initiatives and achievements as well as the obstacles which remain. It was a collaborative effort developed jointly with the delegations of Central Asia who prioritized these topics and drew upon visits to Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in April 2024. We agreed that the delegations of Central Asia would report on implementation at the upcoming 2025 Annual Session in Porto.

I informed them of my intention to prepare a new resolution for the Porto Annual based on the discussions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ashgabat conference (November 2024) and the upcoming visits to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (April 2025). All five delegations expressed their support for a new resolution, highlighting the importance of strengthening parliamentary diplomacy and multilateral co-operation to address common challenges and threats such as terrorism, the situation in Afghanistan, climate change, water scarcity, and energy and food security.

I recommended keeping the focus on the three priority areas identified (see above) in order to monitor progress. However, I have taken note of proposals for further

topics for engagement and enhanced regional co-operation for 2025-2026, with transport, trade and inter-connectivity emerging as a possible new theme.

In Vienna, in February 2025, I also met for the second time with the Permanent Representatives of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to the OSCE to discuss follow up on the 2024 resolution as well as my planned visits to their respective countries. I also met with the Permanent Representative of Turkmenistan to the OSCE to discuss the outcomes and follow up on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ashgabat Conference.

I continue to liaise with OSCE Field Operations in Central Asia and the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre's Central Asia Desk and to support national and regional initiatives across Central Asia.

## **B. Addressing the Multifaceted Impacts of Climate Change and Water Scarcity in Central Asia**

I had the opportunity to raise awareness about the challenges related to water scarcity in Central Asia at a seminar organized by the Clingendael Institute in April 2025. I shared the painful impressions from my visit to the Aral Sea in April 2024, underlining that this is a man-made disaster, the results of decisions taken without understanding the long-term consequences with disastrous ecological but also social, economic and psychological impacts. I also underlined the importance of raising awareness of how irreversible some of the damage is. I also shared the positive developments, such as the historic agreements between Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan on border demarcation and shared water resource management – signs of a new era of co-operation. I emphasized the crucial role of politicians in encouraging dialogue but also in raising awareness and promoting education to help communities understand the causes and consequences of climate change and water scarcity and ensure that future generations are better equipped to protect their environment.

I reiterate my call to the Members of the Assembly to consider how they can support efforts by the countries of Central Asia to address the multifaceted impacts of climate change and water scarcity as these have global repercussions with far-reaching global consequences for water security, food security, economic stability, public health, and regional security.

## **C. Engagement with Turkmenistan**

### **❖ *Bilateral Visit to Turkmenistan (26 November 2024)***

On 26 November, in advance of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ashgabat Conference, President Kauma and I travelled to Turkmenistan to meet with the Chairperson of the Mejlis, H.E. Dunyagozel Gulmanova, members of parliament and Foreign Minister Meredov. Many ideas for further engagement were discussed including a continuation of the Ashgabat conferences as well as possible thematic focuses. We had the

opportunity to visit the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat and to meet with Amb. MacGregor and his staff who provided an overview of the activities of the Centre. It is encouraging to hear that requests for expert support from the authorities have increased as a result of the growing profile of the OSCE in Turkmenistan. Amb. MacGregor also acknowledged the role of the OSCE PA in elevating the profile of the OSCE CiA and in promoting OSCE commitments in the country.

#### ❖ **Second Ashgabat Conference (27-28 November 2024)**

As a follow up to a regional seminar held in Ashgabat in May 2023 on “The Role of Neutral States in Strengthening Security, Stability and Dialogue in the OSCE Area”, the parliament of Turkmenistan hosted a second conference from 27-28 November 2024. Focusing on the theme of “Parliamentary Diplomacy in the OSCE Area: Dialogue as a Tool for Building Bridges for a Secure and Peaceful Future”. It brought together over 100 participants, including parliamentarians from 18 OSCE participating States, international experts, government representatives and high-level stakeholders to explore the role of parliamentary diplomacy in addressing pressing global challenges and securing the interests of future generations.

I had the honour to moderate session 1 on “Parliamentary Diplomacy in the OSCE Area: Building a Strong Foundation for Lasting International Peace and Security Through Dialogue and Cooperation”. This session emphasized the importance of multilateralism, trust-building, and inclusive dialogue to address global challenges and create a stable and prosperous future for all. Parliamentary diplomacy was highlighted as a bridge to foster connections and advance mutual understanding, particularly in addressing transnational issues such as climate change, migration, and human trafficking.

I encourage you to read the report<sup>11</sup> of the conference which has been positively received by the Delegation of Turkmenistan and the Permanent Mission of Turkmenistan to the OSCE.

#### **D. Visit to Kyrgyzstan (25-26 April 2025)**

My two-day visit to Kyrgyzstan focused on strengthening regional co-operation, advancing climate resilience, and promoting clean energy solutions. I was accompanied by the Deputy Head of the Delegation of Kazakhstan to the OSCE PA, Ms. Ainur Argynbekova, who had participated in the visits to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan in April 2024 and whose presence ensured the exchange of best practices.

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<sup>11</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Ashgabat Conference on “Parliamentary Diplomacy in the OSCE Area: Dialogue as a Tool for Building Bridges for a Secure and Peaceful Future” (27-28 November 2024) – Highlights, at: <https://www.oscepa.org/en/documents/seminars-a-conferences/5140-osce-pa-highlights-ii-ashgabat-conference-27-28-november-2024/file>

In Bishkek we were received by the Speaker of the Parliament, H.E. Nurlanbek Turgunbek uulu, and the First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Asein Isaev. Our discussions centred on the development of parliamentarism, Kyrgyzstan's co-operation with the OSCE and the OSCE PA, and broader regional dynamics. The historic border agreements reached in March 2025 between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and the adoption of the Khujand Declaration between Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, were also high on the agenda. During our exchanges, I expressed the hope that these positive developments would pave the way for deeper regional dialogue and co-operation on shared challenges such as climate change and water scarcity. I also highlighted that the OSCE PA, through its instruments of parliamentary diplomacy, and the OSCE, through its field operations, can help support further confidence-building and the development of resilient, inclusive, and forward-looking societies where all voices are heard.

We also had the opportunity to learn more about Kyrgyzstan's climate policy priorities in our discussions with Minister of Natural Resources, Ecology and Technical Supervision, Meder Mashiev, in particular the protection of mountainous ecosystems, the reduction of carbon emissions, the green energy transition, and climate financing. We had an invaluable opportunity to learn more about OSCE projects in the area of promoting environmental awareness from Eduard Kubatov, an accomplished mountaineer and President of the Federation of Mountaineering and Sport Climbing of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Despite our tight schedule, human rights and civil society engagement were also on the agenda. Ombudsperson Dzhamilia Dzhamanbaeva and representatives of civil society organizations highlighted recent developments in the area of human rights, the rights of women, children and persons with disabilities, prevention of torture and gender-based violence, and freedom of assembly and media. Recent legislative developments and their impact on the development of democratic institutions in Kyrgyzstan were also addressed.

I also had the opportunity to visit once again an institution which I am particularly fond of – the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, meeting with its new Director Dr. Pál Dunay and staff. I also engaged with students from five different countries on the topic of a lecture which I gave on the topic of “Civil Society's Role in Safeguarding Human Rights: Navigating Geopolitical Crises and the Erosion of International Law.”

My heartfelt thanks go to Ambassador Alexey Rogov and his wonderful team at the OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek, for their support in organizing this visit and for the important work which they are doing across all three OSCE dimensions, aimed at strengthening regional security and fostering an open, resilient society in Kyrgyzstan.

## **E. Visit to Tajikistan (28-30 April 2025)**

Following the visit to Kyrgyzstan, I joined President Kauma and 13 other Members of the OSCE PA in a three-day visit to Tajikistan with the objective to better understand the important mandate and work of the OSCE Programme Office in Dushanbe (POiD) and to interact with key stakeholders from government, parliament, the international community and civil society. This visit was part of a broader initiative by the OSCE PA to promote the work of OSCE Field Operations, following up on a visit to the OSCE Mission to Serbia October 2024.

Our delegation received a very warm welcome at the OSCE POiD by Deputy Head Tatiana Turcan and staff who briefed us on the activities of the OSCE Programme Office in Dushanbe, sharing their insights on challenges and achievements. I found our discussions with representatives of civil society in Tajikistan just as rewarding as it allowed us to discuss their priorities and achievements in a number of areas, including human rights, and specifically women's rights and the rights of persons with disabilities, mine victim assistance, youth engagement, and environmental protection. These exchanges provided valuable insights into the challenges facing civil society and how OSCE support contributes to advancing rights, empowerment, and resilience at the community level.

Our delegation learned more about the security challenges facing Tajikistan and the specific concerns related to Afghanistan with which it shares a border of over 1300 km as well as projects being jointly implemented by the OSCE in the first dimension related to arms control, counter-terrorism, and border management. In the second dimension, the focus was on the environment, water management and exchange of best practice in this field, disaster risk reduction, good governance and anti-corruption initiatives. OSCE staff working in the third dimension shared their concerns about radicalisation in prisons, especially since 2024. We also heard that many civil society organizations (CSOs) have scaled down their activities or to closed altogether in part due to declining donor support. The lack of preparedness of CSOs to address human rights challenges in the digital space and social media was also highlighted. Challenges related to trafficking in human beings and gender-based violence (88 per cent of women experience domestic violence at some point in their lifetime) were also shared. The Women's Resource Centres developed with the support of the OSCE play a key role in providing support to victims through legal assistance, social counselling, and economic empowerment. One area where positive change was occurring was in relation to the rights of persons with disabilities despite widespread stigma.

We had the opportunity to visit two key projects in the politico-military field. The Border Management Staff College (BMSC) which acts as a centre of excellence for the delivery of expertise and best practices in border management and security for the whole OSCE region. The Regional Explosive Hazards Training Centre,

established with the support of the POiD, supports Central Asian OSCE States in addressing the challenges and complex issues posed by explosive hazards.

Our delegation met with government and parliamentary representatives of Tajikistan at the highest levels. President Kauma was received by President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon and discussed strategic priorities of Tajikistan's co-operation with the OSCE and the regional security agenda, as well as the Commander of the Border Troops Major-General Rajabzoda Murodali Rajab, who briefed President Kauma on Tajikistan's regional security challenges and threats related to border issues as well as its strategies to counter these. The delegation also met with Shermuhammad Shohiyon, the First Deputy Speaker of the Assembly of Representatives (lower chamber) of the Supreme Assembly, and members of the Assembly of Representatives, as well as Foreign Minister Sirodjiddin Muhridin. It was encouraging to hear them reaffirm their commitment to OSCE principles and express their appreciation for the constructive co-operation between Tajikistan and the OSCE and the OSCE PA. Areas for co-operation which were specifically mentioned included border security and management, water management, climate change and disaster preparedness. Our delegation was also informed about reforms which Tajikistan is implementing to enhance democratisation and about legislation to protect the rights of children, women, persons with disabilities, and victims of torture. Tajikistan has adopted a national strategy in the field of human rights protection until 2028.

#### **F. Resolution on “Strengthening Parliamentary Diplomacy and Co-operation to Safeguard Future Generations” (2025)**

Regional co-operation is key to addressing challenges related to climate change and water scarcity as well as other common concerns related to regional security and stability. This is why I have chosen the topic of “Strengthening Parliamentary Diplomacy and Co-operation to Safeguard Future Generations” for the resolution which I have tabled for discussion at the Annual Session in Porto. Building on the Second Ashgabat Conference (27-28 November 2024)(see above), as well as the interest expressed by Central Asian MPs to strengthen regional cooperation to address common challenges. I look forward to a lively debate on this resolution at the Annual Session in Porto.

### **III. Further Steps/Suggested Topics for Further Engagement**

The multifaceted impacts of climate change and water scarcity will remain a top priority for the years to come, not only in Central Asia but in the OSCE region and beyond. As expressed in the resolution which I have tabled for discussion at the Annual Session in Porto, we owe it to future generations to address these urgent and long-term global challenges. These are challenges which we need to address together, through strengthened inter-parliamentary dialogue and diplomacy and through co-operation with international organizations and civil society. Enhancing the participation of women and youth in political processes and in conflict prevention, peace-building and reconciliation efforts is critical for achieving results and for building inclusive and sustainable societies.

The following topics proposed by Central Asian delegations could be further explored within the PA framework in the coming years:

- Connectivity, trade and communications corridors linking Central Asia to the wider OSCE space;
- Institutionalized regional parliamentary co-operation, inspired by models for sub-regional parliamentary integration (e.g. Benelux and Nordic Council);
- Strengthening networks of women parliamentarians and enhancing their role in decision-making.

We also have important parliamentary elections coming up in Kyrgyzstan in 2026 followed by a presidential election in 2027.

I will continue to advocate for the excellent work of the OSCE Field Operations in Central Asia across all three dimensions and the high level of competence of their staff working under difficult financial conditions. The Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA), under the leadership of Amb. Dzhusupov of Kyrgyzstan, is also an excellent resource.

I want to conclude this report by drawing attention to the unprecedented financial challenges which the OSCE Academy in Bishkek is facing. Over the past 23 years, it has grown from a single-degree programme into a top-ranked, four-degree institution with programmes accredited on three continents and over 700 alumni and 85 academic partnerships worldwide. It is currently facing a shortfall of over EUR 1 million for the remainder of 2025 in extrabudgetary (ExB) funding. This could force it to take drastic measures, such as suspending admission to the BA programme next year, and delaying the start of the next Politics and Security, and Economic Governance and Development MA programmes. I hereby relay the appeal by Chair of the Board Alexey Rogov and Academy Director Pal Dunay to support this centre of excellence through sustained funding which would enable it to plan more strategically and in a longer-term manner. The Academy is also open to alternative models, such as earmarked pledges to cover costs associated with particular students, degree programmes, courses or professors.

## Annex I - OSCE PA Special Representative on Central Asia



FARAH KARIMI (NETHERLANDS)

Farah Karimi (Netherlands) was appointed as the Special Representative on Central Asia by OSCE PA President Pia Kauma in September 2023.

Karimi is the Head of the Netherlands delegation and has previously served as the Special Representative on Youth Engagement.

### ***Mandate:***

- Encourage active participation by parliamentarians from Central Asian OSCE participating States (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) and Mongolia in the work of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to strengthen parliamentarism in the region;
- Liaise and support the work of the OSCE field missions in the region, as well as relevant OSCE institutions, international and regional organizations and diplomatic missions;
- Encourage closer contacts between the parliaments in the region to promote greater intra-regional cooperation in all three OSCE dimensions;
- Report to the President of the Assembly on developments in the region, including opportunities for enhanced parliamentary dialogue and further inter-parliamentary co-operation among the Central Asian OSCE participating States and Mongolia.

## **Annex II – Activities Implemented (Sep. 2023 – June 2025)**

### **I. Engagement with OSCE PA Delegations and Other Stakeholders**

#### **A. Bilateral Meetings with OSCE PA Delegations** (*online, September and October 2023*)

- Uzbekistan: Mr. Sodiq SAFOEV, Head of Delegation + Members of Delegation
- Turkmenistan: Ms. Dunyagozel GULMANOVA, Speaker of the Mejlis, Head of Delegation + Mr. Begmurat MUHAMEDOV, Member of Delegation
- Tajikistan: Mr. Saidmurod FATTOHZODA, Head of Delegation
- Mongolia: Mr. Tsogtbaatar DAMDIN, Head of Delegation

#### **B. Joint Meetings of the five OSCE PA Central Asia Delegations**

- OSCE PA Autumn Meeting (*Yerevan, 19 November 2023*)
- OSCE PA Winter Meeting (*Vienna, 22 February 2024*)
- OSCE PA Annual Session (*Bucharest, 2 July 2024*) + Side event on “Climate Change and Water Scarcity in Central Asia”

##### Keynote Speakers:

- Ambassador Bakyt DZHUSUPOV, Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA)
- Amb. Askhat ORAZBAY, Chairman of Executive Committee of International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS)
- Dr. Volker FROBARTH, Head of OSCE Programme Office in Astana
- Mr. Pere Joan PONS, OSCE PA Vice-President, Special Representative on Climate Change
- OSCE PA Autumn Meeting (*Dublin, 3 October 2024*)
- OSCE PA Winter Meeting (*Vienna, 21 February 2025*)

#### **C. Bilateral Meetings with Heads of Permanent Missions to the OSCE**

- Vienna, 5-6 October 2023: Amb. Mukhtar TILEUBERDI (Kazakhstan); Amb. Tolendy MAKEYEV (Kyrgyzstan); Amb. Idibek KALANDAR (Tajikistan); Amb. Hemra AMANNAZAROV (Turkmenistan); Amb. Abat FAYZULLAEV (Uzbekistan); Mr. Munkhbaatar DAVAASAMBUU, First Secretary (Mongolia)
- Vienna, 21 February 2024: Amb. Bakhtior IBRAGIMOV (Uzbekistan)
- Vienna, 19 February 2025: Amb. Tolendy MAKEYEV (Kyrgyzstan); Amb. Idibek KALANDAR (Tajikistan); Amb. Hemra AMANNAZAROV (Turkmenistan)

#### **D. Meetings with the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre/Central Asia Desk**

(*Vienna, 6 October 2023; Vienna, 19 February 2025*)

## **E. Bilateral Meetings with OSCE Field Operations in Central Asia**

- Mr. Jukka TUONONEN, Acting Head of OSCE Programme Office in Dushanbe (*online, 24 November 2023*)
- Dr. Volker FROBARTH, Head of OSCE Programme Office in Astana (*online, 24 November 2023; Astana, 9 April 2024*)
- Amb. Alexey ROGOV, Head of OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek (*online, 24 November 2023; Bishkek, 25 April 2025*)
- Amb. John MACGREGOR, Head of the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat (*Ashgabat, 5 April 2024; Ashgabat, 26 November 2024*)
- Amb. Antti KARTTUNEN, OSCE Project Coordinator in Uzbekistan (*Tashkent, 11 April 2024*)
- Ms. Tatiana TURCAN, Deputy Head, OSCE Programme Office in Dushanbe (*Dushanbe, 28 April 2025*)

## **II. Field Visits**

### **A. Turkmenistan** (*Ashgabat, 5-7 April 2024*)

See Press Release: [Environment and energy in focus during OSCE PA Special Representative Karimi's visit to Turkmenistan](#)

### **B. Kazakhstan** (*Astana, Almaty, 8-10 April 2024*)

#### Composition of the Delegation:

- Ms. Farah KARIMI (Netherlands), Special Representative on Central Asia
- Mr. Pere Joan PONS (Spain), OSCE PA Vice-President, Special Representative on Climate Change
- Ms. Ainur ARGYNBEKOVA, Deputy Head of the Delegation of Kazakhstan
- Ms. Dilorom FAYZIEVA, Member of the Delegation of Uzbekistan
- Ms. Mirgul TEMIRBAEVA, Member of the Delegation of Kyrgyzstan

See Press Release: [OSCE PA delegation's visit to Kazakhstan highlights urgency of enhancing regional co-operation on climate change, water security and clean energy](#)

### **C. Uzbekistan** (*Tashkent, Nukus, Moynaq – Aral Sea, 11-12 April 2024*)

#### Composition of the Delegation:

- Ms. Farah KARIMI (Netherlands), Special Representative on Central Asia
- Mr. Pere Joan PONS (Spain), Vice-President, Special Representative on Climate Change
- Ms. Gudrun KUGLER (Austria), Rapporteur of the General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment
- Ms. Ainur ARGYNBEKOVA, Deputy Head of the Delegation of Kazakhstan
- Ms. Dilorom FAYZIEVA, Member of the Delegation of Uzbekistan

See Press Release: [OSCE PA delegation discusses regional co-operation on environmental issues in Uzbekistan, visits Aral Sea](#)

#### **D. Turkmenistan (Ashgabat, 26 November 2024)**

See Press Release: [OSCE PA leadership highlights regional co-operation during visit to Turkmenistan](#)

#### **E. Kyrgyzstan (Bishkek, 25-26 April 2025)**

##### Composition of the Delegation:

- Ms. Farah KARIMI (Netherlands), Special Representative on Central Asia
- Ms. Ainur ARGYNBEKOVA, Deputy Head of the Delegation of Kazakhstan

See Press Release: [OSCE PA Special Representative Karimi discusses regional co-operation in Central Asia and resilience to climate change in visit to Kyrgyzstan](#)

#### **F. Tajikistan (Dushanbe, Chimteppa, 28-30 April 2025)**

See Press Release: [“OSCE field activities in focus during OSCE PA visit to Tajikistan”](#)

### **III. Participation in Conferences, Seminars**

- **2023 Central Asian Model OSCE** (*Istanbul, 25-29 September 2023*)
- Presentation “Bridging the Gap: OSCE PA Initiatives for Gender and Youth Inclusivity SDG Implementation”, **Second Global Forum of Interparliamentary cooperation in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals**, organized by the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Parliamentary Commission for Monitoring the Implementation of National SDGs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, UN agencies in Uzbekistan and the IPU (*online, 30 November 2023*)
- Remarks at the **International Forum “Dialogue as a Guarantee of Peace”**, Thematic Session “Using dialogue as an Instrument of Preventive Diplomacy” (*online, 11 December 2023*)
- **Central Asia & Türkiye Youth Talks** (*Istanbul, 12-16 August 2024*)
- 2nd Ashgabat Conference on “**Parliamentary Diplomacy in the OSCE Area: Dialogue as a Tool for Building Bridges for a Secure and Peaceful Future**” (*Ashgabat, 27-28 November 2024*) (see Press Release and Report at: [Multilateral dialogue and co-operation essential for addressing global challenges, participants say at OSCE parliamentary conference in Ashgabat](#))
- Lecture “**Civil Society’s Role in Safeguarding Human Rights: Navigating Geopolitical Crises and the Erosion of International Law**” (*OSCE Academy, Bishkek, 26 April 2025*)
- Keynote speech at seminar on “**Water Challenges in Central Asia**”, Netherlands Institute of International Relations - Clingendael (*The Hague, 17 April 2025*)

### **IV. Upcoming Activities**

- Joint Meeting of the OSCE PA Central Asian delegations (32<sup>nd</sup> OSCE PA Annual Session, Porto, 29 June 2025)
- Discussion on the Draft Resolution “Strengthening Parliamentary Diplomacy and Co-operation to Safeguard Future Generations” (32<sup>nd</sup> OSCE PA Annual Session, Porto, 29 June – 3 July 2025).