

Your Excellency Mr Dilyor Khakimov,

Dear Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends,

I would like to welcome you all, on behalf of the European Institute for Asian Studies, to this roundtable on the topic of “Central Asia: New Economic and Political Dynamics”. I am glad to see so many people in attendance despite it being Friday afternoon. A proof that Uzbekistan and Central Asia, indeed, matter.

Over the last few years, we have with our institute developed very close working relations with the Embassy of Uzbekistan in Brussels, not only covering the latest economic and political developments, like in today’s seminar, but also highlighting the rich cultural heritage of Uzbekistan and the great touristic potential it holds.

Things have been moving very fast since the election of Shavkat Mirziyoyev in 2016. It is a country in continuous transformation. Under his presidency, a wide array of domestic economic, political and social reforms have been implemented in order to speed up the modernisation and liberalisation process of the country. Abroad, President Mirziyoyev has pursued a very intensive and pro-active foreign policy, visiting partners near and far to promote economic cooperation and integration, even with those countries with which in the past relations were delicate. The historic meeting of Central Asian leaders during Navruz in Astana points to a new regional environment of trust and cooperation. Furthermore, a few days ago, you may recall, he was paying a visit to President Trump in Washington, and we hope that before the end of the year President Mirziyoyev will visit Brussels.

At EIAS, we are eager to give Uzbekistan and Central Asia the visibility and importance it deserves, and we are glad to see the European Union also paying an increasing attention. As such, we are hopeful that the new Central Asia Strategy, due to be released next

year, will reflect the new realities in Central Asia. There are, indeed, many areas where the EU and EU companies can have a positive impact in Uzbekistan and the wider region, and I am sure our panellists today will touch upon that.

Without wanting to take any more time from the discussions today, I will pass now the floor to our moderator today, Mr Frederic Carlier, and I wish you a successful discussion. May I also invite everyone to join us after the event for a buffet reception with some delicious Uzbek food very kindly provided by the Embassy of Uzbekistan

I thank you