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## Summary record

### EU Central Asia Invest Networking Meeting 2019 29 November 2019, Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan

#### Key outcomes

The European Union Central Asia Invest (CAI) Networking Meeting 2019 took place in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan on 29 November 2019. It brought together private and public partners of the programme, including Central Asian governments, Business Intermediary Organisations (BIOs), CAI project managers, EU-funded project stakeholders namely the OECD, the Council of Europe (CoE) and the International Trade Center (ITC), as well as other development partners. The meeting aimed to focus on the results achieved and lessons learned during the last three years of the CAI programme, and to present the new phase. The networking meeting was preceded by the launch of three EU-funded programmes in Central Asia implemented by the ITC, the CoE and the OECD.

EU CAI projects had the opportunity to share their respective achievements over the past three years, which stimulated discussions and provided recommendations for the next EU CAI BIO phase, clustered by stakeholders:

#### **To EU CAI project managers & BIOs:**

##### *Co-operation:*

- Promote local ownership and strong long-term equal partnership
- Create close synergies with other regional programmes and involve all relevant stakeholders (private sector; state agencies; BIOs; international and local NGOs)
- Enhance BIO2BIO co-operation on service delivery
- Closely co-operate with the government to clearly define roles and provide business-oriented policy recommendations

##### *Peer-learning:*

- Involve Central Asian business experts to share their regional expertise
- Make best use of the EU CAI network to foster peer benchmarking and learning, and enhance mutual understanding and synergies
- Expose project participants to best practices (study tours)
- Encourage BIOs to internationalise/ innovate: exposure to available foreign sources of information; networks; databases; and funding opportunities

#### **To the development community:**

##### *Partnership and promotion of local ownership:*

- Invite BIOs to events with the support of CAI project managers, and provide speaking slots when relevant
- Regularly collect policy messages from CAI projects to present these to high level policy-makers
  - In the process, inform CAI projects on on-going policy dialogue activities
- Organise regular in-country co-ordination meetings between CAI and EU-funded projects

- Partner with local and international players on the ground to support the implementation of policy recommendations or relevant programmes
  - Ensure ownership by governments and local stakeholders
  - Include business associations in the delivery of business development services

#### **To policy-makers:**

- Involve business associations (on a rotating basis) in the policy dialogue on private sector activities

### Opening remarks

**Mr Sven-Olov Carlsson**, Ambassador and Head of the EU Delegation to Kazakhstan, opened the meeting by reiterating the EU's commitment to boosting investments and mobilising the private sector in Central Asia. Mr Carlsson reiterated the success of the CAI programme, which has funded 34 projects, and supported 60 BIOs, overall contributing to improve the business climate and foster regional integration.

**Mr Johannes Stenbaek Madsen**, Head of the Co-operation Section of the EU Delegation to Kazakhstan, and **Mr William Tompson**, Head of the OECD Eurasia Division, further introduced the important role played by BIOs particularly in sectors where the private sector plays a key role and may face obstacles. BIOs can act as the voice of businesses, particularly smaller businesses.

High-level policy-makers from the region participated to the event, including **Mr Zavqi Zavqizoda**, First Deputy Minister of Economic Development and Trade of Tajikistan and **Mr Ezizgeldi Annamammedov**, Deputy Minister of Finance and Economy of Turkmenistan.

### Networking Meeting Session 1: Outgoing Phase Projects

This interactive session consisted of a poster fair, which allowed the EU CAI project members and BIOs to share and discuss the lessons they learnt during the last three years. **Mr Stefano Ellero**, Head of the Co-operation Section of the EU Delegation to Tajikistan, moderated the session and summarised the outcomes with the support of rapporteurs:

- The objective of **PRO HOUSE** is to strengthen private companies in the housing management sector in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. **Ms Larissa Schreckenbach and Ms Rakhima Ortikova** highlighted the importance of modern housing to multiply social impact. Planning and implementation skills are needed to modernise buildings inherited from Soviet times, which took 25 years in Germany.
- **ECEAT** aims to provide jobs for rural communities with a focus on tourism. **Mr Marlon van Hee** underlined the importance to integrate sustainability from the beginning; focus on rural women to foster entrepreneurship; and seek regional best practices through study tours and exchanges. He highlighted the micro needs, namely supporting BIOs in their lobbying, outreach and networking efforts; and the macro needs, such as advocating for fewer visa restrictions and open sky policy.
- **CANDY** seeks to contribute to promoting the growth and expansion of export-oriented SMEs. **Ms Stoyanka Manolcheva and Mr Umed Aslanov** shared lessons learnt on the importance to promote local ownership, to find synergies with other regional programmes and to involve all relevant stakeholders. They mentioned the difficulty to find qualified trainers and lacking management skills.

- The **OECD Policy Component of the CAI Programme** aims to help create the conditions for sustained economic growth and investments in Central Asia. To this end, concrete and achievable policy recommendations are needed, followed by effective monitoring. Reform implementation is best supported by building an inclusive work process with the government, businesses and international organisations.
- **NICE-TAK** has the overall objective of assisting local BIOs to develop their capacities in key areas in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. **Mr Fiorenzo Sperotto and Mr David Vezdeni** shared key learnings for the future such as involving experienced CA businesses as experts and being careful with donor subsidies.
- **AGROCOMP** seeks to promote sustainable and eco-innovative practices in the agro-business and food processing sectors in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. **Ms Olga Novaeva** introduced good practices such as putting in place institutional networking and peers' benchmarking at all levels, which can further foster learning, mutual understanding, synergies and the generation of new ideas.
- **CEED's** overall objective was to advise and support transport and logistics BIOs in Central Asia. **Mr Nikolay Yarmov** highlighted that storage was an area in which further advice is required, for which study tours have been organised. A lack of investment and managerial skills are still hindering the logistics sector.

Mr Ellero closed the session by stating the importance to connect beneficiaries, BIOs and the government to enable them to discuss needs and ideas to improve the business environment. Knowledge exchange is fundamental, and both local and international experts can share their expertise and transfer knowledge. Particularly newly arising themes will require support, including digitalisation that can support trade and exchanges in a land-locked region like Central Asia. Limited access to finance will also have to be addressed.

## Networking Meeting Session 2: New Phase Projects & Co-ordinations Tools

The last session of the day was moderated by **Mr Francois Begeot**, Head of the Co-operation Section of the EU Delegation to Uzbekistan. **Mr Johannes Stenbaek Madsen** presented the upcoming phase of projects for which seven projects have been selected. **Ms Silvia Pietropaolo**, Programme Manager at the EU Delegation to Kazakhstan, stated the key criteria for selection had been the geographical coverage with at least two countries being covered as well as the tangible knowledge transfer. **Mr Francesco Straniero**, Programme Manager at the EU Delegation to Tajikistan, recommended to co-ordinate with other international organisations and highlighted the importance of the work on IT sector. **Mr Elbek Khodjaev**, Programme Manager at the EU Delegation to Uzbekistan and **Mr Luca Carapelli**, Programme Manager at the EU Delegation to Kyrgyzstan, presented the selected projects in their country. Lastly, the session discussed how to improve information sharing and communication among projects with **Mr Sebastian Kupferschmid**, from the OECD, introducing an upcoming website.

## Closing Remarks

**Mr Stenbaek Madsen** concluded the event by highlighting the EU's interest and strategy in Central Asia, including the promotion of EU values, such as multilateralism, sustainability and green projects. He further pointed out the importance of the private sector and of the EU CAI network to live by these values, with projects that can help build capacities on themes such as housing, tourism, trade flows with the EU and connectivity.