

REFLECTIONS ON THE EU – CENTRAL ASIA SUMMIT

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As previously noted, some news and assessments regarding the European Union (EU) Central Asian Countries Summit held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, on 3-4 April 2025 were included in our earlier bulletins. This summit was the first high-level meeting of its kind between the EU and Central Asian states. While there have been undoubtedly numerous interactions between Central Asian leaders and EU officials in Brussels and respective capitals reflecting the EUs growing interest in Central Asia, the summit was attended by European Council President António Costa and EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on behalf of the EU. Representing Central Asia were the leaders of the five nations: Uzbekistans President Shavkat Mirziyoyev (the host), Kazakhstans President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Kyrgyzstans President Sadyr Japarov, Tajikistans President Emomali Rahmon, and Turkmenistans President Serdar Berdimuhamedov[1]. The event was also attended by the President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Odile Renaud-Basso, and representatives from the European Investment Bank.

Following the talks, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen made several noteworthy statements. She announced an agreement to allocate billion (approximately $12 billion) to the five Central Asian countries, emphasizing that these funds would be directed toward strengthening sustainable transport connectivity in the region. The joint declaration issued at the conclusion of the summit elaborated on these points, underscoring the role of transport connectivity as a key driver of economic growth and regional integration. It recalled decisions made at the Global Gateway Investors Forum in January 2024, where billion in support and investment was prepared for Central Asia to develop efficient regional transport corridors, logistics networks, value

chains, and mechanisms to enhance mutual market access[2].

President Von der Leyens remarks also highlighted the EUs intent to elevate its relationship with Central Asia to the level of a strategic partnership, a development that merits attention. Another point of significance is the absence of Türkiye □□ country with deep linguistic, religious, historical, and cultural ties to the Central Asian republics and a candidate for EU membership □□□□ this summit. The EUs decision to exclude Türkiye, for reasons that remain unclear, appears to forgo the opportunity to leverage Türkiyes expertise and experience in fostering close relations with Central Asian states. Whether this oversight was deliberate remains uncertain, but it is evident that the EU missed a valuable chance to benefit from Türkiyes regional insights and experience. Even an invitation for Türkiye to participate as an observer could have facilitated meaningful contributions, an opportunity that has regrettably been squandered.

Another point worth noting is that Von der Leyen emphasized that the development of the Middle Corridor would facilitate transit from Central Asian countries to the South Caucasus and onwards to the Black Sea. By stating that 'seamless border crossings between Central Asia and the South Caucasus are essential for access to the Black Sea,' the aforementioned appears to overlook Türkiyes role in the EUs connectivity to Central Asia, perhaps even doing so deliberately. In any case, it can be stated that the days are not far off when such attitudes, which overlook Türkiye at the heart of the Middle Corridors transport and communication channels, will lead to regret.

The joint declaration from the 3-4 April summit also contains a reference to the Cyprus issue, though this may not be immediately evident. Paragraph four of the declaration specifically addresses this matter, stating: In this context, we commit to respecting the principles outlined above, particularly the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states, within the framework of all international and regional platforms, and we declare our intent to refrain from any actions contrary to these principles. Likewise, we reaffirm our strong commitment to United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions 541[3] (1983) and 550 [4] (1984). We emphasize that participation in regional cooperation initiatives requires full respect for the international principles necessary for advancing EU-Central Asia relations [5].

The reaffirmation of commitment to UNSC Resolutions 541 and 550 is clearly intended to uphold the non-recognition of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) and to endorse the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus as the sole legitimate authority on the island. The inclusion of such a paragraph in the final declaration of a summit focused on EU-Central Asia cooperation suggests the influence of two certain EU member states with a direct interest in the Cyprus issue. It is worth recalling that UNSC Resolutions 541 and 550 are not recent, and significant developments have occurred since their adoption. Today, Cyprus is characterized by a new reality of two sovereign, equal, and democratically governed states existing side by side, each with equal international status. Furthermore, it is notable that the international principles cited as deserving respect are routinely violated in other contexts, as evidenced by the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza, where actions amounting to grave violations occur with little response from the UNSC. Invoking the sanctity of UNSC resolutions in this context raises

questions about consistency and credibility.

Lastly, we reaffirm our belief that those who rejoice in including matters inconsistent with the realities on the island in the final declaration of a Summit meeting unrelated to the Cyprus issue will sooner or later see their hopes dashed.

*Image: https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/ozbekistanda-birinci-avrupa-birligi-orta-asya-zirvesi-basladi/3528122

[1] Outcomes of the First Central Asia EU Summit in Samarkand, New Central Asia, newscentralasi.net, 5 April 2025, https://www.newscentralasia.net/2025/04/05/outcomes-of-the-first-central-asia-eu-summit-in-samarkand/.

[2] Joint Declaration Following the First European Union-Central Asia Summit, *European Commission*, 4 April 2025, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/fr/statement_25_980.

[3] T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı, BM Güvenlik Konseyi Kararı 541-1983, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/data/DISPOLITIKA/KIBRIS/BMGuvenlikKonseyiKarari1983541544.pdf .

[4] T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı, BM Güvenlik Konseyi Kararı 550-1984, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/data/DISPOLITIKA/KIBRIS/BMGuvenlikKOnseyiKarari1984550553559.pdf .

[5] Joint Declaration following the First European Union-Central Asia Summit, *European Commission*, 4 April 2025, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/fr/statement_25_980.

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