

CENTRAL ASIAN CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS OF EDUCATION, JUNE 18, 2021

OPENING REMARKS

Sjur Bergan, Council of Europe

Ministers, ladies and gentlemen,

It is not only a great honor but also a great pleasure to be invited to speak at this distinguished conference of Central Asian Ministers of Education.

The task before this conference could not be more important. Ministers are invited to decide whether to establish a Central Asian Higher Education Area. In making this decision, you will need to decide what this Area will look like, what your priorities will be, and what objectives you would like the Central Asian Higher Education Area to achieve.

The Council of Europe is an intergovernmental organization encompassing 47 countries, with 50 countries participating in our work on Education under the European Cultural Convention, Kazakhstan among them. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan are all parties to the Lisbon Recognition Convention, which is the legal basis for the recognition of qualifications in the European Region. The Council of Europe is also strongly involved in the European Higher Education Area.

From my vantage point, the proposal to establish a *Central Asian* Higher Education Area is an excellent idea that deserves our full support. It has every potential to help develop coherent higher education reforms and systems in Central Asia. It has every potential to help establish Central Asia more firmly on the world map of higher education.

I will have an opportunity to speak about the challenges and opportunities of the European Higher Education Area later in this conference. The European experience is important, but it cannot be carbon copied. The Central Asian Higher Education Area should seek to meet the challenges and priorities that you – as Ministers of Education of the countries of Central Asia - see for the region and for your individual countries. It should be developed in close cooperation with the Central Asian higher education community. The higher education community of students and teachers will ultimately be the main beneficiaries of the Central Asian Higher Education Area, but they will not be the only ones. All of society will benefit.

The journey you are about to set out on is important and exciting. It is not one that will simply *pass through* Central Asia. It is also not a circular road that will take you to different parts of Central Asia but not go beyond. On the contrary, it is a road that will start in Central Asia and link up to other similar roads in all parts of the world.

The road we have traveled toward the European Higher Education Area can be of inspiration. The European Higher Education Area is reasonably well advanced, but it is still being built. Some of the road signs we have used may be of help as you set out to construct the Central

Asian Higher Education Area. We can be of help and inspiration if you see fit, but *you* will build the Central Asian Higher Education Area. We can point to some possible road signs, but *you* will do the traveling.

We will be following your progress with strong and positive interest. I wish you every success in this endeavor, which is important to Central Asia but also to the rest of the world.

524 words = 4 minutes