

SECOND REGIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING

26-27 June 2023
Astana, Kazakhstan

OPERATIONAL CONCLUSIONS

The aim of the Second Regional Steering Committee meeting of the joint European Union/Council of Europe Central Asia Rule of Law Programme was to take stock of the **achievements** and identify what could be **further accomplished** within the remaining implementation period of the Programme - extended until June 2024.

The meeting was opened by **Kestutis Jankauskas**, Ambassador of the European Union to the Republic of Kazakhstan, **Claus Neukirch**, Director of Programme Co-ordination of the Council of Europe, **Tastemir Abishev**, Secretary of the Human Rights Commission under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, **Ruslan Bekbolotov**, Deputy Head of the Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic in France, **Saifiddin Sorozoda**, Adviser to the Office of the Legal Assistant of the Executive Office of the President of the Republic of Tajikistan and **Nozimbek Rustambekov**, Head of Legal Department of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

It brought together 75 participants representing national partner institutions from Central Asia, including relevant ministries, Constitutional and Supreme Courts, Ombudspersons, law enforcement agencies, anti-corruption authorities and national training institutions of legal professionals, as well as representatives of the European Union Delegations in the region and of the Council of Europe.

Main achievements

The Programme has significantly increased the pace of implementation as of 2022, following the easing of restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, with more activities carried out on the ground.

Only in 2022, the Programme organised more than 56 bilateral and 7 regional activities, including legal and policy reviews, development of training materials, tailor-made capacity building activities targeting in particular legal professionals and law enforcement officers, thematic conferences, awareness raising seminars and regional exchanges.

The participants welcomed the achievements accomplished. They highlighted the following results (non-exhaustive list):

- ✓ **Increased interest** of Central Asia partners in Council of Europe Conventions:
 - **Kazakhstan** was invited to accede to three Council of Europe Conventions open to non-member states, namely the [Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence](#) (2020), the [Criminal Law Convention on Corruption](#) (2022), and the [Convention on Cybercrime](#) (2023);
 - **Kyrgyzstan** was invited to accede to the [Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons](#) in 2022. The country has also expressed interest in Conventions on Corruption, Anti-Money Laundering and Combatting the Financing of Terrorism and on Cybercrime;
 - Partner institutions from **Tajikistan, Turkmenistan** and **Uzbekistan** increased their knowledge of the benefits and commitments of acceding to the Council of Europe Conventions and expressed interest in some of them.
- ✓ **575 legal professionals** of the region trained on topics such as prevention of ill-treatment and torture, violence against women and domestic violence, protecting vulnerable groups and right to a fair trial;
- ✓ **Three courses** of the European Programme for Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP) adapted to the national context and launched in **Uzbekistan**;
- ✓ **Significant efforts to prevent and fight corruption and money laundering/terrorist financing (AML/CFT)**, including:
 - Strengthening of legal and institutional frameworks in accordance with European and international standards. It concerns for instance inspections reforms in the business sector and the promotion of business integrity in **Uzbekistan** as well as the protection of rights of entrepreneurs in **Tajikistan** and **Kyrgyzstan** ;
 - Supporting **Kazakhstan** to improve the legal framework on the prevention of conflict of interest and whistleblower protection, to implement the recommendations of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) and enhance the transparency of beneficial ownership;

- Supporting **Uzbekistan** to strengthen mutual legal assistance and international co-operation in criminal matters, manage an electronic asset declaration system, promote rules of conduct, integrity of public officials and prevention of conflict of interest;
 - Raising awareness of anti-corruption and anti-money laundering bodies and relevant ministries of **all five countries** on relevant Council of Europe standards and monitoring mechanisms;
 - Improving capacities of law enforcement bodies for prevention and fighting corruption, especially in financial investigations, asset recovery and management of seized and confiscated assets and interagency co-operation, through **bilateral (Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) and regional activities**;
 - Introducing Council of Europe risk assessment methodology of ML/TF in sectors such as legal persons and arrangements and virtual assets in **Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan**;
 - Improving capacities of relevant specialists for more effective AML/CFT strategic analysis in **Tajikistan**.
- ✓ Expertise provided **on draft legislation on institutional frameworks and towards the promotion of the culture of constitutionalism**. As major constitutional reforms occurred in most of the countries in the region, they have benefited from the expertise of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe.

Overall, the level of participation of national institutions and the results of the activities have confirmed the **relevance of the Programme's** approach – **demand-driven** and based on interventions with a **clear added value** in terms of the expertise provided.

Working methods and approach

- **Finding a balance between regional and bilateral actions** will remain key in the implementation of the Programme. The regional approach has provided a platform for sharing best practices and peer-to-peer exchanges. At the same time, the Programme demonstrated its added value in offering to the national partners tailor-made support to overcome specific issues they encounter at the national level;
- **To complement** the work already done, the Programme will continue addressing **human rights issues**, including prevention of ill-treatment and torture, violence

against women and domestic violence, protection of vulnerable groups and right to a fair trial;

- Close co-ordination with the **Delegations of the European Union** in the region will be pursued through bilateral and multilateral exchanges in the region. There is a need for joint efforts with the European Union to promote **synergies** and ensure **co-ordination** with other relevant interventions carried out by international organisations in the region, especially in the field of economic crime and human rights;
- The Programme will continue to highlight the importance of the active participation of women in its activities and will address gender-related issues such as violence against women and trafficking in human beings. Further efforts to incorporate **gender mainstreaming** in the Programme's actions remain to be done;
- Ensuring closer contacts with national partner institutions will be crucial to maintain ownership and a high level of participation in the Programme activities. The **local support** provided by national Programme consultants has proved to be already useful in that respect.

Recommendations on specific areas of intervention

- Expand the work related to the progressive **creation of a common legal space between Europe and Central Asia**, based on the universal approach to human rights and the principles of the rule of law, by:
 - ✓ providing further support to the **finalisation of accession** to the Council of Europe Conventions currently underway;
 - ✓ **actively promoting** the most relevant Council of Europe conventions, such as the [Convention Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism](#) (Warsaw Convention), the [Convention on cybercrime](#) (Budapest Convention), the [Convention Transfer of Sentenced Persons](#) and other conventions related to **extradition** matters, the [Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#) (Istanbul Convention) and the [Convention on action against trafficking in human beings](#).

- Provide further support to the effective implementation of **human rights standards with a focus on legal professionals** (judges, prosecutors, lawyers) through the unique training tool developed by the European Programme for Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP), by:
 - ✓ increasing the number of translated and adapted HELP courses;
 - ✓ calling on national training institutions to include HELP courses in their internal curricula of in-service training of legal professionals, where relevant, and establish and maintain an internal pool of trainers.
- Pursue efforts **to prevent and fight against corruption and money laundering/terrorist financing**, by:
 - ✓ continuing the implementation of the comprehensive work plans that have been agreed upon with all beneficiary institutions of all five Central Asian countries such as General Prosecutor's Offices, law enforcement training institutions, anti-corruption agencies, financial intelligence units and representatives of businesses;
 - ✓ ensuring sustainability of the knowledge shared by the Council of Europe and contributing to more interagency co-ordination.
- **Advance on constitutional reforms and respect for the rule of law when implementing such reforms through the support of the Venice Commission**, by:
 - ✓ responding to requests for opinion to the Venice Commission related to constitutional and legal developments;
 - ✓ increasing knowledge of senior civil servants on the implementation of European and international standards of the rule of law and democracy through joint activities with Constitutional Courts, Supreme Courts and High Judicial Councils of the region.
- **Promote peer-to-peer regional networking** on questions of common interest through participation of Central Asian partner institutions in platforms such as:
 - ✓ HELP annual conferences that promote discussions among national training institutions on achievements and challenges relevant to **human rights education for legal professionals**;
 - ✓ regional capacity building training for law enforcement bodies on **preventing and fighting against corruption and money laundering/terrorist financing**;

- ✓ conferences with a regional or international dimension organised by the Venice Commission, where representatives of bodies such as Constitutional Courts, Supreme Courts, and High Judicial Councils can exchange best practices and gain theoretical and practical knowledge on European and international standards of rule of law and democracy.

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