

Statement of the Chairman of the Board of the Foreign Policy Research Institute Bolat Nurgaliyev

26 May, 2022 Nur-Sultan

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen! First of all, I would like to express my profound gratitude to the Embassy of Hungary in Kazakhstan and personally to Ambassador Otto Ivan Rona for the initiative to organize in collaboration with our Institute this “round table” on the regional cooperation experience of the Visegrad Group and its lessons for Central Asia. We cherish the opportunity to engage in fruitful discussion of the role that Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland individually, as members of the V-4 and, lastly, of the whole European Union can play in promoting the EU’s engagement with the Central Asian states. During the April 2021 visit to Nur-Sultan of the Hungarian Foreign Minister Mr Siyarto our Institute signed the Memorandum of Understanding with the Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary. It gives me profound pleasure to greet today distinguished professors of this Institute Dr Laszlo Vasa and Dr Peter Stepper who will make their presentations on the topic. Thank you so much for taking time out of your busy schedule to visit Kazakhstan in person, instead of communicating online. Allow me in conclusion of the welcome part wish all of us an energetic and meaningful exchange of views. Hopefully, as a practical outcome of the “round table”, we’ll enrich our understanding of effective ways to promote interaction of Central Asia with the Visegrad Group. And of course, many thanks to the National Library for hosting the event and thanks as Deputy Foreign Minister R.Vassilenko to participate for accepting our joint invitation.

Dear participants! Though the V-4 countries and the Central Asian republics are geographically distant, there are certain similarities between them, which serve in favor of closer cooperation and, I dare suggest, position the V-4 into the frontline of the EU Strategy for Central Asia launched in 2019. Both

regions underwent through a similar historic experience of belonging somewhat 30-33 years ago to the same ideological system and to the same military-political alliance and economic integration structure. To a varied degree in terms of duration, consistency and intensity they transited from this particular legacy of the past and thus are able to understand political, social and economic challenges of each other better than the original members of the EEC. As Central Asia is committing itself to modernization and regionalism, it increasingly looks up to development of interaction with the EU as an effective way of getting outside support in strengthening statehood, protecting national security and ensuring successful implementation of longterm goals. I believe that of especial significance for the Central Asian republics is the EU's experience of institutionalization and its internal process of formulating common foreign and security policy without which one can not claim that there's a genuine regional integration.

Meanwhile regional integration is definitely becoming the dominating trend of global development, reflecting the recognition that under current and continuing erosion of established international order to protect their national interests states have to form and strengthen regional groups. My interpretation of the origin of the V-4 is that the founders were eager to benefit from their goodneighborly relations born out of living together in Central Europe. They intended to support each other in their efforts to integrate into the common European house. Undoubtably, the V-4 states together made and are still making a considerable contribution to promoting cooperation and stability throughout the vast European space. For Central Asia especially valuable is the V-4 experience in lobbying within the EU structures of the Central European priority projects, be they in the sphere of security, migration, transportation, culture, education, environmental protection and water resources fair distribution. For us three decades of the V-4 states development, individually and as part of the EU, are inspiring, proving the possibility of speedy social and economic progress when efforts are combined. It was

well put in the Krakov Declaration, I quote: “V-4 is recognized in Europe and the whole world as a reliable partner and a symbol of successful political and economic transformations, an important pillar of the historic project of the European reunification.”

Understandably, from the very beginning of the Central Asian newly independent republics' statehood and formulating foreign policy priorities the focus was to develop relations not just with our immediate neighbors, but with the wider world, in the spirit of implementing multi-vector foreign policy. By the way, when Kassym Jomart Tokayev in his capacity of the then third Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan was insisting on the use of “multi-vector” term for describing our long-term strategy of developing relations with different countries irrespective of their geographical location – East-West, North-South, there were domestic critics claiming that in mathematics there is no such notion as multi vector, by definition vector can be only one. But nowadays there is no dispute that for a state like Kazakhstan multidirectional foreign policy is the most effective, indeed, the only viable choice. Multi-vector foreign policy of Kazakhstan is also manifested in our participation in quite a number of international structures, including the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Eurasian Economic Union, the Council of Turkic States, the Islamic Cooperation Organization, etc. Kazakhstan is proactively developing relations with different countries in the framework of dialogue platforms of Central Asia with the EU, United States, Republic of Korea, Japan, India, Turkey, Iran, China and Russia. We welcome the engagement of the abovementioned international institutions and states in Central Asia which is beneficial for diversification of our foreign relations. Diverse external ties strengthen sovereignty and territorial integrity of Central Asian republics.

I understand that there is an ongoing discussion on the so called regional question: should the EU frame its relations with Central Asia on a regional rather than bilateral basis? While we, the Central Asians consider ourselves part of a distinct region of Central Asia, with distinct set of political and economic priorities, we welcome the approach that besides recognizing certain differences among the five republics, and believe me, there are plenty, the focus of the EU is maintained on promoting good governance and sustainable economic development across the region. A well-to-do and politically stable neighbor is understandably preferable to a neighbor unable to ensure sustainable socio-economic development with all inherent risks to security and stability.

A few words about a larger definition of Central Asia by including Afghanistan, thus lumping it together with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tadjikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. There is a school of thinking that it's wrong to treat Central Asia as entirely separate from Afghanistan. But if we share the same ending in the name of the country, it does not mean that the general outlook to internal and external policies is similar across the board. We are very much in favor of Afghanistan becoming a prosperous, stable country maintaining predictable, friendly relations with the outside world, be it neighbors in Central Asia and South Asia, or those Western states which for nearly 20 years were trying to help the Afghan society embark on the road of economic recovery and political stability. Unfortunately, the international community as a whole failed to get Afghanistan out of its status of a failed state. There are encouraging signs, for example, a recent news that the Taliban government is going to convene Loya Jirga. We'd welcome any steps leading to national reconciliation and introducing inclusive forms of governance. Until the new rulers of Afghanistan make a clearcut choice to lead the country to normalcy, first of all by abiding to the rule of law, respect of basic human rights, including those of women and ethnic minorities, instead of trying to impose on the XXI century society medieval practices, I personally do not see how secular nations of Central

Asia could be reconciled with the idea that the Islamic Khalifate of Afghanistan shares the same values as the rest of the region.

Yet another folly is overusing the terminology of “Great Game” in viewing developments in Central Asia. Nobody likes to be assigned a role of a space for rivalry of outside players, we in Central Asia are not an exception: we prefer to be treated as masters of our own destiny, subjects rather than objects of international and regional affairs. Nowadays a return to obsolete ways of relations between the rulers and the ruled is absolutely excluded, at least as far as Central Asia is concerned. For example, Kazakhstan from the early years of its independence has prioritized an activist approach to foreign policy and started to practice constructive involvement in promotion of regional integration, stability and security. We made this choice because of the understanding that social and economic transformation of the country could be ensured if outside conditions are conducive and the trends in international relations are predictable. President Tokayev’s reformist strategy for New Kazakhstan envisages close cooperation with neighboring countries, both within the framework of broader, Eurasian integration and parallel development of Central Asian regional interaction. We view the European Union and the V-4 within it as important partners as Central Asia progresses forward. Dr. Stepper predicted that in future relations V-4 with CA are possibility, I’d like to call on future presidencies to turn the possibility into the certainly.

Thank you for your kind attention.