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LET US NOT FORGET THE IMPORTANCE OF CENTRAL ASIA TO EUROPE, FROM ANCIENT TIMES UNTIL TODAY

COMMENTARY ON THE INTERVIEW OF THE PRESIDENT I. KARIMOV

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The organization of ceremonies and construction of remembrance monuments like the monument of the *Mourning Mother* for the casualties of World War II inaugurated in Ouzbekistan the 25 april 2013 by the Président Islam Karimov are important milestones for the cohesion of Nation-States. Only Nations sharing a common vision of their own history can build their own future.

One such event not only preserve the memory of history in Uzbekistan, but should also be an opportunity for Europeans to remember on the importance of Central Asia, in which Ouzbekistan plays a pivotal role, for Western Europe and the geopolitical balance on the Eurasian continent. Central Asia seems far away for European citizens, but its importance for European history and its geopolitical developments was however always constant .

The participation of Central Asians citizens to World War II, as citizens of the former USSR brought an important contribution to the liberation of Europe from 1941 to 1945, and led to a huge number of Uzbek casualties compared to the total population.

Already in the ancient times, the Byzantine Empire was able to survive more than half a century because Tamerlan, head of an empire centred around Samarcand defeated the armies of the sultan Bajazet in 1402 in Ankara. The fall of Constantinople took place only in 1453. Many intellectuals and craftsmens had the time to flee from the threatened byzantine empire to Western Europe, and then contributed to the *Renaissance* era of the western world.

Even before, the Silk road connecting Europe to Eastern Asia through Central Asia brought prosperity and valuable exchanges between ancient populations

Today, The Republic of Uzbekistan and the whole of Central Asia is faced with a growing security challenge coming from the instability of Afghanistan.

The Arab revolutions spreading from the Maghreb to the Middel-East risk also to aggravate the potential conflicts in Central Asia. This chaotic process leading to civil wars in the worst case, destruction of states, and rising of muslim fondamentalist forces underline the misunderstanding these revolutions have created in European countries. Some States were misled by choosing to support revolutionary movements, to the detriment to stability and step by step reforms States need to adapt themselves to a multipolar and instable world.

The destabilisation of Central Asia and Uzbekistan in particular, because of the worsening of the afghan situation and the spreading of the ethnic and religious conflicts from the middle East, would endanger the Eastern flank of the European Union. It would irrigate extremist ideologies from Middle East to Central Asia, then to the Caucasus, Russia, and then would finally affect the whole geopolitical balance in Europe. Such a scenario would only harm commercial and energetic but also cultural ties between Central asia and Europe.

It is urgent to reassess the European strategies currently applied to the huge arc of crisis going from Africa to Central Asia, and move from the ideological and more and more resultless objective of westernisation through promotion of democracy and regime change to wise *Realpolitik* and the primacy of stability.

As history have show us, geopolitical developments in Central Asia always had an impact on Europe, and we Europeans should focus more our attention on this region in times of growing security challenges and international uncertainties.